

# THE FULNESS OF TIME AND OTHER STUDIES IN THEOLOGY

by Joseph Conn

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*Conn's collection of theological studies centered on the concept of the fullness of time in God's redemptive purposes, examining key doctrinal themes in their biblical and historical context.*

13 Chapters

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## 01 - Chapter 01

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I. THE PERSONALITY OF GOD. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want (Psalms 23:1).

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him (Psalms 103:13).

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence (Psalms 139:7). THE distinguishing characteristic of the Religion of the Israelites is well known to every reader of the Old Testament. While the nations that surrounded them were given up to Polytheism and Idolatry, the Israelites believed in one only living and true God: Creator and director of all things:

One who, though transcending, was yet immanent in the world: a Personal and Ethical Being who stood in moral relationship with man.

How exalted this belief appears to be when it is compared with the beliefs that prevailed in those early times! And how true it seems when con-trasted with some of the most modern interpretations of our religious impressions! Does a man believe in more Gods than one?

Then his belief is in direct conflict with that faith in the unity of nature which every increase in scientific knowledge helps to strengthen. Does any one assert that the universe is simply a gigantic piece of mechanism constructed and set agoing by one who has vanished from the scene of his labours and has gone we know not whither?

Such a belief will, of course, destroy religion, but it will do more. It will put an end to all ethics, to all our ideals, and to all our efforts to realise them. "It will reduce" says Mr. B. F. C. Costelloe "consciousness to a mockery, spirituality to a dream, and love to a chemical attraction: and after all it will have explained nothing, but have rendered everything insoluble." Does a man believe in an Impersonal God, "a stream of tendency which makes for righteousness"?

Then the question arises, How can you have righteous-ness without right thinking and conscientious doing? And how can you have these apart from a Person?

Moreover, a belief of this kind is likely to carry a man further than he may be inclined to go. A stream must flow in its appointed channel, and it cannot rise higher than the source from which it comes. A stream must have its origin in the hills of God, and find its replenishment in the rains that fall from heaven. Does a man believe that this divinely fair and cunningly ordered universe owes its origin to accident and its government to chance? Then he believes in a miracle infinitely greater than any recorded in the word of God. " Was there " asks Lord Kelvin " anything so absurd as to believe that a number of atoms by falling together of their own accord, could make a sprig of moss, a microbe, a living animal?

People thought that given millions of years these might come to pass, but they could not think that a million of millions of millions of years could give them unaided a beautiful world like ours...

Forty years ago I asked Liebig, walking somewhere in the country, if he believed that the grass and flowers which we saw around us grew by mere chemical forces? He answered, No; no more

than I could believe that a book of botany describing them could grow by mere chemical forces.”

Some scientific men, it is true, do not like to be asked to take their choice in what seems an inevitable alternative belief in a creative and directive Power, or belief in a fortuitous concourse of atoms. They prefer to think of the world as gradually evolved by eternal laws out of primeval atoms, elements, matter. But evolution, we must carefully remember, is not, of necessity, such a godless creed as many have imagined it to be. When the famous French mathematician Laplace went to Napoleon to beg him to accept a copy of his great work, the *Mecanique Celeste*, Napoleon said to him, “ Mons. Laplace, they tell me you have written this large book on the system of the universe and have never even mentioned its Creator.” Laplace, though time-serving as a politician, was as conscientious as a martyr in reference to his philosophy, and drawing himself up he bluntly replied, “ I had no need of that hypothesis.” Napoleon, greatly amused, related the incident to the celebrated mathematician Lagrange, who exclaimed, “ Ah, that is a beautiful hypothesis; it explains so many things.” How different Laplace’s conduct was from that of Sir Isaac Newton, who closed the third book of his *Principia* with a noble passage of ascription to “ the Most High God, the Eternal, the Infinite, the Omnipotent, and Omniscient, who ruleth all things not as a mere spirit of the Universe, but as the Lord and Master of all, whose name is the Lord God Almighty.”<sup>1</sup> There was an excuse for Laplace. He dealt with the universe as a mathematical problem in dynamics. To him the universe was a machine, and the things he had to discuss were blind forces which could be measured, and dead matter with the characteristics of mass, weight, rigidity. But how different all things are to the modern evolutionist! Matter to him is not dead and unproductive, but possessed of “ the promise and the potency” of all things. Atoms to him are not lifeless but animated, endowed with the properties of attraction and repulsion, and possessed of such a resemblance to life, feeling, thought, that pleasure and pain and love and hate may almost be predicated of them. To him chemical elements are no longer simple elements, but resolvable into simpler forms of matter, which in turn may be refined away altogether into ethereal vibrations or electrical energy; so that atoms of matter have come to “ be thought of by some as concentrated portions of electricity. To the man of science in our day there is no such thing as empty space. To him the whole of space, so far as it is not occupied by ponderable matter, is filled with a continuous ultra-gaseous substance called ether a substance which is so light and subtle that it cannot be weighed, if indeed it has any weight a substance which is for ever in motion, and to whose vibrations we are indebted for light, radiant heat, magnetism and electricity. The man who goes to the root of things, therefore, if he has eyes to see, may well find himself at every step face to face not merely with a creative, but also with an indwelling and directive Power: for how can “ purposive contrivance “ be produced by purely mechanical processes without design? We are not surprised, therefore, when we discover that even such a man as Haeckel sees God everywhere and recognises the Divine Spirit in all things, and is able to quote with approval the words of Giordano Bruno, “ There is one spirit in all things, and no body is so small that it does not contain a part of the divine substance whereby it is animated.” And so the advance of science does not necessarily tend to banish God from the Universe. On the contrary it enables us to emphasise more strongly than we have hitherto done the great fact of the divine Immanence, for it reveals God as a permanent resident in the world, and not as a mere occasional visitor coming now and again to supplement or amend His original creation by external and arbitrary interferences. If law implies Lawmaker, and if “ the reign of law “ be regarded as another name for the abiding Presence of a great sustaining and directing Power, it is difficult for us to find fault with Dr. Strong, Dean of Christ

Church, when he defines evolution as “ an organic teleological process, a process guided by rational purpose at every step, determined in every detail by the consciousness of an end in view.” If all things are for ever changing, if the world is only in the process of being made, if the universe is only becoming what it will one day be, then the question arises, what is the nature of the change that is thus taking place? If it is not a mere drift or aimless clash of elements producing chance products to be devoured by chaos, but an evolution or process evolving higher and higher forms, then there is order underlying the change, and purpose behind the order with a guiding hand direct-ing things towards the predestined end. To some men in our day the existence of God would almost seem to be a luminous self-evident fact. They need no argument to convince them, for their spiritual vision is such that they can say:

“ Where'er I look abroad, I see the living form and face of God.” To others, God is a spiritual experience an ex-perience which, they think, can only be theirs because God makes His presence felt in their souls. God is immanent, they say, in man's rational, moral, and spiritual nature, and influences that side of our nature where the finite being blends with the Universal Being: and so our best knowledge of God is an immediate consciousness of God. “ The feeling of God within us is, for us at least who feel, the certified fact that God is.”, But man is essentially a rational being, and it is only by slow and laboured steps that many men rise from the seen to the unseen, from nature up to nature's God. Nevertheless, by men and women of this kind, if they are earnest in their search, there are always to be found in reason and in the nature of things sure grounds for the belief in God as a personal and moral Being. The ever-changing phenomena in a universe, which nevertheless does not pass away, constrain us to think of and believe in an unchanging reality which underlies all things. The power, the life, the fruitfulness of nature seem to speak of an abiding presence immanent in nature. Matter never comes before us as matter and nothing else. When we look at matter it is clearly seen to be matter in motion, and so impelled by some power: or matter at rest, and so acted upon by equal and opposing forces: or matter animated by life and characterised by growth, as we have it in plants and trees: or matter remarkable for its form and colour, and thus distinguished for its beauty like the flower: or matter endowed with sensation, as we have it in the animal: or matter inhabited by mind and guided and directed by reason and conscience, as we have it in man. And so the material universe inevitably leads us beyond itself to the Power the Presence which is within, behind, and above nature.

“ Yes, write it in the rock Saint Bernard said Grave it on brass with adamantine pen:

'Tis God Himself becomes apparent, when God's wisdom and God's goodness are display, For God of these His attributes is made.” And when reasoning from the works of God to Him whose works they are, we must not forget that man is part of the universe whose existence has to be accounted for. Man is the flower and crown of creation, but he belongs to it. And when we dream of explaining the universe by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, we must think of man with his reason, conscience, free-will; with his sympathies, affections, unselfish acts, self-denying deeds; with his efforts for the welfare and his struggles for the existence of others.

If all things owe their existence to the blind operation of mechanical laws how are we to account for the free acts of man? We may, of course, say that human freedom is not so unqualified a thing as many imagine it to be. But we know that man is responsible only to the extent to which he is free, and we all feel that there is much, very much indeed, in our lives for which we are

responsible. And so every action of human free will is a miracle to physical and chemical and mathematical science. And how are we to account for the “moral imperative” as it is felt by the human conscience? The “I ought” that is forever welling up from the depths of our being is a strange fact. It speaks to us not in the way of information, but commandment.

It tells us that we are under the obligation of a moral law which we did not make, but which we must obey a moral law which we are constrained to think of as emanating from a personal author. And so it introduces us to another mind, before which we bow in instinctive homage a mind stored with the same moral order as our own, if not indeed the source of that order in ourselves. The power which made the world and all things has bestowed on man that moral consciousness which condemns what is evil, approves what is good, and urges us on in the path of purity and holiness. And so this moral consciousness in man is it not a suggestion of moral consciousness without? a proof in fact that God is a moral Being? for man's moral consciousness is God's voice in man. When we think of these things after this fashion, we can with calmness and confidence turn our faces backward towards the beginning of the universe, and ask ourselves the questions, Is Spirit self-existent and eternal? or Is it a function of matter? Is matter self-existent and eternal? or Has matter been brought into existence by Spirit? In the human personality in which alone we can find an analogy imperfect and inadequate doubt-less to the Divine Personality, spirit and matter are always found together. And spirit is here so closely connected with matter, and apparently so dependent upon it, that it is difficult for us to think of the spirit of man as existing apart from the material body. But whatever may be the origin of the spirit in man, and however unimportant it may seem to be when we are in infancy, there can be no doubt that the spirit gradually asserts itself, until it occupies a position that is significant in the extreme. The matter of our bodies is forever changing, but our spirit remains one and the same, and throughout the whole of its experience it is conscious of its identity. Our bodies are acted upon and shaped by what is external to them, but our spirits determine themselves from within, and without compulsion elect what they are going to do and what they are going to be. It is the spirit that thinks, wills, loves, distinguishes between good and evil, chooses its own end. And the transcendent importance of our spiritual nature is even more clearly seen when we notice that while spirit can be of no use to matter, matter is of “incessant and inevitable use to spirit.” Except when we are asleep, the spirit never ceases to use the eyes, the ears, the mouth, the hands, or the feet. So thoroughly indeed in every way does the unconscious matter of our bodies not to speak of the matter that is outside us serve the purposes and minister to the needs of our self-conscious, self-determined spirits, that it is difficult for us to keep from believing that it exists to serve the purposes of spirit.

It may not be easy for us to think of spirit as existing and acting without matter: but it is impossible for us to think of matter as existing and acting without spirit. It may be difficult to think of matter as owing its existence to spirit, but it is impossible for us to think of spirit as an evolution from matter. For evolution does not create. It can only bring forth as a result what has been in some way present in the process. A process of evolution, therefore, which ends in spirit must have had spirit in it from the beginning. When we think of God as the great first cause of all things, we do not require to think of Him as existing by Himself for an eternity before resolving to create the world. Neither do we require to restrict His creative functions to a single act to imagine Him creating the substance of the world in a moment, endowing it with the faculty of the most extensive evolution, and then troubling Him-self no further about it.

Doubtless it is difficult for us to picture to our-selves how the eternal purpose did actually realise itself in time. But the difficulty seems to be lessened when we think of God not as mere arbitrary power, but as intelligence, love, wisdom, holiness; not as a mere abstract self-identical unity, but as a self-revealing spirit whose very nature makes it necessary for Him to reveal Himself in order to realise the glory and blessedness which are possible for Him. When we think of God after this fashion it is not unreasonable to expect that He should eternally manifest His inner nature in “ an infinite cosmos of inter-related physical and psychical agencies.”

Modern science knows nothing of a beginning. As to the origin of matter and life it can, apart from inference and speculation, neither affirm nor deny creative power.

All things in this world are for ever changing: but most scientific men in these days believe in what has been called the law of substance, which embraces the chemical law of the conservation of matter as well as the physical law of the conservation of energy. The law of the conservation of energy asserts that the sum of force which is at work in infinite space is unchangeable, however many transformations its constituent parts may undergo. The law of the persistence or indestructibility of matter declares that the sum of matter which fills infinite space is ever the same, however much its component parts may change their shape or nature. But even the most thorough-going believers in the conservation of matter and energy may not be so far removed as they imagine from a legitimate Christian belief on the subject of the origin of things, for according to this law a body has merely changed its form when it seems to have disappeared, and it is merely a question of change of form in cases where a new body seems to have been produced. But all scientific men admit that the physical universe as it now exists is greatly different from what it must have been in the dim and distant past, while the great majority of them maintain that the matter of the universe, which is now so solid, is likely to have been, at successive periods as we go backward, in a state which we may justly characterise as viscous, fluid, gaseous, etheric, and so practically invisible to such eyes as ours. There is nothing, therefore, absurd in the belief that the visible universe in which God now dwells, and through which He reveals Himself unto the children of men, may have been at one time the invisible vesture of the Great Unseen. And when scientific belief maintains that the visible universe came forth from the unseen, it is not out of harmony with Christian faith, which understands ‘ that the worlds were made by the word of God: so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.’ Moreover, when scientific men declare that the universe, which began in time, may in time come to an end, they are in accord with St. Paul and St. Peter, who say: ‘ The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.’ ‘ The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.’ With regard to the beginning of the universe, of which we can know so little, one remark may safely be made.

If the present visible universe came forth from the invisible if the unseen universe gave birth to the seen then the force which brought about the change must have had its origin in will force, which is the product of mind; for, so far as we know anything on the subject, it is spirit alone that is self-determined and able to originate change without compulsion from without.

Whatever else the universe is, it is a universe of changes; of effects produced by causes which are themselves effects. And if we are not to go back-ward for ever from physical cause to physical

cause, we must come at last to spirit: for physical causes are not in the true sense causes at all. They are simply the antecedents or conditions which transmit causation which they themselves cannot originate.

It is spirit alone that is self-conscious and self-determined, and able out of its own inner nature to originate change. Spirit must, therefore, have existed before the time when that process of development was set agoing which has resulted in our present physical universe. Before any given point of time, before the happening of any event or change, God was, God must have been. When we remember this, we see how self-evidently truthful is the great assertion made in the opening words of Genesis, ' In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' The relation of the Divine Personality to the human is an extremely interesting but profoundly difficult subject. In every act of conscience we distinguish between what is and what ought to be, between the promptings of our inclinations and passions and the voice of the moral consciousness which seems to be of us, but which we recognise to be over us, and which, somehow or other, we are constrained to think of as the voice of God within us. In this way the finite self awakes to find over against its own self " an infinite self making its presence felt by waves of emotion, new and most wonderful." The human soul is neither self-derived nor self-subsisting, but, however depend-ent upon God we may feel ourselves to be, we are never so carried away by the thought, " God is all," that we are unable to distinguish between ourselves and Him who is all in all. Our power to resist the moral order of the universe, the existence of sin and our sense of responsibility, remind us that we have an individuality and a freedom which are not illusory, and that the human spirit cannot be regarded as " a mere mode of the universal spirit." The human personality is a unity, not simple and undifferentiated, however, but highly complex, made up of many parts, faculties, functions which act and react on each other and which are necessary to the existence of each other and of the whole. May it not, indeed, be asserted that every person is a trinity in unity? Are not body, soul, and spirit a trinity in unity? Does not a man think and feel and will with three different sides of his one nature? We are all well-acquainted with the conscious self, but have we not discovered in these later days the importance of the sub-conscious self, and are we not greatly interested in the mutual relations of these two parts of our personality?

