THINGS NOT SEEN

STUDIES IN THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF LIFE

BY

HERBERT H. FARMER

M.A.

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INTRODUCTION

IS the Christian interpretation of life true? It is not enough that we should think it helpful; a drug may be thought helpful. It is not enough that we should think it beautiful; there are many beautiful phantasies. It is not enough that we should think it impressive because of its antiquity; antiquity can give a glamour to almost anything. Helpfulness and beauty and antiquity are part of the evidence from which the question of truthfulness must be answered, but the question itself, or rather the answer to it, is the crucial thing.

How can we find the answer?

Many questions are answered wrongly, not because the evidence is contradictory or inadequate, but because the mind through its fundamental dispositions and presuppositions is out of focus with the only kind of evidence which is really available. And of all the distortions of mind which the presentation of Christianity has to meet the most common is, perhaps, a certain prior scepticism whether the invisible world is real at all, whether that which cannot be seen is in any sense, popular or scientific, "*a thing*." Unless such prior scepticism, which is by no means confined to those who make no profession of religion, can be got rid of, or at least for the time being held in suspense, the most persuasive exposition of the spiritual life will fail to persuade.

It ought not to be impossible, or even difficult, to hold such scepticism in suspense. For, in the first

place, to do so is not in the least to run counter to reason. Such scepticism has more to do with racial habit and instinct than with reason. The circumstances of the evolution of man's life are quite sufficient to explain the superior reality with which his mind invests things he can see and touch and hear. But in these days when physical science, for so long the High Priest of materialism to the popular mind, is finding matter dissolving away into something which, whatever it is, is not visible, and psychology, for so long the Cinderella of the sciences, has at length come into its own, and a good deal more than its own, —in these days it is not only not unreasonable, but even not unfashionable, to admit the supreme importance of things not seen. In the second place and more important, to suspend the sceptical bias of our minds in respect of the unseen is, we believe, to follow the true bent of our nature. In other words, strong as the bias may be, it is still only a bias. If a man can suspend it for a period and take the unseen world with which religion deals simply and naturally and experimentally, sooner or later something deeper within him becomes active and induces a sense of reality and truth which he knows he cannot, in sincerity or reason, resist. Not that the doubts and the scepticisms will never afterwards return, but there will now be a true and reasonable counterpoise to them in living experience.

To know the reality of the religious interpretation of life it is necessary to do two things. First, having rid the mind of prejudice, we must look at such interpretation, and see whether, taken as a whole and not necessarily in all its detail, it lays hold of us in any degree by its own inherent truthfulness and light. Then, second, if it so lays hold of us, we must be boldly

experimental and live by it day by day. We know the reality of any world partly by looking at it and partly by living in it. It must invite us, but we must accept the invitation. Larger experience, greater knowledge, deeper thought, fuller acquaintance with evidences drawn from the whole breadth of life, may later play a part in building up a more surely based Christian conviction, but nothing can take the place of this initial compulsion on the soul of the Christian message as a whole and this initial willingness to test the matter loyally in daily life.

It is hoped that the following chapters may present a Christian interpretation of life which, though personal, will not be merely private, and which, though inadequate, will at least be adequate enough to induce, or renew, in any who may care to read them a sense of its general truthfulness and a willingness to make further experiment of it. The chapters, which were originally prepared at various times as sermons and addresses, have been selected and arranged with this end in view, and it is hoped that they form a unity which will be the more truthful perhaps because not intended at the time of composition. The book indeed hardly seeks to do more than to ask, in the words of George Macdonald, whether now "before your own door stands not a gate, lies not a path to walk in. Enter by that gate, walk in that path, and you shall arrive at the conviction, which no man can give you, that there is a living Love and Truth at the heart of your being and pervading all that surrounds you."

FOREWORD

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THINGS NOT SEEN

I

GOD AS REFUGE

"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."—PSALM XCI, 2.

THE subject we are to consider falls into three main thoughts: first, man's nature and the world in which he lives are such, that he continually finds himself in need of a refuge of some sort; second, that, in the end, the only adequate refuge for him is something which transcends this world altogether, namely, God, as He has been revealed to us by Jesus Christ; third, that this congruency between man's essential nature and need and the God of Jesus Christ is strong evidence of the truth of our faith. So stated, these propositions will seem formal and uninteresting. But a consideration of them will lead us close to some of the most vital and significant facts in human life and in religion.

I

First, then, man's nature and the world in which he lives are such that he continually finds himself in need of a refuge of some sort.

From some points of view this is a commonplace. Man is born to trouble, we say, as the sparks fly upward. Man is supremely the discontented, disappointed, restless animal in creation, his flesh the heir to a thousand and one inevitable ills, his spirit the daily vehicle of unsatisfied desire. Yet, from another point of view, this commonplace is perhaps the most surprising and challenging thing about him.

It is an obvious principle of all life that it is ever seeking to come into greater adaptation to, and harmony with, the world in which it lives. Generally speaking, living creatures, including ourselves, only begin to move and to act when they and their environment fall into disharmony with one another. The attempt is made to get rid of the disharmony by action. Thus the hungry animal, because he is hungry, ranges the world for food. This, indeed, is the test whether and in what degree a thing is alive or not; does it adjust itself to its world or its world to itself, and so restore the harmony which has been broken? Now, if we look at the way in which living beings grow and develop, we see that it works in this way. There is a continual give and take, a reciprocal action and reaction, between the creature and his world. Something new crops up in the environment, and, in order to deal with it, the creature develops a new power which has hitherto lain dormant and unsuspected in its make-up. Then that new power, so developed, opens up still more new things in the environment, and these again call out still further powers, and so on, the only

limit to the process being the natural limits of the capacities of the creature concerned. Thus, we may suppose it was the lack of food which first evoked in living creatures a greater capacity for movement, and hence the development of limbs to help movement; but movement, once begun, enlarges the world in other directions besides the quantity of food it brings within reach, witness our own belief in the value of travel in education. Moreover, such a larger world opened up by movement demands in the creature greater discrimination of vision, and so sight begins to develop, and sight, developing, opens up a still bigger world demanding still more powers and readjustments, and so on. One might say that sometimes the demands of the environment are in front of the living creature's powers, and sometimes the living creature's powers are in front of the demands of the environment, like walkers who continually pass and repass one another.

But the significant thing for our thought is this, that in all creatures except man the disharmony between the creature and his world, the extent to which one is in front of the other, is never at any one moment very great. In their natural surroundings animals have reached a position of comparative equilibrium with their world: on the whole they *fit* their circumstances and their circumstances fit them. In some cases, like that of bees or ants, they fit so well, they are so perfectly adapted to their world, that their existence has the precision and fixity of a machine. But man is altogether different from this. His powers appear

to have forged too far ahead of the world in which he lives. He has developed faculties of various sorts which demand more, apparently, than this earthly environment can give him and which, instead of bringing him into greater harmony with his world, have the effect very often of continually throwing him permanently into conflict with it. This extraordinary fact is often hidden from us because we are so very proud of man's pre-eminent powers in comparison with the brutes. We look at his mind and his memory and his imagination and his conscience, his sense of right and wrong, his art, his science, and all the rest, and we are lost in wonder at the distance he has travelled beyond all other living creatures, but we do not realize that, so far as being happy and satisfied in the material world which he shares with other living creatures is concerned, these wonderful powers have only been a help to him up to a point and in certain directions. There is hardly one of his distinctively human qualities which is not left, at some point or other, suspended, so to say, in the air, with nothing in this world on which to grip. By becoming man he has become, not a better fit, but a misfit in the earth which has produced him. Infinitely higher in every way than the cow which lies in the meadow and chews the cud, yet he has failed, as the cow has succeeded, in the one thing which is desirable for them both —some sort of harmonious adjustment to their world.

Take, for example, man's powers of memory and imagination. Beneficent as have been the

uses of these faculties in many directions, yet they have served again and again to burden the human personality with a host of disabling terrors which otherwise would never have existed. Fear and worry attain a power and a permanence in human life which are unknown in the animal world, and that is largely due to memory and imagination. Or take the consciousness of self which is a quality peculiar to man. It has the effect of giving our loves and affections such an intensity that death, which is an essential part of our earthly world, becomes a far worse discord and insult and affront to us than it would ever otherwise be. Or consider man's conscience, his sense of right and wrong. This is in some ways his highest gift. Does it make him happy ? Does it help him to be satisfied with himself and with his world ? In some ways it is the most disabling and worrying thing he has,—this sense of personal responsibility and guilt ; and he cannot escape it. Let him commit some sin and his bosom henceforth harbours a stinging asp of remorse, and his world becomes a penal Tartarus about him which never forgives. And so we might go on. The matter is clinched by asking this simple question—how is it that man, for all his pre-eminent powers, suffers from nervous breakdown, premature grey hair, insanity, and all kinds of mental and physical ill-health unknown in the animal world ? The answer in part undoubtedly is, that it is just because of his pre-eminent powers that he so suffers ; they have made him too big, too dynamic, too complex for his earthly environment.

II

This brings us to the second point, that the only adequate refuge for man is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The most significant fact about religion is, that it affirms that the environment with which man has to deal is bigger than this world in which, for the time being, he lives. The central assertion of religion, without which it would lose its meaning and its power, is that the seen world about us is not all; that there is an unseen world, a supra-mundane, spiritual reality, God, with Whom it is possible to be in living relationship, and with Whom it is necessary to be in living relationship in order to achieve well-being and to be satisfied. In other words, religion extends and enlarges the world with which we have to deal by adding to it a spiritual and Divine overworld. We have then this significant situation. Here, on the one hand, is man, by his very nature, restless, dissatisfied, at conflict with his environment and himself, his best powers continually stretching out like the filaments of a spider and either floating in a void whence there is no response, or else being snapped in twain on harsh, uncomprehending rock. There, on the other hand, is religion asserting that there is an environment larger than this world into contact with which men can at any time come. Here is man manifestly wanting a bigger world, and there is religion saying that there is one. Do not these two things fit together? They do.

We have not got to the heart of religion until we understand that it is the movement of man's spirit into an environment which includes and is greater than this world, and which, therefore, is adequate, and brings harmony and satisfaction, to those powers which have outgrown this world altogether. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."

In harmony with this, men have instinctively recognized that one test of the truth and value of any religion is the extent to which it does introduce man to a bigger world more congenial to his whole nature; the extent to which it, so to say, succours and harmonizes his personality, and makes him cease to be the misfit which he otherwise must certainly be. Every religion, which has ever had any grip upon mankind, has gone some distance in thus succouring men and in giving them an environment bigger and more adequate to all their needs than this world. But nothing becomes clearer as one studies life and the ways of men, than that only the God of Jesus Christ can fully carry out this task, and be man's full defence and rock of refuge in all his profound dissatisfactions and disturbances. To take only those things which I have already mentioned. The fears and worries of life, which become so intense through man's splendid powers of imagination and memory, are finally exorcised, and can only be finally exorcised, by the discovery, not merely that there is a Beyond, a God, but that that Beyond, that God is

love and not any other thing. When that truth has really laid hold of the mind, courage and poise begin to be restored to it in face of life, and it ceases to be the terrified misfit it would otherwise be. Again, the horrible disharmony which death introduces into human loves and affections is only resolved when the personality moves out into a larger world of spiritual realities, where God's love for each individual and the immortality of each individual are seen to be mutually involved facts. It is only in the light of God's Fatherhood that death is completely swallowed up in victory. And then, and even more important, conscience ; the terrible breakdown and discord which sin and the consciousness of sin introduce into a man's life —and who escapes sin ?—constitute one of the plainest and most challenging facts of life. It is sober fact and not in any way a biased pulpit exaggeration, that the only thing which gives the guilty conscience a peace, which is healthy because it involves the breaking of the power of sin altogether, is to discover the reality of God's forgiveness as it is laid bare to us in Jesus Christ. And so we might go on. I believe that the Christian religion, and by that is meant the religion which looks to a God like Christ, and not the religion of difficult theologies and creeds which have often only served to hide and distort both Christ and God, is the only thing which can fully satisfy human nature and bring it into some sort of equilibrium with itself and its world. Not that it reduces human life to a stagnant equilibrium which is death ; on the contrary, its adequacy to our souls is shown in

that it lays open infinite horizons to us ; but they are horizons which, though beyond us, are always congenial to us. For myself, that which makes me go on preaching Christianity is the conviction that it can make men and women progressively more poised, more harmonious, more strong, more dignified, more hopeful, more at peace with themselves, even in this present restricted and inadequate world. That is what religion is meant to do and that is what Christianity, at its truest and best, certainly does.

III

It will be said : " Yes ! but is Christianity true, is there really a God like Jesus Christ ? " and straightway the gaunt spectres of all sorts of intellectual difficulties begin to flutter in the mind. The answer is our third thought, that this congruency between man's essential nature and need and God as revealed by Jesus Christ is really very strong evidence for the truth of our faith.

Two things may be said.

First, it is very difficult to believe that man is a permanent misfit in the heart of the Universe. For if he is that, it is difficult to see any reason for his appearance on the scene at all, and he is strangely and inexplicably at variance with the rest of the animal creation, which, on the whole, is very well adapted to its world. Moreover, man is, after all, singularly adapted to his world on the intellectual side of him. In his science he instinctively assumes that at the back of all phenomena

there is reason, that their intimate nature is rational, and apprehensible through rational thought; and the assumption is justified. But it is absurd to suppose that the Universe is such, that it is in harmony with our reasons and permanently out of harmony with the rest of our being, permanently out of harmony, that is, with desire and feeling and conscience. Every analogy and probability points, therefore, to man *not* being a misfit in the Universe; but, that being so, if he *is* a misfit apart from religious faith, then that is sound evidence so far, that religious faith brings him into relation with a real world.

Second, we must take our minds as they are; for, unless we do so, we shall very soon be landed in a barren scepticism about everything. Now our minds are such, that they are forced to recognize as true and real that which satisfies our whole nature and harmonizes us more and more with the Universe in which we live. We know instinctively, and it is only in our sophisticated moods that we pretend we do not, on the one hand, that no falsehood can in the end make a man happy and good, and on the other hand, that the truth makes free and that which makes completely free must be the truth. In other words, the supreme test of truth by which our minds do as a matter of fact work, is whether a view can be lived by, whether it can make a man a stronger, more complete, more balanced personality. If we are willing to throw over these ultimate intuitions of our minds about truth and falsehood, there is not much can be said, except perhaps that in that case we ought,

to be consistent, to give up the task of living altogether, for we cannot in practice avoid making such intuitions nor can we cease in practice to act upon them.

The supreme apologetic for the Christian faith, even from the point of view of the soberest philosophy, is that consistent living in the light of it does on the whole succour our best selves, does give us courage in face of all life's tasks, and does possess our hearts with that peace which Paul said passes all understanding: in short, it satisfies the whole of us in a way nothing else does. Perhaps you say you have not found that to be so. If that is the case, there is nothing more to be said. Only be sure you have really lived in the light of such a Father as Christ reveals. It is surely significant that Christ, the most perfectly harmonized human being who has ever lived, was also the One who lived nearest to a Divine Father. A vast amount of religious scepticism derives nearly all its power from the fact that the best religion, the religion of Christ, has never been genuinely tested. When a man finds his mind growing clearer, his passions less disorderly, his fears less obsessive, his temptations less seductive, his joy and peace more permanent, and all these a genuine Christian does find, he never has any doubt that somewhere or other he has been through Christ in naked contact with the truth.

II

GOD AS POWER

The weakness of God is stronger than men."—I CORINTHIANS 1,25.

THE key to the meaning of this striking epigram is in the previous verses, with which it is closely connected. "We preach Christ crucified," the Apostle declares, "unto Jews a stumbling-block, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, Christ the power of God." Christ crucified, then, is God's power. But contemplate Christ crucified. Is it possible to conceive anything which looks more like utter weakness and defeat? It is the complete reversal of all that normally symbolizes victory and power to our minds. Yet it *is* power, Paul affirms, God's power, and it will prove itself to be so in the end by defeating us all. The weakness of God, manifested in the Cross, is stronger than men.

The epigram, then, is fundamentally a challenge to us to re-think our ideas of the power of God, and to re-think them in the light of the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is a challenge to get past the appearances, past our first impressions of things, to something deeper which gives them the lie. And

there are few things we need more to do than that, few things more urgent than to get truer ideas of the nature and methods of God's power.

I

Failure to have right ideas of God's power has at least three evil consequences.

First, it puts an unnecessary strain upon faith. "No one," says Bishop Gore, "can know his own mind or the mind of men and women in general without recognizing that the real strain on faith is the spectacle of the present seeming weakness of God and of good, which no prospect of future reversal seems able to counterbalance." Now it is, of course, part of the meaning of faith that it flies in the face of appearances, that it asserts doggedly against all that seems to deny it, that the victory is in the end with God and with what is good. But faith, like every other human function, can grow tired. It cannot keep on heaving itself up in a vacuum. There must be insight in it, some present perception that God knows what He is doing, and that His seeming weakness really is power and is moving inevitably to its triumph. Part of the work of Christ, part of the value of His Cross, is precisely that He succours faith, and gives it, if not a final solution of all its difficulties, at least enough insight to carry it through this world. And He does that precisely by giving us a new understanding of what Divine power really is and how it is winning its victory.

Secondly, failure to re-think our notions of God's

power in terms of the Cross puts an unnecessary strain upon reason. It makes religious convictions look unreasonable, and that is always unsatisfactory, even though, through the energy of faith, we may still cling to them. We all know the old intellectual dilemma about God's power, of which rationalistic writers at one time used to make so much. It was put thus to religious people : " Your faith is, that God is all-powerful and good. But He cannot be both these at the same time. For, if He is all-powerful, then He could have made the world a better place than it is, and if He is also good, He would have made it a better place than it is. But since it is not a better place than it is, then we must infer, either that God was not able to make it so, in which case He cannot be all-powerful, or else He was not willing, in which case He cannot be perfectly good." Such an arid piece of rationalism we might ignore, were it not that that is just how even religious people think when they are up against the evil of things. That a good God who is really King in His own universe should endure an evil world like this as long as He has endured it, strikes us sometimes with all the force of unreason. We may put the difficulty away into some cupboard of our mind, and decide to stake our all on the side of faith, but it comes out to mock us every time some fervent, urgent prayer is unanswered, every time some foul evil of life fills our hearts with a sense of impotence and horror. When we ourselves can do nothing, when all the age-long yearnings and strivings and martyrdoms of mankind appear to have achieved

nothing, our thoughts fly instinctively to One who is all-powerful and who, according to the obvious definition of all-power, can do what we ourselves would like to do and what the situation obviously demands to be done. But He does not do it. Why ? We feel ourselves shut up in the dilemma. If God is good, then His refusal to act shows He is not all-powerful ; if He is all-powerful, then His refusal to act shows He is not good. Is there no way out ? There is. A dilemma is only final, if its terms are final. We have to re-think our ideas of Divine power and Divine goodness and re-think them in terms of the Cross, of Christ Crucified.

Thirdly, our failure to re-think our ideas of God's power sets an unnecessary hindrance in the way of our effective work and witness in the world. This is perhaps not obvious at first sight, but it is important. Let us ask ourselves, for example, what exactly is the distinctive contribution which we Christian people have to make to the solution of the social troubles of our time. By distinctive I mean the contribution which we alone, by virtue of our Christianity, can make. Surely it is that we are in a position to tell men, and to exemplify to them by our own relations with them, what is really effective, what, therefore, is really powerful, in respect of the hallowing of human life and the bringing in of God's Kingdom. As religious people we must hold that nothing is effective in human life which is out of harmony with God. We must believe that things are what they are and act as they do act because God is what He is and not something else. For us *realpolitik* must be

spiritual politics, and our methods, in order to succeed, must be God's methods. It is our calling, therefore, to know and to tell the world what God's method of making Himself effective really is, what is the true definition of His power; for that and that alone can be the true definition of human power, human effectiveness. What impresses me again and again as I read history and study human affairs is the sheer incapacity of those who are counted leaders among men to lead us anywhere very much worth getting to. History, someone said, is the record of the littleness of great men. There is truth in it. The world at times impresses one as being full of over-estimated people,—statesmen, leaders, publicists, who are powerful enough in respect of the influence they wield, but who, in respect of their actual effectiveness in the achievement of the blessedness of mankind, are impotent nobodies. This is not a cynical judgment. There is not any real lack of good-will in the world, good intention; the trouble is it is ineffective; and it is often ineffective even when it gets a supreme opportunity in some position of influence and authority. The history of Europe and of our own country during the past ten years or so is a record of a continual failure everywhere to discern that in human relationships nothing in the end is so impotent as force to achieve well-being, or in other words, that what looks like power, and feels like power when you are using it, is in respect of ultimate effectiveness not power at all. Can that be called power which however much you use it cannot bring you what you want?

Over all human history from the beginning, and over all our private lives, over all our silly prides and obstinacies and estrangements, both individual and national, there trails false thinking as to what is really strong, really powerful, really effective to bring us blessedness.

II

For all these reasons, then, it is essential for us to re-think our notions of the power of God. The reasons, too, will have suggested where the re-thinking must begin. It must begin by our understanding what has more than once been pointed out by various thinkers, that power is only another name for *effectiveness*. If God can do what He wants to do, if He can carry out all His purposes, then He is all-powerful in the only rational sense in which we can use that term. So long as God can carry out what are actually as a matter of fact His purposes in the universe which He has made, then that is quite sufficient to constitute Him God. Before we can understand His power, therefore, we must understand His purposes; we must understand what it is He is aiming at. Only in the light of those purposes shall we be able to see clearly that Christ is the power of God, the incarnation of the only effective method of achieving His Will; shall we be able to see that the apparent weakness of the Cross is really strength, pointing the only way of victory, both for God and man.

What then is God's purpose? We believe it to

be the establishment of His Kingdom, His Rule. But what is His Kingdom, and where is it ? We are far away from the mind of Christ and the truth of God if we do not realize that that Kingdom is nothing, and it is nowhere, if it is not within the hearts and wills and affections of men and women. God is Spirit and His Kingdom is spirit. God is within. If God wins within, He wins everywhere : if He does not, He wins nowhere. That, I suppose, is a truism, yet it is precisely our failure to realize it which lies behind all our misconceptions of Divine power and all our bungling failures to make our human life a better thing. In these days we are always talking about bringing in the Kingdom of God. What does the phrase call up before most people's minds ? If I am not mistaken, it calls up as often as not a vision of a society which is perfectly organized and delightfully pleasant in all its external arrangements ;—our present society in fact with all its ugliness and inequalities removed, but otherwise very much the same,—no slums, no poverty, no sickness, no wars, no ugliness, no disorder,—a kind of universal garden-city, with rosy children, pictures, books, holidays, congenial work for all. That is all right so far as it goes, but observe the disastrous fallacy to which it often leads. Being externally conceived we imagine it can be achieved by external means, by the application of external forces which shall lift out of society, and keep out of it, anything or any person who might mar its fair beauty. We execute some foul murderer and feel somehow that by thus vindicating justice and ridding society

of his evil presence we have won a victory for the Kingdom, that we have made human life the purer. When a certain notorious criminal was sent to prison for a long term, an evening paper said that human society was cleaner and better for his enforced absence. We wage wars and persuade ourselves that the mere physical defeat of the enemy, whom for the time being we identify with evil, has somehow lifted the world nearer the Kingdom. We pass laws and maintain an elaborate system in order to enforce them, constraining men, first by fear and thereafter we hope by mechanical habit, to do what they should by one another. Now, I am not saying that these things have not their place ; I do not wish now to discuss that. But the fact that they may have some place only makes the fallacy which they engender the more dangerous. That fallacy is simply the failure to realize that God's victories are won only on the battlefields of the human heart. You may segregate a criminal and keep society clean that way, but until the criminal's heart is won you have, from the point of view of God's Kingdom, been defeated. You may build a garden-city by eliminating undesirables and breeding a race of enthusiasts for by-laws and regulations, but that is not the Kingdom. The Kingdom comes, not when the undesirables are eliminated, but when they are redeemed and purified in the innermost dispositions of the heart. From the point of view of God's Kingdom, every use of external force is really a confession of defeat, a confession of weakness. It may possibly prepare the way

for a change of heart, but it cannot in itself effect it. Only love can evoke love, only a new affection can expel selfishness and lust, only a right spirit can set other spirits right. Most of our mistakes in dealing with one another, most of our despairs and puzzlements about God, have one root at least in not realizing this. Such is the darkness and unspirituality of our minds, it is when we are exercising force that we are most conscious of exercising power, and we conceive God in the same terms. Yet all the time, so far as the real issues of God's Kingdom are concerned, we are confessing weakness and defeat: we are confessing that we cannot win men's hearts. Strength from the point of view of man is weakness from the point of view of God.

III

God's purpose is to win men's hearts to Himself. Can He do that? If He can, He is able to establish His Kingdom, and His power is vindicated in the only sense it requires vindication. I believe He can and I draw that faith from the Cross of Christ. Obviously there is only one method of winning such a victory when methods of force are ruled out, and that is simply to love; to love so passionately, so utterly, that even the most brutal and seemingly triumphant violence of sin leaves it still love, unchanged, except in the increasing agony of its disappointed desire to bless and to redeem. The only qualification for victory required of love is that it should be able to endure its most shattering defeat and yet still remain love. If it does that,

it has still got the whip hand; for, in its very weakness of defeat, it has within it the invincible strength of remaining itself, and it will yet win its victory. As someone has said, "You cannot defeat defeat." This is not mere sentiment. It is based on the unchanging psychology of the human heart, on the eternal spiritual laws. Let men take every advantage of the seeming weakness of love, let them bruise and batter and seek utterly to smash it, as they did at the Cross; but let it still remain love, and still remain love, and still remain love, and in the end they will have to give up, and look upon what their hands have done, and break down in its presence. At some time or other the very weakness of love will cut them to the centre of their being with more power than a two-edged sword—only it will be spiritual power. I am sure that is so, human hearts being what they are. The weakness of a God of love is stronger than men.

Jesus saw this when He went to the Cross. What amazing insight! What amazing consistency of spiritual perception! Christ Crucified—the power of God, which yet appears weakness,—the only power which can win the victory in men's hearts, the only power which can win its victory in and through its worst defeat. Let sin and folly and blindness do their worst, let violence run out to the ultimate wickedness of murder and death,—what more can it then do? Nothing. But what more can the love which endures it do? It can haunt minds and consciences ever afterwards; it can meet men in the spiritual places, in their

thoughts, whence no violence can expel it; it can lay hold of them in those moments when even sin and selfishness are exhausted, and confront them with the memory of one who prayed, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do;" it can get right into the citadel of their being and find hidden allies there which will betray them into remorse. Ah! but you say—"Did the Cross do that? Was Caiaphas changed? Did Annas become a Christian?" Not in this life perhaps. But why confine the fruition of God's purposes, the vindication of His power, the achievement of His Kingdom, to this life? That is another mistake we make. We think of God's Kingdom not only too externally: we think of it also too temporally, too much in terms of this world. Somewhere, somewhen, we dare hope, God will win His victory with Caiaphas—after much pain maybe both to God and Caiaphas. But it will be by the same method. Caiaphas will look upon the love he pierced and surely he will be broken by it.

So it will be with you and me.

III

GOD AS REVEALING PURPOSE

"*The Spirit of truth . . . shall guide you into all the truth.*" —ST. JOHN XVI, 13.

THIS profound utterance of the Master opens up many avenues of thought. Let us take out of it a single truth, one which is both important and easy to forget.

It is this. We must understand that behind all our discovery of religious truth, prior to it, explaining it, causing it, is God's intention to make the truth known to us, God's personal, purposeful, revealing energy in our lives. If we attain the truth about God at all, it is because the Spirit of truth guides us into it. There are other ways in which we might express this. We might say that, though it is our duty to seek God, we only find Him because He is first seeking us. Or again, we must listen for God's voice, but, if we hear anything, it is only because God chooses to use His voice and to use it in a way which we can understand. Or again, we entirely misconceive religion if we do not understand that it is essentially a communion, a conversation between children and their Father, in which the Father's will and desire

to impart are greater than, and prior to, the children's will and desire to question and receive. But, however we put it, the general thought is clear. Take away the conception of a Father of our spirits actively revealing Himself to us, and you take away something of the heart of all vital religion. You may still have the form of religion, but it will be a dead form. A dumb God spells a dead faith.

