

THE
GATES OF NEW LIFE

BY
JAMES S. STEWART, 1876-

Popular Edition

"Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst Thou—so wilt Thou!
'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

David, in BROWNING'S *Saul*.

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TO
THE CONGREGATIONS OF
ST. ANDREW'S, AUCHTERARDEER
BEECHGROVE, ABERDEEN
AND
NORTH MORNINGSIDE, EDINBURGH
WITH GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION

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THE GATES OF NEW LIFE

I

CLOUDS AND DARKNESS AND THE MORNING STAR

"If one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof."—Isa. v. 30.
"I am the bright and morning star."—Rev. xxii. 16.

OF all the doubts which, as Browning puts it, can "rap and knock and enter in our soul," by far the most devastating is doubt of the ultimate purpose of God. You may doubt some of the dogmas of your ancestors, and be none the worse for it. You may doubt a particular article in a credal statement, and still be on the Lord's side. You may doubt the validity of contemporary fashions in religious thinking, and still have your feet upon the Rock of Ages. But to doubt the final purpose of God—which means to doubt the rationality of the universe, and the significance of human experience, and the worth of moral values—is there anything left to live for then?

Yet that is precisely the doubt which is lying like an appalling weight on multitudes of lives to-day. They would think twice before subscribing to Tennyson's faith:

"Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,

And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns."

"Where is any evidence of such a purpose?" they want to ask. "Where is any convincing trace of plan or pattern or design? It does not make sense—this tangled world. We

are not getting anywhere. We are just blundering along, victims of fate and chance and accident; and all our dreams and hopes and idealisms and struggles are a mere forlorn futility."

So they are back where Ecclesiastes was. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." What is the use, cried Thomas Hardy, of all your prayers, you praying people, when you have nothing better to pray to than

"The dreaming, dark, dumb Thing
That turns the handle of this idle Show?"

"A bad joke"—that was Voltaire's final verdict on life. "Ring down the curtain," said the dying actor, "the farce is done."

People do not go about saying these things, of course. Not in so many words. But deep down in the hidden recesses of many a soul that doubt has begun to stir. Has God a plan?

Mark you, they are not flippant souls whom that doubt afflicts. Some of the most lovable and devoted people in the world are in the toils of it to-day. There was a man I knew: he turned in, with this particular burden on his heart, to a church one day. The preacher's sermon was a hotch-potch of Emersonian optimism, plus a dash of Coué: the world was getting better and better every day, and everything in the garden of the human heart was lovely, and soon we should all reach the New Jerusalem by our own momentum. That man left the church that day not only hurt, but angry. I don't blame him. I think it would have angered Christ. Face the facts! That is Christ's first rule of honesty. And when men do sincerely endeavour to face the facts, do you think it is so very surprising that sometimes a doubt of the ultimate meaning of it all creeps in? Read your Isaiah. He might have been writing for to-day. "If one look unto

the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof."

Now this doubt of an ultimate plan or purpose in life springs from various sources; and I am going to ask you at this point to imagine that we have here in the church two or three typical representatives, who are going to speak for themselves.

Here is one. "My doubt of an ultimate purpose in things," he tells us, "comes from science." "Will you explain?" we ask him. "Well, it is like this," he goes on. "It is now a recognized fact that the universe we inhabit is gradually—very slowly, but none the less certainly—running down like a clock, with its energy imperceptibly but steadily degenerating. And if that is true, if that is the line of our destiny, is there any sense in talking of an ultimate purpose or a plan? Now it is a real difficulty; and even if I were to point out to this speaker that a universe which is running down like a clock must first have been wound up by some one, and that therefore his own argument points to a divine mind in control; even if I were to remind him that in any case Christianity never suggested that our home here was permanent ("The world passeth away"), it is hardly likely that this would dispel his doubt. Some better answer will be required. There is a better answer. There is, in Christianity, an overwhelmingly convincing answer. We are coming to that soon. Meanwhile, the difficulty stands.

Take a second man. "It is not science," he tells us, "that has led me to doubt the purpose of God: it is the state of the world. It is this pitiless, unending struggle for existence among the nations. It is the collapse of our idealisms before the brute facts of force and chaos. It is the feeling that there is something demonic in the heart of things which is working against us, that there is a radical twist in the

very constitution of the universe which will always defeat man's hopes, make havoc of his dreams, and bring his pathetic optimism crashing in disaster. Purpose? Look at the world! That settles it."

Take a third man. "It is neither science nor history," he tells us, "that has shaken my faith in a divine plan. It is the fact of suffering." And then perhaps he quotes the words of the philosopher Hume. "Were a stranger to drop suddenly into this world, I would show him, as a specimen of its ills, a hospital full of diseases, a prison crowded with malefactors and debtors, a field of battle strewn with carcasses, a fleet floundering in the ocean, a nation languishing under tyranny, famine, or pestilence." "Honestly," he declares, "I don't see how you can possibly square that with an ultimate purpose of love." And indeed, I wonder if any one here has never felt, like cold steel running into his soul, the sudden stab of that wild doubt? There is a most poignant moment in Eugene O'Neill's play, *All God's Challeum got Wings*. "Will God forgive me?" one of the characters asks another. And the answer comes—"Maybe He can forgive what you've done to me; and maybe He can forgive what I've done to you; but I don't see how He's going to forgive—Himself." It is the same haunting doubt. Is there any loving purpose in command?

We have imagined these three men speaking frankly of their problem—one arguing from science, another from the condition of the world, a third from the mystery of suffering. But perhaps for some one here the problem is more intimate and personal still. It is not really science, nor the world, nor an abstract problem of evil that is your worry. It is your own experience. The psalmist advised us, when the low mood came, to address our own souls, and say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" But there are multitudes of people who know perfectly well what their souls would answer.

"Cast down? How can I help it? Life has been so different from what I hoped, so full of thwarting and frustration; and I seem to be of so little use to any one, and if I died to-night the world would go on to-morrow as if nothing at all had happened. And this struggle to achieve something like a decent character—what a weary business that has been! This troublesome self—ten years, twenty years ago, I was fighting that; and here I am, fighting the same thing still. And what's the use? I feel so tragically ineffective and futile. Don't talk to me of a divine purpose in my life! For that I can't believe."

We have listened, then, to these different voices; and I think you will realise that what they are doing is to force us up against the most crucial alternative, the most inescapable "Either-Or" of life. That alternative is this: Either despair—or faith. Either blank, unrelieved pessimism, or a gambler's throw with your soul. Either darkness and futility and ultimate night, or the vision of God standing within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

There is no third way. It is between these two readings of life that every soul of us must choose. But it is precisely here that Christianity comes in with its central demand. It demands that, before we choose, we should at least try to see what the men of the New Testament had seen.

What was that? They had seen one point of light in the darkness. They had wrestled desperately with this strange puzzle of life, its problems and griefs and breaking hearts; and then God had put into their hands one word, and they looked at it, and suddenly they realized that this was the solving word, the code word, and that they had only to apply this to decipher all the rest. They had pored long on life's jumbled, meaningless pieces, trying vainly to make sense of them; and then one day the semblance of a pattern had

appeared, not much of a design, it is true, just two lines like a cross—but at least it was a pattern; and with this standing out, somehow all the other things began to move into their place. In the maze of life's perplexities, they had come upon one fact that made the idea of a blessed purpose suddenly credible. They—the common soldiers on life's field—had been allowed for one moment to glimpse the great Commander-in-Chief's plan of campaign. In one flash across the darkness they had caught a sight of God's meaning with the universe and with themselves. They had seen Jesus.

And this stands to-day as the central demand of Christianity, that when you and I are baffled by life and cannot see purpose in it anywhere, and when we stand facing the final alternative of despair or faith, we should not decide until we have included the fact of Jesus in our evidence, and taken cognizance of His life and death and victory, and seen across the midnight darkness that bright and morning star.

This, of course, is not to exclude the possibility of other evidence. Go to Nature, for example. Is there no trace of purpose there? Have not scientists like Jeans and Eddington been telling us that everything points to the existence of an infinite, directing mind, as of a great mathematician? Does not the vast system of ordered natural law imply that ultimately the universe itself is on the side of righteousness—which is what the Bible means when it says, "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera"? And is there not a deeper meaning than some of us have suspected in the words of a familiar hymn?

"But the slow watches of the night
Not less to God belong;
And for the everlasting right
The silent stars are strong."

Or turn to History. Is there no trace of purpose there?

Erratic and incalculable the course of events may often be; but do no clear principles stand out? This at least has surely emerged from the long travail of the ages, that "where there is no vision, the people perish," and that where there is moral apostasy, there comes inevitably national decay. Does that not indicate purpose?

Or turn to your own experience. "I came about," said Robert Louis Stevenson, describing a decisive stage of his soul's career, "like a well-handled ship. There stood at the wheel that unknown steersman whom we call God." Perhaps there has been no such dramatic hand of Providence in your experience. But before you deny the presence of an overruling purpose, think again! I put this to you now: Are there not certain things you would die rather than do? Are there not certain ideals of honour and truth that have an absolute claim on you, so that you can only say, "Here stand I: I can no other"? Where does that feeling come from? Do you really believe Bertrand Russell when he asserts that it is just "the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms"? Were the heroisms of the martyrs, and the preaching of a Savonarola, and the devotion of a Wilberforce, and the sacrifice of a Livingstone, and the shudder that passed over your own soul when the first real temptation came, and the peace that followed when you conquered—were these things the product of chance groupings of atoms? Do you not think that that explanation is definitely less plausible, far more incredible, than the Christian one, according to which that sense of honour, that resolve to die rather than do certain things, is the grip of a living God upon your soul; in other words, the clear token of a great purpose working through your life?

Yes, there are these lines of evidence. God has not left Himself without a witness to His purpose in nature, history, experience. But that is not enough. Men never felt that it

was enough. Still the mists of uncertainty linger. Still the shadows of the dread doubt darken the soul. But suddenly, out of the mists comes Jesus! High in the darkened heavens rides a messenger of hope. I am the bright and morning star!

How do I know, looking at Jesus, that life has a meaning, and God a purpose? *I know it from His character.* Into this tumbled, chaotic world there has appeared at one point of time that quality of life—absolute chivalry, consistency unwavering, love triumphant over every evil, compassion as wide as the sea, purity as steady as a rock. And when I gaze at that, immediately there is a voice in my own heart that begins to cry—"The meaning of life is there! God's purpose for me, and for all humanity, is there. Soul of mine, follow the gleam!"

How do I know, looking at Jesus, that life has a meaning, and God a purpose? *I know it from His cross.* When a flag is flying in the wind, you cannot always make out its design and pattern; but then perhaps there comes a sudden stormy gust, and blows the flag out taut, and for a moment the pattern stands out clear. Was it not something like that which happened nineteen hundred years ago? The flag of life and of man's long campaign had been flying for ages, and none could read its meaning; but suddenly came a storm-blast, the fiercest gust of all, and straightened out the flag: and men looked, and lo! its pattern was a cross. Does it not help you, in your own sufferings, to know that that cross is the ground-plan of the universe, that life is built like that; that the trials and troubles and sacrifices which often seem so meaningless, the very negation of all purpose, are really the means by which the most glorious purpose imaginable is being wrought out; and that therefore every pain you have to bear can be a holy sacrament in which the God who

suffered on Calvary comes to meet you, and your contribution to the building of the kingdom of heaven and the redeeming of the world? Christ died to tell us that.

How do I know, looking at Jesus, that life has a meaning, and God a purpose? *I know it from His resurrection.* Do you remember the dramatic passage in which Browning likens conversion to the effect of a lightning-flash in a dark night, showing up everything momentarily as clear as day?

"I stood at Naples once, a night so dark

I could have scarce conjectured there was earth

Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:

But the night's black was burst through by a blaze . . .

There lay the city thick and plain with spires,

And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.

So may the truth be flashed out by one blow."

What was the resurrection of Jesus? What were the appearances to the disciples? They were the lightning-flash of God, the bursting of the unseen world into the seen, the break through of God's new creation, the spiritual world order, into the order that now is. No wonder Paul, meeting Jesus outside the gates of Damascus, fell blinded to the earth! What had he seen? Do not think it was the Syrian sunshine that dazzled him. No! He had seen—for one tremendous moment, in that risen, death-defeating Christ, he had seen—the unveiled purpose of God. And you who have been where Paul and these disciples were, you who on some high road of the spirit have met the risen Christ again and felt the thrill and glory of His power, you to whom He is now the companion of the way in a blessed intimacy of friendship whose wonders never cease—you need no further proof. Life does have a meaning and a purpose and a goal. And we poor struggling creatures are not the doomed playthings of chance and accident and futility. We are getting somewhere. We are moving onwards to a day when this

suffering, tormented creation shall see at last of the travail of its soul, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, and God shall be all in all.

"I am the bright and morning star," says Jesus. It all comes back in the end to the question: Who will follow that gleam? Are we prepared to live now as those who have seen the purpose of God, as men and women who have tasted the powers of the world to come? And will we hold to it in spite of everything, in spite of the tangles and the darkness and all our own secret sorrows and disappointments and defeats, that God's will is coming out at the last; that though hindered often and set back by human blindness and folly and sin, its ultimate victory is sure? O trust that morning star! God set it in the sky for you.

"And all the jarring notes of life
Seem blending in a psalm,
And all the angles of its strife
Slow rounding into calm.

And so the shadows fall apart,
And so the west winds play;
And all the windows of my heart
I open to the day."

II

THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH

"Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."—Rev. xix. 6.

WHAT is the biggest fact in life to you at this moment? What is the real centre of your universe? "The biggest fact in life?" replies one man. "Well, I reckon it is my home. That, for me, is the centre of everything." A very noble thing to be able to say! "The main fact in life to me," says a second, "is, without any shadow of doubt, my work. If you take that away from me, you take just everything." "The central thing for me," declares a third, "is health and happiness. As long as I have that, I am quite content. I can't bear to be unhappy." But what is your own answer?

I know what Jesus' answer was. Was it home? No—though none has ever hallowed home-life as Jesus hallowed it. Work, then? No—though none has toiled so terribly as the Son of God. Health and happiness? No—though none has been responsible for nearly so much clean happiness and mental and physical health as Jesus. The central fact in life to Jesus was none of these things. It was this—"the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

Is that your answer? More blessed than home, unspcakably blessed as home may be; more crucial than work, be that work never so urgent; more vital than health and happiness, though sometimes, especially when you lose them,

of the Cæsars, taking the cup from the hand of a nameless waif of the streets, and both of them feeling it was the most natural thing in the world to do, for there was a love deeper than sisterhood between them now. Only one thing explains it—Christ.

It was an amazing thing, that early fellowship; and it meant everything to those who shared it. When they met temptation out in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—the fellowship was an unseen reinforcing host, backing them up, steadying them, putting them on their honour, giving them victory. Young converts coming into the fellowship out of heathenism found that in the testing days after their conversion, when the first glow had passed and the old environment was trying to drag them down again, it was the fellowship that held them up. Not that these early Christians were always talking about their fellowship. It never occurred to them to make orations about it. And they never tried to organize it in a semi-professional way, saying, "It is our duty as Christians to be brotherly: let us start a meeting to promote brotherhood." That would have seemed to them utterly trivial and foolish. Their fellowship was this—that they were sharing together the very life of Jesus. And the trouble with us to-day is that far too often we have tried to run a superhuman fellowship on a human basis. And it can't be done. We have tried to organize and mechanize and work the thing up, not seeing that the fellowship of the Church is going to be just as limited, just as disruptive, just as much at the mercy of temperament and frail human nature as all the other fellowships of this world—unless it is true to its own supernatural origin, and builds on an experience of Christ.

Now there is one thing I ask you to notice specially about that fellowship of the Spirit in the New Testament, namely this: it never wasted time on mutual admiration, as though

X

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

"The communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all."—2 Cor. xiii. 14.

THE communion of the Holy Ghost! The fellowship of the Spirit! Here is a phrase that leads straight to the core and centre of the Christian experience.

The first thing we need to get quite clear is that this great conception, rooted here in St. Paul's Trinitarian benediction, means two things, not one. For there is no such thing as fellowship of believers among themselves apart from the fellowship of their separate souls with God; and there is no fellowship with God which does not produce as its primary and characteristic result a living fellowship with men. Now that lays down the lines for our thoughts to follow. Let us think first of the Christian fellowship in the world; and then let us think of the lonely fellowship with God that lies behind it.

It is an extraordinarily vital and impressive thing—the Christian fellowship that meets you in the pages of the New Testament. Here you have Saul of Tarsus, haughty Pharisee, Hebrew of the Hebrews, who took care that everybody should know it, sharing his deepest intimacies with poor illiterate slaves from Greek slums, barbarians, he would once have called them, Scythians, miserable outsiders—yet now miraculously his brothers. Only one thing explains it—Christ. Here you have a Christian love-feast in the catacombs, and a Roman lady, with imperial blood in her veins, a kinswoman

the fellowship were an end in itself. It never became esoteric, for it was the Body of Christ, existing for Christ's purposes in the world. It never sang, as alas! its successors of a later day have sometimes sung:

"We are a garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground;
A little spot enclosed by grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness."

There was far more of John Masfield's Saul Kane about it

"I knew that Christ had given me birth
To brother all the souls on earth."

Always the fellowship was drawing others to itself. Always it was self-propagating.

Every member of that early fellowship knew himself to be a herald. He knew that that was the condition on which his own place in the fellowship depended. I wonder if we have ever fully realized that the very life of the fellowship to-day depends on each member of it being (to use the language of electricity) a *Christ-conductor*? "Your brain," an old schoolmaster of Ernest Raymond's used to say to his class, "shouldn't be a cold-storage chamber, but a power-house." That is even truer of the soul than of the brain. Our soul is not to be a cold-storage chamber where our personal religion is stocked and hidden away, but a power-house, sending out into the world the light and warmth and radiance of the Christ. That is what God wants to-day, not apologists arguing for Him—God has been argued for long enough—but heralds proclaiming Him. Thomas Carlyle, speaking of his *French Revolution*, once said: "This I could tell the world: you have not had for a hundred years any book that comes more direct and flamingly from the heart of a living man." That is how our witness as members of the fellowship ought to come, direct and flaming from the heart. And even if we

cannot tell it out (for Christ is glorious beyond our poor stammering words), we can at least live it out, and so share it with the world. Some time ago, in the *Spectator*, there was a review of a book on the poet Blake, and in the course of it the reviewer said that the cry raised by all the world's greatest literature is, "Read me, do not write about me, do not even talk about me, but read me!" To me it seems that the cry raised by the world's great Christ to-day is: Live Me, do not debate about Me, do not even argue for Me, but live Me! That, surely, is what the fellowship is meant for—to be out in the world living Christ, scattering the glory, heralding the Lord. And it is the very death of the fellowship if it fails its Master here.

But now we must go deeper. I said at the beginning that the "fellowship of the Spirit" means two things, not one; and we turn now to the other side. Behind that wonderful Christian fellowship that burned and glowed in the Early Church there lay a direct individual fellowship with God, a personal experience of the Holy Spirit. In other words, behind it was Pentecost.

Now we have been told scores of times in these recent years (and certainly it is true) that to recapture Pentecost is the prime need of the Church to-day. But I suppose that for many of us the story of Pentecost as it stands in the New Testament, with its record of rushing winds and cloven fires and gifts of tongues, is strange and dark and mysterious; and the big question for many minds is, What was it that really happened there? That something happened, something tremendous and revolutionary and startling and sudden, is clear: and any historian, studying the New Testament, whether he is a Christian or not, freely recognizes that on this particular page and on the pages that come after it there rings out in the lives of these followers of Christ a note

which had not been there before ; that here, in a single moment, the human fumbling and faltering which had so often come between these men and Jesus is all finished ; and that from this point you get the throb and the beat of the march of men whose heads are up, who are utterly sure of themselves because they are utterly sure of God. All who give thought to Christian origins (even historians with no particular Christian bias) are agreed that here, at this definite point and on this definite day of history, something happened that saved Christianity for the world. But what was it ? What does Pentecost really mean ?

I would have you notice two simple but decisive things about the men who got the experience.

They were expectant men. That is to say, Pentecost did not happen in a vacuum. It happened in an atmosphere where faith and eagerness had prepared the way. It came to men who were taking time to *listen* for God.

And there will never be a Pentecost without that—either for the individual or for the Church. We complain sometimes that we have never had much in the way of definite spiritual experience, and perhaps we even come to think that we were not meant for it, that it is “not in our line.” But with all my heart I believe that God has a great spiritual experience waiting for any man or woman who will rise up to receive it. I do not see how we can believe the New Testament and the Christ of the New Testament, and not believe that. But it is the listless, bored, apathetic, non-expectant attitude that balks God all along the line. If I say my prayers, for example, as a kind of job I had better put through, if when I go home to-night I finish up the day with a prayer because it is a habit, a custom, nothing more—I am taking the channel between God and myself that Jesus Christ has dug with His own hands, and blocking it. But if I can offer to God a prayer electrically charged with faith, if in the hushed shrine of my

secret soul I am really expecting God to speak, listening for that, then God will speak indeed. I know it, for He has done it. And you know it, for He has done it for you. It is the expectant heart to which the Holy Spirit comes.

The other simple but decisive thing about these men who first got the great experience was this. *They were Christ-surrendered men.* Every one of them had given himself to Christ up to the hilt, and was ready to go anywhere, do anything, at Christ's command.