" A person," says Mr. Illingworth, " is a subject who can become an object to himself, and the relation of these two terms is necessarily a third term. I cannot think or desire or will without an object which is either simply myself or something associated with myself or dissociated from myself considered as an object, in either case involving my objectivity to myself... And I cannot think of the world I live in without thinking of it negatively as outside me, or positively as including me, in either case related to myself." And how can an individual realise his personality apart from association with others? Separated from others wholly and from the first, our moral as well as our intellectual capacities would be undeveloped, and we would remain strangers to those deeds of love and self-sacrifice which enable us to emerge from the narrow and dead life of self-centred individuality, and to become partakers in a wider and fuller life which ennobles and en-riches. But is not the first stage in our association with others to be found in the family which is the unit of society? And does not the family imply the existence of father, mother, child? And is it not, therefore, a trinity in unity? After the same fashion, Is it not impossible for us to think of God as a self-identical unity who is shut up for ever in blank potentiality of Being?

God is love, we say. But love is social in its character, and where could God's love from the first find satisfaction save within the unity of the Godhead? And how could God's greatness be realised and His blessedness perfected apart from the wonderful visible universe which reflects His glory, and the children of men who were made in His image and whose very fall has been the occasion for a signal manifestation of the Divine compassion and mercy? When we think of these things after this manner we become less inclined than, perhaps, formerly we were to find fault with the Christian doctrine with regard to God that doctrine which represents God not as a self-identical unity, but as a self-revealing Spirit; a Trinity in unity who, in perfect love, and for the realisation of their glory and blessedness, go forth from out themselves " to create, to sustain, to redeem, to sanctify, to bless."

## 02 - Chapter 02

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### II. THE WORLD AND THE LIFE OF MAN:

HOW THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITERS LOOKED AT THEM. The Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of hills is his also... O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand (Psalms 95:3).

“ CONDUCT,” says Matthew Arnold, “ is three-fourths of life.” With at least equal truth it is possible for us to assert that the standpoint from which the Old Testament writers looked at things was three-fourths of their inspiration. The best and clearest thinkers in Israel were as far as possible from being materialists or poly-theists. They were convinced that matter was neither the only nor the most important thing in the universe. Behind matter and force they discovered a mysterious agency a Presence a Person of whose existence they were as sure as they could be of anything that is to be seen by the outward eye. In short, they perceived and realised the existence and character of the one only living and true God in a way that was quite unique. And their exalted thoughts about God naturally determined their method of looking at the world and at the life of man. They never dreamt of a religion without God, or of a philosophy of human life which did not take into account the universe that is around us, and of which we form a part the God who has created all things, and in whom we live and move and have our being.

“ Know well thyself, presume not God to scan, The proper study of mankind is man.” The wisest and best Israelites would have rejected the pre-supposition that underlies such words as these, for to them God was knowable and, to a certain extent at least, known, and they clearly perceived that we could not know ourselves well and truly without knowing something at least about the universe and the Creator of it the Eternal not-ourselves that makes for righteous-ness. And so they thought of all things in their relation to God. ' In the beginning God ' these opening words of Genesis give us the key-note not merely to the story of creation, but also to the whole of the Bible.

Moreover, in consequence of their clear vision of God the sacred writers are always on the out-look for, and they are better able than others are to recognise, indications of God's presence in the world of men. They saw God's hand in the rise and fall of nations, and history was to them the unfolding of His purpose. The Bible, consequently, was not meant to give us facts of history merely. Even the historical portions were not written solely with the intention of relating to the Jewish people the important incidents and events in their national history.

They were written that all of us might know something of the way in which God deals on the whole with nations, and with individual men and women in this world. And the prophetic Books of Scripture have a moral and spiritual meaning and purpose which can-not be overlooked. It is a mistake to think of pro-hecy as history written beforehand, or to believe that the Prophets were merely foretellers of future events. The Prophets were profoundly interested in the secular welfare of their people, and their counsels and warnings were founded on a true knowledge of what was

taking place around them, and on a right understanding of the natural tendency or drift of affairs. But they were, above all things, preachers of moral and religious truth. Owing to their clear spiritual vision they could penetrate more deeply beneath the surface and could see more clearly than others into the heart of things; and so they could interpret more truly than others what God was doing and commanding in their own age, and they were better able than others to foretell what, in judgment and redemptive mercy, God meant to do and must do in the divine event. And this reminds us of the fact that the Books of Scripture were written with a special purpose as well as from a special point of view. From first to last their constant purpose is that of leading men to God, whose nature and character they ever more and more clearly reveal. No writers see so clearly or realise so keenly the great, the awful difference between right and wrong, good and evil, righteousness and sin. They have an enthusiasm for righteousness, for in their eyes it is the doing of that which is pleasing in the sight of Him whose name is Holy, whose power is irresistible, and who is for ever blessing those who fear and serve Him. And no writers have so great a horror at sin, for it is rebellion against God the doing of that which is diametrically opposed to the will of Him who hateth evil and whose righteous judgments are for ever going forth against all workers of iniquity. And no writers are so terribly alive to the fact of sin's existence. They see it where ordinary eyes are unable to discern it. They see it tainting almost every action of the great majority of men and women. They see it at the centre of our being poisoning the springs of life. And so they are forever warning men and women against sin, forever exhorting us to do that which is pleasing in the sight of God. ' Be sure your sin will find you out.' ' Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.' ' Ye that love the Lord hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints: he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.'

How or when some of the apparently earlier Books of the Old Testament assumed exactly their present form, how or when the Israelites came to believe that their national Jehovah was the righteous Ruler of all nations, and of the whole universe, we need not for our present purpose inquire. Doubtless it was only gradually, and as they were taught by men peculiarly susceptible to moral and religious truth, and as they were disciplined by the stern logic of events, that even the most faithful reached the pure and exalted conception of God and our personal responsibility to Him which is to be found in the Prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. But " for the root idea from which the perfect flower grew " we may have to go back to a very much earlier period in Jewish history. " Israel on the way to exile is on the way to become Israel after the Spirit." These words are true, but it is possible to make too much of the truth which they contain. The exile purified, broadened, and en-nobled Israel's thoughts of God, but did the exile originate Israel's faith in God?

Whatever we may think on this subject one thing is certain. When the Israelites did believe in one God who is Lord of all, and when they did realise in thought the full significance of what they believed, a great revolution must necessarily have been effected in their thoughts, beliefs, convictions with regard to the world and to the life of man.

We are all aware of the great change in men's views brought about by the acceptance of the Copernican in place of the older astronomy which regarded the earth as the centre of our system, while the sun, moon, and stars were thought of as mere ornaments of our firmament or light-givers to the earth. How changed men's views of things became when they realised the truth that the sun is the centre of our system and that the earth is merely a planet revolving round the sun. When this

great fact was brought home to the minds of men astronomers had to recast their science, whilst multi-tudes who were not astronomers had to alter radically many of the opinions which they had held tenaciously for years. And yet the revolution brought about by the Copernican system of astronomy is as nothing when compared with the revolution effected in the thoughts and lives of men when they began to look at the world and human life with the eyes of the sacred writers, for then the truth was borne in upon them that the things which are unseen are eternal, that the life is more than meat and the body than raiment, and that righteousness, truth, and goodness are infinitely more important than those things towards which the hearts of the children of men are usually so strongly inclined. There is no comparison, from the point of view of religion, between the position of the man who worships idols and whose religion consists in rites of an absurd or debasing kind, and that of the man who realises the great-ness and the holiness of God, and who, in answer to the question, ' Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? ' is able to say, ' 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 '; ' Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' And are not men greatly strengthened for the doing of what they know to be their duty, and is not their sense of the importance of right doing intensified and deepened, their perception of what is right for them clarified and quickened, when they pass from the point of view of morality to that of religion and look at things from the theological standpoint of the Jews of old? It may be true that the earliest religions do not seem to stand in a close relation to morality. The mighty tyrants worshipped by men in ancient times were often thought of as appeased, not by the moral actions and fair lives of men, but by gifts, offerings, sacri-fices, deeds which might be of an illegitimate or immoral kind.

It may be true that morality is not dependent on Theology, and even when we do not admit that conscience is the product of social opinion and custom, we may believe that moral ideas have arisen and been developed in the social life of man, and have only afterwards been set up in connection with the gods. But if higher conceptions of duty have led men to nobler thoughts of God, we must not forget that worthy religious beliefs have done much to advance the ethical ideas of men, and have helped them to live more consistently in harmony with them.

It is impossible to read the Old Testament with-out perceiving that with the Israelites morality was closely connected with religious belief. And because the God in whom they believed was a moral deity, this close connection of religion and morality was a great gain to them.

How could such a people in such circumstances as those in which they often found themselves have retained their faith in moral truth if it had been regarded as having no connection with religious belief? Must there not have been to them a marvellous reinforcement in hope, confidence, and strength when as their thoughts came back, so to speak, from heaven to earth they felt themselves possessed of the unwavering conviction that when they were doing their duty they were doing what God wished them to do: that when they were obeying the dictates of conscience they were obey-ing the voice of God within them: and that when they were living in harmony with the moral law, which is in us and of us and yet over us, they were in league with Him who is from everlasting to ever-lasting, and whose plans and purposes cannot fail? And what a blessed experience must have been vouchsafed unto the select few who, in virtue of their true conception of God, had at least a glimpse of the meaning of " the calling of Israel " ! For when other

Jews were wrapped up in a selfish exclusive-ness and puffed up by the narrow belief that the chosen people were the favourites of Heaven and destined to be the only recipients of that great salvation which would yet be forthcoming from the Lord, they were able to rejoice in the thought that Israel was the servant of Jehovah and elect for the sake of mankind the nation through whom other nations were to receive ' the light ' and the blessings which come from a knowledge of the true God the nation which, though punished, afflicted, purged, chastened, purified, was yet to be the means by which other nations would share in a salvation which, because needed by all, was meant for all.

## 03 - Chapter 03

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III. FAITH IN GOD AT THE ROOT OF JEWISH HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS. Where is thy zeal and thy strength,... are they restrained? (Isaiah 63:15).

Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down (Isaiah 64:1). THE same facts often make different impressions upon, or suggest different inferences to, different people.

One man looking over the pages of history sees nothing therein but isolated events of more or less interest and importance, while to another they contain a record of God's way with man. One man, as he scans the face of nature, sees nothing but particles of matter and thinks of nothing but blind force and mechanical laws, but another sees God everywhere and looks upon nature as God clothed in material dress that thus He may appeal through our senses to our souls. And it was even so with the people of old. When they looked at nature and at human life, some saw things which others did not see and realised the meaning and significance of things on which others put little or no stress. What we may call the prior spiritual convictions of men were different, and so they interpreted what was before them in different ways.

Take, for example, the attitude of men and women towards the sterner and more sorrowful facts of life.

Those who were unspiritual and unbelieving were confirmed in their unbelief by what they saw. How can there be a righteous God, they asked, when the inequalities of life are so great and when there is so much sin and sorrow in the world? How can a righteous God bear so long with the sins of wicked men? How can a just God permit so many and so great inequalities and injustices to exist in human life? And so they said there is no God, and if there be He has forsaken the earth and cares not at all for us miserable men. But the prior spiritual convictions of pious and enlightened Jews would never, for more than a moment, tolerate such inferences and conclusions from even the saddest of facts. To them God, though invisible to the bodily eye, was yet the most real and powerful fact in all the universe of being, and the sternest and most perplexing experiences in life were not able to make them give up their faith in God. There might be, there were, things in human life which perplexed them, and which they could not reconcile with the existence of God: but God, they felt sure, was on His throne over-ruling all things, and they were convinced that He would yet make light to arise in the darkness, so that men might clearly see Him energising wonderfully, and causing all things to work together for good to them that loved Him. The Israelites had been long in Egypt, and we may be quite certain that in many ways they owed much to a people who for hundreds, if not for thousands, of years before the exodus were far advanced in learning, in art, in civilisation. The Jews of St. Stephen's time meant more than some of us are inclined to think when they said that Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.

Nevertheless there was one all-important matter in regard to which Moses, after the example of Abraham, wished his people and himself to be clearly marked off from those among whom they

dwelt. A few of the Egyptians may have been possessed of a worthy conception of God, but in the religion of the people there were gods many and idols innumerable, with customs and practices of an absurd and degrading kind; and from all these Moses naturally wished his people to be free.

Moreover, while the Egyptians believed in a future life and in a judgment after death, their belief was so darkened by baleful superstitions and doleful legends that the future, with its sombre gloom, overshadowed for them the immediate practical duties of the present. Instead of being to them an inspiration and a help, their belief in a future life was a night-mare which robbed them of their strength.

Possibly it was because Moses clearly perceived the hurtful character of the Egyptian belief in a future life that he was divinely led towards that belief which he tried to impress upon his people belief in an ever-present God, governing and guiding now, rewarding the righteous, pardoning the peni-tent, and punishing the guilty. And it may have been because Moses believed his people to be specially blessed of Him whose power and good-ness they recognised, and whose will they obeyed a divine society certain to be supported by an extraordinary Providence that in the earlier books of the Bible so little stress is laid upon the doctrine of a future life that some have been inclined to wonder whether, at first, the children of Israel were even so much as acquainted with it.

Now it is not difficult to see that when believing as Moses had taught them the children of Israel were not destitute of a reason for the faith that was in them a reason vaguely felt if not always clearly seen.

For, after all, it is man's inhumanity to man that causes such countless thousands to mourn; and why should we blame God for the evil done by man?

There is one thing in the universe which God did not create, and that is sin, whose evil and hurtful consequences to the sinner as well as to others are more or less apparent unto all. Sin owes its origin to man, who is a Self, a Personality, endowed with the gift of freedom and self-determination, without which a moral life is impossible, and who can, and only too often does, introduce disorder, lawlessness, rebellion into the world by ignoring his true place in the universe of being, and putting his own will in the place of the will of Him who is, and ought to be recognised as, supreme. But when we overlook what evil man hath done to himself and to his brother man by his sin, and think only of our relationship to Him who is in-visible, we cannot fail to perceive the abiding good-ness of the Lord. Is not our existence a thing for which we ought to be thankful? Is it not a glorious thing that God hath prepared for us a habitation in this wonderful universe? that we are privileged to look abroad upon the marvels and beauties of earth and sky and sea, to experience the pleasurable consciousness of continued life and activity, and to know that our every blessing comes down to us from Him who causeth His sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust? In the eyes of the Jews material possessions bulked very largely, and it was difficult for them to believe that a man was blessed of God if he was not successful, rich, and honoured. And was there not an element of truth at the root of such a belief?

Even in a disordered state, where unjust laws pre-vailed, were not God-fearing, conscientious, honest, thrifty, hard-working men and women as likely as any others to secure a competent portion of the good things of this life? And even in such a state, when we look long enough at human life,

do we not often see good men come at last to their own, while mischief, sorrow, and disaster sooner or later follow in the train of godlessness, vice, knavery, and pro-fligacy? 'Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him; but it shall not be well with the wicked.' ' I have seen the wicked in great power and spread-ing himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.'

Moreover, however materialistic the Jews might be in their ideas with regard to prosperity it did not require a very pious Jew to see that material blessings were not the only good things of which a man could be possessed. Were not they who trusted in the Lord and who strove at all costs to do what they believed to be His will, possessed, as a rule, of an inward satisfaction, a peace of mind, a strength, a hope, a confidence which were altogether wanting in the case of those who were unbelieving, faithless, sinful? And was there not a restlessness, a dissatis-faction with self, a wretchedness, a misery in the hearts and lives of the godless, the unbelieving, the careless, the sinful, which even the greatest material prosperity was not able to remove or undo?

' Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly... but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' ' Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.' At the same time we must carefully remember that the question as to the inequalities and injustices in human life did not come before the minds of the children of Israel in the way in which it presents itself to us. For with the Israelites the great thing was not the individual, but the family, the tribe, and, above all, the nation in which all property and power were centred and which assigned to the individual the status, the power, the authority which he possessed. And so in their eyes there was nothing very irrational in the idea that God should punish the community for the sake of the individual, or that the father's virtues and vices should be visited on the children or the children's children.

They did not, therefore, when they attempted to justify the way of God with man, feel any great need of the doctrine of a future life, more especially as that life was for long only too often thought of as a life of inactivity, dulness, death the continued existence of pithless shades in a land of powerless-ness and forgetful ness.

Even towards the close of the kingdom of Judah, when, in order to undo the evils of a fatalism that was paralysing the efforts of the people and driving them to despair, the Prophets had to assert the worth and emphasise the responsibility of the indi-vidual, they did not summon to their aid the doctrine of a future life, for they still believed in the old doctrine which asserted that, all things con-sidered, the individual's experiences were in keeping with his deserts. But owing to the circumstances in which they found themselves they had to restate the doctrine, calling attention to and strongly emphasising the sin fulness of those who suffer the iniquity of those who are afflicted of the Lord. ' In those days,' says Jeremiah, ' they shall say no more the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grapes his teeth shall be set on edge.' ' The soul that sinneth,' says Ezekiel, ' it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of

the wicked shall be upon him.'

Jeremiah and Ezekiel, like Job, could not have been far away from belief in the doctrine of a future life. Nevertheless, without it, and with the aid of the old doctrine, they were able, so they were persuaded, to solve the problem with which they had to deal. And we are the less inclined to wonder at this conviction of theirs when we remember that to them the fate of the individual was overshadowed by the consciousness of the living presence of a God who concerned Himself, more especially, with the welfare and wellbeing of the people as a whole. With them, as with the great majority of the Jewish people in the days of old, the thought of a God-fearing society upon the earth, a perfect kingdom supported by an extraordinary providence, was the thought which above all others possessed their minds. With them, therefore, the great question was, Will God's own kingdom yet be established on the earth in all its glory and in all its completeness? Will God's own peculiar people yet be exalted and honoured among the nations? And will all nations yet be constrained to confess that Jehovah is in very truth the only living and true God? The Prophets as they succeeded each other were inspired by hope as they looked forward to the future, for they saw their own nation chastened, transformed, exalted, and they pictured the advent of an age when Israel, freed from foreign oppressions and purified from ungodly members, would realise its ideal character and live an idyllic life of righteousness. Yea, they had hope for other nations also, for 'the day of the Lord,' whose early dawn they all eagerly awaited, was a day when the power and glory of the Lord would be fully manifested before all men, and when the nations of the world, acknowledging God to be the Lord, would be incorporated with or made willing subjects of a glorified Israel, or else remaining irreconcilably hostile they would be utterly destroyed by God and His people.

Without a belief of this kind, how could the Prophets of Israel have borne themselves up with heart and hope in the presence of facts that often were disappointing in the extreme? What was required, most people felt, was a signal manifestation of the power of Almighty God. Proud and haughty men must be humbled, and godless and insolent nations must be made to see that they cannot continue to ignore and defy the Lord. And they were sure that this expectation of theirs would yet be realised. It must be so, for God exists and rules, and must prevail in the end. God is in His heavens, and sooner or later it would be right with their nation and with the world. And pious Jews had no doubt at all as to the truthfulness of the prophecies of their inspired Leaders and Teachers and as to the coming of that which to their mind was inevitable. One of the most remarkable things in Jewish history is this, that the star of hope never ceased to be visible to many, however dark and clouded the sky of their national life might seem to be. Hope sprang eternal in the Jewish breast. Even in the time of direst calamity and deepest humiliation the sure vision of her best and ablest men foresaw and fore-told a time of deliverance and victory and greatness when He would come who would be mighty to save, who would restore the kingdom to Israel and reign in righteousness over the whole world. But the pious Jews were perplexed by the delay in the coming of that time. Why did God permit the world to go on as it was? Why did He not at once interfere and deliver the world from sin and sorrow? Why did the great Deliverer delay His coming? Why did He not rend the heavens and come down and banish sin and sorrow and misery and oppression for ever from the earth? 'Where is thy zeal and thy strength' they cried to God 'are they restrained?' 'O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down!' Who could have anticipated the strange and un-natural use which some have made of the hopes

and expectations of the Jews? Who could have pre-dicted that they would be used as an argument against the divine origin of Christianity? And yet so it has been. The wish was father to the alleged fact, some have said. Men invented what they were always expecting. And so we are re-minded that this tendency among people in former days to believe that a certain event was likely to happen is for us an argument against the belief that it has actually taken place. But such an argument can only hold good if the event expected be antecedently improbable, which in this case it is far from being.

If God be not a mere self-identical unity, but, as we have reason to believe, a self-revealing Spirit, is it not perfectly natural for Him to desire to enter into communication with the men and women He has called into being? And if He reveals Himself unto them, are we not entitled to expect that that Revelation will be made in a manner suitable to their needs and conditioned by their moral and spiritual capacity?

It is true that the form in which the hopes and expectations of the Jews were popularly expressed had led the people of Christ's day to look for a deliverer of a kind greatly different from the one that was actually sent. But, as many people soon perceived, Christ really answered to the greatest needs, deepest longings, and noblest aspirations of the Jews, even when seeming to disappoint them. For the popular beliefs were crude representations of habitual and instinctive convictions which arose from the very depths of their being. They believed in a righteous God whose will must in the end be realised, and it was perfectly natural for them to be convinced that a life of sin is not the true and normal life for man, and that a world of increasing wickedness is not the world as God meant it to be, or as He wished it to be, or as He willed that in the future it should be. And why could not God have been in Christ fully and abidingly even although He was born of a woman and made under the law?

If God dwells anywhere on earth it is in the humble and pure heart. If God is to be seen any-where on earth it is in the life of man. And does not God work out his plans and purposes in human affairs by the instrumentality of man? We need not be surprised, therefore, when we find that the Divine Spiritual Power makes itself manifest in the Man Jesus that it is from the bosom of humanity that He is raised up who is to be a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel. And how could one sent by God redeem a sinful nation, not to speak of a wicked world, without opposition, conflict, pain, sorrow without being, as the Prophet foretold, ' despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief with-out being wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities without that sacrifice which the good of others demanded without that giving up of Himself for the wellbeing of others in which divine love reaches its highest expression and finds its richest, purest, most abiding blessedness? The hopes and expectations of the Jews, there-fore, were not mere illusions without any ground in reason or in the nature of things. And instead of being an argument against the truth contained in the words, ' God sent forth his Son,' they, in reality, lead up to and prepare us for that great event which took place in ' the fulness of time.'

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IV. THE FULNESS OF TIME. When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his son (Galatians 4:4).

WHY was the advent of our Saviour so long delayed? Why did He not come at a much earlier period in the world's history? When we are perplexed by this question it will be well for us to remember the words, 'When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his son.' The Gospel was withheld until the world was ready for its reception. The Saviour came when the course of preparation for His coming conducted through the previous ages was completed. Had our Saviour come into the world when Judaea was comparatively independent and severely intolerant, He might have been crushed at once by those in authority, or innumerable and well-nigh insurmountable obstacles might have been put in the way of His work among the Jews. Had He come into the world long before the fulness of time, He might have come into a world divided up into countless separate kingdoms, jealous of each other, or at war with each other, and filled with people narrow-minded and prejudiced a set of circumstances which must have seriously impeded the work of the Apostles and missionaries in the early days of the Christian Church. But in the fulness of time Judaea was a province of the mighty Roman Empire an Empire that comprised almost the whole civilised world an Empire over the whole of which one language was well understood an Empire throughout which peace then prevailed, and wherein every kind of religion was tolerated an Empire so thoroughly organised that there was frequent and easy communication between the capital and the most remote provinces.

It was now comparatively easy, therefore, for the disciples and followers of Christ to preach what they did preach and where they did preach it. And we must carefully remember that the Jews in Palestine were only a fraction of the Jews in the world at the coming of Christ. In the course of the ages the Jews had been scattered everywhere throughout the world, and everywhere they had made their influence felt. They were everywhere, and everywhere in force throughout the Roman world: and outside the Roman world there were great colonies in Babylon, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and in every place or city of any importance. And wherever they went the Jews carried their faith with them that faith which marked them off from all others that clear strong faith which filled them with hope and confidence, and which was so well able to hold its own against the superstitions of the world, and to arrest the attention of those who had no real faith in anything. But here we must pause to notice that moral discipline and those mental and spiritual movements by which the Jews had been prepared for the reception of the Universal religion. To the Israelites there was to be but one God, and His right to their sole allegiance was not to be doubted. But in the course of the ages the misfortunes and sorrows of God's people had often been so trying, so overwhelming, that had it not been for the Leaders and Prophets who from time to time arose in Israel, the faith of the great majority would have been seriously endangered.

Now it does not surprise us to find, even in the earliest period of Israel's history, divine grace work-ing and good men striving for the removal of spiritual blindness and for the undoing of the evil

which sin had wrought upon the earth. For while sin is the sign of man's fall, it may also be made the means of his moral uprising. Our moral sense brings home to us, and rebukes us for, our imperfections and our sins. But in the very act of doing this, it becomes a witness to the divinity of our nature, and an earnest of the glory that may yet be ours. And so it is for us a divine voice calling upon us to forsake our sins exhorting us to be faithful to those Revelations which God is ever breathing into the consciences of those who seek to do His will and urging us on to heights of holiness to which we have not as yet attained.

There is thus a divine side to the higher thoughts of men: and God is in every noble effort for the regeneration of the world. We are not perplexed, therefore, when we find it said in Scripture that God called Abraham, and that Abraham responded to the call. And we have no great difficulty in discovering the purpose which God meant to work out through the instrumentality of those faithful servants whom from time to time He raised up for the instruction and guidance of His own peculiar people.

It is true that the children of Israel were often far from being what God wished them to be. Time after time they fell back into idolatry and superstition: often, very often, they gave themselves up to grievous sin. Stern was, therefore, the discipline to which they had often to be subjected. Severe was often the chastisement wherewith the Lord chastised them. But not even in their greatest trials and tribulations did the most faithful wholly lose their faith in God. And, strange to say, at every turning-point in their history there stood forth before them at least one man who spoke with authority, and who in the most earnest and impressive way pointed out to the people the real meaning and significance of the crisis that had overtaken or was about to overtake them. Even the enemies of Israel were, the Prophets asserted, in the hands of God, who determines the limits of their power, and can say to them, Thus far shalt thou come, but no further. Moreover, Jehovah's attitude towards Israel and all other nations was, the prophets declared, conditioned by His righteousness and justice; and what they asked could even the Jews expect from great and long-continued unfaithfulness to God and to His law but sorrow, mischief, and disaster, which were at once a manifestation of God's displeasure at sin, and an indication of the possibility that God's purposes for mankind might have to be realised through an Israel purified by much discipline "a shoot from the stock of a felled tree, the remnant of an afflicted and poor people." In Israel and in the world God may have some seemed to suggest a ministry through that better part of the Jewish nation which, after being purified by trial, would truly represent the whole, make atonement for the sins of the whole, and secure a blessing for the whole.

Without doubt, God had for Israel plans and purposes of the wisest and most beneficial kind. And yet, the Prophets said, these might not be exactly what Israel desired and expected. The salvation which God had in store for them might be of a deeper and more spiritual kind than that of which they fondly dreamed. Even the great Prophet who was to prepare the way for the Lord's day of judgment and redemption, the great and righteous King who was to arise from the house of David, might be 'a Servant of Jehovah,' a vicarious Sufferer, one who would bear the griefs and carry the sorrows of His people, one who would be wounded for the transgressions and bruised for the iniquity of His people; and so not in accordance with their ideas regarding the Deliverer whom God would yet raise up.

It is true that many of those who heard the words of the Prophets did not lay them to heart; did not even understand them. And many of those who in after ages read the words of the Prophets did not perceive their meaning and significance. And so materialistic in their conception of things were they, and so wedded did they continue to be to the expectation of a great and glorified Israel that was one day to bear sway over all the nations, that when Christ appeared upon the earth the people were, for the most part, blind to the real greatness of Him who came "in weakness and in woe," in meekness and humility; and there was little to attract them in that kingdom of peace and truth and love and righteousness into which Jesus called men, and of which the words could be truly spoken, 'the kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, lo here, or lo there, for behold the kingdom of God is within you.'

Nevertheless, there were a few who were able to recognise the grace and glory of Jesus Christ, and the value and importance of that salvation which God vouchsafed to men in Him.

Some, like Simeon, had been disciplined and trained to wait for the consolation of Israel for Him who was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles as well as the glory of God's people, Israel. And some, like John the Baptist, were able to see in Christ and in His kingdom a grander fulfilment of their hopes and expectations than that of which the Israelites for so long had dreamed. The Psalms to be found in the first two chapters of St. Luke the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis to which utterance was given by Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon, are beautiful examples of the hope of Israel which was nurtured in saintly souls "through the teaching of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of God, under the Old Dispensation." In the next place, we must carefully remember that at the coming of Christ, belief in a Resurrection, in a Judgment, and in a future existence, would seem to have become somewhat common among the Jews.

It is true that the belief then held was not so spiritual, so purified, or so exalted as the faith of the Apostles. Neither was it placed on the firm foundation laid by Him who brought life and immortality to life through the Gospel. More-over, it was only gradually that the Jews had attained unto the belief that then was theirs. At a very early period in Israel's history the thought of a continued existence after death was not altogether wanting. Doubtless, it was an existence rather than a life of which men then spoke an existence indefinite, vague, shadowy.

Nevertheless, when men died they were spoken of as 'gathered unto their fathers,' and at a later day they were represented as going down into Sheol. And these expressions at all events the latter meant that death was not regarded as ending all. By and by, however, the faith of the Israelites became more definite and confident. But even yet it was merely a hope, not a dogma; and for a time it was a hope for the renewal and resurrection of the nation rather than for the resurrection of individuals. And when an advance is made and men begin to think of the resurrection of individuals, the hope is, even to the close of the Old Testament, limited, or well-nigh limited, to Israel.

Now it is not difficult for us to explain how it was that the thoughts of the Jews on this subject became clearer and more distinct as the years passed by.

1. The inequalities of life must always have produced in the faithful a tendency towards belief in a future life, and in personal immortality. Goodness and virtue do not always receive in this life what, under the government of a holy and omnipotent God, we should expect them to receive. Evil doing

is not always followed by that condemnation and punishment which ought to be meted out to it. Might often prevails over right, and unscrupulousness and dishonesty often win that success which ought always, as we think, to follow in the train of virtue. And what conclusion is forced upon us by these things, in view of God's justice and might? Is it not that there must come a time, in another life, if not in this, when the world will be judged in righteousness, and when every man will receive according as he hath done, whether it be good or bad?

2. The great national catastrophe the Captivity gave rise to practices, thoughts, feelings, which tended towards a belief in personal immortality.

Far away from Jerusalem, and without the aid of the Temple Services, it was necessary for the Jews to have, much more than heretofore, personal and direct dealings with God in prayer. And this awoke within them the consciousness of their personal responsibility to God, and led them more and more to look for the divine benediction in "that spiritual satisfaction which is the boon of all who, in any age, or in any land, repose their simple faith in God." And close spiritual fellowship with God helped to create the conviction that they who walked with God and lived in God must be personally superior to death. The eternity of God became the ground of their confidence with regard to the future. 'Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die.' 'Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; My flesh also shall dwell in safety. For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; Neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption.'

3. Belief in the resurrection of at least the pious Israelites would seem to have followed naturally in the train of belief in the Messiah and the Messianic kingdom. The Jews of a later date knew well that many of their ancestors had served the Lord with all their heart. Some of them had even died for their faith. Were they then to have no share in the glory of the Messianic kingdom?