I

In order that we may understand that this really is so, we must realize that the principle holds only in respect of *religious* truth. When Jesus said to His disciples that the Spirit of truth would guide them into all truth, He did not include under the phrase "all truth" the truths of mathematical or historical or chemical or social or any other science. Indeed, He expressly described the kind of truth into which they were to be led. It would be truth about Himself. "He shall glorify me: for He shall take of mine and shall declare it unto you." That is to say, the promise is confined to "religious" truth. And if it is asked what is meant by religious truth, I should say first, that it is truth about the character of God and the ways of His dealings with men, and second, that it is truth which any man or woman can understand, whatever may be his or her mental gifts in other directions. It is "religious" truth, then, the attainment of which by man depends upon the prior revealing activity of God to the soul. And

the attainment of scientific and other truth is not dependent upon it in the same sense.

Now there is a sense in which it is possible to maintain that every truth discovered by men in any sphere, even in the most abstruse departments of science, is revealed to them by God. When Sir William Hamilton discovered the difficult mathematical doctrine of quaternions, something happened which might be called a revelation from the side of God quite as much as a discovery from the side of Sir William Hamilton, because, after all, God made the reality in respect of which the doctrine of quaternions is true, and He made a mind in Sir William able to understand it, and so it was in a sense of His design and will that the two, mind and reality, should, so to say, meet and wed one another in that extraordinary flash of truth. But, if we get down to the facts, we find that the actual *experience* of discovery is entirely different in the case of a scientific truth like quaternions from what it is in the case of a religious truth like, say, a man's sudden and vivid sense of abominable sinfulness. Hamilton had no sense of a personal will, so to say, thrusting the truth of quaternions into his soul. The truth was conceived as being there the whole time, static, quiescent, hidden, and only laid bare by the activity of Hamilton's mind. Had he not sought it, pondered over it, experimented with it, it would never have been found. Certainly it would never have sought him. But the peculiarity of all vital religious discovery is that it has always in it, not only this sense of you finding something, but also

of something or someone finding *you*—of an activity on the other side, as it were, a deliberate will probing into your life, a Presence haunting the soul. This difference is so real that it must mean something; it must represent a fact. It is so real that it would strike us all as being a trifle ridiculous to speak of God as deliberately willing, and anxiously trying, over a long period to reveal quaternions to Hamilton or wireless to Marconi: but it does not strike us as ridiculous to think of Him as deliberately willing and trying to reveal to us, over as long a period as you like, our sin and His forgiveness. In the latter case we naturally speak of a purpose behind it all, and in the former we as naturally avoid so speaking; in the one case the word which leaps to the lips is revelation, and in the other case it is discovery. And this natural habit must reflect a very real difference in fact. God is not actively at work revealing Himself in science in the same sense that He is actively at work revealing Himself in that side of life which is the domain of religion and faith.

II

That this should be so is to my mind a great enrichment of life. There are things in life which God has left us to ourselves to find out, and there are things which He has not left us to ourselves to find out. Scientific truth belongs to the former class. God's character and the ways of His providence and the demands of His holiness belong to the latter. There is a great thrill in seeking out

the truths of nature, as well as a grand discipline of character. We can take our time about it and not concern ourselves if we have not the capacity to do it. The laws of nature, the vast undiscovered continents of knowledge, there they stand like the polar seas, unchanging, austere, indifferent to us, challenging us, but never helping us, except in so far as we ourselves probe them and bend them to our purposes, and *make* them help us. But it is not so with the truths of religion. Religion is bound up with the thought that there is a department of our lives where the reality with which we have to deal goes out towards us in seeking desire as well as we towards it, that there is a pungent, eager, personal purpose seeking our fellowship; and if religion, with all the warmth and urgency which this sense of a Divine activity of revelation brings, were to disappear, life would be infinitely impoverished, just as it would be if science with its austere discipline of unaided exploration were to go too. Both revelation and unaided discovery have a place in God's ordering of our lives. In revelation God is seeking to give us Himself, in discovery He is merely leaving us to develop our own powers. Yet the revelation is the more fundamental, for only by it do we learn that behind even the cold aloofness of Nature there is a purpose to evoke our powers and do us good.

No better proof of the reality of this distinction between revelation and discovery could be found than to compare the Bible, which is the supreme product of vital religion, with even the most engagingly written of scientific text-books.

Throughout the Old Testament the assumption is quietly made, so quietly that it is obviously part of the essential stuff and texture of the religious experience which is described, that the faith of Israel and all its attendant joys and privileges were not in any degree achieved by Israel, but were entirely given by God. If man is to have aught of God, he can receive it only from God, who is lovingly self-communicative in it. That is Israel's belief from the first. When a Hebrew historian writes even of the most primitive ages, he never thinks of man as having somehow raised himself up to God by his own efforts. It is always God who speaks first, and man, weak in understanding and faith, listens. And the same applies to the highest prophets and seers. Indeed, they are perhaps more conscious than anybody else that what they have to say is a direct, intentional revelation from God and not the mere product of their own unaided reflections. "Thus saith the Lord" is their exordium, "The Lord hath spoken" their conclusion. God is always thought of as having broken into the lives of the great pioneers of Israel's history, such as Abraham and Moses; they are not thought of as having broken into undiscovered tracts in the purposes of God. The Hebrew word which is consistently used in the Old Testament for the knowledge of God means a knowledge gained by living communion and not by solitary philosophical inquiry or unaided scientific research. And the same deep conviction is carried over into the New Testament, though there it is given a richer meaning in the truth of

the Incarnation and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. God's deliberate and intentional unveiling of Himself to men is consummated in history in the coming of Jesus Christ, who is not for one moment regarded as a mere product, from below, of the human race; He is One come down from above, of His own free and self-giving love, One sent from God, the expression of a Divine movement towards men. And in individual experience the Divine self-revelation is regarded as being consummated in the coming of the Holy Spirit, who, as our text says, leads and guides men, the chief activity being on His side, not on ours, into all truth. Always I say, throughout the Bible, from the first page to the last, you find the same fundamental conviction, sometimes explicitly stated, sometimes tacitly assumed, that in the religious life God is always the first mover, always the efficient cause, so that without His pouring out of Himself upon us not even the utmost preparedness and desire on our part would be of any avail. But no such conviction would as a rule be gathered from a scientific treatise—it would be out of place there—and in that fact there is indicated a note, a supreme differentiating quality, of living religion.

III

What is the importance of all this for us? It might seem at first sight that the insistence of religion upon the fact that God is the primarily active factor in spiritual things is a trifle theoretical and superfluous. I mean it might seem to us that

the important thing is God's seeking of us, and not our *knowledge* of His seeking of us. If He seeks, it might be said, in the end He must find ; if He teaches, in the end we shall be taught, even though at the moment we are not aware that He is doing these things. But one of the first things God teaches us, and one of the first things we must learn and thoroughly lay to heart, is *that He teaches us,* that He is active, that it is of His mercy that we know anything about Him at all. Until we learn that lesson we cannot make very much progress in spiritual things. The deeper discoveries of God are made only by the people who have made this prior discovery, and live daily in the light of it, that strictly speaking they do not discover at all in these matters, but God *un*covers, God reveals, God speaks and in the main it is our first job simply to listen. And I want to insist on this because one of our modern heresies is just precisely to forget this and to conceive religion as a voyage of discovery into God rather than primarily, if I may use the phrase, God's voyage of discovery into us. The result is an impoverishment of our spiritual life.

There are at least three reasons why progress in spiritual things, in knowledge of God's character and will, depends upon realization of His ceaseless, revealing activity in our souls.

The first reason is the quite simple and obvious one that God can make known very little to a heart which is not truly humble and docile and conscious of its dependence upon a power other and higher than itself. This is, in a degree, true of any

department of experience. One of the prime sources of error in every sphere of life is the way we have of imposing ourselves, our theories, our egotistic ambitions, our cowardly fears, upon the facts, instead of humbly allowing the facts to impose themselves upon us. But this is especially so in our dealings with God, for the temptation is peculiarly great there. The thought of God, if we entertain it at all, is at once so elusive and so tremendously important to all our interests, that our tendency inevitably is to conceive God sometimes quite unconsciously in our own image. We want a God who will assist us, not a God whom our first duty is to assist. We want a God who will take *our* commands and listen to *our* words, not a God who will Himself command, whose words we must at all costs listen to and obey. It is instinctive and proper for the human heart to seek God : it cannot help it. But by itself such seeking has its danger ; the danger is that we find the God whom we want to find. Such an impulse has to be balanced by the solemn thought that God is seeking to speak to us, and that if that were not so, all our seeking would be in vain, and that, therefore, it is not what we say, but what He says, which is important. It is this humble, teachable dependency, this sense of the sheer wonder of God being mindful of man at all, which lies at the basis of all spiritual progress. Primitive religion always tends to say, " Hear, Lord, for Thy servant speaketh." As it develops it learns to say, " Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

The second reason is that upon the truth of God's

tireless, active revealing of Himself and His purposes depends the sense of the urgency of spiritual matters *to us:* and upon that sense of their urgency to us depends, in turn, all progress in regard to them. In order to see this, let us assume that religious truths are on a par with scientific truths and that our discovery of them takes place simply by our own unaided effort. Let us imagine that God and His Kingdom are passive in regard to us, and that we find our way to them like an explorer entering a new continent; let us suppose that there is no primary movement on their side towards us. What then? Why, inevitably the call of the Kingdom loses a great deal of its urgency to us and our conviction that it is something with which we cannot trifle, with which we dare not be leisurely, is diminished. There is always a temptation to postpone our allegiance to the higher calls of life; we do not actively reject them, we keep them waiting. That temptation is increased a hundredfold when the insidious thought lays hold of us that the higher calls of life are content to wait for us, as the great truths of science wait for anybody who may care to discover them. But if, on the other hand, we realize that these calls are the entry of a Divine, personal, intentional, inescapable insistency, the whole situation is changed; it becomes lively, dynamic; spiritual things are felt to matter *now*. I can postpone as long as I like calling on my neighbour, but if he calls on me, if he interferes in my life, I have to deal with him. So here. If we conceive the Kingdom of God to be merely a static Utopia, laid up

like some Platonic idea in the heavens, which we can realize at any time we care to evolve out of ourselves the necessary powers, then its urgent pungency departs, and we join the class of folk, so common in these days, who profess the finest sentiments and a great love for the ideal and for God, but who seldom, if ever, do a really urgent and self-sacrificing thing to bring in what they profess so greatly to desire. If we could remind ourselves every morning, if we could seriously accept what in our hearts we know, that every noble impulse, every aspiration for righteousness, every call to service, is indeed the personal touch of the living God, the living Spirit of truth, pressing in upon us and seeking to lead us higher, it would make us very different people indeed.

The third and last reason is that upon the truth of God's revealing activity in our lives depends the sense of the urgency of spiritual matters not merely to us, but also *to God*. This also is important. Nothing shows the bankruptcy of much that passes for religion in these days so much as the fact that people of good instincts continually hover between a vague and lazy optimism and a vague and equally lazy pessimism. They admire high and spiritual ideals, but if things are well with them they lose the sense of the urgency of such ideals, and if they are ill with them they lose the sense of their worthwhileness and fall into despair. Confronting the sorrow and confusion and mystery of our own lives, as well as the sorrow and confusion and mystery of life as a whole, it is difficult often to maintain a conviction of the utter worthwhileness

of Christian work and witness, and of the ultimate victory of spiritual things ; it is difficult sometimes to keep oneself steadily loyal to the highest in thought and word and deed and hope. It will greatly help us if we bring ourselves continually back to the thought that, inasmuch as God has revealed these high desires and allegiances in our hearts of His own personal intention and will, they must count infinitely to Him. This indeed is a great source of permanent and sane optimism in face of life,—to have felt the living touch of God upon our hearts in the highest that we know, and to stand firmly upon that. God is living. God is personal. God has touched our lives and revealed Himself to us. This sense of God's activity within enables us to say with the Psalmist the words which he uttered when he was tried by misfortune and paralysed by the riddles of providence, "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee. Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterwards receive me to glory."

IV

GOD AS LOVER OF BEAUTY

"And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin : yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"—ST. MATTHEW VI, 28-30.

OF all the recorded utterances of Jesus there is none which is a greater favourite than this little nature-poem about the birds and the lilies and the anxiety of man. Yet, as with all familiar passages, it is easy to miss its full force and to be vaguely pleased with its poetry rather than deeply illumined by its message. Even if we understand the general conclusion of the words, which is that we are not to worry overmuch about the provision of material things, yet the cogency of the argument behind that conclusion is apt to be unappreciated. The argument is from the beauty of the wild flowers to the wrongness of worry in human beings, and the passage of thought from one to the other is through the fact, that the extraordinary beauty of the flowers teaches us something about the nature of God. It should be

noted that it is an argument and not merely a parable. Jesus is not asserting that just as God clothes the wild flowers so He will clothe us, and asking us to believe it on His authority. He is asserting that because God clothes the wild flowers, it follows that He is a certain kind of person and has a certain way of looking at our needs, and we are asked to see this of our own insight and by the inevitable logic of our own minds. From the beauty of the flowers our thoughts should pass to faith in God, and quietness of mind, and concern with higher and heavenly things, as naturally as from any adequate premise to its conclusion. If we have not faith, if we have not a certain detachment of mind in respect of material things, it must be because we have not understood the meaning of the beauty of the world.

Perhaps our slower minds and more sluggish spirits will find it easier to follow the argument if we put it under the microscope of analysis.

I

The first step is that the beauty of the flowers reveals something about the nature of God.

You remember that Jesus used to set great store by the chance words of men. "Every idle word that men shall speak," he said, "they shall give an account thereof." "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaketh." The unstudied word, the word which we let slip out without thinking and to serve no particular end, the small change of daily intercourse, which we could

quite easily dispense with so far as the immediate business of living is concerned,—these, almost more than anything else, reveal the inner man, and are the index of his true quality. So also are the little, superfluous, unnecessary acts of daily life. Most of us manage to do with some grace the necessary things, the things which clamant human need or coercive public opinion demands; but the man who throws little, unnecessary, beautiful acts into his daily conduct, he it is who reveals a truly beautiful soul. The superfluities, the things which flow, not so much out of the pressure of the external situation, as out of the internal pressure of a tender and generous spirit, these declare the man. Now it is the same with beauty as a revelation of God. Beauty in creation is the overflow of God's heart; it is the unstudied Divine word uttered, apparently, for no particular purpose and to serve no particular end; an unnecessary, delightful superfluity; therefore, more eloquent of the Divine mind almost than anything else.

In support of this we may note that science, which studies the relations of events with one another as causes and effects, and the utilities which they serve in the system of animate and inanimate nature, takes very little account of, and can give very little account of, beauty. Beauty from its point of view is a superfluity which can be ignored. Consider, for example, a sunset and analyse it out scientifically into its component parts; give a scientific history of its origin and purpose and end; and what becomes of its beauty? The sun

is just a flaming furnace to give light and warmth that creatures may live. The clouds are the same as the clouds of steam in a laundry—condensed moisture : the wind which blows the clouds across the sun is only an air-current equalizing regions of different atmospheric pressure. That is all,—yet it is all gorgeously beautiful and moves the appreciative spirit to the depths. From the scientific point of view all this beauty is just a bit of inexplicable high spirits on the part of creation, a " wild sunset-foolery." Or consider a landscape. I remember once discussing this with the late Principal Skinner. We had been walking together and had been admiring the strange, fascinating beauty of even the flat fen-country, with its pollard willows and its marvellous expanse of sky. " Curious," he said in a later letter, " mysterious, this landscape beauty. We know pretty well the forces that determine the shapes and contours of a landscape and the surprising thing is that they produce anything having æsthetic value at all. But they do ! " Even the desert, where no man can dwell and where nothing grows, is often coloured as with an artist hand. Or, again, consider a flower. It knows nothing of its own beauty. It is in itself a strictly utilitarian thing, having a task to perform and using all its structure merely in order to perform it. That task is to propagate its kind and maintain the continuity of plant life. The pistil is only meant to carry the seed germs and the stamens are artfully arranged to deposit the fertilizing pollen on the marauding insect, and the petals, we are told, are merely stamens flattened

out and splashed with colour to attract the said insect, and the exquisite scent has the same very humdrum purpose, and the whole of it is only a scheme for getting fertilized and shedding its seeds. Immediately this is done it drops its petals, loses its perfume, and is no more. Yet what an exquisitely beautiful thing it is ? Why ? Any splash of colour would have served to attract the bee, and any arrangement of stamens would have served to brush its back with pollen, for neither flower nor bee shows any sign of appreciating the beauty of the whole. So far as they are concerned the beauty is a pure superfluity.

Here is a more striking example still, given by Olive Schreiner in her usual strong, uncompromising way. " A gander drowns itself in our dam. We take it out, and open it on the bank and kneel, looking at it. Above are the organs divided by delicate tissues ; below are the intestines artistically curved in a spiral form, and each tier covered by a delicate network of blood-vessels standing out red against the faint blue background. Each branch of the blood-vessels is composed of a trunk, bifurcating and re-bifurcating into the most delicate, hair-like threads, symmetrically arranged. We are struck with its singular beauty. And, moreover, this also we remark : of that same exact shape and outline is our thorn tree seen against the sky in midwinter ; of that shape also is delicate metallic tracery between our rocks ; so shaped are the antlers of the horned beetle. How are these things related that such deep union should exist between them all ? Is it chance ? " What is

this beauty ? What purpose does it serve, can it serve—inside a duck ? It is superfluous !

And the argument is in a way made stronger when it is pointed out that some things are more beautiful than others, and that some things even appear to have no beauty at all, though that is perhaps doubtful. If all things were equally beautiful, we might suspect some as yet undiscovered mechanical rigidity in nature, which deeper knowledge would reveal to us. But they are not. That beauty should thus add itself to the utilities and the uniformities is a mystery ; that it should add itself thus sporadically, appearing in unexpected places and sometimes not appearing at all, increases the mystery. Yet, wherever it appears, it calls forth something deep and reverent and joyous in our hearts. It comes to us with a significance out of all proportion to its seemingly so casual and superfluous place in the order of Nature. Why ? It is because through its very superfluity we sense something of the nature of the Creative Power which lies behind. Beauty comes out of the overflow of God's heart. Only a heart and mind, we feel, which is akin to the highest instincts and yearnings of our own hearts and minds, could, in addition to making a flower an adequate propagator of its kind, make it also so exquisitely beautiful. Superfluous from the point of view of the practical business of the world, this beauty is not superfluous to the human heart. It reveals the nature of God ; it is meant to reveal it. In no other way can we explain the fact that, so far as we can see, man alone of all living creatures

hears this superfluous word of God and finds his heart leaping in response to it. When the horse stops browsing to admire the view ; when the frog stops croaking to grow ecstatic over the colour of the water-lilies ; when the bee gives up collecting honey and lies on its back in a rose admiring the sky, we will overhaul the argument. Meanwhile it stands. From the beauty of the world we know that a spirit is at work in nature, with which the spirit of mankind is in fundamental union and which manipulates the elemental forces of nature to speak to us and to minister to our joy. Beauty is like a glance of love from a friend in the midst of a hostile crowd ; a hand pressure, a caress, to those weighed down with the traffic of the market-place ; a word of appreciation to a man discouraged. As Tagore says, " Surrounded by the pomp and pageantry of worldliness . . . we still live in exile, while the insolent spirit of worldly prosperity tempts us with allurements. In the meantime, the flower comes across with a message from the other shore and whispers in our ears, ' I am come. He has sent me. He will draw thee unto him and make thee his own.' "

II

Now, second, the next step in the argument. Jesus seems to draw two conclusions.

The first is that those whose minds are open to the message which beauty brings concerning God will, if they really rise to the full height of the meaning of it, never be worried about the

sustenance of their daily life. "Take no thought" means, as the Revised Version makes clear, "Be not anxious." Jesus is not advocating carelessness or improvidence, needless to say. But He does read in worry and anxiety a fundamental atheism which is tantamount to denying that the beauty of the flowers is anything but a meaningless and gaudy mockery of our souls. It is an *a fortiori* argument. As the Master took a gleaming lily or a scarlet anemone in His hand and drank in all its inexhaustible beauty of line and colour and scent, He looked up and saw a fisherman toiling in the sunshine on the blue waters of the lake. He knew that fisherman's soul and all the hopes and fears and loves and heroisms of it; He knew what a finer, deeper, more wonderful thing than a flower it was, for all its sin,—yet what care, what love of a non-utilitarian value every line and tone of the flower revealed. It was nonsense to think that God should value beauty and should create it, not for the flower, but for man to enjoy, and not know the value of a man. "Shall He not much more clothe you, oh! ye of little faith." To argue otherwise would be to suppose a moral twist or kink in the Universe which all the profound faith and religious experience of Jesus, to say nothing of the sheer logic of His reason, declared to be ridiculous. It was another favourite principle of Jesus that grapes do not grown on thistles, nor good fruit on a corrupt tree. Such careful fashioning of beauty could not come from one who at the same time could create *a man* and leave his life and destiny to the mercy of chance and destructive forces. Thus to create men would argue a callous cruelty. Yet, could callous cruelty fashion the beauty of a rose? There are moral impossibilities as well as logical. Why could not men rest quietly on the providence which thus so plainly revealed the overflow of its heart in the flowers, instead of turning grey and bitter with anxiety? Oh! ye of little faith!

The second inference is a necessary completion of the first. Jesus is far too wise to imagine that anybody can learn the lesson of the flower's beauty irrespective of the attitude of mind he brings to it. If beauty teaches the providence of God, it teaches also the conditions which alone permit the fullest working and verification of that providence in men's lives. We must have something of the same mind, we must love in some degree the same things as God. The whole of this discourse of Jesus begins in the question of serving God or serving mammon, and it ends in an injunction to seek first the Kingdom of God and leave the rest to Him. Jesus had had plenty of experience of the kind of things men live for. He had been in their crowded cities and passed through their noisy bazaars. He had seen the glories of people like Solomon—the majesty of Herod's Temple, the pomp and circumstance of Imperial Rome, the rich merchandise of the caravans on the Palestinian roads. He knew what He was talking about. He saw men, as He would see them to-day, frantically busy trying to get more and more power, scrambling for riches, exploiting one another's lives, building up a kind of rank beauty of comfort and

fine living on cruelty and callousness to one another. He would escape from it all at times, as from some stuffy and fever-stricken house, up into the hills, where the dells were full of wild flowers and the grass fresh with the dew : and He knew there, with a solemn certainty, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Not merely as a matter of fact, but as a matter of everlasting necessity. Solomon never could be arrayed like one of these, though he tried till Domesday, for one had its beauty from an artist hand painting delightful things for his children, whereas the other was seeking only the tinsel glory of egotistic self-display.

Here also is a hidden harmony in things. Good fruit cannot come from a corrupt tree. If what we seek is merely to make use of the world for our own ends, merely to accumulate its treasures for our own comfort, we are alien to the spirit of Him who so lavishly beautified it out of love for us, and we shall never understand Him or appreciate His works or be supported by His providence. In the end we shall find ourselves naked and blind and dead, cast on one side by a Universe which values none of the things for which we have lived.

It is so. Jesus never leaves things out. His poetry never takes leave of fact. The lilies of the field come with a message of comfort, but also with a message of demand, and the comfort and the demand are one. They tell of One who seeks to speak to us and to give us joy, One in whom we can rest : but they tell us also of One who is inexorable in His selfless pursuit of all that is true

and beautiful and good. Only in proportion as we discern both these things and seek to live by them can all worry and fear be cast out and the peace of God which passeth all understanding possess our souls. We may, we must rest in God's providence ; but it is a revolting mockery if we seek to do so, flouting His Will ; if we grow piously lyrical over a rose in our garden, but live daily under the dominance of selfish ambitions. " Seek ye first the Kingdom of God."

V

GOD AS HOLINESS

"Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that . . . speaketh truth in his heart."
—PSALM XV, 1-2.

THIS Psalm is one of the grandest and most significant utterances in the whole of the Old Testament. It expresses in terse and vivid phrases a certain discovery about God and about His dealings with men to which Israel, throughout the long ages of her history and under the guidance of her seers and prophets, had been groping her way;—the discovery that God is above all else morally holy, and that, therefore, a prime condition of fellowship with Him is moral holiness. It is this discovery, and all that it has led to, which makes the history of Israel for ever unique in the annals of mankind, which sets Israel as a factor in the religious evolution of humanity in a class by herself, and which makes the record of her life from the earliest beginnings, as we have it in the Old Testament, still, with the single exception of the New Testament, the most valuable and inspiring book we have. In no other people of which we have any record did there emerge out of the darkness and superstition and cruelty

and, often enough, sheer sensuality of primitive and decadent religion quite so clear a stream of austere personal piety, quite so simple, yet so profound and searching a conviction that God is morally holy, and that His chief demand upon us is that we should be morally holy too. We have a glimpse of that stream and that conviction in this Psalm.

There was, of course, still something yet to be learnt about God, otherwise the New Testament, or rather Jesus Christ, would not have been necessary. But in God's revelation, as in other things, there is a proper order of development, which it is impossible to alter or to overleap. Man had to learn, indeed, that he could not fulfil this demand for moral holiness merely by his own solitary efforts, and that his soul needed a Divine Saviour and Friend, otherwise it would perish. But to realize his impotence in face of the demand of God's holiness, he had first of all to realize the demand. Some sort of conviction of sin, of moral weakness and worthlessness, always has been and always will be at the heart of true and deep and developing spiritual life. But that can only come through a vision of the utter moral purity of the inescapable God with whom we have to deal. And that is the justification for following this line of thought in a sermon. In our own personal lives we have, as a rule, to pass through an Old Testament period before we can get livingly into the New. We too have to ask ourselves, with the utmost seriousness and solemnity as though upon the answer depended all that is really worth while

in our lives, "Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in Thy Holy Hill?" and something has to reply within us, "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh truth in his heart." That first, and then after that the discovery that it is a condition beyond our fulfilling, and the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

I

It will help us to see where we ourselves stand if we very briefly review Israel's history. I said that Israel's great discovery was that God is *morally* holy. You may ask, what other holiness is there than moral holiness? The answer is important. It is, that, whilst there is not in fact any other holiness than moral holiness, men and women always have a tendency to think there is, and their so thinking is apt to be a clog on their spiritual development. Part of the darkness and the rubbish out of which the clearer stream of Israel's piety had to force itself, and of which it had to disencumber itself, was wrong ideas about what is meant by the holiness of God. It was against such wrong ideas of holiness that the great prophets were fighting all the time. So far as can be made out, the primitive mind thought of God's holiness as a kind of mysterious and awful force, which was somehow resident in holy objects and with which it was exceedingly dangerous to come into contact except under the most stringent conditions and regulations. The earliest Hebrew

names for God all seem to have something to do with the idea of power, a power which is awful and entirely different from anything which man can possess and understand. When the Hebrew of those early days used the word "*holy*" it was to this supernatural Divine power, so entirely above himself, so potentially dangerous to himself, that his mind turned, with something akin to a thrill of delight and something akin to a shudder of fear. We are told how the Israelites were warned against coming too close to Mount Sinai when the law was being given lest "The Lord break forth upon them and they perish." And in Samuel we are told of fifty thousand men perishing because they looked into the ark, and again of Uzzah who, in order to steady the ark on its carriage to save it from falling, touched it and died instantly. The Divine force which thus broke forth destructively upon people was not conceived as taking any note of, or being interested in, moral distinctions, as we understand them, at all; it was in the main non-moral. It was, in a sense, like electricity which will kill a saint as quickly and as ruthlessly as it will kill a sinner, if he breaks the rules. In primitive religion the rules for dealing with this terrible Divine holiness were given in the established ceremonials and sacrifices. To attempt to deal with God except through these ceremonials and sacrifices was to court death, no matter how ethically admirable your life might otherwise be.