Is it there our difficulty lies ? Let me say this quite clearly : none of us has a right to complain that God gave these men of the New Testament a spiritual experience He has never given us, if we have not gone the lengths with Christ that they went, have never done what they did, taken the circle of our life and lifted it up bodily off the centre called self, and set it down and rooted it on the centre called Jesus. Pentecost is God's answer to a soul's surrender to Jesus : it comes after the surrender, not before.

That is precisely our trouble. We want God's Spirit, without God's conditions. How often it happens, for instance, that when some great moral issue is raised—it may be in the world at large, some issue like war and peace, or it may be in our own secret life, where no one knows anything about it but ourselves—how often it happens that we argue, and go on arguing, the matter ! What we don't do is to say, “God has given His orders : that is an end of it. There is no need for argument !” It is so very much easier to spend a dozen hours discussing religion than one half-hour obeying God. It is so pitifully easy to give God a half-obedience, a second-best religion—not the kind of thing that that great soul Temple Gairdner was urging when he said about a certain temptation : “Take it out into the desert with Christ and throttle it !”

I am sure that in these recent years we have been con-

tenting ourselves far too much with a merely friendly and appealing Jesus, instead of a strong, imperial, commanding Jesus; and with a gospel of good fellowship and camaraderie, instead of a gospel of downright obedience. The real danger of the idea of a semi-dependent Christ, who appeals for help, is that almost inevitably you will have men imagining that by professing Christianity they are doing Christ a favour. You know what is apt to happen whenever any prominent man of letters or man of science writes an article in which he speaks approvingly about Jesus of Nazareth and the Christian religion. Immediately there are crowds of Christians ready to applaud it, as if it were another feather in the cap of Christianity, ready to broadcast it excitedly—"So-and-so has given his vote for Christianity: isn't it fine?"—as much as to say, "How gratified Jesus must be!" That is all wrong. It is a travesty of the truth. Christ does not court any man. Christ commands him. And Christianity does not consist in complimenting Christ as genius, or artist, or poet, or teacher, or social reformer, or anything else whatever: it means bowing to Christ as Commander. It is being ready to make His will our law, His command our joy, and His hardest marching-orders the music of our life.

This is the crux of the matter. Pentecost is God's answer to men's obedience to His Son. The Spirit comes to those, and to those alone, who can say to Christ such words as Robert Herrick three hundred years ago said to his Anthea:

"Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
The very eyes of me,
And hast command of every part,
To live and die for thee."

To those men of the New Testament, so expectant, so utterly Christ-surrendered, the Spirit came. And the heart

of the experience was not the rushing winds, nor the fires, nor the tongues—these were mere accessories and corroborations. The heart of the experience was *power*—a power that shook them to the very depths of their souls, and then sent them out to shake the earth.

It is power that our religion lacks to-day: not organization, not intellectual equipment, not social idealism—but power. And there is no secret of power except in a deepened spiritual experience. Such an experience we can have, if—a big "if" this—we want it with all our heart and soul, and if we are prepared to pay down the price of it in self-surrender to Christ and self-commitment to the holy will of God.

Now that brings us, finally, to this. The fellowship of the Spirit is power on certain different levels. *It is power on the physical level.* Look at the men of the New Testament. Quite apart from their spiritual force, they were physically twice the men they had been before, tingling with an energy and a verve which they themselves formerly would not have believed possible, and carrying things through triumphantly which would once have broken them. For a spiritual experience exhilarates a man's very body. That is not hard to understand. You see, it puts a new song into his heart; and naturally that reacts beneficially upon his nerves, and instincts, and the whole tone and balance of his physical frame, imparting a marvellous degree of peace, and poise, and serenity. Indeed, the idea that to be religious is to have a cramped and weakly life is one of the most stupid heresies ever invented, so stupid as to be mere rubbish. There is a Jewish legend which tells how Satan was once asked what he missed most since he had fallen from his former high estate in heaven. "I miss most," he answered, "the trumpets in the morning!" The Spirit of God keys a man up—like trumpets at dawn—to a pitch of vitality that no worldly spirit knows anything about; and

even on the physical level, the fellowship of the Spirit is power.

It is power also on the mental level. It is possible to make far too much of the illiterate character of the Early Church. In point of fact, that Church had in its membership some of the best brains of the ancient world. And what a power of initiative they had, what a sureness of touch, what a keen eye for essentials, what a directness of decision! The world has never seen anything like it. The fellowship of the Spirit is power on the mental level.

It is power on the moral level. Look at those men again. Many of them had spent half a lifetime at the beck and call of devouring, devastating passions; many of them had had wasted, shrivelled, burnt-out souls—until Jesus had got hold of them, and by a miracle of grace had wrenched them clear and set them with their faces to the sky; and now there they were, walking through cities that were living dens of corruption, and yet clad in the purity of Christ! Ask any one of them how it happened. "It is not I," comes the answer, "but the Spirit of God in me." What a message of hope to-day for defeated souls! Do you say your will is powerless? Perhaps it is. But Christ does not say, "Try harder." Christ says, "Accept the power of God." There is not a temptation on the face of the earth—no matter how dogged and stubborn it may be—which cannot be smashed, if only that same conquering Spirit is given His chance. The fellowship of the Spirit is power on the moral level.

And, above all, *it is power on the spiritual level.* What mighty missionaries the men of Pentecost were! Wherever they went, lives were changed, and souls redeemed. It was not anything they said that did it: it was the way they lived. They had been swept out of all narrowness and pettiness and selfishness and censoriousness and repression into a life that was radiant and released and exultant and contagious; and

the world, looking at them, could only say, "You have been with Jesus! You have found the secret. Help us to find it too!"

And that is meant to be normal Christianity. That is the impact your life and mine might be making on the world around us, if we were really men and women of the Spirit. I put it to you now, as I put it to myself—is there something still impeding that? Something unsubdued to Christ and therefore spoiling all our Christian witness? There was a day in Napoleon's life when disaffection and mutiny had broken out among the men of the Old Guard, and the risk was great. But Napoleon knew how to meet it. He sat alone in a little room in his palace, a room which had two large apartments opening off it to right and left; and in the hall to the left the members of the Guard were assembled. Each man was summoned alone to Napoleon, and as he entered the door was shut. Not a word was spoken; but Napoleon clasped the man's hand and looked him full in the face. Then each passed out again by the door on the right, until the whole of the Guard, one by one, had passed through. And when all had passed, the disaffection and the mutiny were over. The silent look and the handclasp had done their work: every man of them was Napoleon's now.

Here within this House of God, our Commander Jesus is summoning us to Him, one by one. He is looking us full in the face. His hand, pierced with the nail, is clasping ours. Can we still hold something back? Must we not go out from that silent Presence, His followers unconditionally, His without reserve? So shall we be men and women full of the Spirit of God, and strong in His glorious name.

and for every voyaging soul, is—What about the anchors ? Are they there ?

Here was this ship, labouring against that tempestuous wind Euroclydon, tossed in the wild Mediterranean, threatened by the crags and rocks of Malta ; and, says the writer, “they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.” Have you ever done that ? Have you ever wished and prayed for the day, when the night was black ? There are worse winds in life than Euroclydon, and stormier seas than the Mediterranean, and crueller rocks than Malta—wild winds of doubt, and sorrow’s bitter seas, and temptation’s jagged rocks : and in amongst them, the frail ship that is a man’s soul, battered and benighted and wishing to God for the morning ! As Herbert Trench puts it :

“When round thy ship in tempest Hell appears,
And every spectre mutters up more dire

To snatch control

And loose to madness thy deep-kennell’d Fears—
Then to the helm, O Soul !”

It may come. It has come to thousands. It may come one day to you. Is the ship equipped with anchors ? Have you enough of them ? Are they fit for the strain ? Are they anchors that will hold ?

“They cast four anchors out.” Let us give the four anchors their names. And let us pray the good God that they may be part of the equipment of us all.

We do not need to search far for the first. There is only one other place in Scripture where the word “anchor” occurs. “We have fled for refuge,” declares the writer to the Hebrews, “to lay hold upon the hope set before us : which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast.” There it is then. Anchor number one : *Hope*.

Is that part of your ship’s equipment ? As long as a man

XI

ANCHORS OF THE SOUL

“Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.”—AOS xxvii. 29.

HERE is a question that is worth asking. Have you and I any anchors on board the ship ? And are they strong enough for the day of storm ? Are they fit for the strain of life and death, and joy and terror, and everything that may happen on life’s seas ?

Some people’s faith is purely a fair-weather thing. Some have constructed their religion on the assumption that they are going to meet calm seas and favourable breezes all their voyage through. Some have never taken time or trouble to sit down in the cabin for half an hour with the great Captain, and reckon on the possibilities of gales and rocks and angry, buffeting waves.

It may be, of course, that even so they will get through without trouble. It may be that some tender Providence will hold the storms in leash, and see them safely home to their desired haven. It may be that they will never awake at night with the winds shrieking outside and the wild sea showing its teeth.

But what a dreadful risk ! In a world like this, where the wisest cannot tell what a day may bring forth, where without a moment’s warning the whole aspect of the skies may be changed, it is surely a risk which no serious man or woman would care to face. And so the question, for you and for me

has hope in his heart, life cannot destroy him. It may hurt him, but it will not break him. As long as hope holds out, he will weather the roughest storm. It is when hope goes—it is when things are going wrong, and the heart grows heavy as lead, and buoyancy gives way to cynicism, and life looks futile and contemptible—it is then the ship goes under.

Our anchor—Hope! Only, mark you, it must be *Christian* hope—not just a vague temperamental optimism, not a continual pathetic waiting for “something to turn up,” like Mr. Micawber in the story, not a mere indulging in sentimental day-dreams or building castles in the air. That is no anchor for the soul’s time of need. That snaps at the first real strain. It is Christian hope we are needing. And what is Christian hope? It is the attitude towards life of a man who has gazed upon the face of God the Father.

St. Paul once said this fine thing: “Now the God of hope fill you with joy and peace, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” *The God of hope*—that is, the God who creates hope, the God whose revealed character is the basis of all hope. That is the anchor.

There was a psalmist once, whose barque was tempest-tossed and foundering, groaning in every timber, and heading straight for where the white spray was dashing on the deadly rocks—when, suddenly, he bethought him of his anchor! “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God!” And that anchor, let down upon the everlasting rock, held and saved him. The God of hope! The God who brings a hope as bright as the radiance in the eyes of Jesus. The God you can count on though plans be ruined, and dreams go out, and the things you have longed for most of all never come to you in this life, and your heart feels like to break.

There is a story which Principal Rainy used to tell about a man in Edinburgh, who was a bad character and a confirmed

law-breaker, often in the hands of the police. He had only one redeeming feature in his life—his love for his little girl, who was an only child, the very image of her dead mother. He committed burglary, and was put into prison. During the term of his sentence, his child died. On the day when he came out, he learned of her death. It was a shattering blow. He could not go back to the house. He was simply broken. In his wild and bitter distraction, he resolved that when night came he would fling himself over the Dean Bridge, and end it all. At midnight he stood on the bridge. He was climbing the parapet, when suddenly, for no reason that he could think of (as he himself said afterwards) there flashed into his mind the opening words of the creed—“I believe in God the Father Almighty.” And he stepped back. Again it came, clearer and stronger this time—“God the Father Almighty!” He knew nothing of God, but he did know something of fatherhood. “Why,” he found himself saying, “if that is what God is, if God is like that, then I can trust Him with my lassie—and with myself!” And from that moment death receded: life began anew. At the last gasp, the anchor Hope had held!

“But yet the Lord, that is on high,
is more of might by far
Than noise of many waters is,
or great sea-billows are.

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul.” Can you say it? Have you the anchor on board? You will win the haven yet!

“They cast four anchors out, and wished for the day.” Hope is one. But one is not adequate for safety. We must find another. I want to bring before you now what I believe to be one of the best and most blessed of all the anchors of the

soul, especially in the stormy seas of youth. Its name is *Duty*. That is our anchor number two.

But let us be honest about this. Are there not times when we rebel against duty? We kick against what we think to be the drudgery that cribs and cabins and confines us. We sometimes almost curse the fate that nails us to our daily discipline. Why should we be shackled? Why should we be held down? Why should our life not be our own? Why is there not more freedom to do as we like? Why should we have to keep at it, day in, day out, until somewhere down the years death comes and ends the tale? The whole system, cries the rebel soul, is hard and cruel and unjust.

Believe me, it is only blindness that thinks that. And if you should sit down one day, with a pen and a sheet of paper, to write down, before God and your own soul, the things which have blessed you most since you came into this world right up to this present moment, I would advise you to put duty high up on the list—not indeed first (for the grace of God must stand there), but bracketed next with human love. Why? Because it is the sheet-anchor of your soul! And I pray you to remember this, that there are ships sailing the seas of life to-day, souls of men and women young and old, that would have been smashed and wrecked and done for scores of times, if they had not had that anchor to steady them and hold them safe.

Take an illustration. Take Josephine Butler, the great nineteenth-century heroine and benefactress of broken and outcast womanhood. Every one knows how that noble career began. She had returned home one day from a journey, and Evangeline, her only daughter—who was the light of her life—was watching for her coming. When the carriage reached the door, the child in her eagerness ran from the window, leaned over the balustrade, and fell—and lay dying at her mother's feet. Terrible beyond words was the

darkness of that day's grief; but at last Mrs. Butler turned for help and comfort to the home of an old, saintly Quaker woman who lived nearby. And this was the message she received. "God hath taken to Himself her whom thou didst love; but there are many forlorn young hearts who need that mother-love of thine. Go to — Street, No. —, and knock." She went. It turned out to be a refuge where forty young lives, once lost and in peril, were being cared for with all the kindness of true Christian sympathy and understanding. Into that labour of love Mrs. Butler threw herself; and so found herself committed to the high task that was to make her one of the greatest social reformers of the century. Thus in the day of her bitterest need, when she thought she had reached the end of everything, the end of faith, the end of love, the end of God—it was the call of duty that steadied her, and calmed her, and gave her the mastery of her soul.

Thank God for duty—that mighty anchor! Thank God for the providence which decreed that only in the sweat of his brow should man eat bread. Thank God for the tasks that give you something better to do than brooding and introspection. Thank God for the sheer hard toil that keeps the seven devils from getting into the swept and garnished house. Thank God for the things that must be done, even though the heavens should crash and fall. Thank God for duty! It will hold the ship until the day break and the shadows flee away.

Our first anchor is Hope, our second Duty. Is that enough? "They cast four anchors out, and wished for the day," and hope and duty still need reinforcing. Our anchor number three is *Prayer*.

God help the ship that leaves the harbour without that anchor on board! But so many of them do. And so many who once possessed it have long since cast it away.

It is extraordinary that there are people to-day genuinely

trying to be Christians, and yet never praying from one week's end to another. How can the spiritual life be vital under such conditions? How can God be real? How can religion seem anything more than a dim, vague idealism that does not really count?

I do want to make this clear. The man who does not pray, who does not have even five minutes a day in his own room face to face with God and heart to heart with Christ, is simply playing with his soul. And if he is the father of a family, he may be playing with his children's souls. I want to ask him: What does he believe? He says he believes in God the Father Almighty. But does he? He says he believes there is such a thing as the soul. Does he? He says he believes we are moving on to eternity. Does he? Has he ever sat down and thought out what a single one of these great beliefs involves, for himself, if it is really true? Would not half an hour's hard, honest thinking about it drive him to his knees?

I am not saying that prayer is everything. I am not saying that without prayer a man cannot make a decent show in life at all. But I am saying that without prayer there is no Christian life possible that is worthy of the name. Why? Because it is down the channel of prayer that the power of God gets into a man. And you cannot live the life for which Jesus stands, you cannot love your neighbour as you ought, you cannot keep the spiritual outlook upon the world—without the power of God to help you to do it.

And what about temptation? Let me put this to the young men and women here. Do you know the difference between meeting some particular temptation on a day when you have prayed your morning prayers and looked into the steady eyes of Christ, and meeting that same temptation on another day when you have no such backing and reinforcement? Servants of the King of kings, you who would

fain drive a straight path for yourselves through the dangers and difficulties of this tangled and perplexing age, will you remember that everything depends—your discipleship, your future, your peace of mind, your soul's true health—everything depends upon whether you yourselves are men and women of prayer? God has given you the anchor. Use it!

Am I speaking to some one here who, for one reason or another, has lost the prayer habit? Some one who would feel desperately awkward and self-conscious about starting it again to-night? Friend, do not get angry with me. Do not tell me it is none of my business. If God wants me to talk to you at all, He wants me to talk to you about this. We are not here in this Church for amusement. We are not here to spend a comfortable hour, and rise up and go away just the same as we came. We are here to meet God. And no man can meet God and be just the same. This matter of prayer is vital and decisive, as vital as anything in your life at this moment. And if you go to rest to-night unpraying, this word that I am speaking now is going to haunt you—for your own heart tells you it is true. And just think—it would be so easy to start again to-night; so worth while to conquer that feeling of strangeness and self-consciousness—for the sake of God and your own soul! A day may come, a day of storm and stress, when you will be driven to cry to Him, scourged into it by life itself. Oh, get back your daily prayers—lest, when that hour come, you find your anchor gone!

Hope, Duty, Prayer—three strong, staunch anchors of the soul. But once again the question arises, Is that sufficient? "They cast four anchors out." One more we need. You know its name. It is the greatest of them all. It is *the Cross of Christ*.

Do you know what it means to feel the grip of that cross upon your soul ?

"O dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him too."

I wonder if there is any anchor in this world like love. When the storms are on the deep, is there any safety like the power of a great affection ?

The whole of life bears witness to the fact that it is the personal element that saves. Advice, ethical codes, the religion that deals in "-ologies," and "-isms"—all that may simply leave a man cold and untouched. But if he loves—if he loves—thrice-armed is he against the foe !

A young life goes out into this dangerous world, where countless unknown temptations lurk. What is going to hold him straight and true ? Not any moral philosophy, not any copy-book maxims, not any wise, well-meaning advice. No. But the love of the home and the parents who have sacrificed for him. The anchor ! See him when temptation comes. Hear his soul's brave answer to the tempter—"How can I do this thing, and sin against love ?" It is these personal relationships that are life's master-forces.

And that is why God, two thousand years ago, personalized religion. "The Word"—the abstract thing, the -ism, the -ology—"was made Flesh"—the personal element, Jesus ; that so religion as the keeping of a law might be finished, and in its place might come religion as a personal passion for Christ. And when the cross of God's uttermost on Calvary has got its grip upon a man, when he has felt the strength of the love that will not let him go—what an anchor of the soul is there, stronger than the waves of life, and mightier than the whirlwind of death !

I am going to finish with this. You have read Tennyson's tale of King Arthur's knights and the Round Table ; and you

remember that loveliest of characters, Sir Galahad, who with his own eyes was to see the Holy Grail, because of the great purity of his heart. Recall his words :

"And hither am I come ; and never yet
Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,
This Holy Thing, fail'd from my side, nor come
Cover'd, but moving with me night and day,
Fainter by day, but always in the night
Blood-red, and sliding down the blacken'd marsh
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,
Shattering all evil customs everywhere,
And broke thro' all, and in the strength of this
Come victor."

Listen, young knight of Jesus Christ ! You have seen the cross—blood-red on the hill of Calvary, blood-red with "love divine, all loves excelling," blood-red for your redemption, blood-red with God's great agony. The cross—its very shape is like an anchor—binds, holds, grips your soul with grace and mercy. In the love of this, be pure. In the grip of this, stand steady. In the strength of this, come victor. The cross—your anchor—for ever and for ever !

self, just by being yourself, have been chariots and horsemen to Israel!" What a tribute to the sheer power of goodness!

And here is the clear message it brings to us to-day: it is character alone that is a nation's wealth—not armaments, not gold reserves, not political prestige, but God-filled men. You sometimes hear people speaking disparagingly—it was Nietzsche who set the fashion—of what they call "mere goodness," as though for any practical purpose, for achieving results in this problematical and often heart-breaking world, the things for which religion stands just did not count at all. But, thank God, there is a growing consensus of conviction now that that is the stupidest of mistakes, and that the one hope of this nation and of every nation and of the whole world is not chariots and horsemen, but lives with God's stamp upon them, and Christ's character burnt into them! Such lives are the chariots and the horsemen.

And that is why ordinary statistics can mislead so wildly. One God-filled personality may throw out all our usual calculations. Ten righteous men, said God, would have saved Sodom, when whole battalions of unbelievers could not have done it. And you remember Gideon's strange stroke of generalship: he dismissed his original thirty-two thousand and started all over again with a paltry three hundred. Paltry? No. For every one of them was God's man!

It is told that once during the American Civil War, a detachment of Sheridan's men, caught in a tight corner, broke and fled and galloped away for their lives: and just then Sheridan himself came riding up. Taking in the situation at a glance, he rose in his stirrups, waved his sword above his head, and shouted, "Men, we are going the other way!" Whereupon the fleeing host stopped dead, and for a moment there was not a sound; but then with a great cry they turned, wheeled in their tracks, and smashed their way back to victory. One man's influence! "My father, my father,"

XII

GOD AND THE MORAL STRUGGLE

"Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow."—2 Kings xiii. 14-16.

LET us try to see this young man, this Joash, king of Israel, to see him both in his strength and in his weakness; and may God help us to take the lesson that is here, and apply it to ourselves to-day.