Moreover, the Jews then living were not sufficiently numerous to be the predominant power in the kingdom of the Messiah. And so, to fill up this want, all those faithful servants of the Lord who had departed in the true faith must live again. 'Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth the dead.' 'Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' And when we reach the Apocrypha those semi-sacred books which are not in the Canon of Scripture, but which have always been highly valued in the Church on account of the light they throw on the history of the Jews during the time which elapsed between the close of the Old Testament and the birth of our Lord we find that the doctrine of a resurrection and of a future life for the good has taken firm possession of the hearts and minds of many of the Jewish people. Thus, for example, in the Book called "The Wisdom of Solomon" we have such passages as these: "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seem to have died; and their departure was accounted to be their hurt, and their journeying away from us to be their ruin: But they are in peace. For even if in the sight of men they be punished, their hope is full of immortality." "The righteous live for ever, and in the Lord is their reward, and the case for them with the Most High." And in 2Ma 7:14, we have this passage: "And being come near to death he (the fourth of the seven brethren who were martyred) said thus: It is good to die at the hands of men and look for the hopes which are given by God, that we shall be raised up again by him; for as for thee (the King) thou shalt have no resurrection unto life." When we read such words as these we can easily

understand how thoroughly prepared the way v/as for the coming of Him who was able to say, ' I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.' But beyond the range of Judaism the world was prepared for the coming of Christ. The religions which flourished within the Roman Empire, and which were thus brought, more or less, into contact with Christianity in its earliest days, were infinite in number and of the utmost diversity: ranging from the lowest forms of idolatry to speculations of the noblest and most rational kind. The popular religions of Greece and Rome with their innumerable deities and their strangely varied forms of worship were " too poor and fanciful to contribute anything directly to the treasury of Christian truth." And from the lower forms of idolatry which were to be met with in the Empire what theological or philosophical light could thoughtful men expect to get? It is true that in the vague gropings of these heathen worshippers after that mysterious Power which they felt to be in nature, there is an indication that even to them there were more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in ordinary philosophies. And, doubtless, in the breasts of many there was a vague awe, a sense of fear, engendered by the consciousness of the existence of Powers unseen, on whose due propitiation the safety of the state and of the individual depended. But no more positive contribution than this was made by the religions of the Roman Empire to that preparation which in the heathen world was made for the coming of Christ. For more than this we must go to some of the Greek poets, such as Aeschylus and Euripides, and more especially to the great Greek philosophers and to those in the Roman world who had learned from them: for, as is well known, philosophy became at last in the Republic the religion of the intelligent and the rule of life for the virtuous. The sanctions of a future life form no part of the religious thought of Aeschylus. The world to come is not denied by him, but, though sometimes it would seem to be implied, it is invariably left out of sight. At the same time Aeschylus testifies to the reality of sin, and to the consequences that follow in its train: and it is difficult to read his works without feeling the need which man has of a divine deliverer " to check and control the consequences of violated law."

Euripides brings before us with startling vividness the sorrows and failures of the good. But even in his most tragic and pathetic scenes he appears to be feeling after God and His righteousness; and although his view of man's destiny is a very sombre one, yet he does seem to reach the conviction that they who have greatly revered the gods will prosper yet, and that retribution will ultimately overtake the wicked.

Socrates traced his deepest thoughts and noblest aspirations to divine suggestions, and with him the hope of immortality and the belief in a world which is spiritual and eternal are clear and strong. And he would seem to have reached these anticipations of Christian truth by practising the famous maxim know thyself which he commended to all others, and especially to those who on a superficial examination of the world without are prone to make arbitrary and shallow assertions with regard to the nature of things. For it is only when we look within us and study what ought to be best known by us, viz., our-selves, the powers and processes of the mind, the nature and character of our feelings, desires, volitions, aspirations, that we can ever truly know what lies without us and about us.

Plato believed that in Mind or Reason there was to be found that which gives to human nature its fellowship with the divine, and enables us in the conduct of life to be conformable to the order and harmony which everywhere prevail in nature. He also endeavoured to lead man beyond what is

seen and temporal to “the eternal prototypes of the beautiful, the true, and the good from which man has fallen; thus awakening in him a deep longing for the blessings he had lost.”

Plato grasped firmly the idea that there was a unity in nature: he was convinced that there was reason at the root of things. And as he constantly thought of the end which things were meant to serve, and judged of means in their relation to ends, we may be sure that if Plato had attempted to construct a system of nature, “ he would “ as Dr. Edward Caird has said “ have adopted the teleological view of things in which God would have been conceived as a designer working with a conscious purpose to realise an end, and that end the happiness of his creatures, especially man.” But Plato and his followers, with all their spiritual and noble conceptions, could never altogether rid themselves of the notion of an aristocracy of souls. ‘ God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth ’ these words which doubtless secured for St. Paul the sympathy of his Athenian audience would have sounded strange in the ears of Plato, and they would have been called in question by many of his disciples. For they found it difficult to keep from thinking that one race was pre-eminent over every other, and that there was a natural and necessary distinction between Greek and Barbarian, bond and free. Not to the Philosophers so much as to the conquests and the policy of Alexander the Great are we indebted for the uprooting of those exclusive ideas which did something to mar the philosophy of Plato. “ Alexander,” says Plutarch, “ did not hearken to his preceptor Aristotle, who advised him to bear himself as a prince among the Greeks, his own people, but as a master among the Barbarians; to treat the one as friends and kinsmen, the other as animals or chattels... But conceiving that he was sent by God to be an umpire between all, and to unite all together, he reduced by arms those whom he could not conquer by persuasion, and formed of a hundred diverse nations one single universal body, mingling as it were in one cup of friendship, the customs, the marriages, and the laws of all. He desired that all should regard the whole world as their common country, the good as fellow-citizens and brethren, the bad as aliens and enemies; that the Greeks should no longer be distinguished from the foreigner by arms or costume, but that every good man should be esteemed an Hellene, every evil man a Barbarian.” And these thoughts and sentiments did not pass away with the Empire of Alexander, but survived and became more common in the great Roman Empire which took its place. And so when we draw near to the time of Christ we find in some of the best philosophers the doctrine of the equality of all God’s children, of Greek and Barbarian, bond and free as well as distinct fore-shadowings of other pre-eminently Christian doctrines.

Many, for example, then declared that virtue, not pleasure, is the chief good in life, and, emphasising the spiritual nature of man, asserted that birth, rank, country, wealth are mere accidents in human life.

Shortly before the time of Christ some of the Stoics were inclined to believe that “ the deity is an all-pervading spirit animating the Universe, and revealed with special clearness in the soul of man, and that all men are fellow-members of a single body united by participation in the same spirit.” And as the Roman Empire gradually became co-extensive with the civilised world, we find anticipations of the doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man. Thus, for example, Cicero, who died 43 B.C., says: “ The whole world is to be regarded as a common city of Gods and men.” “ Nature ordains that a man should wish the good of every man who-ever he may be, for the very reason that he is a man.” “ To reduce man to the duties of his own city and to disengage him from duties to members of other cities is to break the universal society of the human race.” But

Philosophy was for the few: it left the great mass of men untouched. And even those who were familiar with Philosophy were made by it to feel and see that even the best of ancient Philosophies lacked one thing the one thing needful that fuller knowledge that was to permeate and transform all sinful man's natural knowledge of divine things that elixir of life that alone is able to vitalise the life of man. The best Philosophies could to some extent show how worthy of being saved man is, but how to completely effect that operation they did not know. They were able to bring man near to the kingdom of God, but to secure his complete admission was beyond their power. The ladder which they set up on earth was high, but the top of it did not reach to heaven; and because it leaned against the unsubstantial clouds men felt and saw that it was unstable and likely to fall. There was a link wanting in the golden chain by which the Philosophers sought to bind earth to heaven, man to God: and men were persuaded that the chain was not so perfect as the Philosophers imagined. The world by wisdom knew not the Almighty unto perfection. The Philosophies of men could not re-veal to us the inner nature and character of God and His relation to the children of men. However ably a few might speculate, the people as a whole knew nothing of man's being made in the image of God nothing of the underlying kinship of God and man nothing of the self-realisation and self-revelation of God in humanity nothing of the Fatherhood of God and of the Sonship of Man nothing of God's love and mercy and compassion nothing of God's ceaseless efforts for the salvation of sinners. And so Philosophy failed to bestow upon man that of which sinful man stood above all things in need: and the most intelligent men grew weary of it. Even the Religions of the day ceased to have influence with the great mass of those who formerly believed in them, for the freedom of thought in which men then delighted had sapped and under-mined the superstitions and irrational beliefs which almost everywhere prevailed. And losing such re-straining influences as were in the old religions, the lives of men deteriorated and became more worldly and sinful. And failing to cultivate their spiritual nature men lost the thought and the sense of the world unseen and eternal.

“ As it is by nature that we believe in the being of the gods, and by reason that we apprehend their nature, so it is by the unanimous opinion of all nations that we hold the doctrine of the permanent existence of the soul.” The weakness of the belief which, according to Cicero, was so widely entertained will become apparent when we remember that it was before Cicero and Cato that Julius Caesar in the presence of the Roman Senate gave utterance B.C. 63 to those words which have ever since been regarded as “ the Manifesto of Roman Unbelief on the subject of future existence.” The question before the Senate was, What should be done to those agents in Catiline's conspiracy who were in custody? When Caesar's turn for speaking came, he said: “ In pain and misery, death is the release from all suffering, not increased suffering: death dissolves all the ills of mortality: beyond it is no place either for pain or pleasure. Where-fore keep these criminals alive, to suffer a fitting penalty; after death there is no more punishment for sin, neither is there any reward for virtue.”

Caesar was, for the year, Pontifex Maximus, the highest functionary of the state religion: and yet he was neither rebuked nor contradicted by the Senate not even by the grave and virtuous and religious Cato or by the eloquent orator Cicero, who was consul for the time being: two men who made speeches after Caesar and who, as Sallust says, referred to Caesar's speech.

Now, what are we to infer from this incident this blank negation of all faith and hope, unrebuked and uncondemned “ in the gravest of assemblies, on the gravest of all public occasions”? The

indifference of such an audience to the expression of such views by such a man on such an occasion shows that while the thought of a future life may have existed as a sentiment or aspiration with a few, yet, speaking broadly, the great mass of the people of Rome were destitute of a real and living belief in a future state of divine retribution. And how Rome thought and felt and acted to-day, in that way the most distant provinces of the Empire would think and feel and act sooner or later. For there was a constant intermingling of the nations within the Roman Empire. All roads led to Rome, and people were constantly going to and coming from the great centre of the Empire and of the world. Many of the adherents of the various religions of the Empire must, therefore, have come in time to see that the gods they worshipped were, at the best, but local deities, and that the peculiar form of their religion was determined mainly by the character of their own locality and by the circumstances of their own people; while the philosophical sceptics would find themselves ever more and more convinced that all the religions were equally false even when they were not equally degrading in their tendencies and hurtful in their results. The people when they met in city or in country must have compared their religions, and they must have been forced to see that all their religions could not be wholly true, whilst all might abound in absurdities even though not wholly false. And looking into each other's faces, and realising their oneness and their brotherhood, the more intelligent must have felt within them a yearning for a true knowledge of Him for whom all were seeking and after whom all were groping a desire for one true religion that would be equally adapted to and equally helpful to all. Then rose from earth to Heaven, as it were, the cry of some of the best in all the nations: "Are we all orphans? and have we no Father? no one God and Father of all?" And then it was that Christ came, revealing the Father: the Father who loved all His children with a love past understanding; the Father in whose eyes the children are of such value that He is prepared to make even the greatest sacrifice for their welfare; the Father who gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. And 'the Saviour of the world did not come a day too soon, for the decay and death of men's religious beliefs had been accompanied by the destruction of morality, and at the birth of Christ the state of the world was deplorable in the extreme. In this enlightened age the moral sense of man had become completely blunted, and the national conscience was a thing of naught. "Immorality, sensuousness, grossness, gluttony, cruelty, bestiality, sordidness, syco-phancy, untruthfulness, were," says Professor Wenley, "never so rife at one time; and as if to render the situation even more gloomy, acts such as we should regard with utter revulsion, amounting even to physical sickness, were perpetrated not in secret, but in the light of common day, and this without arousing anything in the nature of serious or unanimous protest"

"When Jesus came The world was all at peace in utter wickedness."

Doubtless, the testimony borne by Juvenal, Tacitus, Suetonius, Persius, and Martial, to the abounding and shameless iniquity of their time, may be held as referring in the first place and for the most part to life in Rome and in those pleasure cities of the Empire which imitated or taught the capital. Doubtless, among Rome's hundred million subjects there would be, at all events in country districts, many whose lives were fair and worthy. And even in Rome itself there would be some of whom it could not be said that they loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. But the facts would seem to show that such were the exception which goes to prove the rule. Speaking broadly and generally, men and women had fallen away from the eternal laws of righteousness and were walking in the vanity of their minds, according to the whims of evil hearts,

the promptings of sinful passions, or the suggestions of depraved and degrading inclinations.

“ On that hard Pagan world disgust And secret loathing fell; Deep weariness and sated lust Made human life a hell.”

Terrible is the picture which even heathen writers draw of the state of society at the time of Christ. When we read their description of the moral corruption which seemed to prevail everywhere we can understand the words of St. Paul to the saints at Rome and Ephesus:

'As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness.' ' This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.' When we know the state of the world at the advent of Christ we are compelled to admit that it was in the fulness of time that Jesus came.

## 05 - Chapter 05

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V. THE IMPRESSION MADE BY CHRIST ON THOSE WHO HAD EYES TO SEE. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

He that hath seen me hath seen the Father (John 14:9). No written word has come down to us from Christ Himself. All that we know of Him comes to us through the minds and memories of others. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, and with perfect wisdom He has chosen to be remembered and to live on in the world through the impression He made on those who had eyes to see through the reproduction in others of His own mind and spirit and life.

It is on this account that the Gospel of St. John is to many the most precious of all the Gospels. The Fourth Gospel was written long after the death of Christ by the Apostle John, or, possibly, by some faithful pupil who endeavoured to give, to the best of his memory, a short sketch of his Master's teaching with regard to Christ. In order that a precious testimony might not die with the aged Apostle, but be helpful to men and women in generations to come, or in order that something might be done to encourage the hearts and strengthen the hands of many who in times and circumstances trying to their faith wished to be reassured with regard to the truthfulness of the things which they believed, the aged Apostle, or some faithful pupil of his, committed to writing the story, which St. John had been telling in words all his life, of the things which he had seen and heard many years before in the cities of Judah and in the fields of Galilee. And beautiful and touching the narrative is, for there is in it something of the tender grace of a day that is dead; and clear and distinct it is, for the events here recorded have made a marvellous impression on the Apostle, changing the whole current of his life and causing him to live for things unseen and eternal. But there is one thing which seems to well-nigh overshadow everything else in the narrative of St. John, and that is the Personality of Jesus, with whom the Apostle had for long been in the closest fellowship and with whose inner life he was specially familiar. When we read St. John's Gospel we are impressed by the fact that Christ was greater than His words and deeds, great though these undoubtedly were. As the Apostle looks back with wistful eyes to those wonderful days that cannot come again, the vision of the Master as He lived and worked rises up before him, and we cannot help feeling, as we read, that it was Christ Himself even more than His words and deeds which made on the Apostle that deep and abiding impression which seems to have completely transformed his life. And what is the testimony which is borne to Christ by that sincere and God-fearing man who testified with regard to the things which he had heard, which he had seen with his own eyes, and his own hands had handled of the Word of Life?

We can well understand the difficulty which St. John had in trying to describe the Person and Character and Life of our Saviour, for were there not in Him graces and virtues which never were, after the same fashion, in any other graces and virtues quite beyond the power of words to express? There was something in His appearance which arrested attention: something in His look which drew men unto Him: something in His voice which quickened men and women into newness

of life. There would seem to have been in Him a majesty, a grace, a truth, a tenderness, a sympathy, a love, a purity, a holiness which secured the interest, enlisted the sympathy, and drew forth the love and devotion of all who were not blinded by prejudice or carried away by passion, and who were not indisposed to be guided by those better thoughts and feelings which in the presence of Christ were engendered within them.