It was inevitable that man should go through this stage in his ideas of God. He was being taught one thing at a time. He had to learn

that God is utterly above and different from man, and that He is not to be treated casually, or brought down to the level of the merely natural conveniences and expediencies of life. Later he had to learn that the heart and essence of God's utter difference from us is His *moral* purity, and that His immediate presence in life is not to be discovered in physical things, but in His haunting presence in the heart and conscience. All this doubtless seems obvious to us, for we are the heirs of all the ages and we have been given the fuller light from our earliest years. Yet primitive ideas often still cling to us. People still talk of holy buildings, holy water, holy books, though obviously these cannot be holy in any strictly moral sense. Only a personality can be morally holy. If, then, people speak of, say, a holy building, they must be using the word holy without any reference to moral holiness. Of course, more may not be meant than that the building is associated with the worship of God, but I wonder if there is not more in it than that.

Certainly I continually detect in myself when I go into a church something of the same kind of feeling I had as a boy when one of my brothers threw a Bible across the room. I was intensely relieved when nothing dreadful happened to him; I almost expected to see him drop dead. So also when I enter a cathedral I discover moving in myself a dim, instinctive feeling, that there are certain things quite permissible elsewhere which must not be done here, and that not merely because of propriety, decency and sacred association, but

also because they are definitely displeasing to God and so vaguely dangerous to myself. I do not expect I am very different in this. Even as the prophets had to fight primitive ideas of God in Israel so a prophet in me has to fight primitive ideas in my own soul. It is probably a survival of primitive notions of God's holiness which lies at the root of some people's disappointments and difficulties over the Communion Service. The holy elements, as they are called, are handled as though they carried in themselves some mysterious Divine potency, which will work upon the recipient and make him holy in some quasi-magical and irresistible way. And, of course, they carry nothing of the sort, and there is, in consequence, much disappointment, and a depressing feeling that the whole thing is not quite real. But the holiness is not in the bread or the wine at all; that is a primitive idea. The bread is bread and the wine wine. The holiness is in the forgiving love which they symbolize and bring home to our hearts, and before which we bow in deepest reverence. And forgiving love is a moral and spiritual fact, the highest expression of Divine and *personal* holiness. The main point here is, however, that if these primitive, non-moral ideas of God's holiness and of His dealings with us still cling to us, the more remarkable is the discovery of high-minded Israelites such as the author of this Psalm, many centuries before Christ, that God's holiness is moral holiness, and that it is our morals and not our rites and ceremonies which determine our place in His favour and fellowship.

II

But the Hebrew prophets and seers did not merely discover that God's holiness had something to do with morals; they discovered that it was a holiness which imposed a very austere and inward standard of morals. It is important to see that the one followed from the other.

Man, of course, even in the earliest days, had standards of conduct; for only by such standards was it possible to live in an orderly society at all. There had to be customs and conventions, an insistence on the difference between things permitted and things not permitted by tribal tradition and tribal law. Etymologically the word "moral" meant originally simply "customary." There were, then, two distinct departments in primitive life. There was the department of morals in the sense of the tribal laws and customs; to these wisdom, common sense, social pressure, fear of consequences compelled you to conform. And there was the department of religion, in which God's destructive and dangerous holiness demanded that you should fulfil the required religious ceremonies and sacrifices, if you wished to remain unscathed. Now by some original genius, some unusual capacity to know God's mind and to receive His revelation, Israel joined these two departments indissolubly together and asserted that it was God who had given the Law, the customs and enactments, which held society together, and that it was God who was its jealous and morally holy guardian. Israel

fused religion and morals. What happened? Instantly morality was set on a way of development which would otherwise have been closed to it. It became much more inward, much more sensitive, much more delicate in its perceptions. It became a matter not merely of external conformities, but of internal motive and desire. When men began to think of *God* as demanding moral rectitude, they could not be long in realizing that in His searching omniscience He looked right into the heart, and not merely at the outward appearance of behaviour or at the outward conformity, however exact, to external standards. You could play a double game with your fellows: you could keep the customs and the laws with outward respect, but all the time blaspheme them in your heart. You could not do that with God. He was utterly different, utterly above, still utterly fearful and awful even as in the days when He broke out upon Uzzah and slew him. If you rebelled and blasphemed in your heart, *He* knew. *He* demanded truth in the inward parts. In the words of this Psalm—the acceptable man is the one who walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness and speaketh truth *in his heart.*

III

In order to see the force of all this you have only to look within your own heart. I have been speaking of the development of Israel: I am now speaking of the development of you. There are times in your life, as in mine, when alas! you

drop to a merely secular level of daily conduct. For a longer or shorter period God falls out of your thought. What happens? Swiftly or slowly, but always subtly, your main anxiety begins to shift in its direction and emphasis. Your desire, almost without your noticing, tends to centre more and more on preserving your reputation, on doing what men shall approve, on maintaining a certain level of conventional respectability. In a word, leave out God, and instantly your conduct becomes shallower and more external, more a matter of mere conformity to your society. Now perhaps at the end of the day, in your prayers, you bring God back into the picture. Almost the first effect, if you are sincere, is to scatter all the standards of respectability and to force you to examine the rightness or wrongness of your deepest motives. By the standards of men your conduct has appeared entirely satisfactory, but by the standard of God and in the presence of His omniscience it looks but filthy rags. It is God who demands truth in the inward parts. Man does not. Historically that was so in Israel, and it is so still in the twentieth century. The more religion is deep and sincere, the more delicate the moral sense becomes. This is borne out by the fact that the great saints always quite genuinely consider themselves to be the chiefest of sinners. The nearer they get to God, the more inward and exacting become their demands on themselves.

Here is to be seen one of the chief offices of religion. By linking our morality to God's holiness we keep it pure and inward and release it from

the deadly sterility of mere convention. That is why the decline of true religion in a nation or an individual is a very dangerous thing: in the end it must mean a decline of morals, because it means an increase in conventionality. Without religion morals easily become mere manners, and the way to future development is blocked. The effect does not appear immediately; it may not become fully evident for one or two generations; but appear in the end it must. Each irreligious generation will become less morally sensitive than the last, as it becomes less conscious of a Divine holiness which, because it is Divine, searches the most secret corners of the heart. To hand on a deep, spiritual religion to our children is, therefore, not merely to hand on something which will be useful and beneficial to them personally; it is to hand on, in a living and gripping way, the highest moral achievements of the race, it is yourself to add a stone to that foundation upon which alone the happiness and prosperity of peoples are built. Atheistic or irreligious social reformers always strike me as being self-contradictory. They are trying to build up with one hand while they are busy removing the foundations with the other. Society is not going to be put right until men and women are individually far more morally sensitive than they now are, far more tender in their feelings, far more adventurous in their desires. And all the evidence goes to show that only a vital religion, a conscious intercourse with the Holy Spirit of God, can make them that.

IV

Look again at this Psalm. Look at the picture it paints of the kind of moral holiness which gives a man the right to have fellowship with God, and ask yourself whether you have ever realized such holiness in your own life, and again whether, if you could realize it in common with everybody else, the perfect society would not straightway be here ? He that slandereth not with his tongue. He that doth not take up a reproach against his neighbour. He in whose eyes a reprobate person is despised. He who though he has sworn to his own hurt yet changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury. Let us put it in more modern terms. No slander. No tale-bearing. No reverence save for character. No disloyalty to one another. No undue profits. No taking advantage of another's weakness. Why that would mean the New Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land ! Yes, but what searching tests ! Do you really hope to produce such a temper in men by merely telling them they must ? You are more optimistic than I. I have no hope at all of getting men even to see such a delicate standard, still less to live by it, save in the same way as is indicated in this Psalm, namely, by bringing them into touch with the living, searching holiness of God, by getting them to ask this question of themselves first, not what will be acceptable to other men, but what will be acceptable to God.

" Lord who shall sojourn in *Thy* tabernacle, who shall dwell in *Thy* holy hill ? "

Yet, as I said at the beginning, there is still another step required, a step which takes us beyond this Psalm, out of the Old Testament into the New. It is a tremendous step forward when a man gets a vision of the moral purity of God and opens his mind to it and lets it search the most secret places of his heart. But his pilgrimage has not ended ; his discovery of God is not complete ; his deepest moral powers are not yet fully released. He has now to learn that God's is not merely a moral holiness which searches and condemns, but one which yearns and desires and loves. He has to learn that so that his own love may be evoked and so that he may be finally cleansed of egotism and pride. Yet this further step can only be taken in any deep and lasting way on the basis of the step before. Men may talk a great deal about the love of God and about loving Him in return. They may trace His hand in the flowers and in daily food and raiment and in the laughter of little children, and that is well, so far as it goes. Only very often it does not go very far. Very often it is mere sentiment, a mere lyric emotionalism. It does not make them humble, it does not make them terrible in their passion for God's will, it does not carry them to the last ounce of self-abandonment and sacrifice. The only thing that can do that is that they should see themselves as they really are *morally* in His sight, and be probed to the depths by His searching holiness. They must go with Him into every corner of their soul's dwelling-place

and see its horrible shabbiness, and then they must look up, faltering and ashamed, and find, not a glance of righteous and destructive ire, but a gaze of infinite, forgiving, patient love and desire, not the face of judgment but the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. Uzzah touched the ark and was slain ; there was one who touched the hem of the garment of the Holy One and was healed. There you have the two extremes of the evolution of man's spiritual life and of his knowledge of God. Where do you stand ? Has the love of God in Jesus Christ really laid hold of you, so that it is the master thought and passion of your soul ? If it has not, then that may be because you have tried to leap the intermediate step. You have not lived near enough to God's Spirit to let Him show you what a sinner you are.

PART II

SPIRITUAL LAWS

"*He knew what was in man.*"

VI

HIDDEN THINGS REVEALED

"*There is nothing covered up, that shall not be revealed.*" —ST. LUKE XII, 2.

"*There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed.*"—ST. MATTHEW X, 26.

"*There is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret, but that it should come to light.*"—ST. MARK IV, 22.

HERE are three reports of the same utterance and the context is different in each case. A possible explanation of the difference is that this is a saying which the Master repeated on more than one occasion, with the result that the disciples were quite agreed as to what He said, but were confused and contradictory as to when He said it. If that be so, then we may perhaps conclude that the saying enshrines something which to Jesus was important, and worth repeating as life illustrated it afresh.

I

The most striking thing in the saying is its absoluteness. Apparently it lays down a law to which there is no exception; "there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed: and hid, that shall not be known." It might be said that this absoluteness is merely the permissible exaggeration

of an epigram or a proverb. But I do not think that that is so, for three reasons.

First, had Jesus really meant by this saying nothing more than that there is a general tendency in life to disclose and lay things bare, however much men may try to cover them up, He would not after all have meant anything very striking or illuminating. Such a tendency we can all observe for ourselves. We all know the disquieting way truth has of coming out, especially in regard to sin. "The Universe," says Emerson, "protects itself by a pitiless publicity." Character stamps itself upon the face, despite all our posing; time wears, and shoddy work, like the rubble in the pillars of St. Paul's, is in the end exposed; a sudden storm, and the foundations of a man's life are revealed, whether they be rock or sand. We do not need Jesus to tell us that there is this tendency in things. But if it be more than a mere tendency, if there be here an absolute and inexorable law, then we do need someone with more insight than ourselves to tell us of it. It takes much more insight to assert a law than to assert a tendency, to discern a certainty than to discern a probability. Even in regard to sin we continually persuade ourselves that it will be possible to keep our secrets. Still more do we think that there is much goodness which will never be known.

> "*Full many a gem of purest ray serene*
> *The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;*
> *Full many a flower is born to blush unseen*
> *And waste its sweetness on the desert air.*"

That is what *we* think. But it is the mark of the transcendent insight and originality of Jesus to state the matter absolutely, and to lay it out as a law of disclosure to which there is no exception at all.

This leads to the second reason why I think Jesus meant it strictly and absolutely when He said that there is nothing covered which shall not be revealed. On each of these occasions of its utterance He was speaking of His Kingdom and of the contrast between its modest, humble, hidden beginning and its glorious destiny. But nobody could be thus optimistic about the manifest and public triumph of goodness, despite all the forces which try to veil and smother it, except he saw in this law of disclosure a real law, and not merely a rough tendency to which there are as many exceptions as fulfilments.

The third reason is that, according to Matthew and Luke, Jesus said this thing to His disciples in order to comfort them and give them courage. They were not to be afraid of the disproportion between their own forces and the forces arrayed against them, nor of the public position into which their allegiance to Him would inevitably force them. It was inevitable. There was a law of life at work which operated whether or no, and forced a good cause out into the open and in the end gave it victory, the law that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed." Now there is no comfort, no antidote to fear, nothing to rest on, in a mere tendency or probability, but there is in a law and a certainty. The disciples needed to know that life was with them in their great adventure,

inexorably, certainly with them: that they were putting their hands to something concerning which it was foolish to be fearful and ashamed seeing that it was destined to triumph utterly and publicly in the end.

II

We conclude, then, that Jesus meant it when He said that there is *nothing* covered which shall not be revealed. And the conclusion is important because something important follows from it. It follows, that Jesus must have seen a reason in the essential nature and meaning of life why such a law of disclosure should work so inevitably. You can assert a mere tendency merely upon the ground of having observed a fair number of instances of it, as when you say, for example, that quick-temper and generosity tend to go together. But you cannot assert a categorical law merely upon an observation of instances. You can only assert a categorical law upon some insight into the essential texture or structure of life, which makes you quite sure that, so long as life is life, your law must hold. To assert an absolute law you have got to see "a reason why"; to assert a tendency you only need to see "a few examples of." So long as you do not see why in the nature of things everything hidden should in the end be revealed, you will always be able to keep your mind open to possible exceptions. But Jesus, judging by His words, saw no exceptions. There must, therefore, have been an essential principle of life which He discerned

and which made Him confident that everything would be revealed. What was it?

The answer to this question is suggested in the report Mark gives of the saying. Jesus had been speaking in parables, some of which even the disciples had found difficult to understand. They had to be interpreted to them in private. The question then arose, why the disciples should be given the interpretation and not everybody else; why speak in terms which only a few could understand? Jesus' reply in effect was that to be instructed in the meaning of the parables was not a personal privilege, but a very grave public responsibility. "Is a candle brought," he says, "to be put under the bushel, and not to be put on the stand?" What was given to them in secret was meant to become the property of all the world through them. They were meant to be stewards of the light, not misers and monopolists of it. "For," He goes on, "there is nothing hid save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret but that it should come to light." The difference between the two clauses in this saying is significant. In the first Jesus asserts the impossibility of keeping anything secret; in the second He asserts the basis of that impossibility, namely, the will of God working ceaselessly through the whole of life to His own ends. "Nothing ever became secret except *in order* to be revealed." The Divine purpose is towards revelation, towards disclosure all the time. And the whole tenour of the passage suggests the reason why. The reason is that the Divine purpose is towards fellowship,

towards making living spirits members one of another, towards service. The disciples are bidden to share with all the world the instruction they are getting from Jesus in secret, for that is the way of life and they may as well adapt themselves to it—everything will be revealed and made public in the end because everything, including even secret teaching, is meant for the good of all ; that is what God is out for and it is no use going against God. It is a law of life.

We reach, then, this unexpected thought that Jesus is quite sure of a law of disclosure in life because He is quite sure first of a law of love, of a Divine purpose seeking to bring all living spirits into deeper and closer fellowship with one another. It is because the whole economy of nature and life as God has made it is bent on fellowship, that it is bent also on expression and exposure. The spirit of secrecy and the spirit of fellowship are opposed to one another, and the spirit of secrecy is bound to be worsted because the spirit of fellowship is the ultimate Divine purpose at work in the world. To keep a secret is to be alone, but life will not let men be alone. Sooner or later God knocks at the door of every soul and, like some transcendent customs officer, bids it for the common good declare everything and keep nothing back. And the secretive, miserly soul, who will even then hug something to himself, is flung on one side by the great march of life, until his loneliness becomes such an agony to him that he can stand it no longer and craves to be made one with his fellows, even at the cost of being known utterly for what he

is. "Great is bankruptcy," cried Carlyle. Let us say, also, great is exposure. God will pluck aside all our veils, break open every safe in which we try to hoard our treasures, unlock even those cupboards in which hide the skeletons of sin, because He *will* have us members one of another in love and fellowship and service. Secrecy divides. Fellowship at its deepest means all cards on the table. If we will not put them on the table, in the end we shall have to, for life will not be denied.

III

Does this connexion between the law of disclosure and the law of love lack self-evidence in our eyes ? That doubtless is because we do not love enough, because we have not learnt the deepest implications of love. But let us consider one or two things which may bring it closer to our own experience.

Taking the matter on its lowest level, as we can observe it for ourselves, what is it after all that continually lays us bare to our fellows, despite all our masks and hypocrisy ? It is simply that we have to live with them and, as life goes on, are forced into ever more complex relationships with them. It is possible to veil our real nature and to keep secret the hidden springs of our conduct in certain circumstances and for a certain time, but life is too complex and varied, and others' lives are impinging too ceaselessly upon ours, for us to do so indefinitely. A man must relax into his real nature at times, but the demands of his fellows never relax, and so sooner or later he is exposed

and known for what he really is. What trips even the most cunning sinner up is usually the utterly unforeseeable complexity of his relations with men, the endless ramification and involution of human life, of human fellowship. The result is that in avoiding one exposure he falls into another. But the same is true of goodness as well as badness ; a sterling character may be as modest and retiring as you like, but it will inevitably become more known for what it is the longer it lives and the more it is forced into human relationships. I knew a great saint. He hated publicity of any kind ; whenever possible he shrank into the background and left the platform to others. Yet he was known throughout the length and breadth of Presbyterian Christendom as one of the supreme saints of God. He did nothing to publish it abroad. Life did the publishing. It always does. These things are significant. Does it not show that to enter into common life does mean to be more and more known to one another ?

But it will be said, are we then to expose everything in our lives to one another and wear our hearts upon our sleeves, for daws to peck at ? Of course that is not meant. For one thing, Jesus quite clearly regarded it as necessary that some things should remain secret for the time being, though only for the time being ; for when it is appropriate, He insists, life will have us all out in the open and we shall be glad, if we are wise, that that is so. One of the really sad imperfections of this present life, which we have to accept, is that we cannot always put all the cards on the

table, that there is such a thing as casting pearls before swine. And for another thing, it is folly to think that we can create fellowship by frankness ; rather we have first to create fellowship and then we shall find we can be frank with one another. Still, the ultimate thing to which, if we have the right spirit, we must look forward and desire is publicity. Take even our sins. The prospect of those dismal secrets of our hearts being at sometime known to all the Universe probably fills us with dread. Yet I suspect that no sin, even the most secret, has been properly dealt with or properly forgiven, until we are willing to contemplate the exposure of it to anybody, if God and the need of men should demand it as a witness to His marvellous love and providence. There is a strange thought in Hawthorne's " Scarlet Letter " to this effect. One day God will wish to make clear, or at least clearer, to His children the mystery of His dealings with them and of all the sorrow and pain and darkness and discipline of human life. And there will come a point where He will have to say—" the solution of this mystery and the explanation of this stern necessity which was laid upon Me are in a sin which Herbert Farmer did, of which no one but he and I knew." And when that time comes I hope I shall be so purged of pride and so eager to see God glorified and justified, that I shall not mind that that hidden wickedness has at last been revealed. If God's ways are to be justified, if men are ever to know as now they are known, there will have to be a tremendous unveiling of the secret places of our hearts.

IV

Yet, in conclusion, we must not think of this law of disclosure as primarily a thing of dread. Let us not miss the fact that, as has already been indicated, Jesus enunciated it as a thing of hope, something to drive away fear. In common with those first disciples to whom He was speaking, we are to understand, that those who work for love and for fellowship in the world have the whole urge of things, the ultimate drift of the Universe, God Himself, on their side, and that the things which oppose love and fellowship are radically and essentially weak, which weakness will in due time be laid bare in all its rottenness. By the sheer power of self-disclosure the truth as it is in Christ will win. To be afraid, therefore; to shrink from coming out in the open with our Christianity, to hedge and compromise, to pretend that we are other than we are, other than believers in the power of love to transform the world and win the victory, to be overawed by the blatant publicity of evil and depressed by the apparent shy weakness and secrecy of the good, all this is the very pinnacle of erroneous folly. Be downright, be utter, be bold—Jesus seems to say to His disciples—do not fancy that what you have to say will not be listened to. In the end, it must be listened to; the law of disclosure, God, will see to that.

Yes, Jesus knew what was in men. The besetting weakness even of good men, and the source of most

of their cowardices and fears, is a deep-seated scepticism, of which they are hardly conscious, whether the truth really is able to shine in its own light and win its own inevitable victory. Probably nothing would make so profound a change in the quality and temper of our discipleship as to be utterly emancipated from this scepticism. We must lay it every day unto our hearts that the truth as it is in Christ is the one absolutely invincible thing in the Universe, and for no other reason than the quite simple one that *it is the truth.*

VII

DEEPER DARKNESS

"*If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!*"—ST. MATTHEW VI, 23.

"*The last state of that man becometh worse than the first.*"—ST. MATTHEW XII, 45.

"*Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.*"—ST. JOHN V, 14.

THESE three sayings of our Lord seem to be three particular applications of one and the same general truth. That the Master should have made the application thus often is evidence of the importance of the truth in question and of our need to understand it.

The truth is this, that a man's chief spiritual danger is apt to lie along the line of his gifts and privileges as much as, if not more than, along the line of his weaknesses and disabilities. When some great mental illumination comes to a man, some grand deliverance from temptation or emancipation from his lower self, some unexpected restoration from bodily sickness, any sort of gift which for a moment lifts his life higher than its customary level—then that is emphatically *not* the time when he can afford to go easy and to relax vigilance. He must not lie and bask, as it were, in the sunshine of his new gift; he must not trust too implicitly that everything is now well with him. On the contrary, Jesus seems to suggest,

he is now in a quite special danger, and if he is not careful, he will fall into something which is really far worse than that from which he has been delivered. Light can plunge the soul into deeper darkness; a devil cast out can let seven others in; new health may mean new callousness to sin. In each case the last state is worse than the first, and what should be a man's highest blessing is turned into a curse.

In a very general way this is a truth which has often been noted and expressed by students of human nature and morals. Thus it has been recognized that a man's privileges, the things wherein he is superior to other folk, or even wherein he is superior to his past self, lay him open in a quite peculiar way to the deadly temptation of self-satisfaction and pride. Again, it has been recognized that a man may sometimes trust in his strong points too much and become so unwatchful on that side that the citadel of his soul succumbs, just at the point where it appeared impregnable. Again, it has been recognized that privilege entails responsibility and that people with great gifts have more to dread at the Last Judgment of their souls than anybody else; from those to whom much is given much is expected. Finally, it has often been recognized that the corruption of the best is the worst; that a man, for example, can quite literally fall lower than a beast, just because he is meant to be higher. Every equipment for doing good can just as easily be used for doing evil, so that, like a pendulum, the higher a man is lifted into light and joy, the farther he can plunge on the opposite

side into darkness and misery. It was thus a piece of deep insight that Satan should have been conceived as a fallen angel. The absolutely indispensable qualification for being *the* Prince of Darkness is to have been an angel of Light, for being the Father of Lies is to have been at one time a child of Truth.

All these things are in their way illustrations of the one general truth we are considering. But they only scratch the surface of things. They only state facts without analysing causes. Why is a great gift always such a deadly danger? What is the psychology of the matter? We are bidden watch and be vigilant; but what exactly are we to watch for? Perhaps if we now turn to the three recorded instances of Jesus making application of this truth, we may be able to get some further light and come to understand these queer, errant minds of ours a little better.

I

The first saying, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!" is not quite easy to fit in with its context, and different interpretations of it have been offered. It is quite clear, however, that the light referred to is moral light, the capacity a man has for valuing things and ordering his life according to what he knows to be a better or a worse principle. According to Matthew, Jesus goes straight on to speak of choosing between God and mammon. Luke reports the saying, "Take care, therefore, that the light that is in thee be not darkness," as though it is always

a matter of personal choice and responsibility what becomes of the inner light, always a matter concerning which we need to exercise personal care. Coupling this with such a saying as "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall *it* be salted?"—as though there were something particularly disastrous and irretrievable in any failure to be true to one's special gift and opportunity; and again, coupling it with such a saying as "Thou Capernaum, which art exalted into heaven shalt be brought down to hell, for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which have been done in thee, it would have remained unto this day,"—taking, I say, all these things together, one feels that what lies behind them all is a tremendous anxiety on the part of Jesus lest men should trifle with their highest visions and deepest insights and most generous impulses. But the source of this anxiety is the important thing. For Jesus it is not merely that so to trifle is to lose a great opportunity; it is not merely that the fine mood passes, the light fades, leaving us just as we were. Not that at all. If these sayings have any common meaning at all, they mean that when that happens we are not left just as we were. We are definitely worse. That is what worried Jesus. With that piercing insight of His, He realized what we do not realize, namely, that in these deep interior things of the soul, in this business of loyalty or disloyalty to the inner light, we either move up or move down; we never stay where we were. If the light turn to darkness, the darkness is deeper than ever before.

To have seen the moral vision, to have felt the high impulse, and to have disregarded them, is worse, far worse, than never to have seen or felt these things at all. The soul, I repeat, which refuses its opportunity of moving into light, falls into deeper gloom, and God finds it more and more desperately hard to get in, the more we in our folly shut Him out.

The reasons for this are not far to seek. For one thing, here, as elsewhere, we are subject to the law of habit and to the principle that powers exercised develop and powers unexercised decay. Light is not really something which strikes into the soul from the outside, though we often think of it like that: it is a function of the spirit itself, just as movement is a function of the body. It depends upon interior conditions, and it grows or diminishes in strict proportion to those conditions, and interior conditions of necessity become more and more fixed every day we live. A habit of trifling with our highest moods can be formed just as much as a habit of anything else, and, if that is done, such moods become less soaring and less frequent as we go on. Another way of putting it is to say that our spirits are living things, and to postpone our loyalties to the highest as though we can take them up just at the point where we choose to lay them aside, is to treat our spirits as though they were as static and as immobile as tables and chairs. Which, most emphatically, they are not. Every disloyalty, without any exception, starves the spirit and reduces its vitality and health. That is why it is so important for young men and women not to miss the flood tide of their youth's

generous idealism, but rather to give themselves to heroic and unselfish ambitions straight away. A man who surrenders himself to God in later life of necessity surrenders a poorer self, a self emaciated and starved and dark because of the intervening years of unhallowed living. But even more important is the quiet growth of cynicism which creeps upon a man's spirit without his knowing it, every time he palters with the light. How great indeed is that darkness, and it is a darkness which can come in no other way than through our treachery to our highest moods and opportunities. No man was ever made a cynic by other people; cynicism is not *per se* an infectious disease; cynicism is self-induced, it needs predisposing conditions, an appropriate culture ground in a man's own soul. That culture ground is prepared by our deliberate turning away from the light that is in us. We know in our hearts that in so turning away we have done ourselves a very grave injury, that we have abused our highest manhood and womanhood, that we are lesser people, but we harden ourselves into a protective cynicism, almost without knowing it. We project our dislike of ourselves into a dislike of the ideal thing itself and then truly our last state is worse than the first. Better on all counts to have no vision than to have it and be disobedient to it.

II

The second saying introduces us to a rather different range of spiritual facts. Jesus is using popular ideas of demons and their habits as a

parable of spiritual things. Demons were supposed to haunt waste places—deserts and graveyards—when they were cast out of their favourite dwelling-place, which was the souls of men. Jesus draws a picture of one such demon wandering disconsolate and restless in the wilderness till it happens to come back to the soul from which it had been expelled. He finds it empty, swept and decorated, and in great glee goes and fetches seven other demons worse than himself and they take possession, and the last state of the man is worse than the first. It is a grim picture. What does it mean ?