The scene is set at a death-bed. It is the death-bed of a man of God. The long, turbulent life of Elisha is almost over. The voice that had so often startled the world, crying "Thus saith the Lord," is only a whisper now, trailing off into the last eternal silence. It is a poor, unpretentious room where he lies—a humble lodging on the city's eastern wall. But there at the bedside stands the king. And the young king's heart is desolate as he thinks of the void which Elisha's passing is going to leave. "O my father," he cries, for he feels almost like a son towards this dying man of God, and this is a cry of orphanhood, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!"

Was that not a glorious tribute to the influence of consecrated character? For what the king meant was—"You, my father, have been a greater strength to the nation than all its armies and navies. You, by your life and character and vision of God, have been our true salvation. You, alone by your-

cried Joash, "you have been worth chariots and horsemen to Israel!" Mere goodness, shall we still say slightlyingly? Mere religion? It was the Wesleyan revival, declares Lecky the historian, which saved England in the eighteenth century from the horrors of a French Revolution. And it is men and women revived in the Spirit of the living God who are the one real hope of this uneasy and distracted world, which stands listening to the storm-winds muttering in the distance, and to the earthquake rumblings beneath its feet. This is the plain unvarnished truth, God's writing on the wall. Wanted—men of character, men like Christ! The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!

But now let us move on to what is more personal in the story. Here is this young king looking disconsolately into a desolate future in which he will have to stand alone, with no Elisha to lean upon. But suddenly his sad reverie is interrupted. The dying man on the bed stirs, and something of the old light is kindled again within his eyes. "Take bow and arrows," he commands. And Joash, wondering, takes them. "Now come near, and let me lay my hands on yours"; and the prophet lays his wasted, trembling hands on the steady hands of the young king, as though to put something of God's Spirit and power into them (I wonder if Christ's pierced hands have ever gripped ours like that?)—and then, "Open that window to the east," says Elisha. And the young man flings it wide. "Now shoot!" And Joash draws back the arrow on the bow, and lets it fly; and as it flashes on its way, the dying voice cries aloud, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance—the arrow of the Lord!"

Of course, it was all symbolical. For the way to issue a challenge to your enemy in those days was to stand on the verge of his land and shoot an arrow into the territory you meant to conquer. And Joash recognized at once what the

symbol implied. It was as though the dying man had said: "Remember, when I am gone, you are not to bow down to Syria nor acquiesce in its tyranny! You are to challenge it in the name of the Lord God of hosts. You are to stand up to this evil thing, and defy it!" The arrow of the Lord's deliverance!

Is that not a message that we need to hear? Cross out Syria, and put in our own stubborn temptations—do we not need to hear it? What a mass of unheroic spiritual acquiescence our lives can show! We are so apt to accept ourselves as we are, and to be content with that. Perhaps we even say, "Oh, I am not cut out to be a saint or anything of that kind. I am quite satisfied if I can lead a decent average life; and as for those recurring temptations—to be slack about my prayers, for instance, or to be quick to take offence, or to leave thought unguarded and out of control—do such things really matter so very much after all?" And so we just knuckle down to Syria! "But they do matter," says the Word of God here to us quite bluntly, "they do! And it is not brave in the least, it is not manly, it is not honest, to live as though they did not. Out with your challenge! Shoot your arrow. Claim that uncaptured territory for Christ!"

Tolstoy, in a dramatic passage, has described a man sitting in a boat which has been pushed off from an unknown shore; and he has been shown the opposite shore, and given a pair of oars, and left alone. Straight out into the stream he rows; but then the current gets hold of him and deflects him. Other boats are there; some have thrown their oars away, a few are struggling against the stream, most are gliding with it quite content. "Is this the way?" he asks some of them; and a chorus of voices replies, "Of course it is! What did you think? There can be no other way." And so he drifts on; but suddenly he grows conscious of a sound, menacing, terrible—the roar of rapids: and the man comes to himself,

remembers what he had forgotten—the oars, the course, the opposite shore—and madly he begins to row upstream against the current, crying “Fool that I was to drift!” He rows on, until safety is reached. Now, says Tolstoy, that current is the tradition of the world, the oars are freewill, the opposite shore is God!

But how many are content to drift with the stream! “Good-bye to our daydreams,” wrote Captain Scott pathetically when he found himself forestalled at the Pole; and many a young life that once dreamed great dreams of character and God has come to that to-day—“Good-bye to our daydreams.” Some of you will remember the terribly poignant passage in Dickens’ story, where Sidney Carton—“the man of good abilities and good emotions, incapable of their directed exercise, incapable of his own help and his own happiness, sensible of the blight on him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away”—was walking through the lifeless desert of London’s streets in the grey twilight of the dawn. Suddenly he paused, for there in front of him was a vision—the vision of a life, his very life, crowned with nobleness and self-denying perseverance and usefulness and love. But the vision was only a mocking mirage: a moment, and it was gone. He climbed to his lonely garret, and flung himself down in his clothes on his neglected bed, and his pillow was wet with wasted tears. There you have a man acquiescing in his own temptations, taking them for granted, too tame to stand up and strike a blow for freedom. This is all that I have it in my power to be, he says, and for the rest—why worry?

We often feel like that; but sometimes, thank God, we see that acquiescing spirit as it is—a dismal, craven following of the line of least resistance. “O God,” cried Kagawa of Japan, on the day when the new life first stirred within his breast, “I want to be like Christ! O God, make me like Christ!” The most important transaction in life, said

Carlyle, describing his own experience, was on a day when—after years of acquiescence, years of being dragged at the chariot-wheels of his own tyrant fear, with its taunting voice ever ringing in his ears, “Thou art mine, my bond-slave, mine”—suddenly something within him sprang up and took control, and looked that tyrant in the face. “I am not thine,” it cried, “but my own, and free! And I hate, hate, despise thee!” That is the spirit. “I promise before God in heaven,” cried Abraham Lincoln in his youth, watching the tragedy of a slave-market, “if ever I get a chance to hit this thing, I will hit it hard!” You have a chance to hit that tyrant thing in you—now. Don’t say you have to lie down to it. Don’t say that there it is, and there it will always be. Don’t say it does not matter. Hit it hard—smite it with the lightnings of God!

“Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,

Grant us the strength to labour as we know,

Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,

To strike the blow.”

That is what these weak hearts of ours are needing, a purpose ribbed and edged with steel—and Christ alone can create it. Lord Jesus, make us strong!

But that is not all. One bold stroke at Syria, as Elisha saw, was not enough. See what happened next. “Take the bow again,” said the dying prophet to the young king, “and take this time a whole quiver of arrows.” And Joash obeyed. “Now smite upon the ground,” said Elisha. And the king shot three times upon the ground, and laid the bow down. Whereupon, “Alas!” cried the prophet. “Why did you stop? You should have smitten many times, for then you would have utterly conquered Syria—whereas now you will smite it only thrice!”

Now again, of course, there was a parable behind it. And the meaning, the spiritual message for ourselves, shines clearly through. "Remember," it says to us, "you who are battling with temptation—remember it is a stubborn foe you are facing. A good beginning is not enough, one bold defiance is never adequate. You have to keep it up. You have to fight on, and hope on, and pray on—until the thing is dead!"

Here, let us say, is a young man who joined the Church by profession of faith. And on the night of his dedication, he looked into the eyes of Christ and promised to be faithful until death. From that hour, everything was to be new. He would break once and for all with the inward tempter. He would go out and put some wrong personal relationship right. He would make a fresh start with his prayers. He would tear the dearest idol from the throne that should be Christ's. And he did. And there was joy among the angels in heaven. But that was—when? Last year, shall we say? It seems an unreal, far-off story now. Perhaps he is even secretly ashamed of it. So much can happen in a year! Somehow the high mood passed. The vision faded. The flame died upon the altar. Back crept the beloved temptation. Home came the dethroned idol. Gradually, imperceptibly, Christ's standards were toned down. Steadily the world's pressure worked its will. Others did things, and thought nothing about them—why should not he? Was he to miss so much? It was folly to aim too high. The easier and more comfortable road must do. A year ago? Surely a lifetime ago—that night of dedication, that eager vow to Jesus Christ! Oh, surely not last year? Yes, just last year. And to-day?

"Whither is fled the visionary gleam?

Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

Almost every one has phases of religious feeling, and it is

easy in those high moments to stand up and smite the foe in the name of God; but to keep campaigning till the foe is broken, finished, dead—that is where we fail. "I'm all fits," wrote Haydon the artist to a friend, "fits of work, fits of idleness, fits of reading, fits of religion." And in the moral struggle, that leads nowhere.

Good Mr. Pliable, in Bunyan's story, made a splendid start. "This is the life, this is the life," he kept telling himself, when he had fallen in on the march to the Celestial City; and he kept plucking at Christian's sleeve. "Faster, man, faster!" he cried impatiently, "Why are you dawdling? Come on, let us mend our pace—let us run!" And then the Slough of Despond engulfed them; and while Christian set his teeth, and struggled valiantly through to the other side, Pliable, with all his bubbling eagerness suddenly evaporated, was crying, "Help me out! Help me out! If I escape with my life, you can possess the brave country alone, for me—I am going home." And next moment he was running back down the road by which he had come, a poor bedraggled thing with mud in his clothes, and mud in his hair, and mud in his very soul: and that was how his bid for freedom ended. And how it has ended thousands of times!

Thinking of which, this old Book declares with discerning directness—"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin," and lays its finger on that as the real clue to our spiritual commonplaceness. And if we answer back, "But I *have* resisted, I really did try to conquer this temptation, I did fight the thing, and it is simply no use," if we make that our defence, "Yes, yes," it continues, "you resisted—in a way: but look at your soul—*where are the blood-marks?* None? None? None? And yet you talk about 'resisting'? Friend, climb Calvary! See what resistance meant to Jesus! See the blood—from His head, His hands, His feet, His side, His heart—sorrow and love flowing mingled down!

And is it to mean not one drop of blood for you? You are not in earnest."

There was a great moment once in the Roman Senate, when Rome had been humbled on the battlefield by the might of Carthage, and pessimistic voices were counselling surrender. "It is the only thing to do," they said, "we have fought and we have been beaten: now let us make some compromise." "Stop!" cried an old senator, leaping to his feet. "Remember this—Rome does not go to battle: Rome goes to war!" Remember this, in the fight with your temptations—Christ's men do not go to battle, they go to war! They refuse to quit the field till the foe is vanquished.

You are to conquer on the scene of old defeats. Simon Peter, I feel sure, would gladly have shunned Jerusalem, connected as it was with the most shameful memory of his life, a memory of desertion, denial, and defeat. Yet the first command he received from the risen Christ was, "Begin at Jerusalem! Go and preach My gospel there. Unfurl the flag again on the very spot where you hauled it down!" And I think Peter cried, "No, Christ, no! Not there—anywhere but there. North, south, east, or west I'll go—but not there!" "I say you must!" commanded Christ; "Go, turn defeat to victory!" And he did. And so must we. Don't be a Joash, striking once or twice and then desisting: be like all the saints who have cried—"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise!"

And Christ goes with you in this. That is the meaning of "grace." One might preach self-reliance and self-effort to the day of doom, and only drive men deeper to despair. But to throw yourself in your weakness upon God, to know the reinforcement of a Saviour at your side, to open the inmost recesses of your being to the power of the Holy Spirit—that is the Christian way. That is hope reborn, and courage renewed. That is the dawn of victory.

Give Christ a spirit like that, and the tide of battle will turn. For—this is the last thing I want to say to you to-day, and it is enormously cheering to know it—it is possible, by prayer and persistence and the grace of God in Christ, possible even in this present life, mark you, to gain victories over temptation that are final and complete, final in the sense that that particular temptation will never trouble you again. This is no optimistic fancy: it is proved experience. Sisyphus, in the old story, had a dreadful fate: always he had to keep pushing the great mass of rock up the slopes of the hill, and always when he was nearing the summit, when he was thinking—"This time I shall do it, I am almost there—steady now, steady!—one touch more and it is done"—always it came rolling down, tumbling and dashing to the foot; and he had to begin again, and so on to all eternity. But God means no child of His to be a moral Sisyphus! "Our soul," cried an excited psalmist long ago, "is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped!" And sometimes, when you have battled long and hard and prayerfully with an evil thing, there comes a day when you suddenly realize that the pull of it, the lure and magnetism and fascination of it, are not there any longer: the snare is broken, the bird escaped—your soul flies free! What a tremendous thrill there is in the words of Exodus, spoken to a people who for long weary years had felt the scourge of Egypt on their souls: "The Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever." All those bitter, humiliating years, and then—no more again for ever! It does happen, even here in this present life.

Once there were three crosses on an eastern hill, and round them there was thick darkness and silence, darkness as of midnight, silence as of death; when suddenly, stabbing the darkness, shattering the silence, came from the centre cross

a cry, a shout—"It is finished!" Take courage. This is the glory of the fight of faith, that one day God, looking out from heaven, may hear His own Son's words upon your lips, that one day out of the darkness and silence of your struggle there may come the cry—"It is finished! Finished the temptation! Finished the lure of it! Finished the power of it! Finished the tyranny of it! Other foes there may be yet to meet, but this one—never again. This snare is broken. This Egyptian is dead on the seashore. Glory be to Christ—it is finished!"

XIII

THE MAGNETISM OF THE UNSEEN

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."—1 PETER i. 8, 9.

IFANCY that many a Christian, encountering these words of Peter's—"Whom having not seen"—would answer at once, "But I *have* seen Him! You can't shake my certainty of that. It is the very foundation of my personal religion, that Christ and I have met." I think many of us would say that. And quite rightly. For if the unspoken demand that the Christian preacher hears from a congregation gathering in the Church for worship, is "Sir, we would see Jesus"; if he realizes that he has been ordained to his ministry, not to waste his time and theirs on genial generalities, but to do something to meet that demand for the vision of the Son of God—then it must be possible to see Christ still. I will go further, and say that unless all the saints have been mistaken; unless the hymn we so often sing at Holy Communion—"Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face"—is just a form of words, and nothing more; unless you are prepared to deny the witness of your own heart which, looking back across the years, can single out one place after another and say, "There and there God came to me in Jesus"; unless you are going to write down the inmost convictions of ten thousand souls as the mere vapourings of overheated imagination—the fact stands beyond challenge that men can see Christ to-day. Take a congregation like this. If only it

were possible to have a record of all the personal encounters with Christ represented by such a congregation—encounters in private prayer and at secret crossroads of decision, encounters in young manhood and young womanhood and in the gloaming of life's evening, encounters in quiet moods, and in sudden moments of desperate stress and need—if all that could be recorded, what a marvellous and moving story it would be! Men do see Jesus still. It does happen.

“And earth hath ne'er so dear a spot
As where I meet with Thee.”

And yet—“Whom having not seen,” says Peter. For, after all, none of us has seen Christ just as Peter saw Him. To Peter, as to the other disciples, Jesus had been a physical presence. He had eaten and drunk with them, and trudged the dusty roads of Galilee with them, and slept with them at nights beneath the open sky. Do you not envy them that intimacy? I am sure the thought sometimes comes to us—“If only I had seen Jesus like that, how different everything would have been! If I could have lived with Him as they did, could have consulted Him about the personal difficulties that make a tangle of my life, how much simpler life would have been! One single day with Jesus would have solved all my private problems, and straightened out my soul's confusions, and made me a new being altogether.” Has that thought never crossed your mind?

“Dim tracts of time divide
Those golden days from me;
Thy voice comes strange o'er years of change
How can we follow Thee?

Comes faint and far Thy voice
From vales of Galilee;
Thy vision fades in ancient shades;
How should we follow Thee?”

But natural as such thoughts may be, they are really quite mistaken. One fact they are ignoring, the fact Paul fixed on when he said “Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more”; which means that what Calvary and the Resurrection did was to set the Spirit of Jesus loose in the world, untrammelled and alive for ever, freer actually than He ever was in the days of Galilee, and nearer now to His own than when they roamed together through the cornfields and the vineyards, or kept vigil beneath the Syrian stars.

It is no myth nor make-believe when men declare that they have had intimate dealings with Jesus, and have found His friendship the most vivid reality of life. “Whom having not seen, ye love.”

And so we turn to the main burden of the apostle's message. What he is trying to do here is something rather daring: it is nothing less than to define the central Christian experience in a single sentence; and you will observe that he has packed it all into four words, four short, decisive verbs. “Ye love—ye believe—ye rejoice—ye receive.” That, he declares, is what it means to be a Christian. That, throughout the ages, has been the high road of salvation.

Let us examine this fourfold progression. First stands the verb “Ye love.” Now that immediately suggests the question—What, in its essence, is the Christian religion?

Not a philosophy of life. Certainly it will give you a philosophy, for the faith of Jesus is ultimately the only thing that can make sense of the universe. But that is not what its essence is. You need more than a philosophy to hold you steady when the storms begin to blow, or when your dreams are lying wrecked, or when the demons of temptation have leapt upon your soul.

Not a moral code. Certainly it will provide you with that—the most sublime and noble ethic in the world. But

that is not its essence. Men are not set on fire for God by anything so intolerably distant and impersonal as moral maxims and ethical idealisms.

Not a social creed. Certainly it will give you that: Christ has been behind more social reforms than any other leader who has ever appeared upon the earth. But that is not its essence. No amount of merely social passion can change lives or work the miracle of regeneration; and you cannot build the Kingdom of heaven out of men and women not redeemed.

The essence of Christ's religion is none of these things. It is a personal attachment. It is a response in love to the most fascinating Personality who ever walked this earth. Theologies may sometimes raise more perplexities than they solve, and manuals of ethics may seem dull and strangely out of touch with life; but if you should one day be confronted with the ancient question which confronted Simon Peter, "Do you love Christ?"—I know what your answer, in simple utter sincerity, would be. "Love Jesus? Why, I'd die for Him!" Well, that is religion—not a vague abstraction, but a wonderful affection; not a tiresome argument, but a tremendous friendship; not an intricate and un-inspired philosophy, but an inspired and thrilling love; not a drudging at the grindstone of a dingy routine morality, but "Christ in you the hope of glory."

"How can I choose but love Thee, God's dear Son,
O Jesus, loveliest and most loving One?
Were there no heaven to gain, no hell to flee,
For what Thou art alone I must love Thee."

"Whom having not seen, ye love."

Then the apostle proceeds: "In whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing." There is his second verb. Ye love, and—*ye believe*. Now it is this that keeps the love in Christianity from growing sentimental. For what is belief

in Christ? What, for that matter, is belief in any one? It is *love going into action*. It is love proving itself in life. It is love staking its soul upon the worth of the one beloved. Kagawa of Japan was trying to explain what Christianity meant to him. "I am God's gambler," he cried. "For Him I have wagered my last mite." That is belief—not intellectual assent to a theory, but the throwing in of a life. In the stirring words of Martin Luther, "The only faith which makes a Christian is that which casts itself on God for life or death."

It is easy to see, as I have suggested, that, apart from this, love might degenerate into sentimentalism. There is a type of religion which sings, with suitable emotion, the love songs of the Church, without ever so much as giving a thought to what an old saint once called "the stormy north side of Jesus Christ."

"Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store"—

and all the time, the man is clinging to something which he knows ought to have been cast out long ago, or he is refusing to forgive some injury, or he is easily offended, or he is self-approving and consequential, or he is slack about his prayers.

"Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee"—

and all the time, there is something in his life towards which, in the stern, downright words of the Book of Revelation, Christ's eyes are as a flame of fire! To talk of loving Christ on that basis is purely artificial. To worship Christ, without bringing life into line with such worship, is definitely more dangerous for a man's own soul than if he never worshipped at all. But the mark of Christian faith, says Peter, is not that it uses glowing love-language about Jesus: it is that it sur-renders its life to the object of its love. Faith means being

permeated with Christ's spirit. It means being captured by Christ's character. It means, as it meant to Christ, that you risk doing the will of God, even when there is a cross in it. Nothing sentimental about that love! It is strong with the strength of the eternal hills, and beautiful with the terrible beauty that once flamed up to God on Calvary. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, ye believe."

Follow the apostle's progress further. Ye love, ye believe, "*ye rejoice* with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Do you trace the connection? You love Jesus—that is first; and that love leads on to an offering of your life to Jesus—to belief and faith and irrevocable surrender; and that offering of life in turn produces a new kind of thrill never known before. For here is the great discovery you make: there is no joy on earth like the joy of being committed.

It is the swithering and undecided attitude that is dull and dreary and never sings. You cannot be happy—it is a psychological and spiritual impossibility—as long as you are refusing the daring of your own soul.

Why is the New Testament the most joyous book in the world? It is because these men and women were committed up to the very hilt. They had crossed their Rubicon, and were far too deeply involved with Christ on His great adventure ever to extricate themselves or to draw back. "All things are ours," they cried, "for we are Christ's, and Christ is God's"; and sang their Hallelujah Choruses across the world, and went singing down to the ghastly shambles of the Roman arena, and marched singing to the throne of God.

And if we could show the world to-day that being committed to Christ is no tame, humdrum, sheltered monotony, but the most fascinating and exciting adventure the human spirit can ever know—"joy unspeakable and full of glory"—

then thousands of strong and stalwart lives that have been holding back from Christ and looking askance at the Church and standing outside the Kingdom would come crowding in to His allegiance; and there might be such a revival as the world has not witnessed since Pentecost.