“ It was,” says Canon Scott Holland when describing the impression made upon St. John by the Presence of Christ, “ nothing short of the supreme vision of all visions. It was the disclosure, the unveiling of God Himself. It was in character, in substance, in reality, God’s own glory. Whatever men have found God to be, whatever our fathers of old time felt God to be as He shone in upon their hearts through the splendour of the Shekinah in the Tabernacle of Moses, that same thing Jesus showed Himself to be. We saw Him, saw Him long, saw Him near, saw Him carefully; and what we saw in Him was the glory of God, the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Almighty Father.”

“ In the eyes of St. John,” says Canon Liddon, “ the eternal Person of Jesus shone forth through His Humanity with translucent splendour, and wove and folded around itself, as the days and weeks passed on, a moral history of faultless grandeur. It was not the disciple who idealised the master; it was the Master who revealed Himself in His majestic glory to the illumined eye and to the entranced touch of the disciple. No treachery of memory, no ardour of temperament, no sustained reflectiveness of soul, could have compassed the transformation of a human friend into the Almighty and Everlast-ing Being. Nor was there room for serious error of judgment after a companionship so intimate, so heart-searching, so true, as had been that of Jesus with St. John. And thus to the beloved disciple the Divinity of his Lord was not a scholastic formula, nor a pious conjecture, nor a controversial thesis, nor the adaptation of a popular superstition to meet the demands of a strong enthusiasm, nor a mystic reverie. It was nothing less than a fact of personal experience.” ’ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of Life; (for the Life was manifested, and we have seen It, and bear witness, and shew unto you that Eternal Life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.’ As closely connected with this we have to notice the purpose with which, according to St. John, Christ came into the world.

According to this gospel Christ came into the world that men might have life, and have it more abundantly. That to which He calls men and that which He offers unto them is a new life man’s true life a life spiritual, divine, eternal. Eternal life, according to the Fourth Gospel, is above all things the perfection of the spiritual life. It is a life lived as in the Presence of God, a life animated by the Spirit of God, a life of constant communion with God a life which assures us that we who live in God will live for ever. Eternal life is not so much an endless duration of being, as being of such a kind that time cannot very well be regarded as the measure of it. It is the nature and character of the life rather than its duration which is the important thing about eternal life. And so eternal life is a thing which may be ours now as well as hereafter. ’ This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.’

Now this life was and is the possession and the gift of Christ That which above all things characterised the life of Christ was His unsullied purity, His deep spiritu-ality, His close fellowship

with God, His perfect obedience to the divine will, and that spirit of loving self-sacrifice which constrained Him to live and suffer and die for the salvation of men. And so fascinatingly beautiful was that life, and so divinely powerful, and so stamped with the impress of eternity, that when they who knew Christ best and loved Him most saw Him put into the grave, they could not, save only for a moment, believe that all was over with Him. “ They felt,” as Bishop Well-don says, “ that He had displayed before human eyes the witness of a spiritual and ageless existence.”

Moreover, they clearly saw that the life He lived was in its essence such a life as, to a greater or less extent, they could live. They were persuaded that in proportion to their faithfulness to Christ, and according to the measure in which they were filled by His spirit, they would become possessors of the eternal life which Christ offers unto all and pleads with all men to make their own. They were certain that the gift of eternal life would be given to all those who perceived the beauty of holiness, and the importance of things unseen and spiritual, and who, yearning to be possessed of these things, drew near to Christ and lived in close communion with Him.

Worthy of notice are the purpose and the plan of the Fourth Gospel. The purpose is clearly set forth in the words: ‘ Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing, ye might have life through his name.’ And the Gospel as we find it worthily realises this clearly expressed purpose. From the teaching of St. John, or from the cycle of representative facts which formed the common ground-work of the Apostolic Message, the author of this Gospel has carefully selected those works and words of Jesus which seem to testify most strongly to the pre-eminently divine nature of Christ.

Here, for example, are recorded eight miracles but they are representative miracles: one only of each class being given. Strange to say, there is here no miracle in which a Demoniac is healed. Now the healing of Demoniacs, so often mentioned in the other Gospels, is exactly the class of miracles which many in these days find least difficulty in accepting. May it not have been that miracles of this class are here omitted because they did not seem to the writer to testify with sufficient force to the divine power of Jesus? To the author of the Fourth Gospel the wonderful works of Jesus are not so much miracles as signs. The question as to their being violations of the laws of nature does not occur to him. And yet he seems quick to perceive that miracles of a certain kind suggest and emphasise the pre-eminently divine nature of Jesus. And equally significant are the words and sayings of Jesus as they are recorded in the Fourth Gospel. In the Synoptic Gospels the discourses of Christ are, as a rule, simple, direct, easily intelligible, inculcat-ing moral principles and religious truths which are illustrated and enforced by many parables. But in the Gospel of St. John there are if we except John 10:1-5 no Parables: and the discourses are often deep and mystical, and as if they came from a mysterious Personage invested with divine attributes and claiming to be one with the Supreme God. ‘ I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.’ ‘ I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.’ ‘ I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.’ ‘ I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and who-soever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.’ ‘ He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.’ ‘ I and the Father are one.’ No one could stand in the presence of Christ without being strangely and powerfully impressed by Him. Even the casual spectators had to put to themselves

and to each other the questions, ' What manner of man is this? ' ' Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works? ' In the Gospels according to St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke the earliest biographies of Christ which have come down to us our Saviour is clearly marked off from other men. ' All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whom-soever the Son will reveal him.' ' And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' ' They feared greatly, say-ing, Truly this was the Son of God.' But in St. John's Gospel what has been called the Divinity of Christ is more clearly enunciated than in the other Gospels. And this was so, not because St. John was less careful with regard to his facts, or more disposed than others were to idealise and theorise, but because this Gospel is not so much a memoir as a loving reminiscence which came into existence at a time when the perplexed followers of Christ, confronted by determined enemies of the Gospel, required to be reassured by the most com-petent authority, in the plainest language, and in the most unhesitating manner with regard to the nature and character of that marvellous Being who had long ago appeared among men.

It is true that we do not see Christ with our own eyes, but only through the eyes of others. And what they tell us of Him may come to us coloured, to some extent, by their prior convictions and mental prepossessions. It is not wise of us, therefore, to be too ready to believe assertions that seem contrary to reason or experience even when they are made on the authority of inspiration or miracles, for " the reality of the inspiration or of the miracle can only be established by reason."

Moreover, we must carefully remember that moral goodness can never be inferred from extraordinary power. Without their message of mercy the mighty works of Christ might have been attributed to a power from beneath and not to a power from above. No mere wonders or signs on the earth or in the heavens could by themselves have demonstrated the love of God for man. No material or physical phenomena, however marvellous or mysterious, are or can be, by themselves, demonstrative of spiritual truths. Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned.

Wonderful works, therefore, cannot be regarded as the primary proof of the Incarnation: " for the In-carnation is primarily and essentially a spiritual fact, and no conceivable amount of evidence that is merely material can prove it." And so if we are to become possessed of the Revelation of God which Christ made to man, we must go to Christ's life and to His words which shine by their own light and commend themselves to the consciences of men and above all to that spirit, that personality, that character of which His life and words were but the outward expression. When we penetrate beneath the surface and come into contact with that spirit which inspired His words, and to that heart which prompted His actions when, in very short, we draw near to the Lord Himself we see at once that He was from Heaven and heavenly. When we draw near and perceive the tenderness, the sympathy, the compassion that underlay His every word and act and deed, we cannot help perceiving the divine nature of the Son of Man. When our eyes are opened to the spirit of love and self-sacrifice which breathes through His whole life, and which is specially manifest in the mysterious agonies of Calvary, we feel ourselves constrained to say, Surely this was the Son of God.

It is true that a certain moral affinity is needful, if we are to be able to perceive the Divinity of Christ in His Person, His Character, His Life. And it was because of their moral and spiritual blindness that many of those who were brought into contact with Christ failed to be fully convinced by this the

primary evidence of His Divinity. But though the appeal which Christ made to the hearts and souls of men by the divine nature of His character and life was rejected by those who did not know goodness when they saw it, or were so full of religious errors and prejudices that they could not fail to put a wrong interpretation on what they saw, it was accepted by that little band of faithful followers who were constantly with Christ, “ the men and women whom His glance had kindled and His voice had quickened into newness of life, and in whose souls, as they looked and listened, insight arose out of much love.”

It is true that it was only gradually that even this little company of faithful souls came to see the Son of God in this Son of Man. Prejudices and misconceptions prevented them for a time from seeing the Messiah in one who had so little earthly pomp and power. False notions of greatness pre-vented them for a time from seeing the true greatness of Him who was meek and lowly, and who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Elements of worldliness still adhered to these hearts and minds, blinding them to the real worth of Him who was absolutely pure and holy and full of love and grace and truth. From worldliness and prejudices and false notions, therefore, they had to be delivered, but it was a work which required patience and thought and toil.

Careful training and words of rebuke and warning and encouragement and consolation were required before even the faithful few could rise to that conception of Christ which enabled St. Peter to say for them and for himself, ‘ Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ But the end was gained at last; and although in the hour and power of darkness their faith for a moment seemed to fail them and they were like reeds shaken with the wind, nevertheless the fine gold of a self-sacrificing spirit had been struck in them, and there were already growing up in the soil of their hearts those vigorous seeds of faith and love and devotion which Christ had planted and which were destined in the near future to bring forth abundantly fruits of the most desirable kind. The cloud that received Christ out of the disciples’ sight was big with mercy towards them, for it was when the earthly life of Jesus was over that the eternal life of His Spirit was most obviously seen in their lives. Then the revelation of that infinite righteousness, goodness, love, which was made by the life and death of Christ, came to them with redoubled power, and they were constrained to believe that He was from Heaven, of God, Divine, with a faith which no argument could lessen, and which neither life nor death nor things present nor things to come could subvert or overthrow.

## 06 - Chapter 06

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### VI. CHRIST'S RECEPTION BY THE JEWS.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not (John 1:11).

Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block (1 Corinthians 1:23).

ONE of the strangest, saddest things in the life of our Saviour is to be found in the fact that He was rejected by His own people. ' He came unto his own, and his own received him not'

Why did the Jews as a nation reject Christ?

Why was He a stumbling block unto them? When we think of their faith in God and remember all their hopes and anticipations, we naturally expect to find the Jews giving to Jesus a unanimous reception and a loyal and willing obedience. But our surprise passes away when we remember that the Messiah whom the Jews of Christ's day were prepared to receive was the Christ of ordinary Jewish expectation and not the Christ of Calvary a conquering Christ, not one who was to suffer and to die.

Even the disciples did not like to hear Christ talking about a kingdom founded by the death of the King, of a society which was to be in the world and yet not of it, of the Master whom they knew and loved betrayed, forsaken, and denied by His chosen friends. And as for the Jewish people as a whole, they had made up their mind with regard to what the Messiah ought to be and must be. And because Jesus did not become to them what they wished Him to be, and because being merely, as they thought, a man like themselves, He yet put forth wonderful claims in behalf of Himself, they began to regard Him as an impostor and as an enemy of their religion, and so they turned against Him, and made His life all sad and anguished by their enmities, and at last they nailed Him to the tree of shame.

Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews because, while He seemed to put forth in behalf of Himself claims which they did not expect the Messiah to make, He yet was not outwardly and with power fulfilling their expectations with regard to the Messiah. They did not imagine that the Messiah would make Himself equal with God or claim the power to forgive sins. But they believed that He would be specially sent of the Lord that He would be possessed of a power which would unmistakably prove his divine mission, and that he would appear with a pomp and circumstance which would compel the obedience, if not the love, of all. And so the Jews were far from being satisfied with the appearance of Christ and with His method of living and working. These were not sufficiently extraordinary and marvellous, they thought, for the accomplishment of God's purposes towards Israel and towards the world. The work that required to be done could only be effected by a great manifestation of power. God must lay bare His arm, God must put forth His might, God must rend the heavens and come down if the Messianic kingdom was to be established at once and for ever. And so they could not accept Christ as the Messiah, the Great One sent of God, simply because He did not seem to be endowed with sufficient power and authority. From this fact

it is possible for many of us to learn a lesson. In our desire to do justice to the Divinity of Christ we are apt to forget the limitations to which He voluntarily subjected Himself in order that He might be one with us for our salvation.

We think of the virgin-birth: we dream of an immaculate conception: and we are amazed when we find St. Paul saying that Jesus was 'made of a woman,' 'sent in the likeness of sinful flesh,' 'born of the seed of David according to the flesh.'

We look at Christ as He is portrayed in the Gospels, and we see His Divinity shining out through His humanity, and beholding His glory we become so absorbed in the thought of His Divine Sonship that we forget about His humanity, and we are surprised when at every point in His history we are confronted with the fact that He was a man a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

We start with certain preconceptions with regard to the Divinity of our Lord, and we do not know what to make of those passages of Scripture which bring before us the human nature of Christ, and which remind us of the truth that is in the words, "the divine is to be sought in Him only in the form in which it is capable of being found in a man." 'Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God' 'Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.' 'But of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.' 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Passages such as these, testify-ing to the humanity of Christ, do not seem to be quite in harmony with our presuppositions with regard to the Divinity of Christ, and we have difficulty in accepting them as genuine. How apt we are to forget that it is passages such as these which seem to keep some who approach the Gospels without our presuppositions from rejecting them as works of imagination destitute of a real basis in historical fact.

Christ was in very truth God manifest in the flesh; but just because we believe Him to have been such, we naturally expect to find not merely sparks continually flashing forth from His Divinity, but also miraculous deeds done by Him in almost constant succession. And yet how different the reality is from such an expectation! He was born of a woman, but there is nothing extraordinary in that.

He was made under the law, but there is nothing miraculous in that. He was touched with the feeling of our infirmity, and He was subjected to all the ordinary troubles and trials of humanity, but there is nothing save the common experience of men in all that. And as He lived and worked among men, and went out and in among friends and foes, was not His life, on the whole, of such a kind that in all honesty even the most severe critics can accept as historical facts, at least the main incidents in that divinely tragic career which is so vividly portrayed for us by the Evangelists? That Jesus lived a life of transcendent moral and spiritual beauty that He spoke, with authority, words of heavenly wisdom that He was vehemently opposed by the priests and rulers of his day that He was betrayed by one of His disciples, denied by another, and deserted by all of them that He was condemned to death; that He was crucified on the Cross; and that in His death-hour He prayed for His enemies in the words, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' are facts accepted by men whom no one could regard as credulous. But facts such as these are not what we naturally expect to find when we begin the study of the Gospels with certain mental prepossessions with regard to the Divinity of Christ.

There is consequently more significance than at first seems apparent in the words of Canon Scott Holland: "Is it not amazing that a Creed which starts with such tremendous assertions about the person of its founder, should keep itself so well in hand, so rigidly under control, that its main force is spent in exhibiting the loyalty with which the only begotten Son of God submitted to every ordinance of man and nature, how He bent Himself down to the hard and narrow frontiers of His natural lot? The Incarnation is the revelation of the binding force of natural law, to the necessities of which God gave up His Son. It is the loud proclamation of the deference God pays to that nature which is His own creation. Where indeed can we learn more emphatically than from the Cross of Christ the validity, the sanctity of those natural conditions which God of His own will obeyed even to the death of His Son rather than break? "In the second place: Do we not, in our divided Christendom, sometimes sigh for an infallible authority in matters of faith? an authority that will relieve us of the difficulty and responsibility of judging for ourselves. And since we cannot believe, as many do, in the infallibility of the Pope, we are prone to dream of an infallible Church a Church armed with power to silence all doubt, to root out all unbelief, and to force us to believe in spite of ourselves. And are we not tempted to believe that such a Church exists in the world when we read such words as these? 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' 'Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' 'When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.' The Church, it is true, is a divine institution. It owes its origin to Christ. It was begotten of the Revelation of Himself which God made in Him who was the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. But the Church is also a human society. It is a continuation and extension of the fellowship of the disciples who were personal friends of Christ, and who were held together after His death, not merely by their affectionate remembrance of Him, but also by the convictions, the spirit, the life, the faith, the hope which they had in common. 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,' but God's good gifts to us come not directly but indirectly, not unconditionally but conditionally, through material, animal, human agencies. Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. God arrays them in a glory greater than Solomon's not directly, but mediately through the kindly influence of dews, and rain, and sunshine. The health of the body is from God, but care is necessary for its preservation, and when we are unwell we consult a physician and submit to his treatment And it is even so in the spiritual domain.