There is not much question that its immediate application is to the Pharisees. Now it is important to realize that the religion of the Pharisees might have been a very noble thing. It arose in the time of Ezra and it marked the final expulsion from Israel of paganism and idolatry. The soul of Israel at that time became empty, swept and ornamented ready for something far higher, ready for a deeply spiritual and ethical faith. But the far higher thing never came : there came instead Pharisaism, with its idolatry of the letter of the law, its subtle inhumanity, its intense pride in itself—something which was far worse because more subtle, more disguised, because on the surface it *looked* so much higher and better than what had gone before. The whole weight of the parable seems to be in the curious word " ornamented " or " decorated." The very beauty of Israel's religion after the exile in comparison with the obscene idolatries of former times was its undoing.

There crept in under its cover seven subtle, ingratiating demons instead of one crude and revolting one, and the last state was worse than the first.

Dare we apply this to all men and to ourselves ? Dare we suggest that *any* man by moving forward into a higher spiritual level and outlook may yet contrive only to make himself worse, or, at any rate, to expose himself to even more deadly dangers ? I think we must say it. A man may carry a narrow self-sufficiency into any sphere and the higher the sphere the less likely he is to recognize it. It is possible to become wrongly satisfied with one's higher insight, and deliverance from former idolatries, and exemption from the obvious crudities of iniquity. It is possible to remain small and gain an illusion of bigness from the big things in the midst of which you move. I do not know quite how to express it, or how else to explain the fact that quite genuine religious people are so often so terribly small, so lacking in the bigness and the depth and the tenderness and humility which ought to spring from any living contact with the great things of which they habitually speak. So often one passes into religious circles and has an impression that by that very act one has left the really wide horizons and great tasks and manly disciplines of life behind, and yet, all the time, everybody is speaking of what ought to be the very biggest and most emancipating things of life—God and His love and His suffering over sin and all the other immense truths of Christian faith. One feels sometimes that what would help us all,

if it were possible, would be to tumble into a really crude and pagan sinfulness again, so that we could see the fact of God on that background, instead of on the politer background of our swept and decorated lives. Jesus is undoubtedly right. The very gifts which a higher spiritual religion brings us, its sweeping and garnishing of our lives, its lifting of us up above the obvious violences and uglinesses of human nature, in short, its undoubted capacity to make us respectable, may prove our undoing. We have to foster such a vision of God that we realize we never are respectable in His sight, that the best righteousness of the best amongst us is, in stark and literal fact, as filthy rags. It is difficult for a sinner to forget this, but a converted sinner can very easily forget it. There are pitfalls even in conversion.

III

The third saying is simpler. Jesus had healed a man who had been sick thirty-eight years, and then apparently lost sight of him. John tells us that Jesus sought the healed man out again in the Temple in order to say this thing to him, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee." It is a very revealing incident. May we surmise that Jesus had learnt something about the man meantime, learnt that he had been a wastrel in his early days, before he was smitten by the disease of which he was now healed? May we surmise, too, that Jesus instantly saw the man's danger and how that the gift of restored physical health might

prove his spiritual undoing; that, accordingly, with that intense solicitude of His for men's characters, He sought the man out and gave the warning? I think we may.

But in any case what was the danger? What was worse than thirty-eight years' sickness, what could make such a restoration to health not really worth while? Well, every Jew believed that sickness was the consequence of sin and more than likely it was so in this case. To be thus suddenly and completely relieved of the consequences of wrong-doing might very well bring about a total misconception of the moral fact, might induce a belief that life is more easygoing in regard to sin than it really is. So long as he lay impotent by the pool he could not very well forget the causes of his impotence. But with renewed health the burden of conscience would be lightened, and he would grow almost unconsciously to think that thus any consequence of moral disloyalty might in the end be evaded. "The devil was sick, the devil a monk would be; the devil was well, the devil a monk was he!" Thus the greatest gift that had ever come to this man, might prove the greatest curse: and Jesus, with His usual insight, saw it and gave him warning.

So, in varying ways, it is with us. Nothing tests our moral and spiritual state so accurately as the response of our hearts to what may be called life's unexpected and gratuitous blessings. Here is a man who has abounding health, does successful work, is loved by a good wife, is guided through difficult places and escapes disaster where others

perish. How shall he react to these things? Well, they may stab his spirit into a desperate sense of bewildered sinfulness and unworthiness; they may bring him to his knees with the cry "Why, O Lord, why to me these gifts? Give me grace to use them!" They may, I say, do these things. But the chances are, I fear, if I know anything of humanity or of my own heart, they will do nothing of the sort. The chances are they will lull his spirit to sleep, and induce in him a false feeling that life will always deal easily with him; they will make him forget the awful abysses over which a man through his conscience is daily suspended. A worse thing has befallen him, far worse than sickness and failure and unhappiness or any other thing. His soul has gone blind.

There is only one way to guard ourselves against all these dangers. It is to live in closer touch with Jesus. We must watch and pray. We must daily submit ourselves to two humiliations: the first, the humiliation of laying out our lives fully in the searching light of His perfection; the second, the humiliation of asking and receiving His forgiveness, not because we have any merit to deserve it, but because we have woefully discovered that we have absolutely none, because, poor creatures that we are, we are left clinging only to His mercy and love.

VIII

THE SUCCESS OF WRONG VALUES

"*Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.*"—ST. LUKE VI, 24.

"*Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things.*"—ST. LUKE XVI, 25.

"*They have received their reward.*"—ST. MATTHEW VI, 2.

IT is one of the most striking characteristics of Jesus, and the proof of His unparalleled originality in spiritual things, that often the very things, which to us are a puzzle and a challenge to faith, are to Him a revelation and a confirmation of it. For example, the sparrow falling to the ground evoked in His soul the conviction of God's care for all His creatures, instead of smothering it. Again, the thought that God knows our needs already made prayer seem reasonable to Him, not superfluous and unnecessary. So also with these three sayings. They are so similar that they must have behind them substantially the same thought. But when you come to examine the thought, you find it says something so original, so contrary to our usual notions of what ought to be, so quietly and daringly frank with a certain fact of life which pious folk

have always found it disconcerting and difficult to face up to and accept, that you wonder you have never been startled into examining it before.

I

Do not all these sayings clearly imply the same thing, namely, that to Jesus the terrible thing about having wrong values in life and pursuing wrong things, is not that you are doomed to bitter disappointment, but that you are *not;* not that you do not achieve what you want, but that you *do?* The way of these people, He says, is to be avoided, not because they are such miserable failures, but because, in their own way, they are such triumphant successes! They get exactly what they are out for. The person who is out to get a reputation for piety can get it, says Jesus. He blows a trumpet when he is about to give an alms, so that he may have glory of men, and he has his reward, and that is exactly why you must not copy him! The man who seeks the power and the comfort of affluence can get the power and comfort of affluence; he receives *his* good things during this present life, and he passes hence with his ambitions perfectly satisfied. But he is not to be envied for that reason—quite the contrary. This is his failure, that by his own standards, he succeeds. For there *are* consolations in riches, for those who have a mind that way. There are few troubles in life wealth cannot lighten and mitigate: and, in any case, if you have come to think, as many wealthy people unconsciously do

think, that there is no disaster quite so bad as poverty, there is always some consolation in any trouble in reviewing your possessions. Jesus was too honest to pretend that the consolations of riches cannot be very real and very sweet, just as the pains of poverty can be very real and very bitter. But was the rich man to be congratulated on that account? Not for a moment. What piercing and paradoxical insight is this which says that such a man is really in woe, just at the very point when he is most conscious of being consoled, of being completely justified in his way of life? *Woe* unto you rich, for ye have received your *consolations!* As though one should say, "My friend, your view of life's values is proved wrong by the fact that on experiment it has been proved right; your disaster is that you have had no disaster; your bankruptcy consists in the fact that you are absolutely solvent; your devastating failure is demonstrated by your victorious success. What you asked of life, life has given you. Woe to you!"

II

In order to get to the heart of this paradox, we must first of all see that it is a fact that wrong values are not by any means necessarily doomed to disappointment in this life, but, on the contrary, they do often quite brilliantly justify themselves. Life has a dreadful way of playing up to and satisfying the worldly mind. Indeed, it has a dreadful way of playing up to any sort of mind, if only it be

a concentrated and insistent mind. I sometimes wonder whether when Jesus said, "Ask and it shall be given unto you," He did not mean it in a far more universal sense than we usually suppose, whether He did not mean it of bad and indifferent things, as well as of things good. Doubtless there are limits to what our persistent asking can bring out of life, but the limits are far wider than we care to think, and we shall be wise if we school ourselves to remember that anything we desire passionately we are quite likely to get, irrespective of whether it is good or bad for us. There is probably enough grist in this life to keep going any kind of mill which a man may choose to erect. The reason for this is partly the immense power of self-delusion we all have, whereby we piece out the real imperfections and failures of our world with imaginary successes, and so keep ourselves satisfied; really satisfied, mark you, for a happiness based on illusion is still happiness, and a man may live in a world of dreams to the end of the chapter, getting his reward, the reward he wanted, namely comfort, like everybody else. But still more I think the reason why, in a degree, we all get what we want is that all life is a process of selection, and we each have to build the world in which we live out of the raw material which surrounds us and according to the desires which we bring to the task. "Turn a miscellaneous lot of birds into a garden," says the late Professor Ward; "a flycatcher will at once be intent on the gnats, a bullfinch on the pease, a thrush on the worms and snails." The garden in other words will support them all and

within limits will satisfy impartially *any* ideal, whether of gnats or pease or worms. So, also, suggests the same writer, turn a party of tourists into a glen in Scotland and one, an artist, will find subjects to sketch, another, an angler, will see likely pools for fish, a third, a geologist, will discover evidences for the latest theory of the glacial age, and each will vote the outing a success, for they will all have had their reward, according to what they were interested in. And thus it is always. This earth is a very complex place, after all. Its possibilities are almost literally infinite, the varieties of raw material it offers for building the habitation of your life are beyond computation. There is hardly any desire, any ambition, any principle of living, to which it cannot afford some sort of support and satisfaction, if you are persistent enough and clever enough, and ignore everything outside your own interest, and piece out all the imperfections with phantasy and self-deception. We make our world, and there is hardly any world which we cannot make and live in with tolerable comfort, to the end of our days. I repeat, the terrible thing about wrong values is not that you do not get what you want, but that you so very often do!

It is in respect of what we call the worldly mind that the principle is plainest of all. Indeed, I suppose that is partly what we mean by calling it worldly, namely, that it is not without its success in this world. If it always failed in this world we should call it other-worldly, something not adapted to this world, and we should regard it as

patently imbecile. But it is not patently imbecile : if it were patently imbecile, there would not be so many worldly people. If life played up to worldliness never, or only seldom, if the people who set reputation above reality, property above persons, comfort above sacrifice, expediency above conscience, fashion above fellowship, always and obviously came to grief, if they were always and obviously in the end cheated of their desires, mankind would have learnt its lesson long ago. But, of course, it is not so. "Money," says Lord Beaverbrook, and he ought to know, "is nothing but the fruit of resolution and intellect applied to the affairs of the world. To an unshakeable resolution fortune will oppose no bar." In other words, if you set out for worldly success, there is no reason on earth, or out of it, why you should not get it. God will not stop you, not, certainly, by the miracle of turning the soil of finance into a desert for you. The soil of finance will produce finance if you work it properly ; beyond a peradventure, you will get your reward. I once knew a worldly old man who having gone bankrupt fell into a mood of unctuous piety and thanked God that He had thus intervened and saved him from worldliness. His business friends smiled scornfully, and said the real reason he had failed was that he had been an incompetent fool, and they were right. God had had nothing to do with it : God's grace might use the bankruptcy, but it had not caused it. Had the man succeeded in his business, would he have then thanked God for his prosperity ? Probably not, but if he

had, he would have been almost certainly equally wrong. In the sphere of worldly values neither success nor failure depends on God ; it depends simply on resolution and capacity. On the Stock Exchange and in the corn market, piety is no substitute for brains and perseverance, however genuine it may be ; if it were, there would be no poor Christians. Jesus is right. Be skilful enough in your worldliness and you will get your reward. God will not interfere. He will not suddenly write up in the sky over the head of an advertising expert like that Pharisee giving his alms, "This man is a humbug," so that everybody can see it. He will rather let him die in an odour of sanctity and good works.

III

Are we then to believe that there is nothing in life working against wrong values, no fundamental moral texture and grain of it annulling evil, correcting error, and revealing the ultimate bankruptcy of lies ? Surely not. Jesus' words "woe to you rich," show that He believed there is trouble and failure lurking inevitably behind the consolations of worldly success. "Be sure your sin will find you out" is a principle we cannot let go. But it is precisely the value of the line of thought we are following that it raises the whole question of *how* the annulment of evil takes place. It has been our mistake again and again, it has been the mistake of good people all down the ages, to expect and to demand, that worldliness should be punished at once and in this present world by being cheated of

the things it has set its heart on. It ought not to be allowed to succeed, we say. If it is allowed to succeed, by so much is it clear that life is not working against it and is not moral. But this attitude of mind is wrong. It must be, for it produces two very unfortunate results. In the first place it causes us in our moments of moral fervour to say things which experience does not corroborate, and so our moral witness is discredited. We tell people that good character is the best investment for business success, that honesty is the best policy, that selfishness does not pay, but at the most these are only half-truths, to which life very often demurs with a force which only a very much deeper insight can meet. A good character is just as likely to get crucified as to get a peerage. It does not take long to discover very questionable characters which have got on exceedingly well. If we make any attempt in our fervour to equate righteousness with worldly success we merely darken counsel, and so blunt men's moral perceptions in the very act of trying to strengthen them. And then, in the second place, by demanding that worldliness should not be allowed even worldly success, we land ourselves with an insoluble problem directly we discover that life does not work like that at all. The prosperity and success of the wicked have been a source of trouble to pious people in all ages. You find the Psalmist, the author of the book of Job, and again and again the prophets, wrestling with it. And, to-day, one is continually meeting folk who are puzzled and rebellious, because they feel that somehow

it impugns the goodness and providence of God that so many good people are struggling with poverty and so many worldly people have everything the heart could desire. We need to think the whole thing through again.

Is it not clear that to demand that worldliness should be punished by depriving it of worldly success is to set the same value on worldly success as worldliness itself does? Is it not to grant that worldly success *is* worth something after all, that to miss it *is* a real deprivation, a real punishment? If in the end it counts for nothing, why be put out because bad people so often get it? If our desire is to take it away from them and give it to better folk, are we not really in an inverted sort of way congratulating them on having it, agreeing with them, that it is after all a very good thing, worth striving for? This is no quibble. It represents a very serious and solemn fact of our poor, unregenerate, worldly hearts. There is a great deal of denunciation of the rich which is sheer envy, a great deal of puzzlement and rebellion at life which springs from a materialistic outlook only half redeemed. We say, "woe! to the rich," but only because in our hearts we think them happy, happier than they deserve! How different the attitude of Jesus! Here, again, His amazing originality and purity appear. He stands quite clear of all these fallacies and self-deceptions. To Him the success of the worldly is not an undeserved reward; on the contrary, it is their most terrible punishment, their entirely appropriate doom. He does not envy them it; He pities

them rather. He says "woe to them," because He really thinks it is a most dreadful thing to aim at worldly success and get it. It would have been better for them to have aimed at it and *not* got it. Nowhere, I say, is the purity of His moral perceptions shown more clearly than in this conviction, that the real failure of worldliness lies in its astonishing success, its real woe in its present consolations.

IV

What lies behind this conviction?

Well, in the first instance, let us realize that it is not Christ who criticizes worldliness. It is not we who criticize it. It is not Christ, who, in a bitter and envious paradox, says that the worldly man's success is a very poor kind of success after all. It is not we who say it. Not in the first instance, at any rate. It is *Death.* It is Death that with a very simple gesture turns the whole thing up and shows its hollowness. It annuls worldliness by the very simple process of annulling the world. But Death, it may be said, annuls everything; worldly success is in that respect no worse off than anything else. Well, does death annul everything? That is the crux of the whole matter. Jesus was convinced of a spiritual world beyond this material one, into which, sooner or later, we must all pass, and it is in the light of that fact that the essential tragedy of merely worldly success stands revealed. For the worldly man grows more and more incapable of being at home in a spiritual world; his spiritual powers die one by one, and he becomes

more and more the incarnation of his one dominating desire; but, and this is the point, *he does not realize what is happening*, for the very success of his ambitions seems their quite sufficient justification. That is why Jesus was anxious for rich people almost more than for anybody else. It was because their success blinded them to what was happening to their souls. It made them satisfied with this world by the dual process of fulfilling their lower instincts and drugging and annihilating their higher. Yes, that was it, they were drugged by success, bemused by their own efficiency. Yet the time would come when they *would* pass into another world, more real because more eternal, every capacity for which they had foolishly destroyed or left immature and undeveloped.

"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he reasoned within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have not where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my corn and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry. But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?"

It is all in that parable. The beginning of the man's undoing was that his ground brought forth plentifully. The worst thing that ever happened to him was that he was a successful man.

IX

THE LAW OF INDEBTEDNESS

"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; or she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."—ST. LUKE VII, 47.

WE must follow the example of Jesus and not judge Simon the Pharisee harshly. It was hardly to be expected that he should discern what lay behind this violence of emotion and extravagance of gift, that he should divine that the woman's notorious past had now completely fallen away from her. Jesus perceived it at once, but then Jesus was Jesus, and doubtless He knew something already of what had been going on in the woman's soul. But even making every allowance for Simon there was still something he might learn, something which Jesus, knowing the man, was very anxious that he *should* learn. "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto you. Let me open your eyes to what has happened in this woman's heart, to the awful, sacred transaction which has taken place therein; of which this violent, eager devotion is but the external symptom and symbol; in which you, to your great loss, have never shared. Let me teach you to read the signs. Let me open your eyes to your own soul."

I

Behind the woman's behaviour Jesus discerned a profound experience of forgiveness.

There has, to be sure, been considerable controversy all down the ages as to how exactly Jesus' words should be taken, but there is little doubt that the words "for she loved much" indicate, not the reason why she was forgiven, but the reason why Jesus *knew* that she was forgiven. The words should be attached to "wherefore I say unto you." "Wherefore, because she has loved so much, I say unto you,—her sins are forgiven her." Or, in other words, "I *infer* from this loving behaviour that she has had a deep and valid experience of forgiveness, that she has come to her true self again." That this is the correct interpretation is shown by the whole trend of the story, which turns upon the difference between the outward behaviour of the woman and the outward behaviour of Simon, and the difference in their respective inner experiences which that implied. "Thou gavest me no water for my feet, but she hath wetted my feet with her tears. Thou gavest me no kiss," and so on. It is shown, also, by the little parable of the two debtors which Jesus told Simon, and finally and conclusively by the general statement with which Jesus sums it all up,—"to whom little is forgiven the same loveth little." The whole point is that Jesus draws an equation between the depth of love which a person feels and the depth of forgiveness he has experienced, an

equation so strict, that you can safely infer from the external expression of the one to the internal fact of the other. No deep experience of forgiveness, no great, sacrificing prodigality of love ; no great, sacrificing prodigality of love, and, you may infer pretty safely, no deep experience of forgiveness.

Now Jesus states this as a universal proposition without any exception, and the question is, is He right in so doing ? There is no doubt, of course, that Jesus was right in connecting this particular woman's love to Himself with a profound experience of forgiveness, but is He right in universalizing the matter in this way ? Is it always true that to whom little is forgiven the same loveth little ? Are there, so to say, higher registers in the scale of personal devotion and costly sacrifice which are beyond the reach of all, save those who have experienced forgiveness ? At first sight it might appear that this is not so, and that there is no reason why love should not sometimes be at its deepest and truest and best without forgiveness entering in. But a deeper insight reveals, as we might expect, that Jesus is right, and it is not unimportant to see that He is right. It *is* true that in every relationship of life love becomes different, more intense, more ready for sacrifice and service, more thoughtful, directly something in the nature of forgiveness enters in. We do not realize this because we define forgiveness too narrowly, and because we do not understand what it is in forgiveness which makes it so moving, so fruitful, so recreating an experience in the normal human heart.

II

Let us consider some examples.

Consider the love of parents for their children. It might be said, that this is a love which reaches the uttermost limits of passionate desire and willing self-sacrifice without anything in the nature of forgiveness entering in. But parental love is, after all, a very complex thing, and many thoughts and feelings, many of them merely instinctive, go to the making of it. Often enough it has a strong, if subtle, strain of selfishness in it, even when apparently it is willing to go to very great lengths indeed in the way of service and sacrifice. Without their knowing it, the anxiety of many parents to do their best for their children is often in part an anxiety to make them a credit to themselves,—a disguised form of self-display. I do not say it is ever wholly that, but it is often partly that, and whilst it is even partly that, it seems clear that circumstances may at any time arise through which that egotistic element will be stimulated, and their love will, from the highest standpoint, fall short and fail ; there will be a range and register of insight and experience to which it can never reach. Now the only corrective to this that I know is, that the mind and soul of fathers and mothers should be continually filled with a sense of awe and self-abasement, and yet also of solemn joy, at the thought that in a child a living personality has been entrusted to them,—to *them* with all their weaknesses and follies and sins,—to train and

mould and love, and be loved by. I do not suggest that such feelings and thoughts are usually absent from parental love,—but they need to be brought out into full consciousness, and pondered, and related to the conscience and to the miserable inadequacy of one's own powers. When that is done, the love does become different. The thought of such a supreme gift and responsibility being entrusted to *you*, in spite of all your weakness, humiliates, and strips away egotism, and evokes the highest powers of self-giving. Why it should do that I do not know ; but it does. Parental love seems to fall short of something until it is ready to be overwhelmed with a sense of the stupendous trust reposed in it, stupendous both because of the wonder of a living personality, and because of its own unworthiness to be given the care of it. Now, the point is this : it is just precisely this trust reposed in you, in spite of what you are, that is the central and creative thing in all forgiveness, and makes forgiveness the powerfully transforming thing it always is in human experience. It is not an over-subtle playing with terms, but a simple statement of fact, that the parent who is not conscious in his parenthood of having been forgiven much, trusted far beyond his powers and desert, will fall short somewhere in his love.

Or, to take the reverse side, the love of children for their parents. A child's love for his parents is at first largely instinctive, and is apt to have that erratic, thoughtless quality which belongs to all instinct. But there comes a time, or there should come a time, when, with increasing

knowledge and reflection, the child suddenly realizes what an entirely gratuitous and therefore staggering thing his parents' love has been, how altogether undeserved, how amazingly persistent despite and through the many rebuffs which have been given it. Such a discovery can come to a mind, not altogether callous, with overwhelming force, and when it so comes, the effect is immediate and deep and lasting. The thought that so much pain was endured, so much labour undertaken, so much anxiety and worry felt, so many pleasant things cheerfully surrendered, for *you*, selfish, thoughtless thing that you were, melts the heart into a new tenderness, and into a new desire to do something, something extravagant even, in return. A friend once told me that he counted this discovery as one of the spiritual crises of his life. A boy of fourteen, he had gone off one day with his companions, hatless and coatless, to the woods, some five or six miles away. Heavy rain came on. He played with his companions for an hour or so in an old barn, waiting for the rain to stop. Then he saw coming down the road his mother, carrying coat and hat and umbrella for him. She was not strong ; the five or six miles were too far for her to walk. But she had done it. He said that from that day forward he saw his mother's love in a new light and loved her in a new and deeper way. He had seen what an extraordinary, in a sense unreasonable, certainly altogether undeserved, thing it was that anyone should so love him. But that is the heart and essence of the experience of forgiveness, and precisely that is what gives the

experience of forgiveness its recreating power in the soul.

Or again, consider the love between man and wife, or lad and lass. There, at any rate, you might be inclined to say, is a love which can mount to the highest heights of devotion and sacrifice without anything in the nature of forgiveness entering in. Yet I suspect that a very great deal of the thrill and joy of the relationship, of what really grapples heart to heart and makes the love so eager to express itself in service, is the discovery that, actually and really, here is someone who is more interested in *you* than in anybody else in the world, you with all your faults, you with your very few engaging qualities in comparison with other folk. That is what seems the amazing miracle of such love to a man and woman who come to it fresh and unspoiled, and with no exaggerated notions of themselves. To know your own unworthy heart and yet to find yourself all in all to someone who has thus come to regard you, under no coercion, but out of a free, gratuitous movement of the spirit, is to be moved to the depths in joy and awe, and to find a new and deeper and stronger stream of love and service welling up within the soul. But that, I repeat, is just what is so moving and heart-shaking in forgiveness.

And it is the same in all true friendship, all deep affection. You may take another's love or service for granted and be hardly moved by it at all; or you may feel obliged for it, and seek to repay it in a more or less calculating and unenthusiastic way; but you will only begin really to respond to it, and

to give yourself, when you begin to wonder at it and to feel that it is altogether undeserved. Until a man is ready to be awed and humbled by every piece of love and service which comes his way, until he is ready to discover in every such piece of love and service in some sort a sacrament of forgiveness, there will be something lacking in his character and in the quality and degree of his answering love and service to God and to man.

III

There is something very deep-going in our natures here. It is a universal fact of the human heart, which can be glimpsed in every normal relationship of love and affection, that "to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." But it becomes absolutely clear in the relationship of man to God.

It is possible to go a certain distance in the way of religious experience and to derive a certain amount of real deepening and strengthening of one's character from religious observance, without any very vivid experience of forgiveness; but the utter abandonment of selflessness and self-giving, such as is illustrated in the behaviour of the woman in this story, and such as Christ wants, only begins where the experience of forgiveness begins. Thus a man of certain temperament may cultivate a religion of nature and up to a point be the better for it. He will commune with God through the beauty of earth and sky and sea; he will calm his passions in a garden amid the flowers, and learn

charity from the austere sublimity of the stars; he will elevate his soul among the mountains and purify it in the green pastures and by the still waters; but not thus will he ever learn to be a martyr, not thus will he be so shaken to the depths of his being that he *must* give himself to the slums of some great city, or, like Father Damien, cast everything at God's feet and go and live amidst the loathsome lepers. He will only begin to be and to do all that kind of thing when the sweet beauty of nature, instead of perpetually soothing him, contrives to stab him with a sudden sense of his own desperate unworthiness of it, when it becomes a sacrament of, and a witness to, God's amazing patience and forgiveness. A man once told me that the exquisite beauty of a spring day in an apple orchard made him bitter and resentful of the world's squalor and need, so that he wanted nothing more urgently than to escape them altogether. Surely that meant that his conscience was as yet not awake to the squalor and need of his own heart; for otherwise the beauty of the orchard would have had precisely the opposite effect. Again, a man may, in response to continual exhortation and out of some kind of perception of God's love, display a certain interest in social reform. He may even do a little social work himself, and give substantial subscriptions to good causes. But he will not go beyond a certain point in self-giving to God's Kingdom; he will draw back when the sacrifice demanded is too exacting. And the reason is that any really vivid discovery of God's amazing mercy to a poor

weak sinner has never been made. It is not that he is a hypocrite. He does love God after a fashion, but his love is little, because his sense of having been forgiven much is weak. What it all comes to is, of course, that the only adequate motive which can carry us to a complete dedication of ourselves to God, in spite of all that drags us back, is a daily fresh discovery of the infinite depth of His love; and that is a discovery which can only be made in and through another discovery, the discovery of our own shocking unworthiness of any love at all. "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all."

This is not unreal and wide of the facts. Simon the Pharisee and this woman were real people. There was a reason, a reason rooted in the ordinary laws of the human heart, why one was merely courteously friendly to Jesus, and the other so passionately anxious to serve Him. And if we are not Simons in having refused all water for His feet, yet also we are certainly not as this woman, who washed them with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. We, too, stop short. We do not feel like the woman, and on the whole we do not want to feel like her. We are uncomfortable in the presence of such enthusiasm. Yet the Kingdom will not come by moderation. Is the trouble that we have never really faced up to the exceeding sinfulness of our hearts and lives, and so never really seen the wonder of Christ's love to us, that love which, in order to awaken us, went to the Cross? Is it that God's forgiveness of our sins is still only a mere phrase to us? Let us

search our hearts. Let us take God into every nook and cranny of it and ask Him to show us what we really are. Then let us fall on our knees and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner,"—and so falling, realize what it is to be forgiven, and so realizing, begin at last really to love Him who died and gave Himself for us.