This is no empty dream. There are signs now that the age is ripe for a great return to Christ. What are we witnessing throughout Europe and the world to-day? We are witnessing a demand for two things—a leader, and a cause. A living leader—not any longer a political theory or a revolutionary idea, but the theory incarnate in a man, the idea crystallized in a person, the word made flesh—that is what men are wanting: hence the hero-worship offered to-day to a Stalin, a Gandhi, a Hitler. And along with that, men demand a cause, something which will lay the most absolute claims upon them, something to which they can commit themselves sacrificially, body, mind, and soul. Nationalism and Communism may be at each other's throats, and their conflict productive of chaos in the world; but at least they are alike in this—and mark you, it is the central thing about them, the point at which they are wiser in their generation than the children of light, certainly wiser than a reduced, misguided, milk-and-water Christianity that thinks to attract men by not asking too much—alike in this, that each claims unhesitatingly a man's all, everything he has to give. That is what the spirit of the age is clamouring for—the leader who will really lead, the cause that will challenge to sacrifice. And therefore, is not this the day of Christ's opportunity? A leader? Here is the only leader whose name is not doomed to be writ in water, a leader with a magnetism surely irresistible. A cause? Here is a cause that demands every ounce of valour and devotion a man can bring to it, a cause that does not shrink to speak of sacrifice, a cause that may burn a man out in its service—for God is a consuming fire.

It is high time we realized that it is no use setting a mild and undemanding half-Christianity against a militant, masterful paganism; no use setting some poor apologetic replica of Christ against the deified heroes of the age. But to see the real Christ, "strong Son of God, immortal Love," to stand committed to the real Christian adventure, the serving of Jesus the King with every breath of your body and every beat of your heart—that is a thrill such as no other leader or cause on this earth can ever generate. That is the answer to the heart's demand for a passion and a high crusade. That is the joy unspeakable and full of glory.

And now we take the last step with the apostle. Ye love, ye believe, ye rejoice, "*ye receive* the salvation of your souls." The word "salvation" is like the cross that purchased it: it reaches up to heaven, and goes down to hell, and its arms embrace the world. For the past, it brings forgiveness; for the present, the power of the Spirit; and for the future, life for evermore.

And, says Peter, ye receive it. You do not win it, for no man can do that. You do not earn it, for it is not a wage. You do not buy it, for it is not for sale. You receive it. You bow your head, with pride all broken down, and take the gift from Jesus' hand.

Well, will you? Some of us are hovering on the verge of the Kingdom still, outside the authentic, redeeming experience, not because the next step is too difficult, but because it is so simple. "Ask, and ye shall receive." "If ye know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

But have you asked? Have you ever come to the point of saying—"Lord, the struggle is too hard for me. But Thou hast said Thou wouldst take charge of my life, if I would turn

it over to Thee. Lord, I do hand it over now. Take charge, as Thou hast promised"? Have you ever risen from your knees, after a prayer like that, believing that the gift had come, and gone out to face life in the reinforcement of that belief? So it is that men receive God's crowning gift, the salvation of their souls.

And if you have never quite taken God at His word about this, feeling perhaps that the offered remedy for your problem was too simple to be true, will you not thrust that deadening doubt aside, and make one real trial of a promise for which on Calvary Christ pledged His honour, and take God at His word to-day?

invasions of this untranquil world. And if more people now than ever before are highly strung and nervously irritable and lacking in repose, that is not surprising. For the general insecurity of the present time registers itself not only politically and economically: the toll it takes emotionally and mentally is no whit less serious.

What burdens men and women are carrying! Do you think peace can come easily to a man who is out of work? Or to his wife, trying desperately to make ends meet in the home? Or to tired folk, overdriven almost to the breaking-point? Or to parents wondering about careers for their children? Or to lonely souls who feel that this bustling world does not need them nor want them, and that they are no use at all to any one? The age in which we are living must accept much of the responsibility for strained faces and lives that have lost their peace.

But not all. The real trouble lies deeper. Look into your own heart. Explore the causes of your own restless moods and feelings. Talk to your soul about that sense of strain. Can you say, "It is not my fault: it is circumstances that are to blame"? No. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that will not do. Let us ask ourselves some questions. Why do we ever grow irritable? Why do our nerves get on edge, so that we say things we regret the moment afterwards? Why do we try to cross bridges before we come to them? Why do we find it difficult to relax? Why are there those days when nothing will go right, when work is a burden, and people are exasperating, and life is all worry and fret? Shall we blame the world for that? Surely the trouble is in ourselves. One thing we lack—the peace of Christ, His last and greatest gift.

Would you like peace to-day? I do not mean the peace of lethargic ease or of a safe and sheltered life. Nor do I mean the peace of the emotionless Stoic, who achieves calm by

X V

OUR WORRIES AND CHRIST'S PEACE

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you."—JOHN xiv. 27.

THIS was Christ's last will and testament. This was His only legacy. He had nothing else to leave. He was the poorest of the poor. He had no material possessions of any kind to divide amongst the men He loved. So He bequeathed to them the one thing which was in His power to give. He gave His peace.

But could there have been a more priceless possession than just that? Never a congregation meets for worship but some are there who are needing more than anything else to learn the secret of a true serenity. "Never morning wore to evening, but some heart did break" for lack of the very thing which Christ is so eager to bestow. I fancy there must be few in this House of God this morning who have never prayed, out of the depths of personal experience, some such prayer as Whittier's:

"Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace."

Now I think you will agree with me that part at least of the blame for the shortage of serenity which characterizes modern life must be laid at the door of the age in which we are living. It is certainly not easy to achieve inner peace to-day, or to maintain it unbroken against the assaults and

doing violence to his affections, and by damping down the fires of love and sorrow and pity in his heart. I do not mean that. I mean the peace that stands sentinel at the gateway of the soul, and confronts all manner of difficult things with steady eyes, the peace that holds the heart serene through crowded days and overwork and all the criticisms of men. Would you like that? Well, says the Gospel, you can have it. It is not a matter of temperament: the most highly strung soul can have it. It is a matter of accepting a gift. "My peace I give unto you," said Jesus.

Notice His language. "My peace." The peace that My heart knows. Will you think of that? Jesus did not often speak about it, but on every page of the Gospels you can feel it.

The serenity of Christ! Look at the narratives. Did any one, watching Jesus in those Galilean days, ever see Him irritated? Think what He had to put up with. Could you have stood it and remained serene? Continual intrusions upon His privacy, no respite from dawn to dark, the steady drain on His spiritual resources, inconsiderate people breaking in on His hours of quiet, the awful burden of sharing every hurt heart's sins and sorrows and of feeling them as personally as if they were His own, the misunderstandings, the cutting criticisms, the pettiness of people, the terrible, unremitting toil, the disappointments, the crushing load of such a life—and yet, through it all, that same serene, untroubled heart. No flurry, no sign of strain upon His face, no trace of nerves—always "My peace." Is there anything more marvellous in the Gospels than just that?

Contrast His own disciples. Their nerves sometimes gave way. There was a Samaritan village that was rude and inhospitable. "Lord," they cried exasperated, "let us call down fire from heaven! Let us teach these boorish folk a lesson." But Jesus? "Ye know

not what manner of spirit ye are of." Always that strong serenity! The frail boat was being tossed one night on a murderous sea. "Master," they shouted, all self-control flung to the winds, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" "Peace, be still," said Jesus, and I think He was speaking to those panic-stricken hearts as much as to the angry waves, "Peace, be still." Always that inner calm. A crowd of five thousand people followed them one day out to their secret retreat in the wilderness. "Send them away," said the disciples, "for heaven's sake, let us have a holiday for once!" "They need not depart," said Jesus, "they are sheep without a shepherd, and I love them." Always that heart at leisure from itself. Then came the end; and things went terribly wrong, or so it seemed. "Don't go to Jerusalem," they implored Him, "there is danger in the air—don't go!" And when He went, and the enemy struck, their strained nerves snapped completely: they all turned and fled. But Jesus? "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." And so He died serene. Is it not marvellous? All the way from Bethlehem to Nazareth, and from Nazareth to Calvary—"My peace," My strong, untroubled peace!

"Ah," you say, "but that was Jesus! He was different. We are common clay. You can't expect us to achieve that poise of soul, that spirit serene. It was lovely, it was marvellous, it was magnificent: but for us—utterly and for ever impossible!"

I beg you not to be too sure of that. If I could to-day convince one troubled heart that this thing—the peace of Christ, which is the peace of God that passeth understanding—is not a far-off dream, but actually within reach of any one who will claim it; if even one person were to go away from this Church this morning quite sure of this, that whatever life may do, there is always far more in Jesus to hold a man steady and serene than there can be anywhere else in life

to shake or unnerve his soul—our service would not have been in vain.

For the real marvel is not only to hear, all through the story of Jesus from the carpenter's bench to the cross, the deep central theme, "My peace": the real marvel is to hear Him saying, as I believe He is saying now, "My peace I give to you"—to you who know what it means to be rushed and fretted and agitated and worried: "My peace—to you!"

How does it come? Well, the way to answer that is to ask, How did it come to Jesus? What was the secret of His serenity?

We have seen already what it was not. It was neither the cheap serenity of a sheltered existence, nor the barren serenity of a Stoic philosophy. What was it, then?

I think Christ's peace was, first, *the peace of adequate resources*. There can be few things more wearing to the nerves than to face life, or to face some task in life, with deficient spiritual resources. "That is the real curse of Adam," wrote C. E. Montague, "not the work in itself, but the worry and doubt of ever getting it done." How many there are who know that feeling! The consciousness of inadequate resources can almost drive a man distracted. It can give him sleepless nights. It can keep him perpetually on the strain. It can weigh upon him until he is utterly miserable. But there was nothing of that with Jesus. He moved from one task to another without halting and without haste. He never had the haggard look of one who has reached his limit. He spent Himself without stint, but there was always more behind it and within. And so He was free from the fret and care that lay waste so many lesser souls. The peace of Christ was the peace of a supreme adequacy for life.

Now He can give you that. He can give you adequate

resources for every duty life can lay upon you, for the fear-some responsibilities you would like to run away from, for the crowded days when the pressure of work is becoming a nightmare, for the hours of crisis that take you unawares. He can make you more than equal to this difficult, puzzling life. He can give you—if only you will open your heart to the gift—His Holy Spirit. That is the supreme resource. That is the final adequacy. And to realize it is to find life and healing. To possess it is enduring peace.

Notice, second, that the peace of Christ was *the peace of a disciplined life*. Here, I think, is a discovery we all make sooner or later, that slackness of any kind—whether in work, or thought, or life—is always destructive of inner repose. Restlessness and unhappiness are the inevitable nemesis of the life of passing whim and purposeless drift. Wordsworth put that well:

"Me this unchartered freedom tires;

I feel the weight of chance desires:

I long for a repose that ever is the same."

But whenever you see, shining on the face of some man or some woman whom you meet, the radiance of a deep inner serenity, you may safely say, "There has been discipline there—discipline of time, discipline of thought, discipline of heart's desire!" The peace of Christ was the peace of a disciplined life. And if on these terms you will receive it—"My peace I give unto you."

Now that brings to light a third element in the Master's secret. The peace of Christ was *the peace of a clean heart*. It does not matter much how difficult life may be, as long as the conscience is at rest. The real wreckers of peace—what are they? Not any of the slings and arrows of disappointed hopes. No. But memories that sting because of sins still unforgiven, the remorse that cries down the winds of the

passing days, "Thou art the man," the divided loyalties that strike an uneasy bargain between the vision of God and the lure of the world, the breakdown of goodwill and love, the resentments that brood in secret, the jealousies that torture the mind, the temptations never seriously resisted—these are the real wreckers, destroying all peace of soul. But—O Christ of God, how pure you were, how consistent and untainted! Yours was the peace of a heart for ever clean. And again, on these terms, His offer stands: "My peace I give unto you."

One thing alone remains. The peace of Christ was the peace of adequate resources, of a disciplined life, and of a clean heart. Notice, finally, that it was *the peace of fellowship with God*. This is the ultimate secret. I see Jesus in the Gospels, slipping away from the clamorous crowds when night descends. Where is He going? He is going to some lonely garden, to rest His weary soul on God. I see Him stealing out of the house at Bethany long before dawn is in the sky, and while the village is still asleep. Where is He making for? He is seeking the secret trysting-place, where He has pledged to meet His Father. I see Him entering a city's streets where multitudes of hurt and ailing creatures wait hopefully for His coming—I see Him no longer weary as on the night before, but travelling to meet that crowded day in the greatness of His strength, mighty to save. Where has He been? He has been on the mountain-top, laying that day and all its work before God in prayer, and receiving help and power. And seeing that, I know that I have found the final secret. The peace of Christ was the peace of perfect fellowship with God.

"My peace I give unto you." Will you accept it? Will you make room and space in your life for that fellowship with God without which it cannot come? Will you do what God has perhaps been waiting for years for some of us to do—

stop thinking that you have to carry alone that burden of work, that harassing problem, and cast your burden on the Lord? It is never a waste of time, in the morning, or at midday, or in the evening, to thrust aside—for five minutes, ten minutes, an hour if you like—the insistent, pressing cares, and to be still and remember God. If you would only believe that the time thus diverted from ordinary things would more than repay you by the poise and steadiness which you would carry back to life from that secret place of the Most High!

For that is fact. To have daily fellowship with God through Jesus is to have found the peace which nothing in life, not all the trials and vexations in the world, can ever take away.

"Dear! of all happy in the hour, most blest

He who has found our hid security.

We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing,

We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever."

Joseph Conrad, in an essay, quotes from a letter of Sir Robert Stopford. Stopford was one of Nelson's men. He was commander of one of the ships with which Nelson chased to the West Indies a fleet nearly double in number. And describing the experiences and hardships of that desperate adventure, Stopford wrote the words: "We are half-starved, and otherwise inconvenienced by being so long out of port. But our reward is—we are with Nelson!"

My brother, my sister, life may prove harsh and difficult enough, may deny your dreams and half starve your hopes; but if you can say, "I am with Christ, and through Christ with God," you have your reward. You have found on earth the very peace of heaven.

Moreover, the fact that Luke, in his opening verses, dedicates his work to Theophilus—"most excellent Theophilus," he calls him, or as we should put it, "your Excellency," which indicates that Theophilus was some high official of the Imperial Roman Government and probably not a Christian—that fact prepares us at the outset for a narrative in which the missionary interest will be supreme, and the world-significance of the Gospel will predominate over its purely local Palestinian reference.

Matthew, working with his Jewish background, sees Jesus primarily as the Messiah of the Jews, and the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. This was only natural. But Luke, with his more cosmopolitan horizons, sees Jesus as the Saviour of humanity. Witness the place which his narrative gives to the Samaritans, whom the Jews despised: Luke alone records the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the incident of the one grateful leper ("and he was a Samaritan"). Witness, too, the parable of the Prodigal Son—which Luke alone preserves—a story which almost certainly carries a universal as well as an individual reference, the younger brother whom the father welcomed home so eagerly standing for the irreligious Gentile world in all its sin and need, and the elder brother who repulsed him representing the Jewish. In short, the key-note of this Gospel is its universalism.

Now in the light of this, read again the evangelist's prologue to the drama of redemption. Notice the curiously elaborate historical approach which he employs. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa, and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness."

Why is the man so careful about his history? Why this

XVI

THE WORD AND WILL OF THE LORD

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa . . . the word of God came unto John . . . in the wilderness."—LUKE iii. 1, 2.

NO one who reads the four Gospels with any discernment can fail to observe that the third has a character all its own. Even if nothing had been known about the various writers—their names or nationality or antecedents—we could have guessed, from internal evidence alone, that the third evangelist, unlike the others, was of Gentile and not Jewish extraction.

In point of fact, we know that Matthew, Mark, and John were Jews born and bred, with Semitic blood in their veins, and a Hebrew outlook upon life. Luke alone was a Greek, a citizen of the wider world. And that fact has coloured every page he wrote. The mark of this Gospel is its catholicity, its internationalism, its passionate emphasis on *the world-significance of Jesus*.

One or two illustrations will suffice to make this clear.

It is noteworthy that Matthew, in tracing Jesus' ancestry, starts from Abraham, the founder of Israel. But Luke's genealogy of Jesus lifts the whole matter out of that narrower and purely nationalist setting, and runs back to Adam, the founder of the race, and beyond Adam to God Himself, the Father of all mankind: "the son of Adam, the son of God" is how the genealogy ends.

laborious linking up with world-events? It is his way of asserting the world-relevance of Christ. There, he says in effect, was the scene upon which Christianity launched itself. There was the world-stage into which the religion of Jesus came. There was the panorama—kings and governors, principalities and powers, imperial policies, movements of history, currents of feeling and thought—into which there suddenly marched—*God!* You will miss the whole point of the story I am going to tell, says Luke, unless you see that world-panorama as the background to the message of the Christ.

Now see the force of this for us to-day. There is a spirit in the present age that would politely bow religion into a corner. Christianity, on this view, is a purely private concern. The Christian experience of the individual carries no external authority whatever. If a man chooses to be religious, let him be—it is his own affair. If people want to go to Church, let them go—it is a harmless indulgence. If some misguided creatures persist in regarding the Sermon on the Mount as practical politics, let them so regard it—the world knows better.

So speaks the spirit of the age. If you must have religion, pray keep it in its place. Remember that it is just your personal opinion, after all. And remember that, as such, it is purely subjective, a private sentiment, a species of aesthetic indulgence, with no objective validity. It has no authority to speak on matters like race relationships, or the colour question, or war and peace, or slum housing, or the human factor in industry. Keep your religion where it belongs: we want no intrusion or interference! So speaks a prevalent temper of the age.

But that is the very spirit to which Luke here throws down the gauntlet unmistakably, setting religion in the framework of world-events, and by so doing proclaiming the truth that

Christianity is not a private indulgence of a few religious folk: it is the very Mind and Programme of God for the race, a Mind and Programme which humanity must ultimately reckon with and embrace, or else—go out into the night for ever.

Notice further, how dramatically the evangelist, in his prologue, has brought out *the contrast between the passing and the permanent*. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa," and so on, "the word of God came unto John in the wilderness." Is it not surprising? The sentence which begins with the roll of these great and mighty names—the Cæsars, the wind of whose terrible power had swept to the ultimate seas, the governors and tetrachs beneath whose eminence and majesty and dignity the common world bowed and trembled—the sentence ends (surely a dreadful bathos, a startling anti-climax!) with the name of a penniless preacher of the desert.

If you were reading this for the first time, you might well ask, What is he doing in that company? What possible connection can there be between these great, exalted personages marching across the page of history, and this poor, insignificant hermit of the desert wastes? What is the use of mentioning them in the same breath at all?

Tell Tiberius Cæsar, yonder amid the plaudits of his Senate, that a queer, hungry-looking evangelist has appeared in a remote corner of his dominions. "And what is the interest of that to me?" Tiberius will say. "You must surely see I have not the fraction of a moment of my time to spare for trivialities like that!" Tell Pilate, Herod, and Lysanias that there is some one yonder at the Jordan babbling about having received a word from God, and see how pityingly they will look at you. "What is that to us? Are we to take cognizance of every prating fool who rises?"

But what, Tiberius, if we have to tell you that the lonely

evangelist with the name of John will be a hero and a household word to millions and a shining light of men, long after your proud name and memory are but the merest blur on history's page? And Pilate, Herod, and Lysanias, what if we have to tell you that your names would never have been mentioned in history at all, not one of them, that you would never have been heard of by posterity, had it not been for your connection—your strange and brief and discreditable connection—with the cause of which this same John was the herald?

For that is the truth. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Caesar, in the governorship of Pontius Pilate"—how solid and influential and enduring it seemed, that drama of the nations—"the word of God came to John in the wilderness"—how trivial and evanescent, by comparison, that! But history itself has given the verdict. Tiberius, Pilate, Herod, Lysanias, and all their pomp and might—mere foam on the face of time's hurrying stream: but John, the called of God, standing foursquare still to the winds of the centuries, standing like that very Rock of Ages to whom all his words bore witness!

What a contrast it is between the passing and the permanent; between lives that go out like a candle when they are done, because all along they have been fundamentally godless, with nothing spiritual and therefore nothing lasting about them, and lives that go marching on deathlessly for ever, because they are eternal with the very eternity of God!

This is what persecutors in every age have failed to realize. They have smothered idealism, outlawed religion, trampled righteousness underfoot. They have stoned their Stephens, burnt their Latimers, drowned their Margaret Wilsons. They have crucified their Christ. They have come down the slopes of Calvary, when it was over, con-

gratulating themselves on their achievement. "That is the end of you, Jesus! You will never trouble us again."

Never? "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." And those who strike the weak things of this world, which are Christ's, find sooner or later that they have struck rock, sheer granite!

"The world passeth away," said an apostle, "and the lust thereof"—and that means the reckless ambitions thereof, the cruel tyrannies and the megalomania and the pomp and pride thereof, "it passeth away," and the men who take that line flicker out and cease: "but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

And to bring this nearer home, we ask, How does it stand with our own souls? If some things in this world are passing, and other things are permanent, then clearly the vital question is, To which are we linking up our lives? With which are we secretly identified in our inmost hearts? In that question lies our destiny. Link yourself to the things that perish—the materialisms, the selfishnesses, the earthly pleasures which go out at last into the dark—link yourself to them, and your doom is to go out with them. But link yourself to the things that remain—the righteousness that is of God, the purity that guards the vision, the unselfish love that only thinks of others—link yourself to these, and to the Christ in whom they have reached their crowning glory, and your destiny is to survive the stars themselves, and to stand even on the day when God sweeps the world away.

"Saviour, if of Zion's city

I, through grace, a member am,

Let the world deride or pity,

I will glory in Thy Name.