God is the source of all wisdom, but He imparts it through the lips and pens of human teachers.

God uses man to bring man to Himself. "Through man to man is the primal law of the Incarnation."

Even the Son of God had to become man in order that He might bring sinful men back to God. And everything we know of Him who is the Light of the world has been mediated to us through men. No written word has come from Christ to us, and we have no means of knowing what He was, what He said, what He did, except through the words of those who had been with Him. But whatever we may think of these things, it is perfectly obvious that the Church can have no authority other than the authority of Christ. And Christ did not compel the Jews to believe.

He never dreamt of arbitrarily subjecting His hearers to earthly loss or physical pain on account of their unbelief. He did not require from His followers a mere blind attachment to His person, or an

unquestioning and unreasoning acceptance of His doctrine. He imparted to His hearers the truth as they were able to bear it, and He always aimed at awakening their spiritual intelligence and at leading them into an ever fuller knowledge and realisation of the truth. The authority of Christ was the authority of those divine truths which He revealed to men; truths concerning the nature of God and the true nature of man; truths concerning the relationship of God to us and our relationship to God. It was "the authority of the divine character of the perfect man swaying, because of His divine perfectness, the hearts and minds of men." It was the authority of truth approving itself to man's understanding, the authority of justice, righteousness, and holiness commending themselves to men's consciences, the authority of goodness and love appealing to the hearts of men and constraining them to live, not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. And what authority can be stronger or more enduring than this? Yea, what other authority do men and women require? We are saved, not by the number of articles in a creed which we carelessly accept, but by those truths, few and simple it may be, in which we have faith, and in which we believe the more, the more we test and try them by living in accordance with them.

After all, no spiritual truth is really true to us until its truthfulness has taken hold of our hearts and minds. Blind acceptance has no moral worth, and can never be for long truly helpful. What possible good, therefore, could be permanently done to us by a great, overwhelming, arbitrary, and external authority so armed with power as to compel us to believe in things in which we can find no living interest, or in which we can have no real faith at all? In the third place, is there not a tendency, especially among those who do not believe in the infallibility of the Pope or of the General Councils of the Church, to resort to a mechanical and unnatural method of treating Holy Scripture? In order to arm it with what we deem to be a proper external authority, we speak of every letter and syllable of the Bible as due to the direct dictation of the Almighty, and we think of the Bible as coming to us armed with power, and saying sternly to us, reject, tamper with, or overlook one letter or syllable herein contained, and you are an unbeliever, and therefore in the most deadly peril.

Now, I need scarcely say that this is not the true attitude to take up towards the Word of God.

Doubtless, the Bible comes to us with a message from Heaven, which we reject at our peril. But it brings this message to us by revealing to us truths of the utmost importance with regard to God and ourselves. By enabling us to see the worth and importance of these truths it ennobles our minds and purifies our hearts, and draws us into communion and fellowship with the mind and will of God. The Scriptures are inspired of the Lord, and it is impossible for us to read them with a humble and understanding heart without perceiving and feeling their inspiration without hearing God speaking to us as He speaks in no other book. But while the Scriptures are inspired of the Lord, they were written by men and for men. They were written in popular language and so as to be understood by the people. They were written by men who, so far from being machines in the hands of God, were able to manifest in their writings their own powers and characteristics and peculiarities. "Their thoughts were tinged," says Archbishop Magee, "by the philosophy, their knowledge was limited by the scientific knowledge of their own times; they spoke the history and the science as truly as they spoke the dialect and the grammar of their day: to suppose anything else would be to suppose not a supernatural, but an unnatural inspiration." The Bible is inspired; but the inspiration of Scripture does not necessarily imply the inerrancy of Scripture the absolute infallibility of every letter, syllable, word, or sentence. Holy men of God spake as they were moved

by the Holy Ghost. "The Divine Spirit whose office it is to inspire human minds with the knowledge of the Truth, rested," says Bishop Welldon, "upon the literary labours of the Evangelists. Without His inspiration the Gospels would not have been what they are; nay, they would not have been at all. But the Evangelists do not claim, and the Gospels, if honestly treated, do not exhibit complete immunity from fault or error... Nobody who is a capable judge of literature doubts that they are true; but their truth lies in the substance, not in the letter; and as authorities they are far more impressive by their discrepancy than if they were only so many copies of the same original." The Bible is divine, and yet it is profoundly human. It contains a message from God, but that message comes to us through the writings of man.

What a heavenly treasure we have here, and yet it is in an earthen vessel. And why should we be surprised at this? It is through the human that we see the divine. It is through the finite that the infinite is shadowed forth to us. It is through the material that the spiritual is revealed. It was through the human weakness of Jesus that the glory and the grace of the Highest were made plain to man. It is in the simple elements of Bread and Wine that Christ draws nigh unto us and gives Himself unto us in the Holy Communion. Why then should we be amazed to find that it is through the words of simple honest men that we are put in possession of the Power of God and the Wisdom of God? 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.' 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.'

Misled by appearances, and anxious to demonstrate that there is no heavenly treasure in the earthen vessel, some have laid violent hands upon the earthen vessel, and, smashing it to pieces, they have injured or mutilated the treasure which it contains. But even the foolish and unskilful conduct of some who are inclined to deal rashly with the Bible is no sufficient reason why we should resort to a mechanical and unnatural interpretation of it. For such a method of looking at Scripture prevents us from seeing its surpassing beauty and unique value, and keeps us from discovering many of the precious lessons which it has been written to teach us.

Moreover, such a method of interpreting Scripture must, in these days, tend to make us the slaves of unnecessary fears: for every now and again we are sure to be seriously alarmed at what we take to be the destruction of the heavenly treasure, but which, in reality, may only be the skilful opening of the earthen vessel in order that the treasure which it contains may be the more clearly seen and the more highly prized. But an operation of this latter kind requires, it need hardly be said, the clearest vision and the most loving care. To get out of the Word of God all that it is capable of teaching us we must study it constantly and reverently, with an eager desire to know the truth, and with an unswerving loyalty to the light which it reveals to us. "It is," says Archbishop Magee, "as we study the Bible: as we make it the rule of our life, as we have recourse to it in our hours of sorrow and weakness, trial and temptation, that we find in it ever some word of God that reaches our souls. It is as we gather from it our consolation in sorrow, our strength in trial, our comfort in adversity, our patience in trouble; it is as we gain from it daily light on our path through the world's tangled wilderness of temptation and sin, that it shall become, in the light of its own revealing, the manifestation of God to us." The Scriptures are by themselves alone a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. The entrance of God's Word giveth light; it giveth understanding

unto the simple. “ Those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are,” says the Westminster Confession, “ so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other that not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due sense of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.” But all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves nor alike clear unto all. And when difficulties arise, who is to resolve them? When we are confronted with theological differences what is to be the court of appeal? “ The authority of the holy Scripture,” says the Westminster Con-fession, “ for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church.” “ We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the holy Scriptures; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet, notwith-standing, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts”

It is easy to criticise the position taken up by the Westminster Confession on the subject of autho-rity in religion. We may say that it does not sufficiently guard us against the play of subjective individualistic fancies. May not an ignorant and mistaken man regard his own foolish notions as due to the working of the Holy Spirit in his heart? And do we not, therefore, require an infallible Church to interpret the Word of God for us? yea, to tell us what the Word of God is? But if the words of the Westminster Confession may in this respect be regarded as defective, it is difficult to keep from believing that they point in the right direction.

Think for a moment of the relation of the Church to the New Testament Scriptures.

We all know that the Gospel was preached for many years before it was written. The Church, therefore, does not owe its existence to the New Testament. On the contrary, the New Testament owes, in a sense, its origin to the Church. But it was not to the Church as an organised corporate body that we are indebted for the New Testament Scriptures. These Books were written by individuals, and at first they were accepted by individuals, either because from their own personal knowledge they knew them to be true, or on account of the authority of the writers, who were men who had seen the Lord or had been companions of those who had seen Him. And notice how necessary, how indispensable, these Scriptures have been, if not to the origin, at all events to the healthy life of the Church. What kind of Church would we now have, and what kind of Gospel would now be preached in it if tradition and hearsay had been the only authorities for our faith, and if during all the Christian centuries the New Testament Scriptures had not been in existence to instruct and correct the Church? The strongest evidence in behalf of the facts which underlie Christianity is that of the Apostles who were com-panions of Christ from His Baptism till His Ascension; and next to theirs comes the testimony of those who have set forth a declaration of the things which they received from those who ‘ from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word.’ But the further we come from the time of Christ the less weighty becomes the evidential value of the unsupported assertions of those who tell us with regard to Christ things which are not to be found in the New Testament.

It is true that Christ has promised to be with His Church always, and to guide it into all truth. We must not, therefore, overlook or ignore the religious insight of the living Church when it uses wisely all that is subsidiary. What better, what other, court of appeal can we have than an enlightened Christian consciousness? The decisions on matters of doctrine which are now made by us may not all be final, for even we ourselves may in a short time pass beyond them. Fuller knowledge, increased light, greater purity, tend to clarify our spiritual vision and give us a more perfect insight into the meaning of divine things. And so there is a sense in which every age requires its own theology " its reasoned system of beliefs expressed in terms of its own consciousness." But if our religious consciousness be enlightened, if it be penetrated and moulded by the wisest judgments of human reason, if it be thoroughly versed in the best conclusions of the age as to the contents of the Bible and as to the meaning of the world and of life, then its doctrinal decisions are the best that under the circumstances can be had by us. They may not be absolutely final, for posterity may be able to go beyond them. But at present they are for us the measure of our apprehension of the truth, and nothing more perfect is in the meantime possible for us.

## 07 - Chapter 07

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VII. THE ATTITUDE OF THE ENLIGHTENED GREEKS TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY. When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter (Acts 17:32).

SOME of those who listened to St. Paul at Athens believed, doubtless, in the survival of the soul after the dissolution of the body. But, in all probability, they regarded the material body as the prison-house of the spirit, and believed that it was only when in a disembodied state that the soul was able to attain unto a knowledge of eternal truth, or to become a participant in a state of perfect bliss. To men thinking after this fashion there must have been a difficulty in agreeing with St. Paul when he spoke of a resurrection and of a future state in which the personality will again manifest its activities through the instrumentality of a bodily organism, more especially as St. Paul was not permitted to explain that he spoke of a 'spiritual body.'

Moreover, in that Athenian audience there must have been Epicureans and Sceptics who believed that the spirit is a function of the body and dies with the body, and to whom, therefore, the thought of a resurrection and a future life was absurd.

We all know St. Paul's reply to those who spoke after this fashion. Yes, he said, a body is necessary for the completion of the personality, but in the future the soul will have a body a body which, though it corresponds to, will yet be greatly different from the present material body a body not subject to disease and decay, but characterised by incorruption, power, glory a body perfectly adapted to the altered circumstances of pur being and fitted to be the instrument of the activities of our noblest faculties. And if any one says that all this is miraculous and unbelievable, St Paul points to the supernatural-ness of what is natural in the case of the seed sown in the ground. 'Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body... So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weak-ness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body.' But the Epicureans and Sceptics of Athens would not listen to what St. Paul had to say on this great subject. The slightest reference to Resurrection and Judgment was enough for them. They would listen to reason, but they would have nothing to do with what seemed miraculous.

Now, there are many in our own day who take up towards Christianity exactly the same attitude. To them Christianity is foolishness, and they will have nothing to do with it because there is, or seems to be, in it a miraculous element. To deal satisfactorily with a position of this kind is difficult; but there are many considerations which ought to be able to help us when we are tempted to rush to a rash conclusion on the subject. To begin with, miracles were never meant to be the only, or indeed the primary, evidence of the Incarnation.

We cannot verify the miracles of Christ, and the further we get from them the weaker the evidence in support of them seems to be. And if we take them by themselves, and apart from Christ and His purposes of love to man, we are apt to think that they who tell us of them were self-deceived, or imperfectly informed, for scarcely any conceivable amount of testimony appears sufficient to adequately prove them in face of the long-continued and uniform testimony of Nature's laws that miracles do not happen. To believers the miracles of Christ are credible, because they were done by Him. " We believe in the miracles because we believe in Christ, not in Christ because we believe in the miracles." When believed in, the miracles become to us a revelation of Christ's mercy, pity, love, and divine power. But the very fact that during Christ's life-time, and immediately after His death, such miracles as are found in the Gospels were attributed to Christ, helps to strengthen that evidence to which on a priori grounds no one can object. When we find that many years perhaps after a great saint's death miracles are said to have been worked by him, we do not put the belief aside as altogether valueless, or look upon it as undoing the testimony which otherwise we are disposed to accept with regard to him. However arbitrary, senseless, or grotesque the miracles ascribed to him may be, we regard them as a further confirmation of the belief that the Saint really lived, and that in his day he was a person of out-standing greatness and goodness. And so when we find that even in Christ's lifetime many miracles of love and mercy are assigned to Him by those who knew Him best of all, are we not justified in thinking that they bear strong testimony to the power as well as to the greatness and goodness and love of Christ? Even when we think that the miracle narratives are to some extent the product of religious emotion, and an imitation of a literary method sometimes resorted to in setting forth the lives of heroes, we are constrained to believe that the narratives were really suggested to Christians by the wonderful and beneficent deeds actually done by Christ, and that they were made to assume their present form because it seemed the best means whereby to bring out and emphasise that unique goodness and divine power of Christ which, without doubt, made a marvellous impression on those who were privileged to see Him.

We must not, however, forget that the Incarnation was " the gradual self-revelation of a Person to spiritually minded persons," and that in innumerable ways that Revelation was made to man. By words, by acts, by deeds, by looks, by silences, by prayers, by tears, as well as by signal manifestations of power, Christ made Himself known to those who had eyes to see, hearts to love, and minds to understand. And where faith in Him was not elicited by these revelations of His nature and character there would seem to have been little chance of its being called forth by mere exhibitions of marvellous power. This becomes quite evident when we read the pathetic but apparently fruitless appeals which, according to St. John's Gospel, Christ sometimes addressed to the people. ' The same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me.' 'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.' ' Believe me for the very works' sake.'

Christ saw that the people who witnessed His miracles perceived, as a rule, almost nothing but the power made manifest in them, and He knew that the manifestation of power was no guarantee of goodness; and so He was persuaded that wonderful works did not of necessity compel even those who beheld them to believe in Him. Instead of working miracles, therefore, to produce faith, He is often represented in the Gospels as demanding faith as a condition of their being worked. ' He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.' ' Thy faith hath made thee whole.' '

According to thy faith be it unto thee.' Now if miracles could be so ineffective in the case of those who beheld them, what can we expect from them in the case of those who did not see them?

Quite obviously the Gospels do not give us a complete account of the public ministry of Christ.

' Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book.' And the words and incidents recorded in the Gospels were not narrated in such a way as to anticipate every difficulty which may occur to critics and scientific men in these days. Neither shorthand writers nor photographic artists accompanied the Saviour by the way, and the narratives about Christ's wonderful works do not come to us verified and certified by a committee of experts. The Gospels seem to be short sketches meant for popular use, written by and for people to whom any extra-ordinary occurrence viewed in the light of Divine Providence was a miracle people who were con-vinced that God lives and reigns and works and interposes in behalf of His kingdom, but who had neither our conception of the universality and invariability of Nature's laws, nor our knowledge of what is possible and what impossible. More-over, the Gospels were written with a pur-pose. ' These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.' The Gospels were written in such a way as to make upon their readers, so far as short carefully arranged memoirs could do it, an im-pression similar to that which was made by Jesus Himself upon those who were privileged to behold Him, and who had eyes wherewith to see. And who will say that the Evangelists have failed in their attempt? In the Gospels there may be differences here and there as to points of detail, and as to the setting of several incidents differences which under the circumstances we naturally expect to find, and which, in very truth, point to the inde-pendence and worth of their testimony. But one thing is obvious, there is no difference in the Portrait which the Evangelists draw. " The general impres-sion which they create the impression of a unique Personality is the same everywhere." The facts of human nature which make religion a possibility and a necessity for man are spiritual facts. ' They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.' ' I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' And Christ's invitation is addressed to the unlettered as well as to the learned, to the simple as well as to the wise.