PART III

EVIL AND THE CROSS

"*While we were yet weak.*"

X

CIVILIZATION

'I am not ashamed of the gospel. . . .
"For therein is revealed a righteousness of God. . .
"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness."—ROMANS I, 16, 17, 18.

THESE three propositions, one from each verse, mark the movement of the Apostle's mind from stage to stage of his developing thought. It is a movement which it is important for us to understand; for it gives us an apologetic for the Christian gospel, a justification for our continual preaching of it and insistence upon its unique importance,—an apologetic and a justification which are as necessary and as cogent to-day as they were in the first century when Paul was writing this epistle.

I

First, why was there any question of being ashamed of the gospel of Christ? Why did Paul say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ"? What put the idea into his mind? The answer is clear. It was the thought of Rome, the capital City, and of preaching his message in the midst

of its magnificent palaces and streets, its far-flung imperial interests, its proud, self-conscious citizens. "I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome," he says. And then immediately, "for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." It does not need much imagination to get right into Paul's mind in this regard. Only a dull mind and heart could fail to realize the wonder of that irresistible civilization, which, starting from a single city, had spread all round the Mediterranean, and knit a score of diverse nations into a throbbing unity of order and prosperity and peace. Only a listless imagination could fail to invest the imperial city, the tiny heart of that mighty organism, with almost supernatural qualities of wisdom and power, qualities which perhaps in reality it did not possess. What boy was there in those days whose heart had not leapt at the thought of one day treading the streets of Rome and inspecting those walls and towers which had seen and heard, and still saw and heard, the destiny of all mankind being directed and controlled, or who had not watched with youthful awe the armed legions march by, visible expression of that distant, but inescapable, power? The glamour of imperial might is something which is indefinable and even irrational, but it is very real; probably all of us have felt it at some time or other in respect of our own Empire; it is something we need to watch carefully and control. Paul seems to have been more than usually susceptible to this glamour, though it was brought, in common with other things, into strict subjection to Christ.

He had been born a Roman citizen, and he saw in the Roman power a divinely ordained instrument to assist the cause of his Master; he used its military roads; he invoked the protection of its law; he turned its political system into spiritual metaphors; he saw in its discipline a force which restrained evil; he exhorted his converts to be loyal to its authority; finally, the perspective of his missionary plans focussed in Rome itself,—it would be the crown and consummation of his labours to preach Christ there.

And now the opportunity is near at hand, and a certain contrast, of which he had always been dimly aware, strikes him, now that he is up against a practical situation, with triple force. On the background of the imperial city, its wealth and its pride and the vast horizon of its business, he projects the message he intends to preach. He had been made aware already that the story of Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks nonsense. But what of Rome? All the glamour of it, which he had felt from his youth up, laid hold of him for a moment again, and he saw the thing for a moment from the scoffer's point of view, from the angle of a Roman citizen. It did look a trifle ridiculous, unreal, insignificant. What conceivable interest could Rome be expected to take in the story of a poor carpenter, who was born in a distant and unimportant province of the Empire and perished like a criminal in the company of robbers? By what argument could the conviction that that poor carpenter's cross was the unveiling of the heart

of God to mankind be made to seem plausible to a hard, matter-of-fact Roman mind, steeped in materialist and highly successful politics, and only at home with the things he could touch and see and handle and control by force? Would it not be laughed at, perhaps even completely ignored, at the most listened to as the latest novelty from the mysterious East? For a moment, I conceive, Paul's mind faltered. But instantly he pulled himself together and reminded himself of certain brute facts, which his imagination, in the manner of imagination, had conveniently ignored. By the aid of those brute facts he brought things into a truer perspective and armed himself with the cogent and irresistible argument he required. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," he proclaims. "I grant that the appearances are all against it, but they are only appearances, even in Rome. For,"—and then he goes on to give the reason.

But before we consider the reason, let it be understood that in its own way and according to our modern circumstances, the same contrast and the same impulse to be a trifle shamefaced about the gospel, are apt to lay hold of us and to need the same movement of thought as the Apostle's to meet it. It is not always easy, even for serious minds, to keep a clear grasp of the fact that the Christian gospel is a desperately important thing even in this modern world, that it deals with certain vital facts which only the superficiality of our minds enables us to forget. Not long ago I was able to realize the truth of this in a particularly

vivid way. We went straight from a little chapel, where we had been speaking and singing of the Cross of Christ and of its revelation of God's love, to a tour of inspection of very nearly the largest iron and steel works in the world. Words are quite inadequate to describe what we saw. One's predominant impression was of the stupendous forces of nature which man's brain by machinery of the most baffling intricacy had released and harnessed and controlled. In those vast halls one saw nothing but disciplined physical power. One man was lifting, by the touch of a single electric connexion, a ladle containing seventy-five tons of boiling steel as though it had been a cup of tea; another was controlling a force of many thousand horse-power, one hand in his pocket, the other on a lever; a third was directing a knife which cut through steel plates as though they were cheese,—and over the whole place was an indefinable atmosphere of enormous self-sufficiency and adequacy. It was all so overwhelmingly, so crushingly, real and solid and confident. Every machine seemed to shout to us—"You can at least trust us to deliver the goods." For a moment one felt that this was indeed the true line of progress for mankind,—an ever increasing use of his best brains until all nature ministered to his need and obeyed his word. And one's thoughts went back to the little chapel, where a short while before we had been singing our hymns and thinking about Jesus and His Cross and the love of God. What *had* these to do with one another? A giant electric crane swings silently up and plucks a slab

of glowing steel out of a furnace and moves silently away again, and we scatter out of its path. If we got in its way it would crush us and all our hopes and hymns and prayers as a man crushes a beetle. Do we really assert that the death of Jesus of Nazareth represents something as real as all that, nay, more real, more everlasting, more important? For a second one *is* ashamed of the gospel, ashamed of its apparent pitiful weakness and flimsy unreality, ashamed, until one, like Paul, begins to think.

The steel-works merely magnified a thousand times the kind of impression, which, in a fleeting and more evanescent way, is continually being made upon all our minds. In London to-day we can contemplate the might and the pride of Rome in another form,—the same superb self-confidence, the same absorption in secular things, the same power to make itself felt instantly, in plain and identifiable ways, in everybody's life. You pass up and down the streets with their endless streams of traffic; you pass the places of government in Westminster where decisions are taken which in a few seconds may encircle the earth, and alter the destiny of peoples; you pass in and out of the offices, the financial houses, the big stores; you mix with men and hear the kind of things they talk about. Is Jesus mentioned? Does it enter anybody's mind that that Cross outside Jerusalem has got anything immediately to do with all the frightfully important business of the metropolis of a mighty empire? Is the love of God treated as the last and most important reality in the House

of Commons, on the Stock Exchange, at the theatres? Not for one moment. It is not mentioned. You yourself would be startled to hear it mentioned. You would be startled to hear yourself mentioning it. Let us be frank about this. It comes a little awkwardly into our Western civilization, this gospel of ours, and we are not quite at our ease at being the sponsors of it. We feel we need to apologize for it, if indeed we do not keep it quite out of sight. Like Paul we have to affirm that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, but only because an inward monitor warns us that there is real danger we really should be.

II

How then did the Apostle fight and cast out this diffidence about his gospel which the prospect of preaching it in Rome evoked in him? He fought it, as it alone can be fought, *on a basis of fact.* He put it to himself that there was another side to the pride and power and prosperity of Rome, which was equally real and which, taken along with them, evaporated every particle of glamour and impressiveness from them. He realized it was all a trick of the selective imagination. Any view can be made to look beautiful by leaving things out or by looking in one direction only, as every photographer knows. It says much for the balance and honesty of Paul's mind that, profound admirer of Roman civilization as he was, he could see that in many directions it was rotten to the core. "I am not ashamed of the gospel

of Christ, *for the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness.*"

It is not to the point to discuss what Paul means precisely by "the wrath of God." Suffice it to say that he does not mean "anger" in our ordinary human sense of that term, an explosion of destructive ire. He means, as his subsequent words plainly show, that sin produces consequences and that quite the worst of its consequences is that it very soon gets completely out of man's control, so that he is impotent to redeem himself. The concluding verses of this chapter contain a picture of the progressive moral corruption of contemporary society which is too dreadful almost even to read. And the whole force of it is in the assertion that men are delivered up to their wickedness, or in other words, that there is no capacity in man himself which can, so to say, stop the rot which had set in in his life. This, needless to say, is true to facts. The supreme problem of sin is the moral impotence it produces. So over against the might of Rome the Apostle sets the appalling moral weakness; over against the majesty of imperial rule, the degradation of spiritual anarchy. Rome might send her legions to all the ends of the earth, she might make decisions and enact laws which reverberated through the whole world and reached the poorest peasant in his cottage on the distant frontiers; she might grow wealthy and build abiding monuments of her greatness; but she could do nothing to help the victims of lust and sin of which her realms were full. Nothing whatever, even if she had wanted to. And with

an inspired vision Paul saw where it would all end, in toppling destruction and ruin, unless,—well, unless God did something. Man being powerless, the only hope was in God. If there were a remedy and hope in Him and Paul knew it, he might well say "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.*"

And is it not the same to-day? I came away from those steel-works and thought them through into relation with certain other things, temporarily forgotten. They instantly began to shrink and dwindle, until they looked almost pitiably silly. I followed in imagination this wonderful modern man able to control such stupendous physical forces, and saw him lose his temper with his wife, turning his own home into hell. I saw the brain which designed that machinery fuddled with alcohol, the hands which manipulated it fumbling even to light a cigarette. I saw the battlefields of France and remembered what steel can do to the fair, human body. I went down into the slums of Newcastle and saw the revolting dust and ugliness and filth of them,—miles of streets and rooms where even the decencies of a pig-sty cannot be observed. I recalled the factories of certain parts of London where every young girl joins the "booze-club" and gets drunk whenever there is enough funds accumulated to do so. I thought of the divorce courts and the night-clubs, the wealth of the West-end, the squalor of the East, the ill-health, the nervous breakdowns, the tale told every day in the police courts. Yes! and I thought even of the poor level of living of even such respectable folk as ourselves,—so uninspired

and distracted and quarrelsome, so much less than what it ought to be,—I thought of all this, and much more besides, and instantly the steel-works looked small, looked as though *they* were the things which needed apologizing for, being concerned with nothing that in the long run really mattered. And the same is true of all the other vast secular activities of civilization; they look impressive and important and self-sufficient, yet the fact remains that, despite them, man cannot straighten out the tangle of his social and spiritual life, he cannot solve the problem of living together, he cannot rid himself of the legacy of sin and confusion which has come down to him and to which he adds day by day through his own continual disloyalty. Nevertheless it is surely perfectly clear that ability or inability to do these things is the one thing which matters from the point of view of human well-being. And the facts are beyond question. If there is any value in evidence at all, man is unable. Sin's consequences are too much for him.

III

And so, here at last, the gospel comes in. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness. *But in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.*" What did Paul mean by that? Much doubtless into which there is no time to enter, but this essentially, that God's righteousness is an *active* thing, which is at work in the midst

of men to do what they cannot do for themselves, namely, to redeem them and make them good. That was the message which Paul saw to be demanded by all the facts. Unless God undertook to deal with man's sin it would never be dealt with, and until it was dealt with the majesty of Rome, or of anything else, was little better than a bunch of flowers on a grave, giving pleasure to the eye, but doing nothing to stop the corruption and despair within. In the Cross of Jesus, repellent and humiliating as its features might seem, Paul saw the one credible revelation and assurance there was, that man is not left to stew in his own juice, but that God is in this business of sin with man, and ready and willing to lift him to higher things. And he saw too that that was borne out in actual practice. He had seen it happen in other lives; he had known it happen in his own; the vision of God's redeeming and forgiving love in Jesus, the perfect love and sacrifice of Jesus had set his feet on an upward path of increasing moral power and joy. Why then should he be ashamed? His gospel was at least all square with the facts. Let men see those facts in their entirety—the awful consequences of sin, the utter impotence of man to stop them—and they would come humbly to the feet of a crucified carpenter, if there they could gain the assurance of a Divine love and power, which bore their sins, and carried their sorrows, and would yet lift their weakness on its strength up into the light.

So one came to see that the service in the little chapel, and the hymns, and the talk about the

love of God, were really more at the heart of things, more *practical*, far more so, than the electric cranes and the flaming furnaces and all the paraphernalia of the modern world. It is so. It really is so. Meet the feeling of the unreality and unimportance of our faith, which I know sometimes comes over you, with a re-examination of all the facts. Look sin straight in the face and ask yourself what you or anybody else has got to say to it if Christ was a merely deluded man and God does not bear its burden on His heart. Without the gospel there is nothing to say—there is only a lost battle and the darkness of despair. I call upon you to set the Cross at the centre of all your thought and all your witness to the world, not because you are by way of being a religious mystic or an emotional sentimentalist or a foolish dreamer whom men will justifiably ignore, but because you are a practical man who knows life and knows his own soul.

XI

THE DEEPER NEED

"*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.*"—ST. MATTHEW IX, 2.

THE Greek word here translated "son" really means "child," and that Jesus should use it shows that the sick man was very young, probably hardly more than a boy. Perhaps if we translated it "sonny" we should come nearest to the original and at the same time suggest the kindly encouragement of the Master's tones. "Cheer up, sonny, thy sins are forgiven." But why should that cheer him up? He had been brought there to be cured of his illness, not to have his sins forgiven. Neither in those days nor in these do men as a rule go to such lengths to get the moral twists of their souls straightened out, least of all when they are so young. Mark tells us that the sick man's friends climbed up on the roof and dug through it in order to get him to Jesus' feet. That is the word literally, "dug through"; there must have been a shower of mud and straw! Men act thus more under the compulsion of physical than moral necessity. Yet the first word addressed to the sick lad was about his sins, a very kindly

and encouraging word, but still about his sins and not about his palsy. Why ?

Such an unexpected response is surely very revealing of Jesus' mind. It reveals it in a way which is particular to this incident, and it reveals it in a way which is characteristic of His whole life. Let us look at these two points.

I

First, then, this particular incident.

This unexpected response of Jesus implies that He knew a good deal more about the lad than either the lad himself probably realized, or the story, as told in the gospels, gives us explicitly to understand. It seems not unreasonable to surmise that, in the course of His many long stays in Capernaum (Matthew calls Capernaum His own city), Jesus had heard tell of the tragedy of this young man, smitten down so early in his life with a frightful disease ; also He had heard more than once the kind of thing which was being said about it. The boy had been a bit wild, and, in accordance with the crude, popular theology of the time, the shaking paralysis which had come upon him was interpreted as a Divine punishment for sin. So to the physical torment there was added the misery of being regarded as a moral outcast, nay, worse, the misery of so regarding himself. For he himself believed it ; he was no clean-living, spiritual genius like Job, who could rebel against and rise above the superstition of his age. On the contrary, with that morbid intensity which such a condition so often produces, his conscience was only too ready to find justification for the popular judgment. Real sins became magnified out of all proportion to their proper significance, and unreal ones were imagined in order to fill up the account and make it adequate to the terrible punishment it was supposed to have produced.

Jesus, then, had heard something about the boy, and now, when he was let down at His feet, He guessed by a quick intuition who he was. But in any case, if He had not been sure who he was, the whole situation made it plain. The lad had not foreseen that by being so let down to Jesus' feet he would find himself in such a pitilessly public position. He had not bargained for those scribes who were sitting there, stern old men, trained only to think in terms of law and of a jealous God. To lie there before all those people, shaking all over, branded as it were with the record of sin and of God's wrath, to hear the mutterings and whispers which went on, it was a terrible position to be in. He shrank away into himself, not daring to lift his eyes, wishing he had never come, quite ready now for a scathing rebuke from Jesus Himself and an ignominious exit, cheeks tingling with shame and heart sick with disappointment. But if he had not foreseen this ghastly situation equally much he had not foreseen Jesus. How could he ? Nobody in those days ever did foresee Jesus. He was a perpetual surprise. In an instant He had sized up the situation. In an instant He was right inside that boy's soul. He knew exactly how he felt and why he felt it. He knew the mixture of

truth and falsehood which lay behind all this crude theology of sin and its punishment. He knew the wrong feelings from which it sprang. He knew the worse feelings to which it inevitably led. Here was that tender, exquisitely sensitive, infinitely precious thing, a young human spirit, bruised and twisted and on the rack before His eyes, with not a soul to sympathize, to love, to understand. Letting that boy's spirit down into the uncomprehending lovelessness of that room was like letting his body down into a vacuum empty of air ; it was depriving it of the one element it needed to live. The boy's body was a wreck, and now everybody was busy strangling and suffocating his soul, strangling and suffocating it with falsehoods, falsehoods about God, falsehoods about the boy, falsehoods to themselves about the origin and meaning of their own so very righteous feelings. Every vision of God's heart Jesus had ever had, every instinct of sympathy and love for the outcast and the needy, every impulse of indignation and rebellion against the complex tissue of lies which men weave about themselves and about one another, united to range Him at once alongside that lad. In a moment He had his hand in His. The downcast eyes looked up and saw what I suppose you and I would give all we have to see, the eyes and face of Jesus of Nazareth, so strong, and yet so tender ; and then he heard the words, uttered in those tones which John afterwards compared to the sound of many waters, "Cheer up, sonny, thy sins are forgiven thee." Was there ever anything said more human, more

adequate, more tactful than that ? Only Jesus could have said it.

And yet, it is often suggested, and there is a tendency in all our minds to think the suggestion true, that the claim which we make for the moral perfection of Jesus puts Him on a pedestal, and makes it impossible that He should really understand the struggles and failings of ordinary mortals like ourselves. Instinctively our foolish hearts cry out for one who is not too far above us, one who from personal experience knows what the bitterness of defeat and remorse and shame is. We feel we shall be more at home with such an one, and that he will be more patient, and more able to help us at the critical points. Only those who have been ill can sympathize with illness, and only those who have sinned can understand sin. So we argue. But we must understand that that kind of thinking is utterly false, and that it covers one of the most subtle and fatal illusions which sin produces in the soul.

We can set in the first place against all such notions the facts of the life of Jesus. The one person in this crowded room in Capernaum who understood the working of the boy's mind, aye, and the working of the mind of everybody who was there (Jesus knew their thoughts, Matthew tells us), that one person was the very person who, according to this theory, ought to have been least able to do so. It was not the sinners who understood and sympathized and helped. Thus it was all through Jesus' life. The only person from whom the woman taken in adultery got any real

understanding and sympathy was Jesus. The only person who understood the woman who anointed His feet was Jesus. Ordinary men and women, who were conscious of the failure of their lives and of a great poverty of goodness in their souls, felt themselves drawn to Him by a magnetism which they could neither resist nor explain, but which certainly did not spring from the fact that His sin was like unto theirs. The only people who did not get on with Him were the people who were least conscious of sin, and that was because they instinctively felt that He saw through them in a way which they had never experienced with anybody else before. Altogether apart from any dogma of sinlessness in Jesus, all His life challenges the judgment that sin and the understanding of sin go together. On any count, Jesus is infinitely above us in moral purity; and on any count, He is infinitely above us in perception of what sin is, and in sympathy and understanding of the problem it causes in our hearts. Unless the gospels are merely fiction, it is clear that the one person we do need to understand and help us in our moral struggles is One who was tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin.

And when you come to think of it, it must, in the nature of the case, be so. One has only to look in one's own heart to see, that the supreme disablement from which we all suffer in respect of helping the moral life of others and understanding the intricate workings of their minds, is that we are so very much in need ourselves. I

do not find for one moment that my sinfulness makes it easier for me to fathom and to sympathize with the moral need of others. Quite the contrary. I find that my own harsh judgments of myself continually make me pass harsh judgments on other people. I find that my own easy judgments on myself continually make me pass easy judgments on other people. Sometimes it works the other way and I cover self-indulgence by being exacting to others. I am, in short, erratic and confused. Always I read into others my moral mood at the moment, and I see them, not as they are, but through the distorting medium of my own profound dissatisfaction and conflict with myself. Furthermore, sin not only fogs the understanding, but it dries up the sympathies and the affections. Moral conflict within dams back and turns inwards the vital energies which are meant to flow outwards in sympathy with, and service to, other lives. Really to love other people, really to enter into their lives and be identified with them and stand beside them, is so difficult and so exacting, that it demands that the soul's energies should be completely released from any exhausting, internal struggle with itself. That sounds like the jargon of modern psychology, but any one can deduce it from a little observation of himself. It is after some renewed experience of forgiveness, when, for a time at any rate, the inner conflict is allayed, that a man's feelings and desires are most responsive to the need of others. When the gospel of God's forgiveness has deeply laid hold of a man he feels for the moment that he could take the whole

world to his bosom and that he would do anything to share the benefit with everyone he meets. It is the peaceful heart which is the deeply sympathetic heart. There is no doubt of that. As sin gets hold of us again and the old conflict returns, so we become conscious of a re-hardening of the surfaces of personality, a withdrawal of sympathy with others, an increase of callousness. Sin is like leprosy in the sphere of the spirit. It anæsthetizes the skin.

To sum it up, what we have to realize is, that perception of spiritual truth and of right personal relationships is a function of the whole personality, and not of any separate part of it. You cannot have sin and conflict in one part of the soul and discern moral and spiritual truth with another part. You cannot be anxious about yourself without contracting any capacity you may have for being genuinely anxious about other people. You may break an arm and still keep the power to see the world of physical things ; but you cannot break a commandment and still keep the power to see the world of spiritual things, the world of persons, as they really are. The invisible world is discerned by the whole personality, and if the personality is not whole, if it is in conflict with itself, it does not discern clearly, it does not love deeply ; it fumbles and makes terrible, destructive mistakes, like some ill-adjusted machine. No, if we were not so incredibly blind and stupid, the one person in the whole universe we should elect to be judged by, the one person before whom we should not shrink to be laid out, sick with shame

and palsied with sin's consequences, would be Jesus in all the awful holiness and purity of His personal life. What is holiness but love, what is purity but freedom from love's opposite ? He is the one person who, you may be quite sure, will utterly understand and utterly stand beside you in your need.

II

Second, the revelation which this incident makes of something characteristic of Jesus' whole outlook upon life.

I do not think that Jesus said something to this boy about his sins before He said anything to him about his palsy, merely because He sympathized so keenly with the unhappy and lonely position he was in. For had that been so, it would not have been necessary to say more than " Cheer up, sonny, I understand," and then to have proceeded to the cure of his sickness, which was what he had come for. That the lad's sins were declared forgiven implies an admission that there were sins there to be forgiven, and I think it implies, too, a conviction that in any case, whether the sins and the palsy were connected as cause and effect or not, the sins really were the more important. Such a conviction might certainly be deduced from other incidents in Jesus' life, and that is why I said there is something here which is characteristic of the outlook of Jesus as a whole. It is altogether like Jesus to start talking about sins before talking about palsy, to keep the issue of sin steadily in front of everything else. Much as He hated

physical disease and sympathized with those who suffered from it, and immense as was the energy He gave to curing it, yet it was not to be compared in urgency with the task of getting men into right relations with one another and with God.

Think how easy it would have been to have made a grave mistake in this regard with this sick boy. It is not to the point to ask whether Jesus thought that the lad's palsy was a punishment for his sins or not. There was no question that he had sinned and there was no question that he believed like everybody else that he was now suffering the penalty. To have cured him and said nothing about sin, or to have cured him with an assurance that the popular theology was all wrong, which is what you or I might have done, would have been to miss a great opportunity and to run the risk of doing the boy's spirit a great injury. The inevitable result would have been to minimize in the boy's mind the importance of sin. Owing to his illness this lad was taking his sins seriously; he was taking them seriously, doubtless, for a wrong reason and through a crude and false theology; but he was taking them seriously, and to take them any less seriously by working a cure without saying anything about them would have been treason to the whole purpose which had brought Jesus into this world. Here again we are given evidence of the amazing balance and sanity of Jesus, the unparalleled clarity of His spiritual insight. He never makes a false step. Passionate and eager as was His sympathy with this wrecked young life, angry as He was at the harsh lovelessness

with which it was being treated, anxious as He was to comfort and protect and restore self-respect, all of which is expressed in these words, "Cheer up, sonny," yet His feelings did not run away with Him. He will not tell this lad that he is not a sinner when he is. He will not suggest that all his need is summed up in this horrible shaking paralysis, when it is not. Far, far more important than that he should be physically cured is that he should be forgiven, and know that he is forgiven, for his sins. Not that one cuts out the other, but there is no question which ought to come before the other.

We need to ask ourselves whether we believe Jesus to be right in this. We need to ask ourselves whether, if we were given the choice between being cured of the palsy and being deeply and truly reconciled to God, we should choose to be reconciled and keep our palsy; whether, in fact, there are not many, many things in life,—health, wealth, honour, comfort—which in our heart of hearts we put before being utterly right with God and with ourselves about our sins. We are told, of course, *ad nauseam* that the modern man is not worrying about his sins. That doubtless is true, but if it is meant to imply that there ever was an age when the generality of men worried about their sins, it is a suggestion of what is false. It is hard to believe there ever was such an age. For one of the inevitable effects of sin is that your values get all corrupted and you cease to regard it as of much importance. This is part of the sinister power of sin. It creates an enormous illusion about

itself. It contrives to get itself tucked away among the things of lesser importance, among the things which can be postponed to more urgent interests, at any rate for the time being. And even when its evil consequences are being worked out, we do not realize that it is sin which is at the bottom of our troubles. Always sin disguises itself, always it throws up a smoke-screen about itself and eludes our notice. But it is there the whole time, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is at the very centre of trouble. Let us not think for a moment that Jesus' putting of sin first, absolutely first, was merely the gloomy exaggeration of an ultra-religious mind. The world is full of people who are seeking satisfaction and never find it, who are seeking to cure their palsy before ever they cleanse their hearts. It is full of theories and treatments for making men happy, none of which, judging by their ever-increasing multiplicity, has ever yet "come off." It is all very pathetic. Trouble after trouble which one meets in life, ill-health of mind, ill-health of body, bitterness and division and strife in a man's relation to himself and in his relation to other people, only too clearly springs from the fact that men's souls are a cockpit of warring instincts, in which the highest is always being defeated, with the result that their whole inner nature is out of joint. And men do not realize that that is the reason of the trouble. They try this way and they try that; they propose this policy and they propose that; they rush after this distraction and they rush after that; but not one in a hundred has the sense to look in his own

heart and discern the beginning of all life's chaos there, not one in a hundred connects his miserable inadequacy in face of life with his own disorderly and unredeemed and unforgiven soul.

We assert this, therefore, not merely on the authority of Jesus; we assert it also on the authority of plain facts. And we must be true at all costs to it, in all our preaching to the world and in all our conduct of our own lives. We must put the forgiveness of sins first. We must understand that there is no progress unless we do. We must indeed yearn over *all* the need of the world, even as Jesus yearned over this boy. We must seek to mitigate its sorrow and to heal its palsy. But with steady, sad persistency we must talk about sins and the absolute necessity for their forgiveness.

Things are what they are and nothing can alter them. Whether he likes it or not, man's destiny is to be in fellowship with God and God is good. He cannot escape that destiny. Either he will fulfil it or it will crush him. He must be reconciled, he must be cleansed. He must come humbly to the feet of God, asking to be forgiven. Yet we should have no heart in insisting on this, if we were not sure that, if a man so comes, he will assuredly not be cast out. He will assuredly hear such words as this boy heard, "Cheer up, thy sins are forgiven thee."

XII

GOD'S PROOF OF LOVE

" For scarcely for a righteous man will one die : for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—ROMANS v, 7, 8.