Fading is the worldling's pleasure,

All his boasted pomp and show;

Solid joys and lasting treasure

None but Zion's children know."

Here then, in Luke's prologue, we have discovered, first, a passionate assertion of the world-significance of Christianity, and second, a vivid contrast of the passing and the permanent. Will you notice now, finally, that we have here a *dramatic description of the dawning of a soul*? "The Word of God came to John in the wilderness."

What does it mean, this phrase which is used of all the great prophet souls of Scripture at the opening of their ministry—"The Word of the Lord came" to him? Does it mean some sort of magic? Does it hint that these men were in some way psychically abnormal and unbalanced? Was it all perhaps auto-suggestion? Did they simply imagine and invent things, and then dignify their own fancies with the name of deity? No, it means nothing like that. It means exactly what it says. It means that God, who after all is the living God, and therefore presumably able to speak, had actually spoken to them. It means that into their long brooding on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, there had flashed a light from heaven, there had broken a voice more ringing and authentic than any of the voices of the world; and so they stood and cried, "We have seen, and heard—and know. Thus saith the Lord!"

It means—but why should I describe it thus impersonally? It means what has happened to some of you here—was it perhaps at a First Communion when you suddenly knew Christ mattered more than anything? Or in a day of difficult decision, when rival paths confronted you, and then the way of duty leapt to clearness before you, and you knew you had to take that way, or else never be able to look Christ your Lord in the face again? Or in an hour of temptation, when moral issues had grown blurred and been forgotten, and the inner citadel was in danger, and then, like a bugle-call across the ramparts of your soul, there spoke a voice—"That is wrong"; and you knew that this was no mere personal

scruple which was intervening, but the authentic challenge of the universe, the voice of the God of your salvation? Or was it on some day when the darkness and the bitterness of this confused and disappointing world were lying like a deadly blight upon your spirit, and then suddenly one truth grew luminous—the truth that, whatever happens, it is better to be honest than to be false, better to be clean than to be unclean—so that in that moment you would have been glad to die for your conviction? Then, by whatever way the experience has come, you know what the evangelist here is meaning. You have shared in this drama of a dawning soul. And you can take John the Baptist's name out of it, and insert your own. "The word of the Lord came unto me."

Have you not heard it? If ever you have been conscious of Some One coming to meet you when you prayed; if you have ever felt the sudden pressure of an unseen will coming into contact with your own, to challenge or to sustain; if ever music, or the glory of a sunset, or the first flowers of springtime, or a deed of unexpected kindness, or the sight of a pure and lovely face, or some haunting word of Jesus Christ has opened a sudden window in your soul towards absolute reality; if you have ever felt a wave of sickening shame for something wrong you had done; if you have ever risen from your knees a different man; if you have ever sacrificed yourself for some one, in a way which the cold logic of common-sense thought unreasonable, and yet somehow you just had to do it—do you know what that experience was? It was God giving you a glimpse of Himself. It was life for a moment becoming sacramental. It was a revelation of the unseen order, the absolute, eternal reality behind things seen and temporal. It was the word of the Lord to you.

But why does it not come more often? And why does it not come to every one without exception—this voice of the

Lord God Almighty? Why are so many still stubbornly denying that God declares His mind at all, still doggedly asserting—"No word of the Lord has ever come to me: all your notions of a divine, guiding voice are myth and make-believe"? Why?

It is because our modern life is so noisy, and the press and jostle of a thousand cares and duties so blatant and so deafening. What chance is there, amid all that, to hear the one still, small voice which matters most of all?

The Baptist's world was noisy too—Roman legions marching up and down the land, the endless babble of the marketplace, the clash of political opinions, voices loud and passionate, voices fierce and hectoring and God-denying—it was a chaotic medley of a world when the gospel day was born. But see what the writer says: "The word of God came unto John *in the wilderness*." Here was a man who had made a space in which his half-suffocated soul could breathe, had made a silence in which his half-deafened soul could be at peace and listen: and it was then he heard God speaking!

Does some one protest—"But that is foolish, for we can't cut the cables that bind us to our appointed lot: we can't take the wings of the morning, and hie away to some peaceful patch of desert"? Ah, that is not the point. "I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world," said Jesus. But where is the man who cannot have ten minutes of silence in his life each day, to put it near the barest minimum, ten minutes to draw his soul into the healing silence of the eternal, with the world barred out, and to hear what God the Lord will speak? You can do it—and you know it. And if any of us has ceased doing it, he can start again to-day—and he knows it.

How terribly much we stand to lose if God's precious life-giving words, when they fall athwart our souls, find us—

through our refusal of the way of prayer—deaf as the stones of the street! And how gloriously and magnificently much we gain when our lives are tuned in daily to the voice of the eternal!

It is the one thing needful. O for a closer walk with God!

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can touch and handle and control there lies something more, something which calls and signals to what is best within us, as deep calls to deep—in short, as Robert Browning put it,

“The feeling that there's God, He reigns and rules
Out of this low world.”

A new spiritual horizon, a vital and liberating sense of a divine, directing power, communion with the eternal God—such is religion's offer. I wonder—how do we ourselves stand with regard to it? Have you found that horizon, that wonderful communion? Or would you have to confess unhappily, “If that is religion, I am still outside: no such experience has ever come my way”?

Life presents us with two fundamental facts—man's search for God, God's search for man. But the strange, disquieting thing is that, though each is searching for the other, so often they fail to meet.

There must be some here to-day for whom this is a very personal problem. Indeed, I rather think that at times it has been the problem of us all; for there are moods in which religious feelings refuse to come, and days when spiritual perception has ebbed quite away.

Do you know the kind of experience I mean? You say your prayers, but it is like talking into the air: you have no vivid sense of any God who is listening. Perhaps after a while you stop praying altogether. What is the use of persevering, you say, when the whole thing has grown unreal? In church, it is somehow easier; though even there you have the feeling that the words of many of the hymns you are asked to sing breathe an assurance and a certainty which you would never claim to have reached, and that many of the Scripture passages seem to be dealing with emotions, raptures, and discoveries quite beyond your ken. It is the

XVIII

A MODERN SUBSTITUTE FOR THE GOSPEL

“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?”—2 KINGS v. 12.

STEVENSON, in a charming letter dated September 1873, has described a day's walk in Fife, during which he came upon a labourer cleaning a byre, and fell into conversation. “The man was to all appearance as heavy as any English clothopper; but I knew I was in Scotland, and launched out forthright into Education and Politics and the aims of one's life.” As they talked together of this and that, one simple but memorable remark betrayed the real man—“Him that has aye something ayont need never be weary.” “And that,” comments Stevenson, “from a man cleaning a byre!”

It is the apprehension of “something beyond” which is the root of all religion. To define religion is, indeed, a well-nigh hopeless task: an American psychologist has collected no fewer than forty-eight proposed definitions, none of them, it is to be feared, entirely satisfactory. But if it is hard to find an adequate definition, we can at least point to one element linking all the religions of the world together, one common irreducible factor in which the very essence of religion appears to reside: the conviction, namely, of the reality of a world unseen, the sense that behind and beyond and above the material environment that we

ever-old, ever-new problem: "O that I knew where I might find Him!"

It brings a host of questions in its train. Is He a God to whom it is worth my while trying to pray? Is He a God who knows anything about it when things in my little corner of the universe get tangled and go wrong, and my heart is hurt and sore? Is He a God who can lay any hand of healing peace upon my soul when I am rushed and tired and growing hectic? Is He a God who has anything to say to a man left walking in the dark, when some of the kindly lights of life have gone out? Above all, is He a God who can help me when I have done something for which I hate myself? Has He any understanding and compassion and forgiveness and renewal for one who is feeling wretched and miserable and ashamed? O that I knew!

Here are some sentences from Hugh Walpole's story *Vanessa*. They are from the passage where Benjie, that misguided but strangely lovable character, is talking about Vanessa to his mother Elizabeth. "'Vanessa is so good and so fine. She believes in God, you know, Mother.' 'And don't you?' 'You know that I don't. Not as she does. Not as she does. I may be wrong. I dare say I am. But I *must* be honest. I don't see things that way. I'm ignorant. I don't know any more than the next fellow and I want the next fellow to believe as he sees, but I must be allowed to see for myself. I can't see God anywhere. The things that people believe are fine for them but nonsense to me. To me as I am now. I've got all my life in front of me and everything to learn. God may be proved to me yet. I hope He will be.' 'Proved!' Elizabeth laid her cheek for a moment against his. 'God can't be proved, Benjie. He must be felt.' 'Yes, I suppose so. That may come to me one day. Meanwhile—a heathen and a vagabond can't marry Vanessa.'"

"I can't see God anywhere. I can't realize Him in per-

sonal experience." That, for countless thousands to-day, is the great crucial problem of religion and life. Indeed, many in our generation are feeling the problem so acutely that they are almost prepared to drop the religion of their fathers altogether, and to look out for some alternative.

Undoubtedly, the Great War, and even more, the heaped-up disillusionments of the post-war years, have contributed to this result. Take a book like Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, one of the most significant and revealing documents of our times. Some of you may remember how she tells that one of her earliest childhood memories concerned the accession of King Edward VII. to the throne, and the postponement of the coronation owing to the King's sudden illness. "That night," she says, "I prayed earnestly to God to make the dear King better and let him live. The fact that he actually did recover established in me a touching faith in the efficacy of prayer, which superstitiously survived until the Great War proved to me, once for all, that there was nothing in it." That challenging sentence is typical of the revolt in religion. Creeds and dogmas are abandoned. Beliefs once regarded as fixed and settled have had their foundations shaken. Even God, the sovereign Ruler of the universe, is negated and dethroned. And many are on the look-out now for some alternative to religious faith, some substitute for the gospel of Christ.

Now the point to notice is this. That alternative is ready to hand. A new religion has appeared on the field. A substitute for the gospel is offering itself. It is the worship, not of God, but of man. This is the most serious rival which Christianity in this generation is facing.

It is usually called humanism. But the name matters little: it is the thing—the attitude of mind, the way of life—with which we are concerned. Historically, of course, there

have been many brands of humanism. Thus, for example, you have the humanism of Protagoras and the Greek sophists, five centuries before Christ, with their significant watchword, "Man is the measure of all things." At the other end of the scale, superficially similar, yet ethically of quite different lineage, there is the humanism of Swinburne, with his cheap sneer at Jesus, the "pale Galilean," and his "Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of things!" There is the optimistic humanism of Herbert Spencer and the Victorians, sadly shaken, it must be confessed, by the trend of recent events; and there is the pessimistic humanism of Bertrand Russell, who pictures the individual soul left to "struggle alone against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears." There is the scientific humanism of Julian Huxley's "religion without revelation," and there is the hedonistic humanism of Aldous Huxley's "brave new world."

But, broadly speaking, what confronts us to-day as the declared rival of the Christian faith is the theory that puts man in the centre of the picture; that summons him—the old accepted standards of ethics having been eaten away by what Lippmann has called "the acids of modernity"—to work out his own salvation and construct his own scheme of values; that pins its faith to science and education and mechanism and human brains for the redeeming of the world, rather than to grace and the divine initiative; that seeks, with the aid of psychology, to explain away the supernatural element in religion, reducing Christian belief to mere "fantasy-thinking" or "projection"; that substitutes self-expression for Christ's demand of self-surrender, the dictatorship of instinct for the rule of God, and culture for the cross.

Let us, however, give this rival creed its due. There are scores of thousands of people to-day—especially young men and women—for whom organized religion has lost its grip;

and when these, sincerely seeking for something that may fill up what H. G. Wells has called "the God-shaped blank in their heart," turn to one or another of the different substitutes for religion now offering themselves, it is doing the cause of Christ no service simply to denounce their revolt. Sympathy and an understanding heart—these we require: not the negative censoriousness which effects nothing, and is in any case terribly unlike Jesus. Admittedly, what we are witnessing is a revolt; but when you have called it that, you have not necessarily discredited it. For, as Canon F. R. Barry has incisively reminded us, "Mrs. Grundy, when all is said and done, was not a pattern of Christian conduct." Nor can any one seriously deny that between the mind of Christ on the one hand, and conventional Christian ethics on the other, there has sometimes been a deep divergence: witness the toleration too often in the past extended by the ethical standards of the time to such things as wars of aggression, and slums, and desperate inequalities, and villainous social conditions. In so far as the champions of the revolt have stood for the dignity of personality and for the opportunity of fullness of life for all men, their influence has been salutary; and any Christianity that is not prepared to work this demand out in practice is less than fully Christian.

Nor should it be forgotten that the movement of revolt, at its best, has been a challenge to religion to rescue for the praise and service of God those glories of art and beauty which the Church, at one stage of its career, seemed willing to assign indiscriminately to the world, the flesh, and the devil; and that, again through its best representatives, it has been a constant reminder that it is our duty to keep religion free from the obscurantist spirit which is fundamentally irreligious, to welcome new knowledge eagerly, and fearlessly to follow wherever truth may lead. In these ways, the rival creed—at its best—has made a real contribu-

tion to the onward march of mankind ; and of some at least of those who have professed it, God's word to Cyrus might be spoken—"I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me."

The trouble about the modern worship of humanity is that it is *too* human. It cannot see beyond man. It clings pathetically to the exploded myth of mankind's self-redeemability. It has an uneasy feeling that somewhere at the heart of its own chosen religion there lurks a radical fallacy. It begins to suspect that its idol has feet of clay. And thus between thoroughgoing scientific naturalism on the one hand, and whole-hearted Christian faith on the other, it stands withering and undecided, maintaining a precarious equilibrium. It has nothing more satisfying to offer the hungry world than the religion of "disinterestedness, detachment, and maturity of character," which Lippmann so eloquently preaches: "Stoicism in plus-fours," as Canon Barry perhaps rather irreverently calls it. But this is simply to offer a stone to those who are clamouring for bread. It is to misunderstand completely the real problem mankind is facing. Naaman might extol his Abana and Pharpar: but the one question which mattered was, "Could they make a leper clean?" And our modern vaunted Abanas and Pharpars—the disinterestedness and the culture and the scientific spirit of the age—have undoubtedly much to contribute to the welfare of the race. But that is not the question. The question is, Have they cleansing and regenerating power? The predominantly pessimistic tone which characterizes so much of the modern literature of humanism is an implicit confession of defeat. Even H. G. Wells has his "anatomy of frustration" now. Something else is needed. A power that is more than human must come into action. *Go, wash in Jordan.*

The rock on which our modern substitutes for the gospel

go to pieces is the basic fact of sin. Lippmann himself, at the outset of his *Preface to Morals*, makes the significant confession: "We have come to see that Huxley was right when he said that 'a man's worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes.' The evidences of these greater difficulties lie all about us." And in this age when a great word like "Puritanism" is so often merely a gibe; when scores of voices are perpetrating the fallacy that man can have, and ought to have, absolute, unbridled freedom to do as he likes, and to drive his way down any path of self-expression that he chooses; when so many others (taking their cue from that) begin to believe that almost anything can be justified in the sacred name of the new morality—and proceed to talk in a silly self-conscious way (thinking themselves the champions of emancipation) about things which are supposed to be clever, but which are not clever in the least, which are indeed just common sins, and rotten, selfish sins at that—in this age we need to have it written upon our minds, as with a pen of iron on the rock, that God's will, God's truth, God's throne, God's everlasting decisive difference between right and wrong, that difference for which Christ died, stand as fast and as binding as ever, and claim every decent soul's allegiance.

To endeavour to explain sin away—as "humanity's growing pains," or "good in the making," or "the stock-in-trade of a morbid theology"—is simply flippant. If the desperate sickness of the world at this moment is not sufficient rebuke to that superficiality, there remains the inward witness of the individual heart, refusing to consent to any such cheap self-deception. No doubt, for many to-day, the noise of the machine and the jangle of the wheels of progress have drowned the words of the ancient cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" But that cry, for all who have ears to hear, still breaks from baffled hearts the world over; and every movement that claims to speak to this

generation must stand and be tested here. For no man can fulfil his true nature until sin's twist and bias have been met and dealt with—that is to say, until his personality has been transformed, or, as Jesus put it, “born from above,” “re-deemed.” No man can stand up free until a power that is greater than his own has entered into him. It takes the supernatural to burst the chains of the natural. Man must have God.

Do you see now why our modern substitutes for the gospel are so finally unsatisfying? Behind their ethical bankruptcy and powerlessness lies their scepticism about the unseen and the eternal. This is the fundamental irrationality. Eliminate the supernatural, we are being told to-day, if you would be a realist. How often that singularly inept and muddled argument is reiterated! The fact of the matter is that it is precisely the man who believes in the supernatural with all his being (using that word, not in its popular and mistaken sense of “contra-natural,” but as referring to an order above the natural, prior to it, controlling it and holding it together), it is he who is the only true realist. He is actually more scientific, if you care to put it so, than his sceptic brother. For he knows better than to allow the visible and the tangible and the material to obsess and tyrannize him. He has seen deep enough into the heart of life to realize once for all that the real forces are the invisible ones. You can't see personality. Yet what a force personality is! You can't see love. But let love get hold of a man, and it can transform him utterly. You can't see life. Yet life is the most creative thing in the universe. And as the invisible things—personality and love and life and beauty and truth and goodness—are all summed up in God, the religious faith which lives, moves, and has its being in God is the true and final realism.

The task of the Church, faced by the modern challenge, is

surely abundantly clear. It is to proclaim a full evangel, in all its width and sweep and power and splendour. It is to cease arguing the case for religion, and to concentrate instead on heralding the living God. It is to refuse to be deflected by one degree from its primary commission, which is to hold up Christ, crucified, risen, exalted. We hear a great deal to-day about the difficulties with which organized religion in this generation has to contend. Difficulties indeed there are; but let that not obscure the fact that, for a Church possessing the passion of evangelism, this is an hour of quite unexampled opportunity. For tens of thousands, disillusioned by the failure of all the alternatives for Christ, are now ready to hear of some more excellent way; and it is as true to-day as when the words were first spoken long ago—“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.”

But let us begin at the beginning.

Here was this lord of the vineyard. He bought his ground, planted his vineyard, fenced it round, dug troughs for the wine-press, built a tower, put skilled husbandmen in charge: in short, he did everything conceivable—nothing was omitted or forgotten. Do you remember Isaiah's song of the vineyard? Jesus, steeped in His Old Testament, was remembering and quoting from it here. Listen! "My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." And then God's great baffled cry: "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?"

Let each of us put this straight to his own soul to-day. What more could God have done for me than what He has done? "Oh," cries some one, starting up in protest, "He could have done far more! Look at my narrow lot. God could surely have given me more success, more opportunity, more power and skill and influence and talent, more of the good things of this world." Yes, perhaps He might. But is there not something deeper? "There is that soul I have made," God is saying, and He is looking at some one here as He says it. "Have I not given him a happy home, and a task to work at; given him parents who prayed for him when he was a child, and friendship with its kindness, and duty with its challenge; given him eyes to watch the sunset and the splendour of the dawn, ears to hear the glory of noble music, and hands to touch the hem of My garment everywhere; given him the Holy Bible to inspire and kindle his heart, and prayer to keep the road open to the mercy-seat, and all the mystery and majesty of the cross of Christ—what more could I have done for him than what I have done?"

X XI

LOVE'S LAST APPEAL

"Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my Son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do?"—MARK xii. 6-9.

TO read the parables of Jesus in the Gospels is to move through a wonderful picture-gallery, full of the most fascinating portraits—the Good Samaritan, the Younger Son, the Elder Brother, the Sower, the Shepherd, the Pearl Merchant, and many more—all painted by the hand of the great Master Artist. In one dim corner of the gallery, dim because the sunlight which falls upon the other pictures is here toned down and shadowed by a cross, hangs the Artist's self-portrait. Will you stand there with me for a few moments now, and let this picture speak to you?

For this parable, as Jesus told it, was sheer autobiography. And when you think of the Pharisees listening on the outskirts of the crowd that day as this vivid little tale unfolded itself, and seeing their own dark plots against Him (which they had imagined were utterly secret) suddenly and dramatically held up to the light before their very faces—when you think of that, do you not begin to feel that, of all the brave things Jesus ever did, the telling of this story was one of the very bravest?

That is the voice of God, our Creator and Redeemer : it is as though God were almost wondering whether He is to blame for the poverty of the result, whether there has been anything lacking on His part. "What more could I have done?" But to-day, hearing it, I for one can only answer, "Nothing, dear God, nothing! Thou hast done everything, more than everything : it is I who am to blame, that the fruit has been so meagre."

And do you not feel that, too? One of the finest results which this hour of worship could possibly have would be that some one here, before to-day is done, should kneel down in that quiet room at home, and say, with a meaning in the words that there had never been before :

"Spirit of purity and grace,

Our weakness, pitying, see ;

O make our hearts Thy dwelling-places,

And worthier Thee."

Look at the parable again, and you will see here a picture of the marvellous patience of God. The lord of the vineyard sends first one servant, and he is beaten ; then a second, and he is stoned ; then a third, and he is killed ; and then "many others." In spite of everything, he still keeps on sending them. That is Jesus' picture of Israel's story through the centuries—God sending one prophet after another, God pleading in voice after voice, always hoping that some day at long last His people would listen and repent. But it is not only the story of Israel. It is the story of the soul of man—every man.