He makes His appeal not so much to the conscious reason as to that complex of moral feelings which we call conscience. But this does not mean that Christianity is a plant which flourishes only on the soil of human ignorance. For feeling cannot exist without some degree of knowledge. We cannot, for example, love that which we do not in some wise know. We may take it for granted, therefore, that what we call conscience has always underlying it, and bound up with it, a knowledge which, how-ever, may be incipient a reason which may to a great extent be unconscious, reflecting little if at all upon its own operations. The Incarnation is a spiritual fact: and spiritual things must be spiritually discerned. The great aim of the Gospels is to bring us into the presence of a Unique Personality, a Divine Man, the Son of God, the Light of the World, the Life of Men, in order that we may become possessors of that spiritual, divine, eternal life which was the possession and is the gift of Christ a gift which is offered unto us, and which we are earnestly entreated to make our own. And whatever we may think of the Gospels in this direction or in that, they do accomplish the aim and realise the purpose of their writers. Swiftly but surely they bring us into the strangely impressive presence of the Divine Man who, realising in all their fulness His Divine Son-ship and His Human Brotherhood, lived the truest, highest, noblest life possible to man the life spiritual, divine, eternal the life to which we all are called of God. And when we respond to

the invitation of Christ, and make our own the life to which He calls us the life of faith in God, love to God, devotion to God the life which is hid with Christ in God the life which assures us of immortality and makes us more than conquerors through Him that loved us we feel under no obligation and possessed of no inclination to put a stumbling-block in a brother's way by assigning to miracles a place in the Christian Evidences to which they are not entitled. Moreover, we are then better able to appreciate the arguments produced by those who maintain that the Gospel reports with regard to the deeds of Christ are, even when taken literally, well nigh as credible as those with regard to His words.

These arguments may be put as follows:

1. The Gospels everywhere state that the introduction of Christianity by Christ was accompanied by wonderful deeds called 'signs' or 'mighty works': and there are many considerations which point to the probable truthfulness of the Gospel statements. The Jews rejected Christ not because, in their opinion, He did no wonderful works, but because the wonderful works done by Him were not, in their belief, equal to His pretensions. They were not sufficiently great and startling for one pretending to be the Messiah and did He not claim to be the Son of God? Does not this imply that Jesus was almost universally believed to have wrought many wonderful works?

Again, the Jewish world in Christ's day had not our belief with regard to the reign of law. They believed in the possibility of miraculous phenomena, and they were convinced that wonder workers had often appeared among them. Any one, therefore, who wished to gain a hearing among the Jews must be prepared to do what, as they believed, they had seen many others doing. How in such an age and among such a people was it possible for Christ to arrest attention and to have His claims considered, if He was not prepared to walk in the footsteps of the wonder workers whom they had seen?

2. Some of the miracles ascribed to Christ in the Gospels are merely deeds of healing which, however marvellous they may be, cannot in our day be regarded as miraculous. Christian science, faith-healing, mind-curing, may come very far short of what some of their adherents claim for them, but in the opinion of men well qualified to judge there is sufficient evidence to show that a certain mental attitude towards the universe, and a faithful adherence to a certain philosophy of life have a tendency to prevent certain diseases, to relieve sufferers from certain ills, and even to delay the approach of death to many a victim beyond the power of absolute cure.

We all know that mind can influence mind and that the body can be influenced through the mind. Faith, excitement, enthusiasm can make people forget their sorrows; yea, they have been known to rid men of certain ailments and to cure them of certain diseases. We are not surprised, therefore, to find Dr. Mackintosh saying in his Natural History of the Christian Religion: " Christ may have cured or alleviated nervous and hysterical complaints and mental derangements of various kinds by a certain moral ascendancy which he gained over many who came within the sphere of his influence... The exalted state of feeling, the sense of blissful awe produced in sensitive minds by the voice and aspect of One whom they believed to be a Teacher sent from God, the righteous shiver, the sudden shock of emotion sent through their minds by His passing shadow or even by the touch and rustle of His garment, were enough to produce wonderful effects within the area in which the moral and physical nature of man act and react on each other."

3. If Christ by His words, acts, looks, silences, tears, and natural manifestations of wonderful power produces upon us the impression which He made on the people of His day, viz., that He is a unique Personality, one in whom the wisdom and goodness and love of God were revealed in a supreme degree; if we are convinced that Jesus was spiritually one with God, and therefore a perfect source and channel of Divine Light and Life; is it not difficult for us to keep from believing that the Divine Strength was made perfect in His human weakness, and that it is not wise of us to attempt to assign a limit to His power?

It is true that some of the wonderful works ascribed to Christ in the Gospels cannot be classified with deeds of healing, for they seem to be quite inconsistent with our experience of the working of law in the material world. And there are men who, when they find it difficult to interpret such narratives in a literal way, listen readily to critics who tell us that the stream of pure tradition began to be contaminated with foreign elements very near its source, and who endeavour to explain how a nucleus of simple fact, or figurative language used by our Lord, or the influence of certain Old Testament passages, may have contributed to the rise of some of these nature-miracle narratives. Some of these attempts to explain the words of the Gospels are interesting and suggestive, but few, if any, of them are perfectly convincing. For even when we are inclined to handle the Gospels with the utmost severity it is difficult for us to get away from the conviction that they are far from being valueless as sources of history. However critical may be the attitude assumed by us whenever the word miracle is mentioned, it is hard for us to keep from believing that the Gospel narratives with regard to the miracles correspond at least in some way, however imperfectly, to remarkable facts in the life of our Saviour facts which had arrested general attention, and were well known in Palestine. Are we not almost compelled to believe that there is much more in the nature-miracle narratives of Scripture than many in these days are inclined to imagine when we put to ourselves the question, What think ye of Christ? what think ye of Him to whom we are indebted for Christianity and Christendom? And when we find ourselves constrained to say that He was a Unique Personality a Person in whom the Divine Power, as well as the Divine Wisdom and Love, was made manifest in a transcending degree.

4. When we think, as many now seem inclined to do, more of the unity than of the uniformity of nature, we see the universe to be a coherent whole, " whose elements are intimately bound together by the mutual ministrations of all to each and each to all." And this view of things leads to the conviction that nature is rooted and grounded in Spirit.

Hence comes the idea that nature is the expression or manifestation of Spirit yea, that nature is Spirit.

Now, when we reach this exalted conception of the universe the difficulty about miracles becomes infinitely less than formerly it was. For if Spirit be at the root of all things, why should not the processes of nature be modified " for an adequate spiritual end "?

We are free agents, and just because we are such we can interest ourselves in particular things, and we can do much to realise our wishes. As we live in this world, we are indeed constantly changing, for the accomplishment of our ends, the natural trend of the forces that play around us and upon us. Iron is heavier than water; but we can build large steel ships and load them with thousands of tons of cargo and make them sail swiftly over the sea. And if man can act in this fashion, why may not God, in His own far greater fashion? If every act of ours introduces

something new into the sequence of material and organic forces, why may not God also intervene and mould, when so He wills, the solid course of physical change and consequence, and that too without violating any of nature's laws?

I know, of course, that in these days there are two kinds of supernaturalists. On the one hand, there are the "refined" or "universalistic" supernaturalists the class to which most philosophers belong. They see God every-where, but nowhere in particular. They find God working everywhere, and yet at no single point in all the universe is there any sign of special divine intervention. They see God more clearly in the orderly course of nature than in any unexpected and wayward phenomenon. They say, with Martineau, that "the customs of Heaven ought surely to be more sacred in our eyes than its anomalies: the dear old ways of which the Most High is never tired than the strange things which He does not love well enough ever to repeat." And yet these men may have no leanings towards what is called Naturalism. On the contrary, many of them have an increased sense of the reality of the supernatural. They believe that a spiritual interpretation of things is ultimately the only rational one, that the laws of nature are the ways of the Spirit who utters Himself through the forms of nature, and that the most unique and wonderful things in nature are "the exceptional births and workings of nature moulded by the unknown powers of Spirit."

How closely related, after all, such men are to that more common class of supernaturalists to whom the epithet "piecemeal" has been applied. The latter have no difficulty in believing in divine interventions. They think that God interests Him-self not merely in the world as a whole, but also in the details that go to make the whole yea, that He interests Himself in the whole by interesting Himself in the parts. They believe that at certain points, for certain reasons, God bursts in upon the world's phenomena.

"Both instinctively and for logical reasons," says Professor William James, "I find it hard to believe that principles can exist which make no difference to facts. But all facts are particular facts, and the whole interest of the question of God's existence seems to lie in the consequences for particulars which that existence may be expected to entail. That no concrete particular of experience should alter its complexion in consequence of God's being there seems to me an incredible proposition." And this leads me to say that the position which is thus possible to a speculative philosopher reasoning from a priori grounds is in these days being made more tenable by our increasing scientific knowledge, which is swiftly opening our eyes to the fact that there are more things in nature than were formerly dreamt of by scientific men. "No procedure," says W. H. Mallock, "is more essentially unscientific than to assume that no process actually takes place in the universe other than those which science in some formal manner has recognised."

Indeed, every fresh discovery which science makes shows that the constitution of things, as potentially amenable to inquiry, is complex to a degree indefinitely beyond our present knowledge; and this is especially true of the processes which are immediately concerned with life. Our modern knowledge of electricity, of the ether, and of the X rays constitutes a warning against any undue haste in dismissing facts as incredible merely because they are new and strange."

## 08 - Chapter 08

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### VIII. THE INCARNATION; THE POSSIBILITY OF IT, AND THE NECESSITY FOR IT.

Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16).

God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Galatians 4:4-5). WITH Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury in the eleventh century, the great question, was, Cur Deus homo? Why did God become man? But in our day the question which most seriously perplexes many is the prior one, Deusne homo? Did God become man? If so, in what manner, Quomodo Deus homo?

Now, when we are considering this subject we must not make a mistake with regard to the kind of proof which alone is possible here. "A demonstration of the supernatural is an impossibility; it is a contradiction in terms... The facts which we allege as evidence of the supernatural, such as miracles and prophecy, are themselves supernatural, and our adducing them as such in proof of the supernatural is a mere begging of the question in dispute. The supernatural is not to be demonstrated; it is to be felt; it does not prove itself to sense; it reveals itself to faith."

These words of the late Archbishop Magee serve to remind us of the fact that the manifestation of Himself which God has given us in Jesus Christ is one that is, so far as such a thing can be, perfectly natural and intelligible. For here as elsewhere though more perfectly than elsewhere the divine is revealed to us in and through the human, the spiritual in and through the material, the supernatural in and through the natural. And if in the preparation of the world for Christ, or in the Person and life and teaching of Christ, or in the consequences that followed in the train of Christ, we cannot perceive the divine in the human, God in man, then any merely external proof such as miracles will be unable to prove the divinity of Christ, much less to bring this great truth home to us in such wise that we may pass under the power and pressure of it. The great difficulty which many have in connection with the Incarnation arises from the fact that we are so prone to think of it as an isolated event, a strange freak of the supernatural, unconnected with everything that preceded it in history and in human life, and destitute of relationship with that which obviously resulted from it, viz., the Church which was founded by Christ, which in accordance with His promise has survived the ages, and which to-day is healthier, stronger, and more active than ever it was before. But we cannot have a true understanding of the Incarnation when we look at it in this way. And Scripture distinctly tells us that we are not to think of it after this fashion.

Christ came when the world was prepared for His coming. And when He came He 'took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself.' We are thus told that Christ's Incarnation was a voluntary self-limitation of Himself for purposes of love to man. But otherwise we know that Christ lived and suffered and died for the eternal good of men, and that while He lived He was under the conditions and limitations of humanity conditions and limitations which, whatever their effect in other directions, did not seem

to interfere with His full union and communion with God, His thorough discernment of the human heart, and His perfect knowledge of spiritual truth.

' When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.' But just because Christ assumed the form of frail mortality, and came into a world that was prepared for His coming, Christianity always has been, and possibly always will be, liable to what we may call a merely naturalistic explanation. ' We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.' But men have devoted so much attention to the earthen vessels that they have been apt to overlook the treasure which they contain. God's strength was made perfect in the human weakness of Jesus, but many have been so absorbed in the contemplation of this human weakness that they have often failed to perceive the divine strength that was revealed in and through it. God often accomplishes the most wonderful results by means and instruments which in themselves are weak and ineffective, but we shut our eyes to this fact, and many are consequently unable to understand the meaning and significance of the words of St. Paul, ' the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.' The most obvious fact about Christ was His humanity; but there is nothing in this fact inconsistent with the truth brought out in the words, ' God sent forth his Son/ ' God was in Christ.' For if we can find the Infinite in the finite, the super-natural in the natural, we surely need not be surprised to find God in man, who is the greatest of all the creatures of God the one who was made in the image of God, and who still retains some outline of that image, however far he may now be from that ideal life which was meant for him.

We often use the phrases " a mere man," " the natural man," but we sometimes use them carelessly and without a proper regard to their true meaning.

Mere man does not mean mere animal, for every man has gifts, powers, faculties which animals do not possess. The natural man is one who has so neglected the cultivation of his spiritual nature that the lower elements in his being have supreme control in his life. But we have no right to assume that there is no spark of life divine in comparatively unspiritual men, for even men fast bound in the chains of sin often feel inclined to give utterance to these words, ' the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 1 " Down in the human heart crushed by the Tempter, Feelings lie buried that grace can restore."

Yes, grace can restore these feelings, and grace alone can restore them. But they are there for restoration. Although crushed they are not utterly destroyed; although buried they are not wholly dead. Is there a man was there ever a man wholly destitute of every spark of the life divine? " Look into your own souls," says Bishop Lightfoot, " and what do you find there? Yes, ye yourselves are the temples of the Living God. He is there, there, whether you will or not. Through your reason, through your conscience, through your remorse and regrets, through your capacity of amendment, through your aspirations and ideals He speaks to you. You are His coinage. His image and superscription are stamped upon you." Verily we are greater than we know, and we have been more highly favoured than we are apt at times to imagine. Even the natural man may not be wholly destitute of spiritual life; and God is nearer to those who are His than even faithful Christians appear at times to realise. Now, if we are temples of God, if God dwells in us, except we be reprobates, if His Presence is specially vouch-safed to those who are God-fearing and holy, then in a most unique sense must it be true that God was in our Lord and Master, for in the pure heart

of Jesus God must have found a peculiarly fitting abode, and the life lived by Christ and the words spoken by Him and the works done by Him clearly show that as He dwelt in no other, God must have dwelt in Him. The question is sometimes asked, Was Redemp-tion an after-thought on God's part an arbitrary expedient suddenly resorted to when unexpected circumstances had arisen which called for drastic measures? Would, indeed, Christ have ever taber-nacled amongst men if man had never fallen from the estate wherein he was created? As every one knows, hypothetical questions are, as a rule, more interesting than useful. And of all hypothetical problems this is one of the least practical. For whatever answer be given to this question, we can never verify its truthfulness, and we cannot test it because we cannot reproduce the circumstances pre-supposed in the question. The world can never be what it would have been if man had never sinned.

It is difficult for us to think of the incarnation of the Son of God as wholly and solely conditioned by human sin. Does not such a view of things con-strain us to believe that it is a good thing for us that man has sinned? Is not sin, on this supposition, a fortunate and blessed thing, seeing it has procured for us so great a Saviour and such a marvellous manifestation of the divine love and mercy? " O felix culpa quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem! " And yet if man had never sinned there would have been no passion of Christ and no death on Calvary, for these were obviously brought about by the sin of man. And is it not difficult for us to see how, without the sufferings and death of Christ, we could have attained unto that knowledge of God's love, which is to us " the most immediately impressive and soul-subduing " His infinite compas-sion for sinners and His unquenchable desire for their salvation? for these were realised and revealed to us in the sufferings and death of Christ.