THE word translated "commendeth" really means something far stronger than that. It means "maketh good by argument," "establisheth," "proveth." The Apostle, in other words, is claiming that Christ's death for sinners does far more than make God's love look merely probable; many other things do that; he is claiming that it makes it cogently real, puts it beyond doubt. If that be so, there could hardly be a statement in the New Testament more worthy of our consideration. For nothing is at once so difficult and so desirable to believe as that God is love. If here, indeed, is a proof, positive and irresistible, that the last power behind our lives is love, then let us understand it and make its certainty once and for all our own.

I

But, if that be our aim, this must be said first of all. The only way properly to test any argument, or to read the meaning of any fact, is to let its full

force play upon the mind *unhindered by prejudice.* Arguments often fail in persuasion not because they are inherently weak, but because the mind into which they fall is warped, is morbidly or stupidly resistant through preconception or incapacity. The doorway of the soul is tangled up with a network of expectancies, which has to be cut down and got rid of before a fact or thought can get in and shed abroad its own luminous persuasiveness. Do not men often prescribe in advance what form an argument shall take in order to persuade them of a certain fact or truth, saying, "I will not be convinced unless such and such happens or is demonstrated to me"? Yet all the time they ask something quite impossible, and foolishly shut out in advance some other argument which would do just as well and be equally persuasive, perhaps more so, if they would only look at it for what it is and let its full force play upon them.

Nowhere is this more true than in the sphere of personal relations, and the question of the love of God is primarily a question of His personal relations to us. We are all familiar with the story of the court lady who, in order to prove the devotion of her knight, threw her glove among the lions and then turned to him to retrieve it. This he did, but he did not hand the glove back to her; he threw it in her face. Which, on the whole, was the right thing to do. It served her right, and proved his own simple directness of mind. There were a thousand other perfectly cogent proofs of love beside that, and many of them he had fulfilled

already; to demand that love should be proved by foolhardy stupidity, and to refuse to be persuaded by anything else, showed a warped and darkened mind. So with the love of God. How *is* God going to establish it to you and to me? We must be careful that we do not lay down wrong and impossible conditions in advance. Many of us are continually doing that. If we are very stupid, we are like the lady of the glove and expect God to prove His love by doing all that we want and not disappointing our foolish ambitions and desires. If we get on to a higher spiritual level than that, even then we sometimes lay out the conditions of demonstration in advance; we demand, for example, a clear explanation, in terms of God's love, of every wrong or sorrow, before we will believe,—earthquakes, premature death, lingering disease, cruelty of animal to animal and man to man, and all the rest. Yet for God to attempt to explain all these things to us might be, from the point of view of His ultimate purpose of love, as stupid as the knight jumping among the lions. Not that one minimizes the difficulty of these things and the challenge which they fling to an optimistic faith. But the question is whether there is not a way of meeting them other than explaining them; whether the conviction of God's love is not rooted in some other fact and in some other argument; rooted so powerfully, so irresistibly, that such fact and argument have only to be looked at without prepossession, for what they are in themselves and with the desire for our own proofs laid aside, in order that every contrary consideration should

fade away, like darkness before the luminous certainty of the dawn. Paul says that there is such a fact, such an argument. God proves, he says,—it is His choice of method—His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. The validity of the argument is tested, as I have said, by the extent to which, if looked at honestly, it does of itself fill the mind, in spite of all, with certainty and light.

II

Let us then look at the argument.

The Apostle prepares the way by beginning with a human analogy. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; for peradventure for the good man some would even dare to die, but God proves His love to us,"—and so on. Let us analyse the movement of thought. It does not follow the logic of the text-books, but it follows a deeper and quite as certain logic, the logic of the heart, of moral intuition. It takes, as we all know, an enormous weight of motive to make a man lay down his life, so powerful are the forces impelling him to preserve it. Almost certainly love must be a part of such motive, for otherwise the latter could never be strong enough. But, after all, love need not be the whole of it. Other things may bring, and often do bring, their contribution to the stream of impulse carrying a man to so supreme a sacrifice. Let us set it out in a very dry-as-dust way. Assume the weight of motive necessary to impel a man to lay down his life for another to be 100.

Now suppose that other is a really good man. In that case may not, say, thirty per cent. of the motive be something other than just love,—the magnetism of a delightful personality, gratitude for services the good man has done you, a sense that your life is worth less than his, and so on. Why, says Paul, with the help of that thirty per cent. of additional motive involved in the goodness of the man, some of us might manage to sacrifice ourselves; yes, but by just so much would the proof thus made of the completeness of our love lack final cogency. Now suppose that the man is not good, but just righteous. The word represents in the Greek something less attractive, less genial, a man who is, shall we say, just known to you as a respectable citizen. The thirty per cent. of additional motive to give yourself for a good man would in this case be reduced to (say) fifteen, and by so much would disinterested love have to be increased to make up the hundred necessary to total sacrifice. None of us, Paul suggests, could, as a matter of fact, find so much more love as that, but if we could, men would immediately recognize it for what it is. For the heart has its own logic, its almost mathematical standards of motive. Love, then, is necessary to die for a good man, more love for a merely righteous man; but for a sinner known to be such, one who has sinned against *you*,—what then? If in that case the life is given, the onlooking heart knows at once that behind it is the very uttermost, the whole one hundred per cent. of love, love unmixed, love that has passed its final test. "Greater love hath no man than

this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Yet is it not a greater love to lay down your life for your enemies? It is. The purity of love is proved by its capacity to maintain itself to those who have wronged it, or are, for any other reason, repugnant to it. No test could possibly prove more than that, and the soul which demands a further test is not, cannot be, dealing honestly with itself. When the man I have deeply wronged deliberately gives his life for me, then I know with a solemn certitude, which to doubt would be blasphemy, that in his heart is a quite transcendent love and not any other thing.

Now apply this to Jesus. There is no question whatever that, as a matter of sheer historical fact, Jesus Christ made this demonstration of perfect love, of which we have been speaking, in respect of ourselves and of all men. Here was One to whose unsullied soul sin, as He saw it all about Him, was a most revoltingly hateful thing; yet One also who, none the less and in the utmost literality, with the intensest and most delicate consciousness of what He was doing, laid down His life for the people whose sin so revolted Him, and not only revolted Him, but pursued Him in malignant hate to the end. It is not theology, but the surest, solidest fact in history, that Jesus of Nazareth died for men whose sinful state was felt as a wrong to Himself because it was felt as a wrong to His dear Father in heaven. There it stands, the Cross of Christ, a fact, in the midst of human history, and by the heart logic I have tried to expound, it is proof positive to anyone looking

sincerely at it, that at least once in this poor world of half-lights and shadows there appeared in a living spirit the actuality—not the desire for it, the aspiration after it,—but the actuality, of perfect love.

III

But it will be said, and rightly said, that, strictly speaking, Jesus' Cross only proves Jesus' perfect love, so that our text ought to read, "*Christ* proveth His love to us in that while we were yet in our sins He died for us." Christ's death proves Christ's uttermost love ; how does it prove God's ? The answer is important.

We have to remember it was *Christ* that died, and that means Christ with the whole of His inner life and experience as the Gospel reveals them to us. Here again we are in the realm of indubitable fact. Christ's whole life was nourished, and his every act inspired, by a vision of God's love. God's love was the most certain fact in the world to Him. God was the very atmosphere He breathed ; God's felt and assured companionship and approval were as real to Him as men and women, and His perfect love for the latter was indissolubly bound up with that companionship. That He loved men and yet, not He, but God loved men in Him, would have been to Him an almost bald statement of simple fact. You have only got to read the Gospels to see that. Now the question is, was He mistaken, was all that inner life of His an illusion ? Surely not ! Surely, if we admit the perfection of His love and

yet deny the reality of the profound experience of God's love which sustained that love, we are not looking at the matter squarely, and are not being quite true to ourselves. There are moral and psychological absurdities every bit as grotesque as saying that a thing can be black and white all over at the same time. Can a fountain bring forth both sweet and bitter waters ? Can a perfect love,—mark you, not a sentiment of love, but one which, we have seen, went through the worst test life can offer to it,—cohabit the same soul with a perfect lie, and that lie, not on the circumference, but in the very centre of its being ? The Apostle is surely right. God proves His love to us in that the one soul, which the supreme test of dying for men in their sins proved to be full of love, was also full of the consciousness of God's love. Call that a mere coincidence, if you like, but be quite sure you are perfectly frank with yourself in so doing ; be sure that you are not substituting a mere theory for what, if you would only give it full play, is a profound and luminous certainty of your whole soul.

This brings us back to where we began. The test of this proof is the extent to which, when looked at in and for itself, it can fill the soul with certainty and light, in face of the most challenging doubts and the blackest darkness life can offer. Remember that Jesus' perfect love and perfect consciousness of God's love are a fact. Facts, after all, can only be met by facts. When it is in the depths the soul cannot feed on merely pious hopes and pleasant possibilities. The only Fact that can bring assurance

in face of some of the evil things of life is the fact of Jesus. Yes, there are other things besides Jesus which speak to the unsophisticated mind of God's love. There are flowers and little children and human love, and these all have their part in sustaining faith; but there are challenges they cannot meet. Did you ever see a loved one dying in ghastly agony and try to comfort your heart by looking at a rose? Did it do more than merely distract your attention from the evil for a little? Flowers in such a case seem almost to mock. They are so debonair in their beauty, so opaque, so terribly dumb. They may be conscious of the love which made them, but they cannot say so—maybe God's love is as unreal to them as, at the moment, it is to you. Or have you ever looked at sweet little children in some moment of horrible moral remorse and self-loathing and despair, if you ever have such moments? Some people have them. Did they drive out the darkness and fill the soul with a new conviction of God's love? Their very innocence is a worse mockery; they know so little after all; their minds are so uncomprehending of the things that challenge; they too are dumb; their purity, which was once yours, deepens the bitterness of your own moral stain. Flowers and little children and all the rest can meet certain challenges, but not all. There are abysms of darkness and despair from which only Jesus can draw us, doubts in face of which only Jesus' Cross can establish the love of God. If you have never experienced those abysms, remember this against the time when you will.

There was a time during the war when the black, irrational horror and cruelty of it laid hold of the soul and plunged it into shuddering unbelief. One tried to dissipate the darkness by argument, by thoughts of man's freedom and responsibility for the consequences of his own acts, by, in short, trying to pierce through it to God, trying to read it in terms of love. It was useless. Again and again the thought came back, like a demon from the pit, that human life might after all be only the sport of irrational and heartless forces and that the love of God might be a complete mirage. Why not? Was it any use setting the beauty of a daffodil to rout the horror of a battlefield, the innocence of a child to dispel the agony of a base-hospital? There was only this anchor to the soul at such a time, that out of the midst of the same world as had produced the war, had come the perfect love of Jesus, proved up to the hilt by His Cross; and that that love had been utterly and absolutely sure of God's to the end. One let the mind dwell on that and slowly light and hope and faith came back. One faced the choice as to whether Jesus or the war misrepresented God. And the answer came from the depths of the soul, filling it with light: not Jesus, not Jesus. Such love could not be nourished by a lie. God proves His love in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

XIII

THE CROSS

"*For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*"—I Cor. II, 2.

WE can only understand the importance of the Cross by first understanding the importance of sin. There are scores of folk, even sometimes professing Christians, who never really face up to sin, never really look straight into its ugly face and say, "What, in the name of suffering humanity, are you, and why, and how are you to be cast out of our life?" Even a few years after the war, when the whole life of mankind is sick and shattered through events which sprang directly out of human wrong-doing, even when nine millions of their fellows have died violent and premature deaths through someone's sin and folly in their midst, people still suggest that the pre-eminence of the word sin in the Christian interpretation of life is something morbid and repellent. Repellent it may be, but morbid it most emphatically is not, for willingness to face facts is the very definition of mental and moral sanity and health. What *has* happened to the human race? Noblest of all living creatures in

physical form and mental power, yet his life alone is full of perversions and disease. Nothing in the animal world to compare with his art, his science, his magnificent deeds of heroism; but nothing also to compare with his diseases, his insanities, his drunkenness, his sexual vice, his nervous breakdowns, his devastating wars, his chaotic industry, his hideous and filthy slums! What corruption, what cankerworm has got into this the fairest blossom of the world's life? We call it sin. I do not care to speculate about its origin. I am sure it is somehow bound up with our great and unique gift of freedom. But the important thing is that it is here, and no interpretation of life is worth two second's consideration which does not face up to and deal with it.

I

We have not seen sin for what it really is until we understand that it is something which, though it starts in our freedom, very soon, in its effects and consequences, gets completely out of our control. We must realize that sin, in many directions, poses an insoluble problem to the human race.

Consider, for example, *the effect of sin on ourselves.* Take the curious feeling of remorse. We do an unworthy thing and instantly something happens within us; remorse comes. We do not have to work it up. It just happens, and we cannot stop it happening, and the essence of its misery and bitterness is the feeling of the utterly irrevocable, the utterly irreparable thing we have

done, not merely to others, but to our own highest nature and self-respect, through our sin. We have now to face the fact that we are for ever and ever the person who did that evil thing, who had, and still has, that streak of weakness and evil in him. Carlyle says somewhere, " From the purpose of sin to the act of sin there is an abyss wonderful to think of. The fingers lie on the pistol, but the man is not yet a murderer. The slight twitch of a muscle ; the death flash bursts and he *is* a murderer and will for all eternity be a murderer : his horizon girdled now, not with golden hope, but with the red flames of remorse."

But further, not only is the sin, once committed, seen to be an irrevocable and inescapable thing ; the feeling of remorse itself also will not let us go. It comes back again and again, and often the only way to sponge it out of the mind seems to be to coarsen conscience with still further carelessness and sin, which is what many people, wittingly or unwittingly, do. And that involves another way in which our sins, once committed, get beyond us. We have to deal with the inexorable certainty of the law of habit. Maxims about habits we used to copy out in our copy-books, and every New Year we make pathetic jokes about the impotence of our resolutions. But really it is a very terrible thing, the way in which our sins and weaknesses get built up into ourselves, until all our control over them is gone, nay, until all our consciousness of needing to control them is gone. For sin is a blinding thing ; in course of time it dopes even our feelings of remorse and puts out of focus our whole moral

vision, so that we cease to be able to see it for what it really is or our own characters for what we really are. It is not theology, but plain, downright, undeniable psychology, that sin sets processes moving in our souls which are very soon altogether out of our control.

Then there are the *effects of our sins on others.* Here the matter is specially clear.

Sin is appallingly contagious. We unconsciously pull one another down to our own level. Gossip maliciously and you make malicious gossips ; be revengeful and you stimulate revenge ; be bad-tempered and you make bad tempers all round you ; judge, said Jesus, and people judge you ; tell a dirty story and it sticks in the hearer's mind like tar on the fingers, needing every particle of his moral power to wash it away. Sin, too, organizes itself into social systems, which, entrenched in the habits and traditions of a whole class of people, moulds every fresh young life, which is born into it, to itself. Against such a system the reformer often strives in vain, for it is too strong, and he himself lives in it and is conditioned by it. The problem of lifting a single soul to the best it has it in it to be involves ultimately the problem of redeeming the wrongs and injustices of the whole social system. Finally, there are all the other consequences of our sin in the pain and suffering of other people and of God. The war wrote this fact up in gigantic, lurid letters across history, but it always has been true and always will be true down to the tiniest capillary of the social organism in which

we live. If we do wrong, others must pay part of the bill, for, whether we like it or not, we are all indissolubly members one of another. We cannot sin to ourselves; we cannot do anything to ourselves; every act, like a stone dropping into a pool, sends out ripples which cannot be recalled.

It is futile to denounce this as a dismal and depressing picture. The important question is,—*is it true?* It is true, and men and women, who are serious, know it is true. And to men and women who are serious, instantly, this question arises, with frightful poignancy, whether sin, having once arisen, is, with all its consequences, a chronic, incurable disease in the heart of human life. If it is, then, so far as the best mind of mankind is concerned, the Universe is in the main a ghastly tragedy. There is, to be sure, much joy and light and laughter in it and there is the heroism of good men who fight on single-handed and without hope, in the midst of this web of consequences which nobody can really control; but taking it all in all it is a tragedy. But if sin is not incurable, then, in the light of what has been said, it is clear that the cure has got to come out of the heart of God Himself, for it cannot, so far as we can tell, come from man. The facts drive us to despair or to God. The question, therefore, for serious people reduces itself to this: does God care about sin? Has He any remedy for it? Is He setting Himself to redeem mankind or are we left to perish in our own corruption? It is the most critical question any seriously-minded man can face. Where are we to find the answer?

II

We look for the answer in Jesus Christ. What does Jesus say about this problem of sin? There is no doubt of the answer.

If there was one thing more than another which He desired to make plain to men, it was the dual truth that sin is an enormously grave thing, but that God is in it, bearing it on His heart, working against it all the time. This comes out in all His teaching and all His dealings with men. He says it over and over again, from this angle and from that, striving to break through the blindness of men—see! see! see! see what sin is; see what it means to you, see what it means to others, see what it means to God, *but*, also, when you see it, do not give way to despair; see also God at the heart of it, in the midst of it, God stemming it, God purging it, God forgiving it at once to all who deplore their own part in it, God becoming the companion of all who work against it; see it all on the heart of the Eternal, all its cruel consequences laid at last on His heart of holiness and love, see it, in short, on the background of the Father's heart, and take courage once again, knowing that God being God must triumph in the end. Jesus seems to have felt that if He could only get men to see sin in its true light, in its true relation to the Father's heart, they would first be broken down into humble penitence, and then lifted up into the joy and hope of forgiveness, and

reconciliation, and co-operation with God in His atoning work.

But the difficulty was to get men to see it, to see the reverberations of sin in human life and in the heart of God. It was a terrible, yet sublime thing Jesus saw in the heart of God over this business of sin. He saw an infinite holiness bearing all sin's consequences, and fighting it with love and love alone. He saw a Cross,—the final condemnation of sin, yet man's one hope, helpless as he was. Words and deeds could not make it clear —it was too big, too sublime, for that. After three years with Him, even the disciples had not caught half a glimpse of the truth. At the supper table itself they were quarrelling as to who should be the greatest. How could He lay bare this heart of God, thrust it home, tearing down the illusions of men's souls, giving them no chance to say He was a mere spinner of pleasant fancies and verbal sentimentalities,—how could He make it a stinging pungency so that men could mistake neither its condemnation nor its message of hope? In the end He came to see there was only one way and that way He took. He would bring the Cross out of the invisible heart of God into the starkest visibilities of man's sin. He would let sin do its worst to Him, as it does all the time to God, and throughout it all He would love as God loves. He would be wounded by their transgressions, bruised by their iniquities: He would get underneath sin's consequences and lift the pain of them, as God is always lifting it, on to His own shoulders, and He would do it so that men could see it, and

at such cost, that the love in God's heart and in His own could not be denied. He would go to the Cross. He could not do more.

The Cross was the most stupendous of all Jesus' parables—a parable in flesh and blood. And yet more than a parable, for only a supernatural, passionate love, a love of the same stuff as God's love, could have made Him go through with such a frightful thing to the end. Love throbs through it, love without parallel in all history, love springing from His close touch with His Father's heart. There was no compulsion about the Cross. He could easily have stayed out of Jerusalem. He said proudly, "No man taketh my life from me: I lay it down of myself," which was the truth. He went up to Jerusalem of His own free will. He knew exactly what would happen. He intended to let it happen. He would let men see. It was a stupendous and deliberately planned apocalypse of sin's enormity and of the love, which being injured, still loves, still works in the midst of mankind for its final victory. Remember, what we see in Jesus, *that* God is. His Cross, like His whole life, is the expression in time, of the Eternal spiritual purpose behind and continuously at work in the world. God could do no more than this, than show us and offer us Himself, and no more than this is really demanded by the facts. In the end what changes men's hearts is always a vision of God,—a vision which on the one hand reveals to them the revolting ugliness of their present way of life so that they are violently repelled from it, but which, on the other hand, gives them the

confidence that God still loves them and that in companionship with Him sin's legacy of consequence in their own lives and in the lives of others may yet be transformed into good.

III

It seems to be all summed up in the strange fact that Jesus was after all not crucified alone, but with two vile thieves. Have we missed the significance of that? Tradition says that the penitent thief was a young man of the same age as Jesus, and that he came from Galilee, and that his name was Dismas. I suppose he lived a boy's life, like Jesus, on the Galilean hills, with a boy's high hopes and a boy's heroic longings. Then, as time went on, the great sad whirlpool of humanity sucked them both in, Jesus and Dismas; and in the end it flung them up on this mound of Golgotha, and both because of sin. Let us follow Dismas. He was, almost certainly, as much sinned against as sinning. We all are. One day, as a recent writer has suggested, he heard a patriotic orator in Galilean, and with a youth's hot blood he joined a band of revolutionaries pledged to overthrow the Roman yoke. The Roman yoke was founded in sin: the patriotic orator was probably a scoundrel: Dismas' own passions needed control. The result was inevitable. The Roman legions were too strong. Dismas found himself a fugitive taking in desperation to the roads for a living. He sank lower and lower, until he was caught red-handed, and condemned to the cross. And so

that was the end of it all, dying for sins, some of which were his own, and some other people's. His poor body was flung to the dogs and the mother who bore it in Galilee died of a broken heart. So it is in every generation; none of us can escape ourselves or our fellows. There are Dismases all about us: there is one, in some degree, in every pair of shoes.

And yet Dismas was not crucified alone. There was One with him. This one had followed a life of righteousness and love; He had done not one wrong thing. When Dismas stole and murdered, He healed and loved. But He came to the same place in the end, and shared the same condemnation. Love always does share the same condemnation in the end. That is the thing about God we have to learn, and it is our message to this sin-stricken world. And because it shared the same condemnation, because it was there with him in the Cross, it broke the young man's heart and took him into Paradise. "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Surely, the supreme symbol of Christianity should be not one Cross, but two, or even three. Our message is not adequately expressed by saying Christ crucified; our message is Christ crucified by us and with us,—Christ, God with us in the midst of sin and all its consequences. It is the thought of those three crosses which clears my vision and gives me hope.

PART IV

DISCIPLESHIP

"*All things through Him.*"

XIV

TAKING US AS WE ARE

"*Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? . . . They say unto him, We are able.*"—ST. MATTHEW XX, 22.

DID these two sons of Zebedee realize what they were saying? Did they understand what the cup was which they thus asserted their ability to share with their Master? Did they understand that it was a cup of suffering and death? I do not think so. I do not think they had any very clear idea what they were promising. It is probable that they were party to their mother's request for them, that they should sit on the right and the left of Jesus in His Kingdom; that they shared her ambitions and, with them, her illusions; that, therefore, if she knew not what she asked, they, equally much, knew not what they promised. Moreover, the indignation of the rest of the disciples, not, mark you, with the mother, but with the two brethren, and the rebuke which Jesus gave them altogether, telling them that the only way to pre-eminence in the Kingdom is the way of humility and service, suggest that there was nothing to choose between them in respect of real understanding of their Master's

mind and words. They were all thinking of the Kingdom, its demands and its rewards, in one set of terms; and Jesus was thinking of it in another set, entirely different.

That being so, Jesus' reply to the promise of the two disciples, which otherwise might have evoked no question, becomes puzzling, even startling. "We are able," said James and John, meaning one thing, or rather perhaps hardly knowing what they meant, and Jesus says, "My cup indeed ye shall drink," meaning something else, meaning the Cross. What reason,—we might even ask, what right,—had Jesus to accept so unwitting a pledge? J. H. Newman says of the incident that the two disciples "were caught by one mightier than they and, as it were, craftily made captive." But in what sense is a man caught by words which he does not understand, or made captive by a pledge whose meaning he did not fully intend? It is surely a very barren craftiness which catches men in a merely verbal trap. That kind of thing is not in the manner of Jesus. Just because His craftsmanship in dealing with human souls was always so superb, we may be sure that He never tolerated anything but straight dealing with facts, for unreality is the clumsiest and most ineffective of all instruments for dealing with life. There was something in these men's hearts, something in their relationship to Him, which made that pledge, mixed up as it was with ignorance and self-seeking, worth far more than its face-value, made it something upon which Jesus could build the highest hopes for their future loyalty, yea,

even when His real cup, the cup of His suffering, should be held to their lips. Let us try to discover what that something was; it will help our own discipleship and loyalty to the highest, to understand the reason why Jesus could accept so poor and ignorant a pledge, and promise it a fulfilment so rich as to turn it, apparently, into something entirely different from itself.

The matter can, in general terms, be quite simply stated. It is that Jesus was wise enough to grasp a law which governs all fruitful discipleship of any kind. It is a perfectly obvious law; one might almost call it trite, were it not so continually forgotten. It is that, if a master is going to do anything with his disciples at all, he must, in the first instance, accept them as he finds them and as they are. If they pledge themselves to Him in their own terms, and not exactly in His, then, provided the pledge is genuinely meant and has a core of sincere personal loyalty in it, that for the time being is enough, for upon that, and only upon that, can anything greater and better be built. In other words, it is more important at the beginning to get a disciple to say that he is able and willing to do something with and for his master, than to get him to say that he is able and willing to do everything. Let us look at this law first of all from the angle of the Master, and then from the angle of the disciple.

I

First, from the angle of the Master.

There is always a certain obliquity, a certain element of cross-purpose, a certain displacement of perspective and vision, between a leader and his followers. That is what makes leadership the most difficult and sometimes the most heart-breaking of tasks. To be a leader you must be ahead of others ; yet not too far ahead. You must talk two languages at one and the same time, your own and theirs. You must be one of them and yet not one of them, in their world and yet out of it, sometimes entirely out of it. You must see things which they do not see and for the time being perhaps cannot see, things which, none the less, alone determine the path you want them to choose to follow. A leader has to work with his two eyes as it were out of focus, one apprehending the truth, the other the half-truth, or even the untruth, which holds the minds of his disciples in thrall. If he lacks the capacity for this, if he cannot put himself in his disciples' shoes and look out on life in some measure through their eyes, he lacks the first essential of leadership and is doomed to failure. And, of course, the more transcendentally great he is in character and vision and desire, the bigger the distance between him and followers, the more he towers above his contemporaries—then the more urgently necessary, and the more impossibly difficult, will this essential quality of appreciating two worlds at once become.

How great then was the task of our Lord Jesus Christ ! And how superb must have been the wisdom which enabled Him to accomplish it with these very ordinary people who were His followers ! The enormous distance between His vision and theirs is evidenced quite sufficiently by the incident we are considering. To Jesus the Kingdom meant a place where the great ones are those who serve most ; to the disciples it meant a place where there were, so to say, court appointments, which ambitious men might grasp for themselves. It was not that Jesus merely modified natural human values and instincts. He completely inverted them. He said, " Your first is my last, my first your last." Nor was this a wild and egotistic paradox, such as a conceited reformer, who wants to be different from anybody else, might propound. It was hardly more than a bald statement of fact. Ambition simply did not exist in the mental world in which Jesus lived. It was not there. The sight of people getting on in the world did not create the faintest ripple of envy or emulation or congratulation in His soul. He gazed right through all the pomp and purple of the great ones of the earth as though they were non-existent, right through to the soul beneath, right through to its often pitiable smallness. Think how greatly ambition enters into your life, and what fascination personal success and all the external signs of personal success, wealth and honour and eminent position, exercise over you : now think of your life with all that taken away, with every jot and tittle of self-centred ambition evaporated out of it

and a mere passion to serve substituted in its place. Can you do it? It is difficult, is it not? The difficulty is some measure of the displacement between Jesus and these disciples, between Jesus and ourselves.