When David, away back in the old days, fell into that dreadful disloyalty which smirched his whole career, Providence might have flung the man off, might have said, "I have done everything I could for him, I found him a shepherd and made him a king, toiled night and day to fashion him into a leader of Israel and a saint, and after all that—this pitiful

apostasy ! It is heartbreaking. Throw him away !" When Peter and the other disciples began to fight about their stupid little questions of precedence in the very week of the cross, just as though not one of them had ever been with Christ at all or felt His influence in the least degree, He might have wrung His hands in sheer despair. "You!" He might have cried, "you to be My witnesses and representatives and ambassadors ! After three years with Me, you have not learnt even the first rudimentary lesson, which is love, but act as if nothing I have ever said about this had really been meant at all. No, this finishes it ! I am done with you. I will see things through without you." Was that it ? If their Master had been any one else but Christ, it would have been. But Christ was the incarnate patience of God.

And just think how patient God has been with you and me. Think how many chances He has given us. Think how often, when we have smothered one pleading voice within our heart, He has sent another ; and when we have stifled that, He has sent a third ; and when we have stoned that to death, He has kept on sending more, and is not worn out with us even yet, but is perhaps sending another to some one here to-night. Think how often, when (as in Jeremiah's picture) the clay of which we are made has snapped and gone to pieces in God's hands, and when He would have been perfectly justified in throwing out such faulty material like rubbish on the scrap-heap, He has done nothing of the kind, but has gathered up the fragments, and started all over again, saying "I must, I will make something fine and noble of this yet" ; refusing to accept any rebuff ; crying, when we clench our fist and thrust it up into His face to strike Him, "Do it again, and again, and again, and I will love you still" ; almost, in fact, plaguing us by His patience—it is so dogged and indomitable—frightening us, making us cry, "God, God, let go ! Hands off—don't pester me !"

Ah, says a psalmist, if we were to hide in very hell, God would come disturbing us even there. He loves us so much; and even when we cast Him off, His love keeps remembering happier days when we were truly His.

"I will not let thee go.
The stars that crowd the summer skies
Have watched us so below
With all their million eyes,
I dare not let thee go. . . .
I hold thee by too many bands:
Thou sayest farewell, and lo!
I have thee by the hands,
And will not let thee go."

It is to that patience of God, I know without a doubt, that I owe my life and soul. And has not His patience been marvellous with you?

Now notice another fact which Jesus has made very vivid here: the way in which evil always tends to grow. The husbandmen beat the first servant, but when the second came they stoned him, and the third they killed. There you have an instance of the natural and inevitable nemesis of evil. It grows and increases and multiplies itself. Sins apparently trivial open the door to great ones, and these to greater still.

So Cain, in the old story, began with envy; then envy became hatred; then hatred became murder. So Peter had to deny Jesus not once, but thrice; and his first denial was a low, muttered thing, ashamed of itself—"I do not know Him"; the second was more emphatic, "I tell you I don't know Him"; the third was a great, terrible shout, with oaths and curses, "Are you all deaf? Can't you hear me? He is nothing to me—this Jesus—I hate Him!" So in the first verse of the first psalm, you have those three significant verbs, "walketh, standeth, sitteth": "Blessed is

the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly"—a mere casual glance at sin in passing, for the man feels he does not really belong to that environment, and so he just glances at it, surreptitiously and half-ashamed and hoping no one sees him; "who walketh not," says the psalmist, "nor standeth"—he has halted now, you see, for the sense of shame is going, and he is growing bolder, and the thing is beginning to assert itself, to grip; "walketh, standeth," and then, finally, "sitteth," for the evil has got him now, and he is quite at home with it—fixed, rooted and settled, belonging to it body and soul!

That is sin's nemesis: it grows. In the very nature of things, it is bound to grow. And again and again it has happened that a man who began by being utterly shocked at some sin, feeling a shudder pass over his soul at the defiling contact of it, has ended by saying, "Sin? Do you call it sin? I must say I cannot see anything very wrong about it." Yes, it grows. It is, as Thomas à Kempis said centuries ago, first a simple suggestion, then a strong imagination, then delight, and then assent. And you remember Thackeray's fourfold progression—an act, a habit, a character, a destiny. That means that evil is never so easy to destroy as at its first attack. Then is the time for your soul's ultimatum. Don't wait, don't parley—be resolute, cast the tempting thought away. For if once you let it in, it will grow. It cannot help growing. So it was here. They beat the first servant, stoned the second, killed the third.

Follow the story further. Here is this lord of the vineyard, with all his messengers rejected and all his appeals refused; and Luke's version of the parable at this point represents him as crying, "What shall I do?" Have you ever thought of that—God baffled, for the time being at least, by the blindness of His creatures? More than once

the Scriptures hint at the possibility of that. Take that sudden, stabbing cry that breaks from one of Hosea's most moving pages: "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." What a picture of God wringing His hands, as it were, over His wayward children, of God—shall we dare to say it?—at His wits' end with men, balked and thwarted and baffled and bewildered by that sheer dogged dourness that no appeal will move! So here in Jesus' story. "What shall I do?" cries the Lord of the vineyard, "what shall I do?"

Then comes the great decision. "I will send My Son, My well-beloved Son. Surely that will move them! They will reverence My Son."

Will they? "We needs must love the highest when we see it," declares the poet: we cannot help ourselves, we are bound to love it, and to yield to it. Were Christ—so we confidently say—to come back in person to earth to-day, the whole world would be at His feet. There would be such a revival as has not been seen since Pentecost. Every church would be crowded, every knee bowed in adoration, every voice raised to hail Him King! But do you really think so? Carlyle suggested another possibility: if Jesus returned, He would be—not crucified, oh no! we are not barbarians now—lionized first, fêted and flattered, patronized and invited out to dine, here, there, everywhere, and then—politely ignored! For His demands for utter honesty and reality are still as imperious as ever. When Jesus came back, said Studdert Kennedy, the poet-preacher—for in imagination he had seen it happening—

"they simply passed Him by,
They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give Him pain,
They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.'
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and through;

The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary."

"We needs must love the highest": I wonder if that is true. "They will reverence My Son": I wonder if they will. Let us narrow this down to the personal point. God is looking at some one here. He is thinking of you. "There is a soul," He is saying, "on whom I can count. That soul, seeing My Christ, will be moved to the depths of his being, will feel everything that is best within him going down in full surrender, will forsake sin's last clinging shadows, and stand up and live in the light!"

Will you? For remember, Christ is God's last appeal. Refuse this, and you refuse everything. "Having yet therefore one Son, His well-beloved, He sent Him last unto them." "Here is everything I am," declares God in the Incarnation, "here in the fact of Jesus I have bared to you My very heart." So that whenever a man faces (as sooner or later he must) the question "What shall I do with Jesus?" he is facing life's ultimate challenge. If this does not move us, nothing will. If Christ's love does not break us down, God Himself can do no more. "They will reverence My Son." Will you?

It did not happen here. News reaches the rebel servants in the vineyard that another embassy is on the way. Then one of their own spies comes running in. "Do you know who it is?" he exclaims. "I have just heard! No ordinary servant this time—it is the heir, the lord's son!" And at that there is a clamour of voices. "His son? The heir?" Then, with a sudden gleam of devilment in their

eyes, "Why then, this is our chance! As long as he is alive, we shall never be safe, never have this place for our own; but if only he were gone, we could do as we liked, live as we pleased, and have no one at all to trouble us. See! Yonder he is on the road. We must act—now. Come, let us kill him!" And so when the fearless young messenger arrives, they surround him, set upon him, strike him, fling him down, crush him, trample and batter the life out of him; and then throw the poor dead mangled body outside the vineyard gate.

Just a story, was it? No—but autobiography. For within three days from the telling of the story, the whole thing actually happened. Word for word, the tale came true. For here were Caiaphas, Annas, and the rest, accredited keepers of God's vineyard. And here was the rumour flying around—"No ordinary prophet, this Man from Nazareth: a greater than a prophet, the Lord's Son!" And here were men obsessed with the thought, "As long as He lives—this Jesus, this incarnate challenge of God—we shall never be safe. There is going to be no peace for us in our sins, until He has been gagged, silenced, and hurried away out of sight. Come, let us kill Him!" And they did.

And they are doing it still—trying to silence Jesus. They will always be doing it. For Jesus is the most disturbing factor on the face of the earth at this moment. You can't sin in comfort. Christ is there. You can't feel free and happy in your sin: Christ's steady eyes are upon you. You can't call life your own: this stubborn Christ keeps haunting you. And sometimes a man, irked by these feelings and irritated by this Jesus whom he cannot shake off, grows almost desperate, and turns violent hands upon the conscience Christ has kindled within him; he chokes it, suffocates it, shakes the life out of it, and then flings the dead, useless thing away. "There now," he tells himself,

"my life is my own at last! I can do what I like in peace."

But it does not work. For this surely is what the solemn close of the parable means—the final words of the story have the roll of thunder in them—that the most futile thing any man can do is to try to silence God.

Annas, Caiaphas, and the others might rub their hands on the day of Calvary, and say, "That settles Him! We shall hear no more of Jesus. Just look at Him hanging yonder, dead on His Cross. We have managed this well. He is finished!" Finished? Fools that they were! Everything about Him—His life, His influence, His work, His kingdom—had only just begun.

And if they, with Golgotha to help them, could not finish Jesus, no one else can. Stifle the inward voice as much as you please (and how often we do try to stifle it), silence it until you think it gone for ever—and one day it will shatter the silence like a trumpet. Crush down the Christ who haunts you, bury Him beneath years of prayerlessness and neglect—and still He will resurrect Himself, and go marching through your soul. You are never done with Jesus. You have never heard the last of the Son of God. "Keep we our heads as high as we can," says Middleton Murry, closing his *Life of Jesus* (and he is no orthodox believer, but this is the final verdict to which his study of the fact of Christ constrains him) "keep we our heads as high as we can, and earth shall bow at the last." That is the truth. Heaven let us kill Him, and the vineyard will be ours." Nay, they killed Him once, and He rose. They have killed Him a hundred times, and a hundred times He has risen. And He is living to-night, and He is here; and of all strange delusions,

the strangest, wildest, insanest, is to think that we can get rid of Jesus.

But happily we can finish on another note. Look at the vineyard again, and imagine the scene now changed. The same servants are indeed still there—self-willed, bungling, unprofitable servants still. The road leading away across the hills is still there, the road to the land where the Lord of the vineyard dwells. Once more down the road a solitary figure can be seen moving. And now the servants (this time we ourselves are among them) have heard of His coming, and know who the messenger is. It is the heir to the kingdom, the Son of the Lord. Now they are waiting for Him at the gates (and you and I are there), and one thought is filling every heart—"His Son? His only Son? Why then, how greatly He must love us—if, after everything, after all the sin and all the shame and all the way we have allowed His vineyard to run to waste, He still thinks us worthy of His Son! How hugely He must love us, and if He loves like that, there must be now a new beginning a new and uttermost dedication of mind and heart and will, and we must love Him too." And now can't you see that solitary figure on the road drawing near, almost at His journey's end, nearer and nearer—until the gate is reached? And then, what a shout it is that rends the skies! "This is the Heir: come, let us welcome Him! Son of the Lord of the vineyard, hail! This is the hour of new beginnings. Harken, Jesus, to the vow we make—that never while this vineyard lasts, never while an ounce of strength abides in us, never while the memory of Calvary endures, never while life remains, and love, and honour, and God's voice calling after us down the winds of all the days and all the nights of our existence—never will we break our troth to Thee. All hail, Thou Son of the Lord!"

X X I I

THE TRUE SIMPLICITY

"The simplicity that is in Christ."—2 Cor. xi. 3.
 "The simplicity that is toward Christ."—(R. V.)

ONE of the main characteristics of life in our modern age is its bewildering complexity. Both outwardly and inwardly, human life is a far more intricate thing to-day than ever before.

Take its outward aspect. This includes economics, politics, social life, and the like. Economics have grown complex, owing to the innumerable new contacts which have been established between the nations of the earth. Politics have grown complex: national movements, unheard-of twenty years ago, bestride gigantically the scene of history, and democracy struggles for its very existence. Social life has grown complex: for good or ill, there are far more social distractions to-day than the Victorian Age ever knew.

Or take the more inward aspect of modern life. Everywhere ethical codes are in the melting-pot, religious beliefs are being challenged, and old, inviolable systems of faith and morals which were once unquestioningly accepted as part of the very order of things have come under the onslaught of criticism. Everywhere people are asking: What, then, are we to believe? How are we to act? Where are we to find assurance? Both outwardly and inwardly, life is an enormously difficult and complex thing to-day.

Of course, this complexity has compensating advantages. In economics, for instance, every nation is being taught by the very difficulty of the times that never again dare any people imagine that they can stand isolated and self-sufficient in this world; and that discovery is all to the good. In social life, again, the very science which has been responsible for making our age more complex has also opened up for us hundreds of shining gateways, new windows towards knowledge and happiness and fullness of life, which former generations never knew. And in the inner world of the spirit, the growing complexity of our moral and religious problems may simply mean that the new age is refusing to accept, unexamined and at second-hand, traditions and conventions which were largely artificial and unreal, and is determined to think things through for itself; and that again is sheer gain. There are, doubtless, these compensating advantages.

And yet, who does not feel that the growing complexity of life is stealing from us something we can ill afford to lose? The vanishing of the old simplicities is resulting in the disappearance of the old contentment: for science and invention, by ministering to man's pleasures and sensations, have stimulated his demand for these things, and so increased his restlessness. The questioning of the Christian ethical code has had quieting reactions on the life of home and family. The breakdown of religious conviction has left thousands without a guiding faith of any kind—a fact which largely accounts for the sudden vogue of spiritualism and theosophy. Something of dignity, something of quiet, steadfast simplicity has been stolen from us by this hurrying, complex age; and they may well be pardoned who feel that “there hath passed away a glory from the earth.”

Here it is worth noticing that the word “simple” itself is a word which has come down in the world. It has lost caste. When it first appeared, centuries ago, in English

literature, it stood for a noble, shining virtue; but no one likes to be called “simple” to-day. As originally used, it meant single-hearted, crystal-clear, straightforward. But to-day the word smacks of its own unfortunate derivative “simpleton,” and so is under a cloud. Like the other word “charity”—which from meaning the glowing heart of a genuinely Christian affection has been whittled down till it often signifies a gift which costs the giver nothing and undermines the recipient's self-respect—so the word “simplicity” has sunk in the world; until people begin to wonder whether to be simple is really a virtue at all.

Yet no writer on this subject has failed to comment on the striking fact that the world's greatest men have invariably been characterized by a deep simplicity of life and character. Tennyson's lines in his “Ode on the Death of Wellington” are familiar:

“Foremost captain of his time,
Rich in saving common-sense,
And, as the greatest only are,
In his simplicity sublime.”

“As the greatest only are,” says Tennyson; and the poet is right. It is the little men who puzzle their biographers to find anything simple about them. The really great men—the Isaiahs, the Pauls, the Bunyans, the Wilberforces—have been at heart as simple as a child. And that is true also of those who, although their names never appear on any roll of fame, are nevertheless great in God's sight—utterly obscure and unknown to men, yet great in character. A man may be a saint without many of the qualities which this complex world ranks high; no man can be a saint without a deep simplicity of soul.

Now it is a law of life that every prevalent mood sooner or later provokes a reaction; and therefore it is not sur-

prising that in this complex age we hear a good deal about the "craving for a simple life." It was that craving which periodically drove Marie Antoinette out from the pomp and circumstance of a decadent luxury to play at being a farm-girl in the rustic solitudes of Versailles. It is that craving which takes a great part of our population for a week or two in the year from the desk, the shop, the factory; which puts a pack on a man's back and a staff in his hand, and sets his face to the open road and the heather and the hills and Nature's great simplicities. It is that craving of which a hundred poets have sung:

"London streets are gold—ah, give me leaves a-glinting
Midst grey dykes and hedges in the autumn sun!

London's water's wine, poured out for all un stinting—

God! For the little brooks that tumble as they run!"

But the craving for a simple life goes deeper than all this: and you can see from history how a complex, sophisticated age always brings on a reaction. Inevitably the pendulum swings back. There comes a turn of the tide. So it was when St. Anthony of Egypt, sickened by the worldliness and vice of the great pagan cities around him, cut the cables, sacrificed all his wealth and standing, and made his home in the desert. So it was again when St. Francis of Assisi led his little band of friars out from the moral and social entanglements of mediæval Italy into something like the joy and freedom of first-century Galilee. So it was most dramatically when Martin Luther, leading on the Reformation, cut at one stroke through the complex casuistry of papal doctrine, and gave back to the individual soul the directness and immediacy of true religion. And in our own day there are signs that another recoil from over-elaboration is on the way, another reversion to a truer simplicity beginning to make itself felt; taking the form, in social life, of a new distaste and nausea of

the endless catering for sensation; in moral life, of a new Puritanism which is not going to allow life's sanctities to be dragged in the mud indefinitely by writers of mean and petty soul; and in religious life, of a new evangelicalism which, weary of hair-splitting dialectic and endless argument, is ready to cry to the purveyors of these things—"Stand out of the way, and let us through to God!"

We have to guard here, however, against a false simplicity. That there is such a thing, there can be no doubt. It is possible, for example, to aim at a false simplicity in our social life. Suppose we resolved to give up our gains of science and invention, our steam and electricity and anti-septic surgery, and make ourselves thoroughly primitive again. Clearly we should be going against the will of God. For that would be the line of retrogression, not of advance. Again, it is possible to have a false simplicity in our moral life. We could make things easier and much more manageable for ourselves by narrowing down our sphere of interests, cutting out certain instincts and desires altogether, and timidly giving everything dangerous a wide berth. But that is not the simplicity God wants to see us achieving. That is just evading the battle. Once again, it is possible to have a false simplicity in our religious life. We might cry, as some are doing, "Give us a religion without theology, without mystery, without any demand on thought and reason!" But that most emphatically is not the simplicity into which God seeks to lead us. It was Henry Drummond who said he did not congratulate, he pitied, the man who was cocksure of everything in his faith. Let it be repeated: there is a false simplifying of our complex life which is worse than useless.

But some simplification must surely be possible. There must be some way—even though all the social, moral, and religious perplexities of this present age are clamouring in our

ears—some way of keeping our own lives uncontaminated and poised and simple. Where are we to find that way? Paul has got hold of it here in our text. "The simplicity," he says, "that is in Christ."

It is very important that we should remark the difference which the Revised Version has introduced. The Revised Version says "the simplicity that is *toward* Christ"; and that is almost certainly the right rendering. That is what the apostle meant—not primarily the simplicity that was in Jesus Himself, and that marked His earthly life; but the simplicity which ought to be in the hearts of those who love and trust and follow Him, the harmony and poise and unity of a character steel-true and blade-straight, the consistency of an undivided loyalty to the Lord of all good life. That is Paul's meaning. But let us, ere we pass, accept the old translation for a moment; for even if it was not what the apostle said, it does represent a real fact.

"The simplicity that is in Jesus." Think how simple the earthly life of Jesus was—this peasant Christ, who while He lived had nowhere to lay His head, and when He died left behind Him as His only possession the seamless robe He wore. When will the world learn from Jesus' life the great lesson that between riches on the one hand and happiness on the other there is no necessary connection whatever? There have been rich people in this world who have been happy; but where that has been the case, it has not been their riches that made them happy, but something else altogether—something in character quite independent of every question of worldly possessions. Christ Jesus, Carpenter of Nazareth, Child of Mary, is a living confutation of the philosophy of life that connects wealth and happiness, and a standing rebuke to the pampered artificiality of a great deal of life to-day.

"Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,—
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

Again, think how simple the speech of Jesus was. "The common people," we are told, "heard Him gladly." They did not hear their own Rabbis gladly. Their own Rabbis only fogged their minds, and blurred the issues, and spoke above their heads. But when Jesus spoke it was all so practical that they could connect it up at once with their own experience; it was so straight that none could miss its meaning; it was so concrete that it came on them as a glorious discovery after the weary abstractions to which their Rabbis had persistently treated them. Remember that simplicity of speech is a very different thing from superficiality of thought. The simplest language is often the profoundest, and every man who listened knew that Jesus was striking home to the very deepest things in life. Shallow in speech Jesus could never be: yet, by the grace of God, He was utterly simple always.

Or think, again, how simple was the salvation which Jesus offered. "Follow Me," He said, and that was all. And how simple the cross is! Indeed, the very simplicity of the gospel has been, in the eyes of many, its condemnation. They tell you it is a much too simple philosophy for this intricate life—just to "trust and obey." They declare that this tangled, chaotic world needs something more than to be told that "there is life for a look at the Crucified One." Hence in the twentieth century you have the amazing spectacle of men trying to improve upon the means of grace that God Himself has devised. Hence you have religion cluttered up with all kinds of unnecessary accretions. Hence you have good, earnest people narrowing down the way of salvation to their own particular mode of it—whether it be

Presbyterian or Anglican or Methodist or Roman Catholic—and treating their own preferences, their own accepted historic religious forms, as part of the very essence of the gospel, without which there can be no salvation. But surely all that spirit is terribly unlike Jesus! "Whosoever will, let him come." That is the gospel—as welcoming as two wide-open arms, as simple as a cross.

But above all, think how simple Jesus was in His own soul. However worrying life was, He never grew distracted; however loud its voices, He never felt dismay; however threatening its dangers, He walked in perfect peace. And the secret? Christ Himself has let us into His secret. It was His undivided loyalty to God. "My meat," He said, "is to do the will of Him that sent Me." There you have the one claim to which all rival claims were subservient, the one principle co-ordinating the whole of life, the one standard by reference to which every question as it arose was decided—an undivided loyalty to the God of heaven. That was Christ's great simplification of life. And it works.