Yet Jesus never doubted that He could carry His followers over from one world to the other, and in the end He succeeded; and He succeeded precisely because, as I have said, He was wise enough to accept their allegiance and devotion first of all in their own terms, and not to insist on a loftier profession than at the moment they could make with any understanding or any honesty. He was wise enough to see, that in all such things it is the personal allegiance and devotion which matter and are the truly creative and uplifting elements in discipleship, and not the perfection of insight and foresight with which they may be expressed or interpreted. A man may say to his Master "I am able to share Thy cup," not knowing to what he is committing himself, and the Master may reply "You shall share it," knowing well enough what it will mean, without any failure in straight dealing, because the supremely critical thing is *the desire to share at all*, the supremely critical thing is those invisible bonds of affection and interest whose inevitable consequence always is, if they be loyally maintained, to draw minds together, and more and more make them one. Jesus knew that He had these men's love and affection in some measure. He would not injure it by demanding more than at present they had to give; He would not blind them by excessive

light; He would not make the mistake of all superior people which is, by asking too much, in the end to get nothing at all. He would accept love even when mixed up with ignorance and ambition, believing, as He always did, that love in the end must win, must purify and illumine the soul.

There is, I think, a lesson for us here, in so far as we may be called upon to be leaders and teachers in our own day. We are so called upon. The Church professes ideals which are at present in front of the world. We must avoid the mistake which men and women of ideals are always making in their endeavours to lift the world into something higher. They will not accept the ordinary man as he is to begin with, and enter into relations with him on the best level of which he is capable at the moment. They will insist on being "high-brow," and on transporting folk straight off into the heights where they themselves are, suffocating them, more often than not, in a rare atmosphere to which they are not yet accustomed. They will give them no option save to be very bad or very good. Take, for example, the question of raising the tone of the theatre. I believe a very grave mistake has again and again been made in regard to this. Those who have ideals for the stage, and believe it can be made a great force for culture and righteousness in human life, will insist on producing difficult and highly intellectual plays with little or no scenery and exceedingly modern music, entirely ignoring the fact that the ordinary theatre-goer does not like that, any more than he

likes filth and vulgarity, and that he appreciates melody and laughter and simple ideals,—that on the whole he goes to the theatre to enjoy himself. Because he is unable to enthuse over Ibsen, he is left to the shallow vulgarity of *The Merry Widow*. This is only an example. The same danger besets all idealists, and it merely makes them ineffective. The Church has not been above making the same mistake. It is easy enough to denounce the mass of mankind for being so indifferent to religion, but it is much more important to ask ourselves whether we have taken sufficient trouble to present them with a religion which they could, at any rate to begin with, understand in their own terms. I believe we are called upon to stand out from the world, to be in advance of it in our morals and outlook, but that is useless unless we can contrive in some measure also to enter into its best life and appreciate its highest moods, and to meet it as a real friend first on that level, however inferior to the highest we may consider it to be.

II

Second, from the angle of the disciple.

It ought to be a source of very great comfort and strength to us to know that God does take us as He finds us, and upon our so miserable best builds up His own. It will save us much misunderstanding both of ourselves and of others to realize that this is so. There was in the assertion of these two disciples "We are able" a certain amount of sheer ignorance and a certain amount of very disreputable motive,—yet Christ accepted it as having within it the root and germ of the highest He could ever ask of them, which was to share His Cross. So it is with us. It is doubtful whether any one of us ever makes any kind of dedication to Christ without ignorance and wrong motive being mixed up in it. It must be so, for if it were not so it would not be necessary to be disciples at all; we should ourselves be Christs. Further, if Christ did not accept us so, He would never accept us at all.

Consider the element of ignorance. I am sure that a number of people withhold allegiance to Christ, or have an uncomfortable sense of unreality in giving it, because, although they admire Christ and even in a sense love Him, they are afraid to commit themselves to an obedience which they are not at all sure they will be able to sustain, not knowing as yet what it may involve. They say, "If I promise a thing, I like to keep it, and rather than not keep it, I will not promise." Others, again, hold back, or feel a twinge of dishonesty in their profession, because they cannot at the moment honestly affirm, with any sense of proved and experienced conviction, what Christianity has always affirmed about Christ, namely, that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Lover and Saviour of their souls. Well, one respects honesty, but there is a form of honesty which is rather unintelligent, not to say, stupid. None of us knows what his weaknesses and his powers are, nor how exactly life will test them; but it is quite certain that we shall never know what they are, nor will life's tests teach us anything,

unless we aspire to the highest that we know, and are continually testing ourselves by the most lofty professions. To shut out ultimate success through fear of interim failures, to maintain a worthless consistency by the miserable expedient of walking always along the mud flats, to fail in nothing because you had promised nothing, that is a folly which is only explicable on the ground that it springs from a narrow and calculating egotism. Far better always is the generous impulse, which, like Peter, says, " I will, I am able," and then goes out to learn through defeat a deeper knowledge of self and a deeper knowledge of Christ. And how can anyone know with fully proved conviction that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, before he has gone through the whole of life in His company and faced all its worst challenges with Him? Christian discipleship always must begin in ignorance; or to put it in another way, it must always begin in a sort of plunge, a grand experiment. Something draws us to Him and we risk our lives upon Him. There is only one way to prove Him trustworthy and that is to trust Him. We do not ask of anyone to do more than make honest experiment of Jesus. Our faith in preaching Him is that, if Jesus is fairly given His chance, He will be able to make triumphant use of it.

Consider again the element of mixed motives. There is a great deal of misleading nonsense talked about motives in these days. Let me give an example of what I mean. I read in a psychology book once, that one reason which almost certainly takes men into the ministry is that *unconsciously*

they want to find a platform on which to strut and exhibit themselves to the public. I am not going to discuss whether that is so or not. The point I want to make is this, that it does not matter two straws if a desire to be in the limelight is one of the motives, provided there is also a genuine affection for Jesus Christ and an eager desire to serve Him. And that there is likely to have been such an affection and desire mixed up in the baser instinct, is shown by the fact that the ministry was chosen and not (say) the stage or politics. A man may begin doing a right thing from a partially wrong motive, and the sheer pressure of life and the development of his best self, which had never been entirely absent, will in time cast the wrong motives out. So it happens very often that people fall in love in a dreadfully egotistic way, but, in the discipline and enlightenment of family life, their best self emerges and they learn to love with an entirely new purity and power.

So it is with our discipleship to Christ. If we wait until our motives are pure before promising Him our lives, we shall never do anything else but wait. We must begin where we are. You are not to be put out and discouraged by discovering all sorts of disreputable motives at work in yourself. I met a lady once who was almost in tears, because, she said, in a moment of vision she had seen that she had never done a purely disinterested good act in her life; looking back, she had detected everywhere, even in her best acts, a desire to win a reputation, or a desire to be superior or something else equally disagreeable. I told her

that she was probably quite right, for hardly anyone had ever done a purely disinterested act, except Christ. I told her, too, that she should congratulate herself on the discovery, for it was precisely the element of real discipleship to Christ in her life which had revealed it to her, and that she must just go on being His disciple until the work of purification was complete. We are certainly not to acquiesce in our impure motives; we are to ask Christ to rid us of them, but He can only rid us of them if we are His daily companions, giving Him the best we have. It is better to keep close to Him for a wrong motive, than not to keep close to Him at all. He only asks to be a friend to us just as we are.

There is a profound saying of George Macdonald. It sums up all the joy and the power of Christian discipleship. "*Christ is easy to please, but hard to satisfy.*" He accepts our miserable best, but upon that He insists on building His own.

XV

CHRIST'S COMPANIONSHIP WITH US

"*I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.*"
—PHILIPPIANS IV, 13.

JESUS made tremendous demands upon men. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." Yet it would be a gross misrepresentation of Jesus if we made it appear, that He came only to lay fresh burdens upon our already overburdened consciences. He quite clearly thought that He brought a wonderful gift to men —a gospel—which would make these enormous demands possible. He believed He came to lift burdens, not to impose them. "Take my yoke upon you, my yoke is easy and my burden light." Moreover, it is the conviction of Paul and, indeed, of all the New Testament Christians that Jesus was right. Paul found that, at one and the same time, Jesus heightened the ideal and made it easier to attain. It was a paradox, it is a paradox, but

it is the heart of Christian experience. Jesus makes terrific demands, but what is the use of that, if He cannot put us in the way of fulfilling them? Indeed, that is precisely the criticism which many make of Christ, namely, that He sets the ideal too impossibly high. It is a perfectly valid criticism, if Christ cannot supply some sort of new moral power. Paul was convinced that He can supply it. I can do all things, we can do all things, through Him.

How? What is the gift which makes these things possible?

I

It is the gift of God's companionship, His friendship, His nearness, His communion with our hearts, made possible, as it could not have been in any other way, by Jesus. Let us put this a little more fully. The Christian gift, or gospel, contains two elements. First, it asserts that the high ideals of Christian living can only be realized by linking our lives to our Father's life. This need not be argued. People do indeed say that they can be good without being religious. It depends, of course, on what is meant by good, and what by religious. If goodness means goodness according to the standard of Christ, and if religion means true and vital communion with God, then it is not possible to be good without being religious. The proof of this is Jesus Himself. His spiritual and moral life was rooted and nourished in His communion with God, and what was necessary for Him

is not likely to be unnecessary for us. Second, the Christian gospel asserts that this life of gracious fellowship with God is made possible for us in an unparalleled fullness by Jesus Christ. The re-creating communion with God takes place in and through Him. He, if we will let Him, opens us up to God's spirit. He, so to say, unbars the shutters of our souls, opens the doors, flings up the windows, and lets in the Divine Light, Who will work in us and through us and fashion us into what we ought to be.

Again, we ask how?

II

If we are to make clear what communion with God through Jesus is, and how it takes place, it is necessary first of all to clear away four misconceptions.

First, it must be understood that when God's spirit communes with ours, the evidence for that fact is in its effects and consequences, rather than in any direct and immediate consciousness of a miraculous, Divine presence in us or with us at the time. Just as we become aware of the wind only by the movement of things other than the wind, the flying leaves, the white horses on the sea, so we become aware of God within us only by the enhancement of our mental and spiritual aptitudes and dispositions. We do not see Him and touch Him when we commune with Him; we do not hear a voice, or become suddenly aware of a presence as we become aware of the presence of

one another. Yet many people, when we talk of fellowship with God, imagine that that is what is meant, and try to work themselves up to that kind of experience. And they are disappointed when they do not succeed. They hear people speak of loving God, and they think that that means having an emotion towards God, like the emotion they feel to their human friends. They try to stir themselves up to a consciousness of a Divine being alongside of them, and then they try to feel love towards Him of the kind which would make them want to throw their arms around His neck. They fail and they must fail. One does not question the word of those mystical people who say that they do have experiences like these. All that is asserted is, that these are not the normal ways of God's communing with men. He is too vast, too mysterious, too invisible, to be thus brought within the scope of our little senses and emotions. Neither for our thinking nor for our loving does He present Himself a single, unmediated Divine object. No man hath seen God at any time, says John. If we love one another God dwelleth in us and love for Him is made perfect in us. In other words, God does dwell in us, but His presence is identified by its effects, by our enhanced power to love one another, and this love to one another is the only way we have of loving God in return. He comes silently and unobtrusively, cleansing and nourishing and enlightening the spirit; and when we find that we are becoming more adequate to life, when we find that our hearts are becoming more at peace with themselves and with others,

our wills more obedient to the highest, our whole personality more filled with that indefinable glow and poise which we call health—and all this even in the midst of those very things which at one time used to distract us and set us on edge—then there may come, there does come, a sense that Someone has been at work in us other than ourselves (have we not been lifted above ourselves?), a thrilling conviction that we have been and are being made a vessel of Divine life. There has been communion with God.

The second point is a very necessary qualification of what has just been said. If the evidences of God's communion with us are in its effects and consequences, that does not mean that such effects and consequences will be staggeringly sudden and complete, involving a miraculous and immediate transformation of life and character. It certainly means a transformation, but the transformation may take a long time. That, indeed, is implied by the very notion of communion with God's spirit. If God were inclined to lift our lives on to sublime heights by a word, there would be no need for Him to come into our souls. He could utter the word from the outside. Transformation by fellowship, in the nature of the case, means gradual transformation. Certainly as I look within my own heart, even at such times when I am a better person than usual, I see an enormous amount to be done, many crooked places to be straightened, many dark corners to be enlightened, many dead powers to be quickened, and I cannot imagine the task being completed this side of the

grave at all. But that is not a depressing thought; it is rather an exhilarating one. It means that God is a companion, and religion a way of life, which will never pall.

A third misconception, which seems to fog many people's minds, is due to their impotence to think in any but spatial terms. To some simple minds it seems almost an irrationality to suppose that a vast number of people in a vast number of different places can commune with God at the same time. They feel in a vague sort of way like the old farmer who said that under such circumstances, he guessed, God would have to hop about rather lively! The idea is further fostered by the expectancy, already referred to, of feeling a Divine presence actually alongside them in space. The difficulty then is of conceiving how anybody could be in two places at once. It is astonishing how often people let their minds be bothered by these notions. They obviously spring from the tyranny of the spatial sense, from what Coleridge called the "despotism of the eye." On the whole, it is not difficult to make clear to ourselves, when once we begin to think about it, that this is the cause of the trouble and that it is foolish to let spatial considerations interfere with what, on any account, must be a purely spiritual relationship.

The fourth point is this. We must understand that our minds are such that their deepest fellowship with God never takes place, as it were, in a vacuum. This means two things. First, it means that our minds must be active if God is to get His opportunity in our souls. We have to control

our thoughts and to give some sort of Godward direction to our desires. Communion is activity on our side as well as on God's. Second, it means that the thoughts and experiences, through which God will get near to us, will be such as spring out of the everyday facts and tasks of human life. It is through life, through the facts of this world and of the human society in which we live, that God speaks to us, if we will let Him. That highest activity of our souls, therefore, through which God enters into fellowship with us, will never be a withdrawal from life; it will never take the form of emptying the mind of all the rich content of experience,—the beauty of nature, the history of man, the love of friends, the challenge of wrong,—and concentrating it on the bare idea of God. Rather the way of communion is to develop the faculty of reading a divine meaning in every situation in life. God, to be sure, speaks to us more plainly through some things than through others, but it is through communion with Him that we are able to use the more divinely significant facts to interpret, and give us the victory over, the others.

III

Now let us be more positive.

The last point, namely, that God speaks to us and we commune with Him *through life*, leads on obviously to the assertion that such speaking and communion reach their maximum in Jesus Christ. Whatever else Jesus is, He is a concrete, historical,

human fact. He is part of our human world. We can read about Him in the gospels. We can think about Him at any time, bring our minds to a focus on Him, direct our desires to Him, yes, even in a very real sense, come to love Him, and all the time our mental activity in so doing has a richness and definiteness of content, which it can never have if we merely try to think and realize the bare idea of God, as He is described in the books of theology. We have, then, this unique point of intense light and truth right in the midst of human life, a point which can become incandescent in our minds at any moment we care to think about it,—Jesus Christ, who is the whole character and purpose of God expressed in a human personality. What follows? This, that by the unique light of Jesus Christ, God draws uniquely near and works in our spirits and communes with us. Every time you turn your mind to Jesus and let His light begin to glow in your spirit, it is no less than the spirit of God beginning to glow in your spirit. Whenever you focus your mind, with seriousness and real intention to obey, upon Jesus, you are in fellowship with the Spirit of God. Something unique at that moment happens in your soul. God is near. God is within. The better side of your nature is strengthened, the worse side weakened. You are not aware of a presence and certainly you are not yet a saint, but you have communed with God, in a degree and with a result which is only possible through Jesus Christ.

IV

Concerning the practical technic of this, much might be said. We will conclude by taking up two aspects of it.

First, we must clearly understand that this fellowship with God through Jesus Christ can be had in respect of, in the very midst of, the most practical business of everyday life. So many people seem to think that communion takes place at the morning prayer, if there is a morning prayer, and that thereafter it ceases, or, at any rate, it of necessity falls to a lower level of intensity. This is a fatal mistake. It results in our attitude to the practical situations of life becoming extremely secular. So few people enter a new situation, or front a new demand in life, with even a momentary turning of the mind to Christ, even a momentary dedication of themselves to the task of knowing His will and living by it. What have a discussion in a railway carriage, a reading of the leading article in the paper, a determination of policy in the business, to do with communion with God? We commune with God in church, when we are reading the Bible, or on our knees, surely. Nay, but such things have everything to do with communion. It is precisely at those points that God *wants* to commune with you, and to get through His light to you and to the world. To redirect the mind and will to Christ is necessary and possible at any moment, and is at any moment really and deeply communion with God.

St. Francis met a leper, and, reacting for the moment on a purely natural level, turned aside. Then he thought of Christ, and something happened within him. He came back and kissed the leper. That was communion with God through Jesus Christ. I knew a man, who, walking home late one night, saw under some railway arches a number of lewd inscriptions chalked up. He went to bed in the usual way, but suddenly thinking again of those inscriptions, he found he could not sleep. He thought of the boys and girls who would read them the next morning. He thought of his own profession as a lover of Jesus Christ, and the more he thought of it, the more restless he became, until at last he had to do something. He got up, went downstairs, found pail and brush, and walked back, at one in the morning, to those arches and cleaned the writings off. That was a communion with God through Jesus Christ. I knew a woman who slaved every day at a machine. When tired and unhappy through the drab monotony of it and she felt it was all getting the better of her, she used to stop her machine, throw her apron over her head, and think for two minutes of Jesus Christ and of His Cross. It made a difference. It was communion with God through Jesus Christ.

Second, and supplementary to this, there is communion with God through Jesus Christ in prayer. Prayer is essential. People think prayer is difficult because they have wrong ideas of it, and expect wrong things from it. Let me be quite prosaic. You are going to give ten minutes to prayer in your room. It is very quiet and

very familiar and very commonplace there. There is the furniture, the bed, the gas-bracket, a grey sky outside, perhaps even a blue-bottle buzzing on the window-pane. Take five minutes to read one of the stories of Jesus, or a brief passage from a book about Jesus. Just read it, and visualize Jesus, and reverence Him. That is all. You look up. The room is just the same. Nothing has happened outwardly. You have heard no voice, felt no presence. The blue-bottle is still buzzing. Have you wasted your time? Not for a moment. You have communed with God through Jesus Christ. In the deeper places of your spirit, you are better and stronger.

Now pray. Go over your failures and sins for the past day. There is no need to work up excitement about them. Just face them, and make yourself aware of their sinfulness. Then turn your thoughts to Jesus and His attitude to sinners. Think of Zacchæus. Substitute yourself for Zacchæus. You will have communed with God again through Jesus Christ.

Now face the day's tasks for a moment and set them alongside Jesus in your thoughts. Then think of the woman next door who is lying ill. Do not pray a silly, perfunctory prayer like "Please make Mrs. Jones better," but pass imaginatively into her sick room with Jesus. Join your desire to the attitude of Jesus to the sick, as you have again and again read of it in the gospels.

Now get up from your knees. The ten minutes are up. The room is still the same, the blue-bottle is still buzzing; there has been no supernatural

light or presence, but there has been the realest possible communion with God. You are better, stronger, purer for it, and the whole world is a little nearer God's heart. Through Jesus God has found a way in such as would not have otherwise been open to Him.

XVI

OUR COMPANIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

"*And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*"—ST. MATTHEW XXVI, 40.

THIS is a very poignant and searching rebuke. Exactly what the Master was feeling and thinking when He said it, we can never know, for to know it we should need to fathom Gethsemane itself. The bearing of the sins of the world was taking place in the agony of the garden; then was being fought out in the eternal Spirit of Jesus what was afterwards wrought out at Calvary in His human body. And out of this atoning agony Jesus emerges for a moment to discover His disciples asleep and to say these words; then He passes back into it again. Those slumbering forms of the three best men He had known,—men upon whom He had sought to set the impress of His Spirit, and from whom He had expected so much, who, indeed, had themselves promised so much of faithfulness and service,—must have seemed to Him a concrete and visible epitome of the dire plight of mankind, banishing any still lingering doubts in His mind, urging Him still a step farther, if urging were necessary, on the dread and lonely way He must tread. "So it

has come to this then," He says (for thus the words might be rendered), "ye could not watch with me even one hour." Not until we can do the impossible and enter into the whole stream of profound experience and feeling of which the words are, as it were, a tiny cross-section, can we ever hope to understand their full poignancy and meaning.

But though there is this dark and mysterious background to the saying which we cannot hope to fathom, there is a foreground which can be brought nearer to our own experience. For one thing, in the foreground are three ordinary men such as we are. And for another, amongst the men, and the one to whom the rebuke was specifically directed, is Peter, that rough incarnation of ourselves, of feeble strength, of goodness unredeemed and unrefined. Let us then make a study of ourselves as they are exemplified in these disciples. And if that seem a dismal exercise, let us remember that the background of the story is still there, even though we cannot deeply understand it,—the background of atoning love. After all, from one point of view, there is no incident in history more full of encouragement and light than this slumbering of the disciples, this victory of flesh over spirit, with the Master only a stone's throw away in His agony. Suppose that background had never been! I see every weakness, every sin, every slumbering of the human soul in the sleep of its lower nature, as taking place in a garden, and unseen, behind the trees, in the shadow, One bearing it all mysteriously on His own heart.

I

Peter had made, not long before, a great protestation of love and faithfulness to His Master. "If all shall be offended in Thee, I will never be offended. Even if I must die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee." They were strong words and he meant them. It was because of this protestation that Jesus addressed the rebuke especially to him. "So this is what it has come to—all your eager words of faithfulness and service,—ye could not even watch with me one hour." It was such a poor beginning, such a poor preparation, for the severer test which, Jesus knew, was yet to come. "Do watch," He says, "lest ye slip into temptation."

We, too, as His disciples, have made some sort of protestation of allegiance and service to Jesus. We, too, have failed time and again to fulfil the protestation. To us, too, His words might have been addressed, saying, "So this is what it has come to, ye could not watch with me for one hour." Why has this been so? There are many reasons, doubtless, but one surely is, that in common with Peter we have not understood what the true way of faithfulness to Jesus is; we have not understood what He wants of us. We are anxious to serve, but not fully understanding either Jesus or ourselves, we do not realize all that such service must involve.

Our deepest failure in this connexion is that we do not realize that faithfulness to Jesus means

being a companion to Him. We often speak of the Christian life as involving His being a companion to us, and no one would minimize the wonder of that, and the strength which it brings. But so stated it is a one-sided relationship, and, because one-sided, it can very easily turn into an *egotistic* relationship, in which our prime thought of Jesus is that we can draw upon Him to supply our need. There is always that danger in religion,—the danger of regarding God as a servant, rather than as One utterly to be served. Of course, we do not put it to ourselves in those terms ; we speak of a God of love and comfort, and we sing praises to His adequacy to our need, all of which, in its own way, is right. But we must not stop there. There is a stranger and more astonishing thought, which sounds blasphemous perhaps to those who have not been gripped and overwhelmed by it, or who have not fully apprehended that what we see in Jesus that God is, and that is the thought of God's need of us, of God's infinite desire for our fellowship, of God's impotence without our co-operation, of God's loneliness waiting for our companionship. In this word of Jesus,—spoken from out of the midst of the most solemn experience of His life, when more than at any other time He was close to the heart of His Father and God's suffering became His,—I hear an infinite desire for human companionship. "Could ye not watch *with* me?" We need Jesus, but Jesus quite desperately needs us, and that is what we do not realize when we protest our allegiance to Him.

II

But there is also revealed in this incident that in which the Master quite particularly wants our companionship. He quite particularly wants our companionship in His atoning work, in the moments when He is at grips with sin and is lifting its burden on His love. And our fault has been that we have not understood this. We have not understood that faithfulness to Christ is tested and proved by our willingness and determination to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, and to share His redeeming agony over mankind; our willingness to be in the Garden with Him and to watch and pray, even if we cannot follow His sublime Spirit into the deepest waters of atonement. Peter did not realize it. You will notice that Peter's protestations of faithfulness were wholly conceived in negatives. He would not be offended in Him. He would not deny Him. So it is with us. Our aspirations as Jesus' disciples are negative. We will avoid certain sins, we say to ourselves ; we will be more industrious, more punctual, more patient ; we will make another supreme effort to overcome our besetting temptation ; we will lift our lives on to a higher level of purely negative austerity and we will ask Jesus to help us. All of which is good and has its place, but it is not enough, as our perpetual failure should have revealed to us. A more positive note of self-giving is required; a more vivid realization that Jesus is treading the wine-press alone, that He

wants friends, that He wants help ; a determination to go in and help Him and cheer His loneliness with co-operation and love. I wonder how many Christians ever really take the burden of man's sin upon their prayers, and thus at least watch and brood, even if they can do no more. When, for example, one of those poor murderers is executed and to the dreadful sin of one man is thus added the stupid, uncomprehending sin of all society, how many of us try to get near both to the man and to Jesus in prayer and to share in the lifting of the ghastly burden of it all ? I wonder how often we read the newspaper reports of police and other cases with morbid interest, but with hardly a stir of atoning desire, hardly a thought of the Divine heart of suffering within the shadows.

And if we say that we are not good enough for that kind of thing, and that we must deal with our own sins first, even though it entails making merely negative resolutions, that is just precisely the foolish mistake we continually make. The way to overcome temptation and to cast out our sins is to plunge ourselves into some sort of real service to another's need. The only way to raise yourself is to give your thoughts to raising other people. The only way to get better is not merely to ask for Christ's help, but to ask yourself how you may help Christ. Jesus said to these men as He took them into the garden, " Watch with me." And when He found them asleep He said, " Could ye not watch with me ? Watch that ye enter not into temptation," as though the best protection against temptation *is* to watch with Him, to share

His redeeming work. It is so. People say, " I am not good enough to take a Sunday School class, to be an elder, or a missionary, not good enough even to pretend to pray for the world's sin," and they feel positively virtuous at having said so. It is folly, for nothing so garrisons our hearts against evil as the identification of ourselves even in quite a small way with another's need.

III

But again further, is there not something significant for our failure as disciples in the Master's use of the phrase " one hour " ? " Could ye not watch with me *one hour ?* " There is in the words a mournful sense of the *smallness* of the demand in respect of which they had failed, and of its disproportion to the eagerness of their protestations. It did not seem very much to ask, but it was not given. So it is always. It is in the quite small things of our allegiance to Christ, things which with very little effort we could easily achieve, that we fail most. At the end of every one of our routine and humdrum days, each one so like the one before, days in which we have not been called upon to undertake any very heroic enterprise, or to face any testing situation, days in which, therefore, we persuade ourselves we have been in no danger of falling into any very desolating failure or any very deadly sin,—at the end of them all, if our spiritual ears were keener, we should hear the voice saying, to our surprise, " So, ye could not even watch with Me one hour ? " That

failure to give our best to our work for others; that little testiness of temper; that slurring over or complete omission of prayer; that little lack of frank dealing; that readiness to take offence; that apparently so small piece of self-indulgence in food or pleasure or sleep; that censoriousness of judgment or bitterness of retort; that subtle self-conceit and self-display, become so habitual that you hardly notice it; that cowardice which you called a wise compromise; that pride which you termed a proper self-respect; that everything so trivial that you did not think to relate it to your splendid determination, that if all should be offended in Christ *you* would never be offended, and that if you must die for Him, yet you would not deny Him;—these are all met with the same sad rebuke, "So it has all come to this, ye could not watch with Me for one hour." Many of us could rise to a big demand, wherein we had to choose once and for all between Christ and anti-Christ, but it is the little, humdrum situations, the petty irritations and temptations, which floor us, partly because we do not see how really big they are. We think they are too trivial to have any final effects. We can slumber like the disciples for an hour, feeling that we can wake up again and still be good disciples. Yet it is in the little daily relationships that Christ misses us most, for it is only through our personal contacts, only through the transfiguration of the dull stuff of our monotonous mediocrity, that the Kingdom will ever come. Christ's Kingdom on earth is simply men and women in right daily relation with one another in Him.

It would help us, perhaps, if we realized, as Jesus' own words suggest, that these little daily temptations are *the flesh* in a very subtle disguise. Doubtless in the first instance our Lord's words to these disciples, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," referred to their sheer physical sleepiness, but I think there is more in it than that. I think the Lord meant, in that deep-going way of His, that not to watch with Him one hour is a form of fleshliness, and is symptomatic of the whole weakness of man. We mislead ourselves and deaden our consciences by thinking of the sins of the flesh as being only gross and carnal sins, for the violent revulsion we feel at such so-called fleshly sins is apt to make us unduly lenient to our own more respectable failures. But Scripture rather disconcertingly puts them all on a level and includes them all under the title of the flesh. The Scriptural writers call all the underside of our nature, all the egotistic, self-seeking side, flesh, and all the upper side in which God alone can dwell, spirit. From this point of view it is just as much of the flesh to be hectoring and self-assertive (say) to an employee as it is to commit adultery. Both kinds of conduct fall to the side of the flesh and its weakness. And the point here is, that it is a great help sometimes merely to name a thing correctly. To have their failure to watch an hour put down to fleshliness must have surprised the disciples, but it must have helped greatly, at least in retrospect, in their understanding of themselves. Let us, then, put it to ourselves every day, that these, as it seems to us, so venial and

trivial failings, of which the world takes no account, are fleshly, and not any other thing. Fleshly! We have to learn to be revolted by them as much as we are revolted now by what we call the grosser sins. We have to learn what the Pharisees failed to learn, that publicans and harlots are not necessarily farther from the Kingdom than ourselves.

IV

Yet, of course, as has been said, something more even than this is necessary. We need to see our sins for what they are in all their fleshly ugliness; that will help. But we need above all to be caught up into some grand and positive and emancipating conception of life's purpose. So we come back to where we began. We need to see, with a deeper comprehension of its meaning, that lonely figure in its agony under the trees. We need to fix it in our minds; we need to contemplate it every morning before we begin the day. That agony is still going on—it is still in the very heart of life, in the very heart of God, a love wrestling with all the vast immensity of man's sin, a love longing for companionship and fellow workers. And we, God forgive us, are still so interested in ourselves. Let Him not come out of the shadows again to find us fast asleep.

XVII

INCREASING YEARS

"When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. . . . And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me."—St. John xxi, 18, 19.

THE key to the meaning of this strange utterance is in its concluding words,—"Follow me." These were very nearly the last words Jesus ever addressed to Peter; were they not also very nearly the first, as though that, after all, were the sum-total of all Jesus had to say to him, alike at the sunny beginning and the tragic end of his discipleship,—"Follow me"? It is a far cry from Peter in the vigour and strength of his young manhood, hauling nets and splicing oars in the morning sunshine by the blue waters of the lake, to Peter in his old age hanging head downwards on a cross in some sordid place of execution in Rome. Yet the step from the one to the other was already taken, directly the first call of "Follow me" was obeyed. Binding Peter's youth and age together, the strength and weakness, the joy and tragedy, the life and death, making the whole thing consistent, beautiful, rational, was the loyalty

of that discipleship. Let Peter not turn back; let him have no regrets. Just as the way *to* that martyrdom, so the way *through* it, was "following Him."

I

It seems as though Jesus, in this His last talk with him, had a sudden vision of the whole course of Peter's life, and felt with a certain keenness His own immense responsibility for him. There was something naïve, impulsive, improvidently generous, almost boyish, in Peter, which forced one to feel responsible for him. He was the sort of man who might have gone any way in his youth; "when he was young, he girded himself, and walked whithersoever he would." It was a solemn thing, therefore, to have brought him *your* way, especially when the end of it was likely to be a violent martyrdom. The Master's mind, ranging backwards and forwards with that realism so typical of Him, felt to the full the contrast between the beginning and what was likely to be the end of Peter's life. In those early days He had often admired Peter's skill with an oar, the keenness of his eye, the power of his muscles, the bronze of sunshine and fresh air on his face and limbs. He had loved, too, the openness and generosity of his mind, its quick response to idealism, its "all or nothing" reactions of friendliness or dislike, its abounding confidence in itself. This was why He had taken to him and called him to be a disciple. Peter in those days had seemed all that a young man ought to be, the unspoiled, natural stuff of humanity, both

physically and mentally, of which God can make great use. He was not a saint, far from it; there were elements of weakness in him as well as of strength; but he was adventurous and hopeful and uncorrupted, with all life yet before him, and with none of the dull prudences and fixed habits of maturer years. What a joyous fellowship of youth that first year had been! Jesus Himself on one occasion had likened it to a wedding party, Himself the bridegroom, Peter and the others the young people who always accompanied the bridegroom on the festive day. Much had happened since. The time had been short, but the events concentrated into it terrific; for Jesus the Cross, for Peter the discovery of himself as a base traitor, a moral coward; for them all a sounding of the depths of defeat and despair. And now what of the future? Jesus looks into it and sees the young fisherman, whom He had drawn away from his home and his nets to follow Him, old and decrepit, vigour and elasticity of mind and body beginning to wane, life's glorious adventure behind, the freedom of the thousand alternatives of youth narrowed and narrowing to the one dread inevitability of death. And what a death! His poor hands, once so powerful, stretched out tremblingly for help, only to be seized and roughly bound, —*carried out* to die, a public spectacle for a Gentile crowd. "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Jesus, I say, felt the full force of the contrast and knew Himself responsible for it. Would there not

be those who would say He ought not to have done it; that a life opening in light had been made gratuitously to close in gloom; that it was unjustifiable? And would they be right? Jesus knew otherwise. Jesus knew that a life so begun and so ended, and all in fellowship with Himself, was a life glorified and made rational and consistent and worth while, such as, in the nature of the case, it could not otherwise be. Only it had to be lived in fellowship with Himself. "Follow me,"—that was the one thing which could order the contradiction of it all into a satisfactory meaning and a hope that maketh not ashamed.

II

It is well for us to see how this is so. For our lives are not so very different from Peter's. They pose the same problem, a problem which is intensely practical for every one of us. Nothing is more certain than that we are growing old, and though our end is not likely to be anything like Peter's martyrdom, it will quite likely offer sufficient contrast to the days of our youth to challenge in much the same way our thoughts and feelings. What better description both of the process and the problem of growing old and dying could you have, than to say that when we are young we gird ourselves and walk whither we will, but when we are old, others gird us and carry us whither we would not, or, in other words, that after a certain age, growing old seems to mean a progressive narrowing of power and opportunity, a gradual

shackling of the personality with increasing limitations, until, at the last, death girds us and carries us whither we would not? We are so used to this fact that its strangeness and its challenge do not strike us, and the majority of us take no thought to adjust ourselves to it. But there it is and strange it is. We can all understand that our lives should ascend and unfold into their prime, into the plenitude of their powers, but why should things be so ordered that they thereafter develop away from their prime, and just as previously they underwent progressive liberation as manhood's maturity was reached, so now they suffer progressive imprisonment in failing strength as old age comes on? It is not usual, perhaps even not natural, for a young man or woman to ponder the swift passage of the years and to contemplate old age before it comes, yet no young person can do so without some sort of shrinking and regret. From the outside at any rate the whole process seems to be one of increasing limitation, increasing girding. "Shades of the prison house begin to close about the growing boy." Life is so full of possibility to the young. We can as yet be what we like, marry whom we like, play any game we like, fashion our characters as we like, dream any dream we like. But every year we live, and every choice we make, constricts our world into unchangeable and overhanging fixity, like a broad valley which gets narrower as we go higher, till we can see nothing but a single path, and have only a memory of the vast distances of the plain. The boy chooses his profession, and in that profession he will be to the end of his days, its habits

and mannerisms and its peculiar, specialized outlook becoming more and more his second nature. He chooses his wife and, if she will have him, hers must he ever be till the end of time, for better, for worse. He follows this impulse or that with a glorious sense of freedom, feeling that at any time he can turn back and begin at last to be the hero he had dreamed of being, till one day he realizes that he is free no longer, that impulses have hardened into habits, that he is now too old to change, that he is now, and will be to the end of the chapter, a type, and a mediocre one at that. So the years "bring the inevitable yoke" and custom descends "heavy as frost." Such a fate were bad enough in any case, even if our capacities remained at their fullest within those limits which the advancing years necessarily impose. But they do not. At some indefinable point they begin to decline, and to the bondage of walls is added the bondage of, so to say, shackled limbs. The body grows less and less responsive to the will, the senses less and less responsive to the world; the mind loses its old quickness and resilience, till now anything new is not a thrill as it used to be, but a threat! We are old. We must perforce sit on one side and watch the joyous stream of youth flow by, disregarding us and our experience, determined to use its freedom to the full and to create its own bondage in its own gloriously ignorant way. We wonder what it all means.

"*Whither is fled the visionary gleam,*
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

III

Is this a gloomy picture? It is, unless it is possible both in thought and experience to move to something deeper which unites youth and age, unites them in such a way that age is seen not to dethrone youth, but to crown it with a glory which could never be attained save through the limitation it imposes. It is possible to do this. It is not the least of Christ's redeeming works for us to help us to do it, so that, through Him, decline from our prime comes to be not a step downwards, but upwards, a pause in the ascent of our spirits, an indispensable preparation for what lies ahead So death, even in the form it came to Peter, becomes a real consummation, like the highest and narrowest point of the pass opening out into the undiscovered country beyond.

The redemption of this curious process of growing old is surely that life, as it narrows outwardly, must deepen inwardly. The glory of age is to have, as it is the miserable poverty of youth always to lack, a soul which, like the Pope's in "The Ring and the Book," has probed many hearts, beginning with his own, and so is far gone in readiness for God. After all, the glory of youth is apt to be a very much over-estimated thing, or, at any rate, there are many compensating deficiencies to be discovered in it. It all depends on what you consider life's true values to be. Those are not true values which youth can give and age can take away. True values are abiding values, which

remain unaffected by any change in time or circumstance, and such values can only be fully discovered and made our own *within* the kingdom of our own mind and character, and through the double ministry of Christ's Spirit and the ageing years. In order to see this, let us ask what Jesus was doing for Peter which was redeeming this change from the bold freedom of his youth to the helpless martyrdom of his age, making it infinitely worth while.

IV

In the first place, Peter was becoming day by day a humbler person through self-knowledge. His denial of Jesus, for one thing, had taught him a great deal. He realized that there were moral weaknesses in his character which he had never suspected, and that his tremendous courage and self-confidence were largely the product of ignorance both of himself and of life's deadly power to find the joints in his moral armour. This is entirely typical of youth. It is not natural for a young man to be too humble about himself, or to realize as yet the deadly potency of sin. Let him dream the highest dreams about himself; let him entertain the grandest notions of what *he* is going to achieve in life by way of nobility and virtue. Let him set before himself as possible of attainment no less than the perfection of Christ; let him, like Peter, follow Him! Do not try to work up in him a sense of desperate sinfulness. That is not natural for youth. Let him just aim at his dreams.

Let him, I say, follow Christ. He is quite safe in doing that. He will learn soon enough. He will learn through the limiting process of the years. He will find that five, ten, fifteen years have gone, and his dreams have hardly yet begun to be realized; on the contrary, that life, which he hoped to mould to himself, has revealed a toughness and a power to oppose he had never imagined. It has forced him into tight corners which have brought out, not his strength, but his weakness, and shown him he is not the stuff of which Christs are made. Like Peter he will discover that life and his own essential weakness conspire to aid denial of Christ, not loyalty to Him. It is not a pleasant discovery. But it is a great step forward in that self-knowledge which is the beginning of all wisdom, and that unaffected humility which is the beginning of all character. He has, as it were, climbed up by going down; he has developed —in and through the very limitations which increasing age has sternly set to his hopes and dreams.

In the second place was not Peter learning day by day the hardest of all lessons, which is the lesson of a humble and loyal and instant submission to God's will? This again is not a quality natural to youth or easy for anyone to attain. In the heyday of our strength we want to rule, not to be ruled, to impose upon life, not to be determined by it; we want the world to serve our ambition, and it is only quite secondarily that our ambition is required to serve the world. Rebellion is typical of youth, rebellion, even, against the appointments

of God. It is a noble quality, but it too must be disciplined into something quieter and deeper and less egotistic, if it is to be made part of a character really ripe for God. The lesson has to be learnt that in His will and His will alone is our peace, that we can only capture the citadel of our own souls by surrendering them to God, that our wills are only truly ours as we make them His. This is the real strength of character, not egotistically to rebel against, but quietly to accept, the inevitable compulsions of life, and to make them contribute to our highest well-being as gifts from God Himself. But how else could this hard lesson be learned save through the limitations of life, and through fellowship with the Spirit of Him who faced the narrow way of the Cross with the prayer "Not My will, but Thine be done"? That is how Peter learnt it. We are to see, therefore, in the weakness and decrepitude of increasing years a grand exercise in the cheerful loyalty which our spirits must learn to pay to God before they can be ready for His nearer presence. Age is a purge and corrective of the illusions which are necessarily bound up in the strength and glory of our youth; that is, if we pass into it in the light of Christ, and let Him teach us. Peter in his age, carried out to crucifixion with a peaceful heart and a triumphant submission to this the last of Christ's demands,—is not that a grander and a greater Peter than the Peter who hauled nets at Capernaum, with all the glow and vigour of his young manhood's physical strength?

Finally, was not Peter learning that Christ

introduces a man's spirit to a way of life which is far too big for this world ever to contain, which, therefore, must find its completion and consummation not here, but yonder? Peter had started with a very narrow idea of what Christ's Kingdom is. It was something confined entirely to this world, nay, indeed, to the Jewish people. It was conceived almost entirely as a mere enhancement of this earth's amenities for those who were lucky enough to become its members. He had cherished ambitions of being an important person when Christ came into His own. It was all very materialistic and exceedingly narrow. Later, as events unfolded themselves and he grew to know both Christ and himself better, he saw that he had been made part of a kingdom too big for this world, even at its best, to contain; he saw that the prime fact was that his spirit and Christ's were linked together in an eternal love, the riches of which it would take eternity to unfold, and in the light of which, therefore, the limitations of this world were seen to be inevitable and negligible things. He was quite content to grow old and suffer martyrdom. It merely reinforced what he already had been learning every year of following Christ, that this world has no abiding satisfaction for a redeemed spirit. It is not big enough.

This is a lesson we all have to learn. To the young this world is full of infinite promise. It seems to contain all that the heart can desire. Our generous instincts picture a Kingdom of God, a New Jerusalem, built in England's green and pleasant land. But the more we get to know Christ

and link our souls to God through Him, the more we come to see that whilst we must work for the Kingdom in this world, it is too big ever to come fully in this world. There is something permanently frustrating, permanently baffling in this world. There are desires it can never satisfy, problems it can never solve, joys it can never give. It is all a distorting mirror, as Paul put it. So as age comes on and our powers fail, it is surely no burden. It is what in a sense we have grown to expect. Our real life is hid with Christ in God, and as this world grows narrower and narrower, so our spirits turn more and more to their real centre which is not in this world at all. Youth wants nothing more than this world can offer. Age, if it be in fellowship with Christ, has discovered the hollowness of that, and as eye fails and ear grows deaf and mind loses its quickness, it dwells on the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the mind conceived, not even in the height of their power, and which Christ hath prepared for them that love Him.

Thus only Christ can unite age and youth in a rational consistency of meaning and development. We must follow Him, as Peter did. In the strength of youth, in the weakness of age, in the darkness of death, He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

XVIII

DEATH

"*All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death.*"—1 CORINTHIANS III, 21, 22.

THE Apostle is here writing triumphantly, his mind aglow with the bigness of Christian faith and Christian privilege. He has been rebuking the Corinthian Christians for splitting into factions and cliques. One party had rallied around the name of Apollos, another around the name of Paul, a third around the name of Cephas. It is all so petty, Paul seems to be saying; it is all such a mockery of the sweep and grandeur of the Christian message and outlook upon life. *Every*thing, he says, not this thing or this person to the exclusion of that, but everything is yours. That is the hall-mark of the Christian attitude, the source of Christian joy, the very definition of Christian emancipation, to be able to read everything in life in terms of Divine blessing. All things are yours, for your sakes, for your blessing, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or life or death or things present or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's.

To be able to read everything in life in terms

of Divine blessing. Can we so read death? Have we so learnt to read it? That is the question we are to take up,—in what sense is death for our sakes?

I

Certainly, there could be no more signal example of the transfiguring power of Christian faith than that it should enable us, not as a pose but as a piece of genuine insight, to praise God for death, to include among the blessings of life in this world the fact that it comes to such an inevitable and impenetrable end. St. Francis in his famous hymn sang "Be thou praised, my Lord, of our sister Bodily Death." That is not a natural attitude. It is a Christian attitude, but it is not a natural one. The natural attitude is to regard death as the worst of all ills to which flesh is heir. Though a man be passing his life in an abyss of misery, so that each new day is but another turn in the thumbscrew of existence, yet somehow we account him happy to be able to live at all, and if he elects to depart we doubt his sanity. To deprive a man of life we account the severest penalty we can devise. Seeking a symbol for our natural attitudes, we conceive death as a hideous skeleton, with empty eye-sockets and a bony, inexorable finger summoning, not to be denied. In Lucerne there is what is known as the Bridge of Death. In every panel of the bridge there is a picture of death breaking into somebody's life; soldier, statesman, merchant, beggar, he comes to them all, and to each he comes, according to these

pictures, as a grisly apparition filling the heart with dismay. How different the message of another picture, that of the great Christian artist G. F. Watts, "Love and Death." A strong, robed figure is seeking entry into the closed doorway of a mansion. Only the back of the figure is to be seen. The arm is stretched forth with a certain inexorable gentleness, a certain kindness which is yet austere. But standing in the way of his entry is a puny boy, petulantly trying to hold and push him back,—without avail. It is love striving to keep out death. I suppose that when most people see that picture, their sympathies are drawn instantly towards the figure of love and against the silent visitor who would pass him by. This is love, I have heard it suggested, so puny, yet strong enough to hold back our common, cruel enemy death. But that surely is to twist the artist's meaning upside down. The great robed figure of death is meant to hold your sympathy and draw out your gratitude. Only its back is seen, but it is a back which speaks benignity and wisdom. And it is love which is reprehensible in that it seeks to withhold by narrow and ignorant affection this strong, wise friend. As G. K. Chesterton has suggested, the triumph of the artist is in making the mere back of a figure speak so plainly of that strong wisdom of divine appointment, which gently, but firmly, sets on one side our foolish, though natural, instincts and desires.

It is a singular thing how little thought we do as a rule give to the meaning and purpose of death in the providence of One whom we are taught to

regard as the Loving Father of our spirits. We give a great deal of thought and argument, and quite rightly, to the question of life after death. We believe there is life after death. But if there is life after death, why death ? If life continues, why is it ever interrupted ? Why is there drawn across its path this impenetrable curtain ? Why this rupturing change, so complete, so final, so unpredictable, so dark, right in its midst ? There are questions which we must learn not to ask, because in the end they cannot be answered. Is this one of them ? I do not think so, not altogether. If we are bidden praise God for death as something which, as much as life, is for our sakes, then it must be possible to go some distance in understanding its meaning and purpose, even if we cannot go the whole way. If we are to read God's fatherly purpose anywhere in life, we ought to be able to read it clearest of all in the things which are universal. Did not Jesus discern God in the fact that the sun shines upon all men impartially, just and unjust alike ? That which comes to us all must come from one, must be expressive of some broad, indelible principle of life, governing all its variety and inequality to some great, universal end. To the illumined Christian vision, this universal and impartial visitor, who knocks at all our doors and reaps in all our fields, death, must be transfigured, partly by faith, but partly also by insight and understanding, from a grinning skull and an empty cage of ribs into a friend, into one who serves the holy love of the common Father of us all.

II

Obviously, if we are to find reasons for death, they must be found in relation to our whole Christian conception of what life is for. Only in the light of what God is aiming at shall we be able to see why He has ordained death. Now the Christian view of what God is aiming at is clear. It is that the whole purpose of life is educative ; it is intended primarily to educate us in goodness. Keats spoke of the earth as a vale of soul-making, and all we can add to that is to insist that the pattern and standard of the souls to be made shall not be less than the perfection of Jesus Christ. The Father has designed life in order to fashion us into true children of His, and it is only by its place in that design that death can be given any satisfactory meaning. It is that place which we have to try to discover. Our thesis is, therefore, that death is for our sakes because *it is for the sake of character.* It plays a part, an indispensable part in the education of our spirits. And, if that be so, surely one can begin to see at once some justification for so terrific an expedient. Nothing impresses me more in life than the appalling difficulty of the task which God has given Himself in the training of personalities into goodness out of the midst of animal life. It was a stupendous adventure to set about fashioning children for Himself out of a handful of dust and a few animal instincts continually at war with one another. To ask why it was necessary thus to create personalities

in and through the medium of material and animal life is, I think, to ask one of the questions which cannot be answered. But, given that it was somehow necessary, the magnitude of the task at once appears. We have only to look in our own heart to see the thing from another angle. I know something of what God is up against in the task of integrating the surging chaos, which I call my soul, into the wholeness, the beauty, the order, the simplicity of Jesus Christ, and God doubtless knows a good deal more than I do. The odds against success seem to me enormous, especially when there has to be introduced into the task, at some point or other, the element of my own freedom. Judging from the complexity and difficulty of the problem which a human soul sets God, I can well understand that the curriculum of training had to include a factor so tremendous, so utterly staggering and challenging to all our instincts and desires, as death.

Let us ask then what contribution death makes to the training of such creatures as we are.

It seems to me that it makes contribution along three lines according to three aspects of it. There is, first, the fact that death is the complete breaking off of relationship with this present world; it is a total and irreversible change of environment. There is second the fact that death is incalculable and unpredictable; it may come at any time, and we are not told in advance when it will come. There is, third, the fact that death is an impenetrable veil; the next environment, whatever it

is, is entirely hidden from us. These three elements of rupture from the present world, incalculability, and impenetrability, all play a part in the training of our souls for God.

III

First, the element of rupture or utter change.

Does not this stand as a continual challenge and check to worldly values, a continual stimulus to rise out of a merely natural and instinctive life appropriate to this world, into something higher? If it was necessary for God to begin this business of making souls on the merely natural and animal level, if the raw stuff of character, of necessity, had to be the crude instincts and emotions of the brute creation, if, as Paul put it, that which is natural is first and then that which is spiritual, then there had to be something in the world which would awaken man's struggling mind to the fact, and which would continually remind him that the natural life in the nature of the case is not all, but, on the contrary, is meant in the end to be annulled and to disappear. The instincts of hunger and fear and sex and self-assertion and all the rest, are too strong and, when they are active, too easily justified, for man's feeble spiritual life to have much chance against them without the mocking comment which death continually passes upon them. The scales would be too heavily weighted against the growth of spiritual life without death. We make a poor enough hand at it as it is, but that only makes one the more sincerely thankful for every check and

stimulus which makes it easier. I must begin my pilgrimage in animal instinct, but equally much I must not stay in animal instinct; then let me be thankful that there is something which tells me so with such terrific and unforgettable pungency as death, something which sets these instincts continually in a proper perspective, and evaporates from them the dangerous power to satisfy which they would otherwise possess. Death, from this point of view, so far from being a shadow and a darkness, is really a powerful illuminant; it is a light and a revelation which man, with his spiritual destiny, needs, and which, as he rises above the brutes, he is more and more able to make use of and comprehend.

Lest this should seem mere words let me give one concrete example. Is not death a rebuke and purge of our natural feelings? Walt Whitman's beautiful poem "Reconciliation" expresses the point:

"*Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,*
That the hands of sister Death . . . incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soiled world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead.
I look where he lies white faced and still in the coffin—
I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin."

Whitman speaks of war and its bitter enmities, but, in a measure, this is true of all our feelings. All our angers and our bitternesses and our prides and our hates, all our natural passions, which are so hot and quick in our dealings with one another, and are so ready in excuse and justification, falter and look foolish in the presence of death. Death tells us what they really are,—instincts appropriate only to a world destined to be annulled, instincts which must be sublimated into something more spiritual, more worthy of another world. And the same comment death passes on all the tinsel glory of worldly prosperity. Yes! let me thank the Father for Sister Death; let me thank God that my surgent animal nature has to meet daily that cooling and cowing thought; let me thank God that my soul, struggling to extricate itself, is thus reminded that, if it has not might, it has at least right and ultimate destiny on its side.

Second, the fact that death is so incalculable and unpredictable.

We are here to-day and are gone to-morrow, we say; neither virtue nor cleverness nor wealth makes any difference; we all walk along the edge of a precipice, and a slip will take us in. Is this the ordering of the Father of our spirits,—to give us life on so uncertain a tenure, to hold us thus in suspense over the abyss? Granting on other grounds the necessity of death, could it not have come in some orderly and routine way, so that we could plan accordingly? What is the purpose of this uncertainty?

A moment's thought surely gives the answer.

We might be happier if death were more calculable; we should hardly be better. It is surely the finality of death, coupled with its uncertainty, which has drawn out some of the best and highest powers of man's mind and soul. It is the possibility of death at any time which has given a new urgency to virtue and to service, a new depth and tenderness to love. It has evoked courage and self-sacrifice and skill and knowledge to a degree which they would never have otherwise attained. I once heard it said, that, if you wanted to raise the brutes to the level of man, it would only be necessary to give them one idea, and that is the idea of death. There is truth in this, even profound truth. Another writer has said that we only begin to fight disease with all our powers and we certainly only begin to sympathize with it with all our powers when we recognize the threat of fatality in it; witness, for example, our easy-going attitude to sea-sickness. Death, when you come to think of it, is the supreme instance of the hazard and uncertainty of life, nay, it is very nearly the source of all other hazard and uncertainty. And hazard and uncertainty we feel in our bones are the source of all the zest and progress and dignity of life.

There is something here which we can hardly prove, but which we feel and know most when we are on the highest levels of life. To fight death, even though in the end it must overcome us, is to gain something which is stronger than death, a spiritual quality of strength and tenderness and self-control infinitely worth while. Browning perceived this when he spoke of death as the arch-fear, the fear in which all other fear is summed up. Let a man conquer that fear and he has won his soul. Take away the uncertainty of death, make it a regular and contractual thing, a time-table thing, and life would immediately begin to oscillate between an easy-going complacency and a fatalistic despair. As it is, it puts us on our mettle and calls out the best which is in us. Let us thank God for the uncertainty of death.

Thirdly and finally, the impenetrability of death. What lies beyond is hidden from us. Why?

Here the wisdom of God seems to be clearest of all. He is training us in character, in spirituality, in sonship to Himself. But think what true character, true spirituality is. Does it not of necessity include some giving of ourselves to what is good because it is good, and not for any reason of honour or reward? God touches our hearts by the call of absolute values of truth and beauty and goodness. By absolute values I mean that they represent something which must not be put into the balance with anything else; they must be sought at all costs, they must be clung to though the heavens fall. We have only truly given our hearts to God, we have only truly attained spirituality, when we are willing to stand by these things, even at the point of uttermost doubt and defeat. How could we learn to do that, if the future were known to us, and if there were no darkness into which we must plunge, making a dogged affirmation of faith? The thick veil of death alone makes true spirituality, true dedication

possible to us. It forces us to that choice in which all the issues of character are summed up, namely, whether we will follow the highest into the unknown, or compromise for the calculable and immediately realizable rewards of this world.

But in addition to that, the impenetrability of death has much to do with that life of personal sonship and trust which our Father would teach us to have with him. An absolutely essential element in a relationship of personal fellowship and affection must be a certain walking by faith, and not demanding always to walk by guarantee and by sight. This is the difference between a personal relationship and a business or legal one. In business when the way looks dubious we demand a written contract; in our family relationships we ask only a look and a smile, and in the strength of that we go on. The valley of the shadow is but another call, another opportunity to draw close to Him and to discover with a thrill of joy the reality of His love.

And, lastly, does not the darkness of death serve to keep us to our present tasks, and to the learning of our present elementary lessons, undistracted by the dazzling glories of another sphere? God is indeed a wise Father of our spirits. He ordains, as every wise teacher would, that we learn one thing at a time.

Let us thank God that He knows our frailty and our weakness. Let us thank God for the impenetrability of death.

Let us praise the Lord for our sister, Bodily Death.