It can work for us, in our own crowded, jostling age. And this is where the Revisers, with their flash of insight, come in: "the simplicity that is *toward* Christ!" Do you understand the secret now? Here is the answer to the deep craving for the simple life—an undivided loyalty, a heart fixed utterly on Christ, and through Christ on God.

The simplicity that is towards Jesus! Do not let us blame the complexity of the age, if our lives have lost the simple note. It is not the fault of the age; it is our own fault; it is the nemesis of trying to serve more than one master. We have been hoping to have life both ways—God's way and our own way; and it cannot be done. Divided loyalties are the death of simplicity: they lead to endless complications. But see what happens when Christ comes in

as the one controlling principle. Whenever a problem arises in your life, you have now one standard to refer it to for decision; whenever any anxiety threatens, you have one unflinching refuge; and whenever rival claims grow loud, you have one Commander-in-chief of your soul to give the final ruling. That is the great simplification of life, that is the Golden Age come back again—an undivided heart at Jesus' feet.

The late Bishop Moule has told how once during the War, at the close of a variety entertainment given in London for men going out to the Front, a young officer rose, at his Colonel's request, to express the men's thanks. He did so in genial words of charm and humour. Then suddenly, as if in afterthought, and in a different tone, he added: "We are soon crossing to France and to the trenches, and very possibly, of course, to death. Will any of our friends here tell us how to die?" There was a long, strained silence. No one knew what to say. But then the answer came. One of the singers made her way quietly forward to the front of the stage, and began to sing the great aria from the *Elizabet*, "O Rest in the Lord." There were few dry eyes when the song was done.

Here, above all else, is what each one of us needs in the battle of life—a heart that has come to rest in God, a will fully surrendered. That is the great secret. That is the final simplification. That alone will bring us through with honour.

least possible that Mark himself had been a secret disciple of Jesus. You will remember how his Gospel, when it comes to describe Gethsemane, mentions a mysterious young man who was in the garden on the night when Jesus was arrested, who was almost arrested himself, and escaped only by fleeing and leaving his cloak behind him in the soldiers' hands. None of the other evangelists mentions the incident, and tradition says that the young man was Mark himself, who put this personal touch into his Gospel like an artist painting in his signature very faintly in an inconspicuous corner of his picture. However that may be, it is certain that he had been in close touch with the Christian leaders from the first. Hence we are not surprised to find him setting out with Paul and Barnabas on the first great gospel campaign.

So we pass on from the prologue to Act I of the drama. This act bears the title *Recantation*. To begin with, all went well. Mark felt he had found his vocation. There was all the glamour of novelty about it—new places to visit, new friendships to make, new claims to stake out for Christ. But as the days went on, one thought began to trouble him. Were they not wandering too far from their base? Paul, with his far horizons and beckoning visions, seemed determined to carry the campaign into the unfamiliar and dangerous hinterland of Asia. Now Mark had not bargained for this. "The risk is far too great," he told himself, "it is not worth it! I must remonstrate with Paul." But when he endeavoured to raise his objections, he found that he could scarce say a word, for there was something in Paul's face, a burning, passionate eagerness and a glowing resolute determination, which silenced his stammered protests; and there seemed no alternative—he must go on. But all the time his nerve was beginning to fail him, and he knew it. What a wild, savage, God-forsaken land this was,

XXIII

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

"Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."—2 TIMOTHY iv. 11.

THE story of John Mark, the deserter who made good, could be written as a drama in four acts. But first, by way of prologue to the drama, a question arises. How came Mark to be accompanying Paul and Barnabas on their hazardous adventures? This is easily enough explained. There are three facts to remember.

The first is that Barnabas was his own cousin, and was no doubt eager to give the younger man a share in the great work of carrying Christ's commission across the world.

The second is that John Mark came from a home which had played an outstanding part in the life of the Church from the first. His mother, Mary, had put her house at the disposal of the Jerusalem Christians. It was there, in an upper room of her house, that they met for weekly worship. It was thither that Peter had made his way on his dramatic escape from prison. Indeed, the probability is that it was this same upper room which had seen the Last Supper on the night of Calvary, and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the birth of the Christian Church. Mark was the son of that home. Happy the young man who begins life in a home where God has an altar and Jesus is a familiar friend!

But we can go farther. The third fact is that it is at

and up among those mountain fastnesses what nameless perils might be lurking! And Jerusalem was so far away, and his heart so terribly homesick! Many a night he would have given anything just to have heard the Temple bells again, or to have stood on Olivet and seen the sun flaming down the western sky. So the struggle went on in Mark's soul, till at last there came a crisis.

It was in the dead of night, and Paul and Barnabas were asleep; but Mark was wakeful, and was striding up and down alone by himself in the dark. Take a long look at him, I beg you—for there is a man at the crossroads with Christ, a soul facing one of those decisive hours that come to all of us sooner or later. "I can't go on," he is saying. "I ought never to have come. O home, home—I'm weary for my home!"

And then another voice speaks, very quietly and tenderly, and it is the voice of Jesus.

"You are not going to leave Me, My friend? You surely can't be leaving Me now? Do you not love Me any more?"

And the man blurts out, "Yes, Lord, I do, you know I do! With all my heart I love you. How can you say such a thing? But, Lord, I don't think I was built for this. I'm not a Paul or a Barnabas, I'm not like them with their iron nerves and their lion hearts—I'm just one of your ordinary people, Jesus: and it is asking too much of me!"

Then again the quiet voice speaks, but sadly now—"I do not compel you, friend. You are free to return if you must. But I died for you, My son, and this is hard, hard for Me!"

"But don't you see, Lord, I can't go on? You must see that. I have tried my best, I have indeed, but I am not made for this kind of life, and it is not fair to ask me. Can't you understand?"

And at that a new voice, a third voice, comes breaking in—the voice of the Tempter.

"Let Christ go, then. Let Him go! Sell Him and be done with it. Recant, man, recant!"

And then a great silence. But in the morning, when Paul and Barnabas rose to continue their journey, there was no John Mark there. And they went on their way alone. The tragedy of a soul's recantation!

Now I know what some of us are thinking. All this was long, long ago. Conditions have changed completely. Christian discipleship is a far simpler affair to-day: no danger of our deserting Christ through fear!

But are we sure? Suppose we single out one particular brand of fear. What about the fear of unpopularity, of being left on the shelf (as we say), of being passed over or made to suffer for our convictions? Does that never breed deserters?

Let me for one moment speak directly to the young men and women here to-night. Have you never stood at this particular cross-roads with Christ, finding yourself suddenly confronted with the choice either to stand up for Jesus and let the world's good graces go, or else to muffle your Christianity and square the world and keep the favour of some social set? Perhaps you had only five minutes or less to make up your mind, to decide whether the flag was to be run to the top of the mast and held there resolutely in defiance of the consequences, or discreetly hauled down and pushed away out of sight. "Men of Athens," exclaimed Socrates, "I hold you in the highest reverence and love; but I am going to obey God rather than you!" It takes some courage to do that, in this modern age as much as in ancient Athens. It takes some grit and loyalty to do it—in social circle, or shop, or factory, or club. When Wilberforce rose to speak in the House of Commons, "Ah," said a sneering member, "the honourable and religious gentleman!" That sort of thing stings; and there is a bit of us—"the natural man," Paul

called it—which hates being stung, and would rather do anything, would even blunder into open disloyalty and sin against God's Christ than stand out against the conventions of the world or the opinion of our fellow men. Unpopularity—that is one fear at least which still has the power to make souls desert from Christ. And there are others, the fear of sacrifice, for example, the fear of losing ambitions on which our hearts are set, the fear of having to give up something in thought, desire, or habit which we know ought to be given up (this is one of the sternest struggles of life, and until a man has fought through it he is not right with Christ), the fear of God's daily discipline, the fear of the cross. Is there one of us here who will dare point a condemning finger at John Mark, or cast the first stone? Are we not all in this together? Yes, in some degree we have all played our part in this first tragic act—the act of recantation.

We go on now to Act II; and this bears the title *Remorse*. Here we see Mark back in Jerusalem. The homesick man has come home. Away yonder among the mountains of Asia he had thought, "If only I could see Jerusalem, how happy I should be!" Well, here he is in Jerusalem. Is he happy now? Look at him.

People sometimes say a house is haunted. Perhaps, years before, some dark deed was perpetrated there; and the place has never thrown off its evil, sinister reputation. No prospective tenants come knocking at its door. It stands deserted and uncared for, and weeds and nettles block the garden paths. Passers-by cast furtive glances at it in the daytime, and in the night the wind moans eerily around its walls, like the moaning of the ghosts of the dead. So sometimes the house of life, the soul, is haunted; and ghosts of memory walk there, clanking their chains in the dark, shadows of old unhappy far-off things and wild regrets.

"In the night, in the night
When thou liest alone,
Ah! the ghosts that make moan
From the days that are sped:
The old dreams, the old deeds,
The old wound that still bleeds,
And the face of the dead,
In the night."

That was John Mark, back in Jerusalem. Everything was the same—the streets, his home, the Temple bells, the sun flaming down behind Olivet, everything the same: yet somehow there was a subtle difference. All the dear familiar things had lost their savour. Happy in Jerusalem? Call him rather the most wretched man on earth. After recantation, remorse. Does it not always happen? Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury in the sixteenth century, recanted his faith in prison. "Sign that!" they said to him, thrusting a written document into his hands. But when he began to read it, "Nay," he burst out, "'tis a downright denial of my Christ! I will not sign." "Sign it or die," they threatened, and kept badgering him and torturing him, till in a weak moment he yielded, and took the pen and wrote his name. But when it was done, the horror of his betrayal leapt upon his soul, and he looked at the right hand that had signed the name. Had not Jesus said, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off"? And for days and nights he was tormented with remorse. He would gladly have taken a knife, and severed that traitor hand. And when at last, in spite of his recantation, they led him out to die, and the vast throng swarmed round the martyr pyre to see the end, he stood and thrust his right arm first into the flames. "This unworthy hand," he said, "this which hath sinned, having signed the writing, must be the first to suffer," and he held it there till it was blackened and consumed; then plunged into the fire himself.

Words cannot measure the remorse that gripped John Mark in Jerusalem; but the grip of it was agony. "Would God I might live those days through again!" he thought. "If only the thing had never happened! O God of mercy, turn time back, I beg, set me where I was before this dreadful thing occurred. I can't have been myself then! For I do love Jesus. I swear I love Him still. Lord, give me that bad hour back!"

One of Squire's fine poems depicts a man who has persistently neglected a dear one. Always he has been meaning to write, to send the long-looked-for letter; and always in the press of business he has kept putting it off. "Tomorrow I will do it," he tells himself, "certainly I will write to-morrow"; but it is never done. And then one day a message comes. He tears it open: she is dead. And as he stands there, staring at the words, remorse rushes in like a flood. "It shall not be to-day," he cries. "It shall not! It is still yesterday. I'll wrest the sun back in its course! It is still yesterday. There is time still—there must be time!" Poor, unhappy soul! For

"The sun moves. Our onward course is set.
There will be time for nothing but regret,
And the memory of things done!"

"You don't know," cries the chaplain in Shaw's *Saint Joan*, breaking in wildly after he had consented to the saint's death and had stood and watched her die, "you haven't seen: it is so easy to talk when you don't know. But when it is brought home to you; when you see the thing you have done; when it is blinding your eyes, stifling your nostrils, tearing your heart, then—then—O God, take away this sight from me! O Christ, deliver me from this fire that is consuming me! She cried to Thee in the midst of it: Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! She is in Thy bosom; and I am in hell for evermore."

After recantation—remorse!

So with John Mark. I think I can see him at night, unable to sleep, rising from his bed, pacing to and fro in that upper room of many memories. "Where are Paul and Barnabas to-night?" he is wondering. "And where is Jesus?" I see him going down a Jerusalem street at noonday, and now and again people—Christian brethren of his own—look strangely at him as he passes, then turn and point: "See, there is the man who deserted! Would you believe it?" I see him at last one day sitting at the Communion table. He is listening dully to the familiar words, "This is My body, broken for you. This is My blood, shed for you"; and then the bread comes round, and then the cup. But just as he lifts it, something happens. He pauses, and looks at that cup in his hand, for within him a voice has begun to speak—a voice unheard by any of the others there, heard only in Mark's own soul. "This is Christ's blood," says the voice. "And if this is blood in the cup, and if it is the blood of Jesus, and if it was given for you, then what—in the name of all that is honourable—are you doing here? Jesus is out on the lonely, dangerous ways, seeking the lost and the perishing, and this is the blood of that agony. Will you dare to drink it—you? Look well into that cup, Mark, for you are crucifying Christ afresh, and there are drops of the blood of that second crucifixion in it. Look well into the cup!" And the man sits with the cup in his hand, staring at it (have we ever sat like that, confronted with the agony of Jesus, and knowing that some unclean thought of ours, some selfish slackness, some wretched little self-indulgence, was the cause of it?) and then I see him suddenly setting the cup down untasted, rising from the table, and leaving the room—and that very night, do you know where he is? Out from Jerusalem, out on the great North road, with his face set towards Paul and Barnabas and Christ again!

There is an old Gaelic proverb which says, "If you cannot get back to the place where you were born, try to get within seeing distance of it." I would add to that: If you cannot get back to the place where you were first born into the life in God, get within seeing distance of it. Jesus Christ will do the rest.

So we come to Act III: and the title of this is *Restoration*. You know the story—how Mark returned to Paul and Barnabas; how Barnabas welcomed him eagerly, but Paul refused to have anything to do with him (surely if Jesus had been there, it would have been Barnabas' way, not Paul's, He would have taken); how that unhappy dispute led to a quarrel, and the quarrel to a parting, Barnabas going off with Mark, and Paul with Silas; how this splendid coward redeemed his reputation, and proved himself a true hero of Christ, so that even Paul relented in the end, and took him to his heart again; and how when the great apostle lay waiting his death in Rome, it was of Mark that he kept thinking. "Take Mark," he wrote to Timothy, "and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

That is the familiar story. And this is the blessed and most glorious truth which it stands to announce to all who have ears to hear: the past can be blotted out. The heaviest and most shameful burden beneath which any soul in the world is staggering now is not too heavy for Jesus to deal with, nor too shameful for Him to take up in His pierced, royal hands and cast finally away—so that the soul which has gone lame and hirpling under it for years will never set eyes on it again!

It would be a great thing—the gospel of Jesus—even if it applied only to those who had fought the good fight and run the straight race all their lives. But blessed be God, it is more than that, far more; and if the Christian preacher and

evangelist has the gladdest and most thrilling task in all the world, it is because he has been authorized by God to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, the removing of their guilt and the shattering of their power. What *is* the gospel? Hope for the hopeless, love for the unlovable, heroism for the most arrant coward, white shining robes for the raggedest, clean-hearted purity for the muddiest, inward peace and a great serenity for spirits torn and frantic with regret. There is a most moving scrap of conversation in George Macdonald's *Robert Falconer*. "If I only knew that God was as good as that woman, I should be content." "Then you don't believe that God is good?" "I didn't say that, my boy. But to know that God was good and kind and fair—heartily, I mean, and not half-ways with ifs and buts. My boy, there would be nothing left to be miserable about." Believe me, if you have once seen Jesus, as the men and women of the New Testament saw Him, there *is* nothing left to be miserable about. There is everything in the world to set you singing! And if I were to stand here and preach to you a limited gospel; if I were to tell you of a Christ who is the Lover of some elect, sky-blue souls who have never known the bitterness of self-despising and remorse, but not the Lover of all the world; if I were to suggest that there are depths of shame and humiliation and defeat from which the heights of heaven cannot be stormed; if I were to hedge God's loving-kindness round with ifs and buts and reservations and conditions—I should be preaching a lie. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Was Jesus shocked when He saw them coming? Did Jesus ever turn round and say, "Ah, I did not mean you! I can go down deep to rescue the perishing, but not quite to such depths as that"? No, He saw them coming, lame and lost and lonely and sin-scarred and disillusioned and miserable, and He lifted up His eyes to heaven: "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that the

gospel of grace works even here ! I thank Thee that Thou hast sent Me to restore to these Thy broken children the years that the locust hath eaten." And He took them to His arms, God's bairns who had got hurt, and let them sob the whole sad story out : and then—"That is finished," He said, "behold, I make all things new." Do we to-day believe it ? Take your own life, take the saddest recantation there has ever been, take the most locust-eaten year you can remember, take the thing which may be hiding God for you at this very moment. Lay that at Christ's feet. Say, "Lord, if Thou wilt—!" And see if, for you, the ancient miracle is not renewed, and the whole world filled with glory.

And so we end with Act IV of Mark's story. We have watched his recantation and his remorse, and then his restoration. The title which this final act bears is *Reparation*. One thing only let me say in closing. How did Mark atone ? How did he repair the damage he had done ? He became an evangelist. He wrote a book. He gave the world a Life of Jesus, the first Gospel to be written. We can be sure of this, that multitudes of people in those old, far-off days, who had never seen Jesus in the flesh, met Him in the pages of Mark's book, and entered—under the evangelist's guidance—upon the highroad leading to salvation. And still to-day after all these years Mark is introducing men and women of every race and religion to Jesus, and setting them face to face with the redeeming Son of God. That was his atonement. Was it not a glorious reparation ?

What, then, of ourselves ? We who have wounded Christ so often—is there any reparation we can offer ? We cannot be evangelists like Mark, we say. It is not given to us to write Gospels for the world to read. But think again ! Is it not ? The fact is, there is not one of us here to-day who

cannot compose a life of Jesus. You can write an evangel, not in books and documents, but in deeds and character. You can make men see Jesus. You can live in such a way that, even when you are not speaking about religion at all, you will be confronting souls with Christ—His ways, His spirit, His character—and making them feel the power and the beauty of the Son of God. And it may be that, all unknown to you, one soul here or another there will owe its very salvation to that gospel of yours ; it may be that some one will rise from among the throngs around the judgment-seat on the last day, and pointing at you will cry : "There is the man to whom, under God, I owe everything ! It was reading the gospel of Christ in that man's life that redeemed me." And Jesus will turn to you with glad and grateful eyes. "Come, ye blessed of My Father—inherit the kingdom !"

grew stronger and stronger as the months passed. The fact was that he had won his way into our affections. We loved him. And there isn't anything stronger than love, when all's said and done." Of King George V. of Britain, how deeply true that is!

It was in the Jubilee rejoicings that that love found its chance of expression. Never surely can there have been more convincing proof that a King had come into his own! Never did monarch receive more touching or more thrilling evidence of a people's devotion. He knew then how absolutely and finally and unreservedly they had given him their heart.

Consider his achievement. In a generation when throughout the world thrones have been tottering and dynasties falling, he has left his throne stronger than ever. In days of unexampled strain and difficulty, his courage never faltered. The most democratic monarch this land has ever had, he has impressed his personality on the life of the nation.

It must be the loneliest thing on earth, to be a King. And yet, perhaps—not altogether lonely, when some one stands beside him. We think to-day, with millions of others, of Queen Mary in her widowhood. We thank God for the pillar of strength that she has been throughout the quarter of a century of the reign now closed. And to our lips, for her, there comes the poet's prayer—

"The love of all thy people comfort thee
Till God's love set thee at his side again."

I have chosen the words from Micah for our text to-day, for it seems to me that they might stand as an epitome of our late King's life. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

X X I V

THE CLOSE OF AN EPOCH ¹

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"—MICAH vi. 8.

WE meet here this morning for our Communion celebration, under the shadow of an Empire's bereavement. Little could we foresee, when we remembered our King last Sunday, and sang our National Anthem, little could we contemplate the circumstances in which we are gathered to-day. "He asked life of Thee," says the psalmist, "and Thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever."

You will not expect me this morning to speak any words of official homage: this loss, to all of us, is much too personal for that. I wonder if any one could sit, last Monday night at half-past nine, listening to the poignant words from London, "The King's life is moving peacefully towards its close," without an acute sense of personal and private grief, as if it were on our own homes, our own family circle, that the blow were falling?

There came to my mind some beautiful words of Donald Hankey who died in the War. They are in his essay, *The Beloved Captain*. "We were his men, and he was our leader. There was a bond of mutual confidence between us, which

¹ Preached on the Sunday following the death of King George V.

There the prophet has singled out the three great elements of the complete and rounded life—doing justly, that is, integrity of character; loving mercy, that is, sympathy of heart; and walking humbly with God, that is, reverence of spirit. Our monarch had them all.

What doth the Lord require of thee, but *to do justly*? He was, to borrow Tennyson's phrase about Queen Victoria, "loyal to the royal in himself"—a character of sterling integrity.

Think of his sense of duty. How devotedly, how sacrificially, he gave himself to the overwhelmingly arduous labours of his high station, toiling often beyond his allotted strength!

Think, too, how he exalted the domestic virtues; how he took the old word "Home"—which, alas! so many in this generation affect to despise and disregard—how he took it, and honoured it, and lifted it high; and how, by so doing, he set a standard for all social and public life, and made his own life at once an inspiration and a challenge to all his subjects.

Such a life indeed reminds us that character alone is the true wealth. It is a reminder that we constantly require. It is so easy, under the influence of the spirit of the age and the pressure of society, to become almost unconsciously infected by the doctrine that "man *can* live by bread alone"; to follow the crowd in believing that cleverness, astuteness, and worldly wisdom are the qualities that matter most; to set rights above duties, self-interest above self-sacrifice, and success above simple sincerity of soul. But if "man looketh on the outward appearance, the Lord looketh on the heart." And as the late Rudyard Kipling put it to the St. Andrews students in his fine Rectorial on *Independence*: "A man may be festooned with the whole haberdashery of success,

and go to his grave a castaway." The one thing that lasts is character. The one thing that matters is what a man is, when his soul stands naked and alone before its God. Over and over again the Bible bids us remember, gives this indeed as the final truth about life, that "the world passeth away"—and those who make the world their horizon pass and are swept away with it—"but he that doeth the will of God—he alone—abideth forever."

The second element of the complete and rounded life which the prophet has singled out is this, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but *to love mercy*?" If the first was integrity of character, this is sympathy of heart.

Nothing endeared our late King to his people more than his amazingly broad human sympathy. Take one little wartime story—a story that speaks volumes. A young New Zealand soldier had been terribly wounded. He was lying in a casualty clearing station just behind the lines. It was at a time when King George was on one of his many visits to the Western front, and he chanced to enter the place where the dying boy lay. He moved slowly from one stretcher to another, saying a few kind words beside each. Meanwhile the young New Zealander was watching him, with a puzzled look in his eyes, as though he were wondering, "Who is that man? Where have I seen him before? Or where have I seen his picture?" But when the stranger came and stood beside his own stretcher, into the puzzled eyes a flash of recognition came. The dying lad reached out a weak hand, and murmured, "I've heard of you, sir—put it there!" And they clasped hands in the silence—the soldier and the King. Those simple words, "I've heard of you, sir—put it there," that simple instinctive gesture—what impressive testimony to the humanity behind the royalty, the man

behind the King, a man with deepest grace of sympathy, a man of a great understanding heart!

It was this, perhaps more than anything, that won him the confidence of his people. The familiar words, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," were to King George no mere beautiful maxim: they were a daily act of self-dedication. What it cost him to bear that burden, none will know; but always his people knew that it was being borne. They knew that he would never be at rest, while any of them were labouring under poverty or squalor or injustice. They knew he understood what life was to the poor and the handicapped, the unemployed and the struggling and the unhappy. They knew that in all their afflictions he was afflicted—their burdens his burden, their anxieties his anxiety, their troubles his trouble. Not of every monarch has this been true. Not even of every monarch in our own country's history has this been true. Some have been excluded from sharing their people's life by lack of imagination: others, through lack of inclination, have excluded themselves. But he whom we mourn to-day has been a veritable father of his people. His fellow-feeling with his subjects brought him their confidence and affection. His sympathy made him great.

Let us, as we sit at our Communion Table to-day, ask the good God to fill us with the sympathy of Christ. There is such a desperate famine for sympathy in this old world to-day. Pass along the streets, mingle with the crowds, sit among a worshipping congregation—there are far more "men of sorrows and acquainted with grief" around you than the surface appearance of things would show. And when you think of what ordinary folk have to endure in this world, and are enduring every day, do you not begin to feel that the hard spirit, the superior spirit, the censorious spirit, is not just a mistake, but the very essence of sin, and

downright enmity with Christ? As Lacordaire, the great French preacher, used to put it—"Be kind: it is so like God!"

"O ye who taste that love is sweet,
Set waymarks for all doubtful feet
That stumble on in search of it."

"What doth God require of thee, but to love mercy?"

The third and final element of the complete and rounded life which the prophet has singled out is this, "What doth He require of thee, but to *walk humbly with thy God*?" "To do justly—to love mercy—to walk humbly with God": if the first was integrity of character, and the second sympathy of heart, this is reverence of spirit.

No tribute to our late King can be anything but totally inadequate and false that ascribes his faithfulness in duty and his loving service of his people to any other source than his religion. That was the secret of his life.

It is not unknown for persons in authority and in official positions to use the word "God" merely officially and glibly. There was no such unreality with him. When he used it, it was the expression of a firm personal faith and an intense religious conviction.

You will remember—who now can ever forget?—one sentence in the last Christmas message he broadcast to his people. Speaking of the Empire's respect for the throne, he added the words—"and for the man himself who, may God help him, has been placed upon it." That, in very truth, throughout the quarter of a century of his reign, was the source from which the daily help for his tremendous task was drawn. That explains the genesis of all his many acts and gestures of kindness and self-forgetfulness, those deeds which would never have occurred to any one to do who was

not in touch with the Spirit of Christ. His help was in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He walked humbly with his God.

From this sprang his devotion to the Scriptures and to the public worship of the Church. We have all heard how, as far back as the year 1881, the young Prince who was to become our King gave his word to Queen Alexandra that he would read a chapter of the Bible daily, and how through all his life, on to its very close, he faithfully adhered to that promise. And never surely was there a monarch of this land who could take the psalmist's words more sincerely upon his lips—"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." We ought to thank God that in a generation when so many, in every walk of life, have thrown off the ancient pieties of prayer and praise and worship, and have chosen to turn the Lord's Day to their own uses, with never one thought of Christ and never one word of gratitude to the grace that has given them their life—we ought to thank God that we have been ruled over by one who bore such consistent witness and gave such noble example.

Let such a life remind us that there is one great steadfast Rock for our slipping feet amid the storms and chaos of these times—and that is the Word of God in Holy Scripture, where whosoever will can hold converse with the saints and hear the message of the King of kings. Let it remind us that prayer is the Christian's vital breath; and that the Lord's Day has been given us to ensure that amid all the rush and fever and fret and dust and heat of crowded days we may receive a new vision of the things that are spiritual and eternal, that vision without which the people perish. "O that Scotland," cried Samuel Rutherford in the great days of the Covenanters, "that Scotland, all with one shout, would cry up Christ, and that His name were high in this

land!" Above all, let it remind us of this, that if the great assertions of our Christian creed are true—if there is one God over all the earth; if there is a Son of God calling us to rise and follow; if there is a Spirit of God speaking in our conscience, convicting and convincing; if there is a Kingdom of God that shall outlast the stars; if there is an Eternity of God towards which we all are moving; if there is a Throne of God before which we shall stand to give account, when this earthly life is done; if these things which we say we believe are more than pious sentiments, if they are facts, then they are incomparably the most important facts with which every one of us has to reckon, implying, nay demanding, that we make religion the masterforce of all our life, and God in Christ the burning centre of our being. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to walk humbly with thy God?"

"O for a closer walk with God,

A calm and heavenly frame,

A light to shine upon the road

That leads me to the Lamb!"

So to our good and gracious and God-fearing King, we give now our "hail and farewell." In a moment we shall be singing that hymn which of all hymns he held the dearest, the hymn which those who knew him tell us he could never sing without emotion:

"O Love that wilt not let me go,

I rest my weary soul in Thee."

Our comfort, while we sing it, will be this, that of him it is now so splendidly and so royally true: his soul, weary with the almost crushing burden of his high and lonely station, has found its full release, in the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

Come, then, with gladness mingling with your sorrow, come to the Table of Jesus Christ. Come to this hallowed

spot where the cloud of witnesses gathers, and the communion of the saints grows real. Come, in the name of free grace and dying love and life eternal. Come with new resolve to live honourably for their sakes who are gone before, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." And it may be that, coming so, you too will be able to take a prophet's words upon your lips, and say, "In the year that the King died, I saw the Lord."

XXV

THE FINAL DOXOLOGY

"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."—REV. i. 5, 6.

NORMAN MACLEOD of the Barony of Glasgow, who was the friend and confidant of Queen Victoria, once declared that he could sum up everything that religion meant for him in a single sentence. The sentence was this: "There is a Father in heaven who loves us, a Brother Saviour who died for us, a Spirit who helps us to be good, and a Home where we shall all meet at last." Truly a noble summary of a great soul's creed!

Suppose that to-day you were asked to give your faith in a sentence, could you do it? They once asked Denney that; and his answer was—"I believe in God through Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord and Saviour." That, he said, would cover everything. And again it was a noble answer. Could you do it—put your whole gospel into a dozen words? It is indeed a searching test; and every Christian, in this age of the clash of rival doctrines and philosophies of life, must feel acutely the challenge of the question to his own soul.

You who stand as Christ's representatives to-night, thank God if you can say that, amid much that is still dark and mysterious and beyond your grasp, there are some things at least of which in His mercy He had made you dead sure,

surer than of life itself, some few, deep, simple things which He has laid constringingly upon heart and conscience with the command, "There is your gospel; go out and herald that!"

And if you were to try to find a single sentence which would gather up into itself these central and decisive things by which you live, could any better words be fashioned than these of the seer of Revelation? "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

"*Unto Him that loved us.*" That is the foundation of everything. That is the rock-bottom of the universe. That is the conviction on which, like Browning's Festus, you can gamble with your soul. "God, Thou art Love! I build my faith on that."

I know there are other aspects of the gospel besides this. I know there is what St. Paul called "the terror of the Lord." I know there is what the writer to the Hebrews meant when he cried, "Our God is a consuming fire." I know that the sentimental religion which makes the righteous Father of Christ a mere principle of amiability and good-natured indulgence has no justification whatever, either in Scripture or in experience.

But I know also this—that any man who has once gazed into the eyes of Jesus is entitled to stand and cry to all the sons of men, even to the most sinful, shabby and wretched, "God loves you! God is reconciled to you! Underneath you are God's everlasting arms."

It is worth noticing that the Revised Version has turned the past tense into a present. "Unto Him that loveth us." That is the true translation. Not only at Bethlehem where He shared our human lot; not only in Galilee, where He laid His hands on lepers' sores, and bound up the broken-

hearted, and called the prodigals home; not only at Calvary, where His love lighted a beacon blaze which a thousand ages cannot extinguish—but to-day, and to-morrow, and for ever, "Unto Him that loveth us!" We know all the past tenses of the Christian religion—"born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and buried, the third day rose again from the dead"—we know all the past tenses: do we know the glorious present tenses of religion? Do we know the Christ who is out on the streets of the world to-night, seeking and finding the souls of men, the Christ who this very day has been drying the tears of the broken-hearted, and smoothing the pillow of the suffering, and driving out devils in the name of the Lord God Almighty—do we know Him? Unto Him that loveth us now—to Him whose love, though older than creation, is yet younger than this morning's dawn; to Him whose love is a perpetual unwearied intercession for our souls which will still be pleading for us on the very Day of Judgment; to Him who has your name written now across His heart, and will never in time or eternity let you go—to Him that loveth us be glory. That is the foundation of everything.

But now note the next thing. "Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood." For you see, that is love in action. That is love's most characteristic action.

There is a kind of love which never gets into action at all. Heine has described how once he stood before the great statue of the Venus of Milo, now in the Louvre, and gazed on that matchless perfection of grace and dignity and beauty. "But oh!" he cried, "what was it worth? For she had no arms, the goddess, no hands to reach out and help poor beaten souls like me!" But God's love in Christ has arms strong enough to lift the universe, and hands—pierced hands—gentler than a mother's when she tends her child. God's

love acts. "He loved us," says this man, "and washed us from our sins."

What else is all the world needing but just that? There is one stanza of Lucy Whitmell's *Christ in Flanders* that expresses it:

"Though we forgot You—You will not forget us—

We feel so sure that You will not forget us—

But stay with us until this dream is past.

And so we ask for courage, strength, and pardon—

Especially, I think, we ask for pardon—

And that You'll stand beside us to the last."

There speaks the voice of man's deepest need in every age. "Especially, I think, we ask for pardon." And so the proclamation of the Church down the centuries has been, in the haunting words of the negro spiritual, "free grace and dying love." Is there anything else worth preaching?

When St. Augustine's end was near, and his strength was fast ebbing away, he begged one of his friends and disciples to paint on the wall opposite his bed the words of the thirty-second Psalm: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." And the dying man lay there, gazing at the words, steadying his soul on them as the darkness gathered in—"Blessed the man who is forgiven!" Will there be anything else worth clinging to at last? To Him that loves us—and has loosed us from our sins!

Does some one say, following the prevalent fashion, "Sin? There is no such thing. Let us banish that stupid word from our vocabulary! Let us file its jagged edges away! Let us be finished with such antiquated notions"—does some one suggest that?

My friend, look at the world as it is to-day, and think again. Look at the international scene. If you do not like the word "sin," don't use it, get some other word. I care

not what you call it, nor what theories you have about its origin. The point is—the thing is there, tragically there, working against the living God—"the universal insanity," as Seneca called it.

But indeed, we do not need to look at the world; we have only to look at our own hearts—for we are here (as Charles Kingsley used to say to his people in the village church at Eversley) "to talk about what is really going on in your soul and mine." And when we think of all the ways in which we have blundered, or take our life and compare the might-have-been with the actuality, or hear across the clamour of our God-forgetting days the still small voice of Jesus, or walk the fields of Galilee where first we learnt what love and truth and purity could mean, or sit in some quiet upper room with Christ and feel His eyes upon our soul—does that not dissipate once and for all the illusion that there is nothing to be forgiven? In our hearts, we know this thing called sin is fact. We know what it means to face strong, masterful temptations, and we know what it means to be beaten. We know what it means—God pity us—to settle down after a time in dull apathy, fettered by the shackles of habit, soiled and shabby and feckless and resigned. And we know what it means, thank God, sometimes to grow dissatisfied with all that, angry at our own commonplaceness, and to cry "Oh God, to get out of all this, and to be free and strong and conquering and clean!"

Well, says the gospel, you can. "Loved us, and loosed us from our sins."

There was once in the city of Florence a massive, shapeless block of marble, which seemed fitted to be the raw material of some colossal statue. One sculptor after another tried his hand at it, without success. They cut and carved and hewed, till it seemed hopelessly disfigured. But then came Michelangelo's turn. He began by having a house

built right over the block of marble, and for long months he was shut up there with it, and none knew what he was doing. But at last there came a day when he flung open the door and told them to come in; and they looked, and there before their eyes was—not now a shapeless, meaningless block—but the magnificent statue of David, one of the glories of the world. So Christ takes lives defeated and disfigured, and refashions them into the very image of God. "To Him that loveth us—and loosed us from our sin."

No measuring-line has ever been invented that can fix the limits of that grace. I put it to you to-night: have you ever seen the sinner yet whom God would not save? Search the Bible and the literature of the world. Can you find anywhere the words: "I waited for the Lord, and He refused to hear my cry. I begged Him for His pardon, and He answered 'No, we must draw the line somewhere—forgiveness is not for you'"—can you find that anywhere? Turn to the Gospels. Do you remember the day when a poor creature came to Jesus, pathetic and broken and battered by the sins and sorrows of the years, crying, "Jesus, Master, hear me and heal me," and Jesus just shook His head sadly, and said, "My friend, I am sorry for you, very sorry, and I'd love to help you, but even I am powerless here"? Do you remember that—in the Gospels? Of course you don't! For it is not there. Thank God it is not there. It never happened. What you do find there is a grace without end or limit—an evangel that could say to the man at Bethesda who had been for thirty-eight years incurable, "Rise up and walk"—and to a poor wretch of a dying thief, on the very edge and rim of ruin, "Friend, it is to be Paradise to-day!"

Do you say, "Oh, but I have been defeated too often"? Then I say, "Christ died for the defeated. Do you say, 'But don't you see? Life has beaten me so utterly'? I say, Christ died for the beaten. Do you say, 'Oh, but you don't

understand! It is my character I am thinking of—it is fixed and hardened and bound and fettered as with chains"? I say, Christ died for the hardened. "He brake the age-bound chains of hell." To him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood—to Him be glory and dominion!

What next? When a man has been loved and loosed, what happens? "Unto Him that *made us kings unto God.*" Do you catch the significance of that? It means that when a man knows he is loved, something happens to him. There is a new light in his eyes, and a new rhythm in his march, and a new dignity and poise and settled peace in his whole bearing. He has his head up to life now. He is walking on a redeemed earth with God. "Thou hast made us kings," cry the saints. "I have a king's life with Christ," exclaimed Samuel Rutherford. Have we got that in our religion?

There was a day when Jesus, passing down the thronged streets of Jericho, chose Zacchæus—of all unlikely people—to be His host for the night; and the crowd, watching them walking there together, grew fiercely critical and resentful. "A strange prophet this," they muttered, "consorting with the riff-raff of the town! This finishes His reputation as far as we are concerned. Guest of Zacchæus!" Ah, but you should have seen Zacchæus in that hour, straightening himself up to his full total of inches, and flinging off the cringing serfdom of the years—the furtive, skulking look gone completely from his eyes, and a light upon his face that had never been there before. And why? Because one thought was beating in his brain and in his heart: "Christ Jesus is not ashamed of me! He is glad to walk with me. He has even called me a 'son of Abraham'!" And for the rest—what matter though the crowd were scoffing and vindictive? "They say. What say they? Let them

say!" The man lifted his head, and marched down the street like a king.

"All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God!"

He has made us kings.

Have we got that in our religion? The early Church had it. There was a second-century sceptic called Celsus who flung the vitriol of his sarcasm at the followers of the Nazarene. "Just look at them," he cried, "poor, pathetic conglomeration of slaves and artisans and illiterates and gaol-birds and nonentities—the offscourings of the world!" Yes, Celsus, poor and pathetic indeed—and yet, sons of God, every man of them, brothers of the Christ; and therefore able to confront life with level eyes, and to stand before governors and rulers unashamed! He has made us kings.

There is a kind of modern religion which has lost that royal note completely. It is excessively apologetic. It does not proclaim, it ventures to suggest. It says, "If you will allow me to say so, it is possible—it is just possible—that we may be sons of God." Oh, for the apostolic spirit! If God be for us—God as Christ has revealed Him—who can be against us? If the everlasting Father believes in us, who has any power to hurt us? If Christ, knowing us exactly as we are, and everything that has ever happened in our life, can and does most truly love us, who or what can daunt us? Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and lift high the banner of the Lord.

Now there is just one thing more in this great summary of religion by the seer of Revelation. "Loved us—loosed us—made us kings—and made us *priests to God*." That means

direct access to God in prayer. It means that you, to-night, can look God full in the face for yourself. And that, too, is Jesus' gift.

Does some one say—"Oh, prayer! That is just the old advice—not much help in that, prayer does not get things done"? My friend, do you think that all the saints of all the ages have been fools? Was Christ, climbing to the mountain-top or kneeling in Gethsemane, deluded? Does the man who says there is no such thing as an answer to prayer know better than Jesus? Ah, how the praying Christ rebukes our prayerlessness! "Ye people," cries the psalmist, "pour out your heart before Him!"

Every soul, through Christ, has the right of access. In the old days it was different. High on the rock of Jerusalem stood the Temple; and in the Temple there was one barrier after another to keep men back from the shrine. "No thoroughfare to God" was the rule, except for the high priest, who only once a year might enter. And before the holiest place of all there hung the veil, the great massive curtain of blue and scarlet and purple; and if any seeking soul had dared to lay a hand upon the veil, "In the name of God, stand back!" would have been the cry, "Back, man, for your life!" But one day Jesus died; and in the very moment of His death, says the evangelist, something happened in that Temple on the hill. There was a sudden loud rending sound. And the terrified priests ran in, and looked, and the veil was hanging torn from top to bottom, like a poor, worthless rag—as though God Himself had said, "Let them all come! Fling wide the gates of access, and let Me gather them home to My heart." "He hath made us"—and that means you and me—"priests to God."

Don't patch up that torn veil! Don't think there is need for some one to go knocking at heaven's back-doors when God's wandered sons come home! "He arose, and came

of that tribulation, and sitting on the throne of eternity. I hear the song of the serried ranks of the redeemed, 'Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all.' Unto Him it is coming—the glory and the dominion !”

Is that just a dream ? A pious, pathetic hope ? On the contrary. It is sure as God Himself. The only question is, Will you and I have a share in it when it comes ?

Let us dedicate ourselves without delay to Christ the King. Every day of our life, let us renew and reaffirm the dedication. And then, when “the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work done,” yonder in Immanuel's land we shall see Him face to face, the King in His beauty ; and the cry of our adoring hearts will be, “Blessed Jesus, Lord and Redeemer of men—the half was never told !”

THE END

250 THE GATES OF NEW LIFE

to his Father.” It is written on the tittle-deeds of Christianity in the very blood of Jesus, that that right of way is open. Don't let anything or any one hold you back ! Even if your own sins try to hold you back, don't allow it. Be like John Newton, the hymn-writer :

“I may my fierce accuser face,
And tell him Thou hast died.”

Fling that challenge at the sour, snarling faces of those sins—
“Christ has died ! Therefore, stand out of the way, you, for God has bidden me come.”

“Just as I am—Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down.”

He hath made us priests to God.

And so this man in Revelation sums it all up at last, and gathers it into one great, glowing doxology. “Unto Him who has done all that—loved us and loosed us and made us kings and priests—*unto Him be glory and dominion for ever.*”

Here are we to-night, standing in the blood-bought succession of the man who wrote these words, and sharing the same great experience : are we giving Christ the glory ? “Ah, Mr. Spurgeon,” said an old woman whom the great preacher was visiting, “if Jesus Christ does save me, He shall never hear the last of it !” Can we understand that ? Do we, like Charles Wesley, ever stand “lost in wonder, love, and praise” ? Are we giving our Lord the glory ?

“Unto Him,” cries the seer, “be glory and dominion.” “I see a day coming,” he seems to say, “when all the ends of the earth will come crowding in to Christ's allegiance. I see Jesus, once despised and rejected, once savagely criticized and hated with malignity, once crucified on the battle-fields of Europe, Africa, and Asia, I see Him coming up out