Nevertheless, if man had never fallen it might, some think, have been necessary for the Son of God to become man, for innocence is not holiness: it is good unrealised. And the absence of sin is not the same as the presence of innumerable virtues trained to the utmost. And so for the further perfection of man and for his growth in grace, it might have been necessary for God to grant to man the privilege of a nearer and fuller revelation of His character and His will. The pure in heart shall see God, but if, as certain passages of Scripture would seem to suggest, there are to be degrees of glory in Heaven, why could there not have been on earth degrees of perfection, even supposing man had remained entirely free from sin? And does not the Word of God speak of Christ as the end as well as the beginning of creation as the goal and crown of the universe as well as its creative agent as the One in whom alone God's purposes in creation are completely realised? And are not all these assertions in harmony with the supposition that Christ might have been born into the world even supposing man had never sinned? But we never dream of troubling ourselves with such questions when we think of creation as a Reve-lation of God: a revelation more clearly seen in the intelligence and conscience and virtues of good men than in anything to be found in the vegetable or animal world: a revelation which finds its highest realisation in Him who is the perfect pattern of what our human life should be. We never think of troubling ourselves with such questions when we remember that God's purposes of love to man must in the end be carried out: else were He not the Creator and Ruler of all the greatest as well as the best in all the world. The possibility of sin on man's part, therefore, naturally involves the ex-istence and, in God's good time, the activity of a Saviour who is abundantly ' sufficient for these things.' Does it not indeed almost seem as if Atonement, At-one-ment, Reconciliation were eternal, " in-wrought into the nature of things, for the merging of earth's discords in the triumphant revelation of God as

all in all? “Ever since the first origin of evil in the world God has been working powerfully for the good of man.

We were made for holiness and not for sin, and our God-given nature is such that it is well-nigh impossible for a simple and unsophisticated man to sin without being the possessor of thoughts and feelings which tend to bring him back into, and to urge him on in, the way of God’s will for Him. God has always been revealing His righteousness through the ways of Providence, the rise and fall of nations, the movements of society, the incidents and accidents in the lives of men. When God’s judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world are taught righteousness. The conscience of man has ever borne testimony to the righteous laws of God. ’ For when the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.’ The spirit of truth in man, our sense of right, our love and pity and generosity, our heavenly aspirations, our yearnings for a life completely free from sin what are these but the indications of the Presence and the Power of that Spirit of God that is for ever moving around and within our souls, re-proving us of sin and righteousness and judgment, revealing to us the awful obligations of duty and purity, and holiness, and “ illuminating our con-sciences with higher and holier thoughts of God? “In the inspired Prophets of the Lord, who were terribly alive to the righteousness and holiness of God, and who were for ever calling upon men to live soberly and righteously before God, and in all humble and God-fearing men and women whose pious and holy lives have commended them to the best and deepest instincts of our nature, we have a revelation of God that must be fruitful for good to all those who are able to discern it.

Now, when we think of these things after this fashion the transition to Christ is not so difficult.

We then see that Christ came in the line of the Prophets and of all the best and wisest men in the preceding ages. “ It is,” says Principal Caird, “ a conception of the divine order of the world not less shallow than irreverent which regards the religious experience of the pre-Christian ages only in the light of an abortive experiment, and represents uncouthed generations of the human race as having being utilised by Providence merely to prove man’s spiritual incapacity and ineptitude.” To understand the necessity for the Incarnation it is above all things necessary to bear in mind the relative importance of things material and things spiritual. ’ That is not first which is spiritual but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual.’ These words remind us of the relative importance of the material and the spiritual, but in so doing they bring before us the order or sequence in accordance with which the material and the spiritual come into visible prominence. They tell us that the material leads up to and terminates in the spiritual, which, it is to be remembered, is the flower and crown of the material. The truthfulness of this is apparent both in nature and in human life.

Those who can read the book of History which is written on the rocks tell us that long ages had to elapse before that life of any kind was possible upon the earth, and that when it did appear it manifested itself in simpler forms which gradually led up to the higher, assuming at last its highest and noblest form in the life of man. First we have the lifeless earth, and then we have living organisms: vegetable and animal life terminating in the life of man. The introduction of life, the principle of growth and fertility, distinguishes the organic world from the inorganic which underlies

and supports it. The introduction of sensation, or the sentient and appetitive principle, marks off the life of the animal from the life of the plant: while reason and freedom and self-determination and the moral life draw a line of distinction between man and the animals. There is thus in nature a progressive order in the development of life, each stage being clearly marked off from and yet closely connected with the one beneath it, each stage underlying and preparing the way for one above it, where a newer and higher principle of life is introduced into the existent and natural order of things. And when we look at the life of man we see it to be a law of his being that the natural should lead up to and terminate in the spiritual. Our intellectual and moral faculties are the last to be developed. At first we are met by the demands of our bodily nature, and so our appetites and senses are exercised first of all, and at the beginning almost solely. But by and by the intelligence and the conscience make themselves manifest, and the soul with its marvellous powers and infinite aspirations shows us that man is above all things a spiritual being. ' When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man I put away childish things.' " What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! " How the spiritual grew out of the natural; what were the steps in the process by which man has become what he is, we may not exactly know. But this we do know, and this we should carefully remember, man is the flower and crown of all visible created things.

" There is," says Professor Hugh Walker, " a gulf never satisfactorily bridged between ethical principles as gradually evolved out of the non-moral state and the " moral imperative " as it is felt by the human conscience. Hence, the man of religion insists, the necessity of being specific about that vague Power dimly seen behind the philosophy of evolution; and hence the necessity, in the view of the metaphysician, of regarding evolution from above as well as from below. We learn much by tracing things to their origin; but to learn all we must consider as well what they ultimately become. It is, in fact, the final form that gives importance to the question of origin."

It is true, indeed, that multitudes of men and women live neglectful, to a greater or less extent, of the fact that they are intellectual, moral, and spiritual beings endowed with reason and conscience which were meant to be the guides and regulators of their lives. Instead of being masters of themselves, rulers of their own lives, they are slaves of their senses, their appetites, their passions, their desires. Only too often men and women live as if the lower elements of their being were not only the most important, but the only elements in their nature; and so their spiritual nature is neglected or crushed, and their noblest gifts and faculties are destroyed, and they become total strangers to those aspirations, high instincts, mysterious yearnings which reach out beyond this passing world until they lose themselves in the bliss of communion with God. The make and structure of our being is not for sin, but for holiness. ' As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.' " Thou has made us," says St. Augustine, " for Thyself, and our heart is ill at ease until it find repose in Thee." Nevertheless man has been endowed with moral freedom, and so he can, and only too often does, cause evil things to be in what was otherwise God's fair universe. Men talk of the violations of Nature's laws which must be, they think, involved in every miracle, but the greatest, the most frequently repeated, yea the only violation of Nature's laws of which we have any experience is sin. God made man in His own image, and righteousness was meant to be His being's end and aim. Every sin we commit, therefore, is a violation of the true laws of our being, which are in very truth real laws of Nature. And as moral and spiritual

interests are for us of in-finitely more importance than material interests, it is easy to see how it is that the havoc wrought in this world by the sins of thoughtless and wicked men is of the most serious character. God is our absolute Lord and infinite benefactor, and sin is rebellion against God. God is holy, and as evil is the opposite of holiness there is to God in all this world nothing so horrible as sin. Sin is the greatest evil which can happen to any man, and no amount of material advantage should weigh with an honest man against his moral degradation. ' What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'

Need we be surprised, therefore, when it is asserted that God found it necessary to interfere in His own wise and rational way in and among the affairs of men? to specially manifest Himself to men who were so prone to ignore Him? to reveal plainly and unmistakably His true nature and character to men who were so apt to have false and erroneous beliefs with regard to Him? to make sinful men alive to the true design of their being, and to supply the means whereby they could be enabled to realise it?

We are spiritual beings, and we could not believe in a God who thought more of matter than of the souls of men. Whatever we may think of the cosmic order and of the sequence of cause and effect, we could not believe in a God who is untouched by the tragedies played on the stage of the human heart " where the fierce lights of passion blaze." And how could Christ have been our Example, our Ideal, our Teacher, our Helper, if He had been raised high above the ordinary conditions of human life, and had passed through none of our experiences? How could He have been the great Head of our redeemed humanity, the first Fruits from the dead, our Representative with the Father, our Intercessor with the Father, if He had not been closely allied to us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh? ' Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.'

It is therefore quite in accordance with our deepest thoughts and noblest feelings that Christ comes before us in the Gospel as a renewing power: a Saviour from sin, striving to put right what has been done amiss by man and to re-establish in human life a harmony which has been destroyed or marred by sin. And so the life of Christ may well be thought of as God's protest against man's blindness to Himself as He is revealed in Nature and in Providence and in the soul of man. Yea, it is a manifestation of God's love and mercy towards men who are continually violating the laws of their own true nature, and living neglectful of the fact that the material is subservient to the moral and spiritual in man, and who have forgotten the important truth that " the object of living is to live well and to grow in righteousness and in holiness and in nearness to the perfection of God." And if in making this protest and this Revelation the Gospel writers would seem to represent God as violating the uniformity of Nature, we must remember that this apparent violation of Nature's laws is, even with them, in the interests of a deeper law the law of the true nature of man, the law of the righteousness of God, the law of the moral order of the universe.

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### IX. CHRISTIANITY ANSWERS TO THE NATURE AND THE NEEDS OF MAN.

Man shall not live by bread alone (Matthew 4:4).

He shall give thee the desires of thine heart (Psalms 37:4). As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22). THE Christian Church is a visible result of the coming of Christ; and there is, in the opinion of many, no stronger argument in behalf of Christianity than the facts of the Church's history, its origin and growth, the changes effected by Christianity on the convictions, the characters, the lives of an ever-increasing number of men and women. The Church owes its origin to Christ, and was meant to be the abiding place on earth of the Divine Spirit, the treasure house of God's grace, the channel of God's gifts. It was to be the home of God's saints, where they were to be confirmed in the faith, trained in the Christian life, and built up towards the life eternal by the ministry of word and sacrament. It was to be a city set on an hill, a light shining in a dark place, an instrument for the effective working of God among men, a means for the conversion and regeneration of the world. But the story of the Church in its first days did not seem to be prophetic of its future greatness and glory. When Christ was crucified all His disciples forsook Him and fled, and the penitent thief may be said to have constituted the whole Christian Church in himself. And nothing in the New Testament is more remarkable than the quiet confidence with which our Saviour predicted the future greatness of His Church when as yet it had scarcely an existence. Its founder said that the Church would not fail, and it has not failed. He said that He would be with it always, and He has fulfilled His promise. The growth of the Church is fore-shadowed in these words: 'The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof/ 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.' And the prophecy contained in these words has been fulfilled. Truly marvellous has been the progress made by the Church. Strangely wonderful has been the influence which Christ has exerted and even now exerts in the world. The change which Christ wrought upon His disciples and which was perfected only when He had gone away, that same change has the unseen Christ been working on men and women all down the Christian ages; and the effects of this working are to be seen not merely in the number of those who are consecrated to His service, or in that vast multitude of men and women who to a greater or less extent have learned of Him, but also in the innumerable ameliorations, improvements, reforms, which in the course of the centuries have been effected on the outward lot of man. The history of the Church, it is true, has been a troubled one. Over and over again there have come up against her waves of what the world thought disaster, but storm after storm she has weathered and wave after wave she has surmounted. Now her existence was threatened from without and the great ones of earth persecuted her almost to death. And now great danger came to her from within: for heresy arose to weaken her, or schism came to shatter her, or intellectual doubt killed her energies, or moral corruption threatened her existence. But the Divine Life and the Divine

Spirit were in her and they could not perish, and her grand faith and noble aspirations and high ideals would not be crushed out of her, and ' One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all ' was a bond of union infinitely stronger than all the forces that were making for division. And so, notwithstanding all the dangers which menaced her in the past, the Christian Church using the word not in a sectarian manner, but in the broad sense which regards unity of spirit, harmony of aim and homogeneity of life as a more fundamental and essential unity than unity of organisation is alive to-day, and, in spite of her present difficulties and dangers, she is as earnest, active, and successful as ever, adapting herself to the changes necessitated by time, but trusting in her great Head and looking forward with hope, with confidence, to a success greater than she has yet achieved. But the question arises, To what are we to attribute the growth, yea, the origin of Christ's Church on earth? The Church owes its origin to the impression made by Christ on those who knew Him best of all, and to the conviction of which they became possessed a conviction which has not been impossible to men and women of the later generations a conviction towards which many in these days have been favourably disposed by the Teaching of Christ and by the fact that Christianity answers to the true nature and fundamental needs of man. In what remains of this paper let us consider how Christianity answers to the nature, the needs, the aspirations, and the hopes of man.

Possessed as we are of a physical nature, with its clamorous appetites and its innumerable bodily needs, we are tempted at times to believe that man is merely a superior kind of animal, living by bread alone, and with no interest in anything save what he can see and touch and taste.\*J And yet in our better moods we are certain that this is not a true description of our nature and character.

“ For what is man If the chief good and market of his time Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.”

We know that we have a reason and a conscience which ought to be our guide; and we are all conscious, at least at times, of feelings, wishes, aspirations which material things can never satisfy. We all feel that we are capable of and meant for a higher and nobler life than that of an animal: even for a life guided by reason and conscience, a life of faith, love, righteousness, holiness, a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice for our own good and for the good of our brethren; and we all somehow or other have a belief that no life can be at its best or worthiest which is not after this pattern.

Now, Christianity recognises the spiritual nature of man. Even in the first chapter of Genesis we read of our exalted origin: ' God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.' And did not our blessed Lord and Master give utterance to these words: ' Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'? 'What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? '

Moreover, our religion is a religion of faith in that spiritual world whose centre and origin is God.

However much our senses may appear to ignore or deny the existence of such a world, the deepest and truest instincts of our being are in harmony with this faith. Somehow or other we believe that the supernatural is always present in the natural.

Behind what the outward eye sees we feel that there is the great unseen. And so we think that if we could only get behind the vesture by which God reveals and yet conceals Himself, if only we could abolish the intervening medium which hides God from our view, we would find ourselves in the presence of a glory unspeakable. We are convinced that somewhere within the wonderful temple of the universe there is an inner temple, a holy of holies; and we yearn for a fuller knowledge of that holy place.

“O for a nearer insight into heaven,

More knowledge of the glory and the joy, Which there unto the happy sons is given, Their intercourse, their worship, their employ.” And to this desire of ours Christianity most providentially responds: not with full and detailed information, it is true, for now we see through a glass darkly, now we know in part. Nevertheless, Christianity does respond to our yearning, giving us an assurance which otherwise we could not have, and telling us everything we require to know.

’ The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.’ ’ Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.’ ’The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.’ ’ There remaineth a rest for the people of God.’ ’ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.’ But further, Christianity answers to the needs of sinful man. And what is it which, above all things, sinful man requires? “ What humanity needs is to be saved from itself, its fallen and perverted self: what it craves is to be left to itself.”

What sinful man needs most of all is the assurance of the divine forgiveness, a new heart, a soul so thoroughly in love with the things that are just and pure and true and holy and so certain of the worth and of the final victory of these things, that he is constrained and enabled thereby, in spite of life’s many and great temptations, to walk with confidence in the straight path of duty, and to follow on where Christ doth lead the way. Our circumstances and surroundings mean much to us, for they have an unmistakable effect upon our hearts and lives. When, therefore, you change for the better the outward lot of a man whose surroundings are unfavourable to his growth in grace and his increase in virtue, you do well, for in blessing him outwardly you are, it may be, making a contribution towards his moral and spiritual prosperity.

Moreover, education is a matter of great moment in a man’s life, for, as we all know, much of the evil in this world is, in great part, due to ignorance. But the great and fundamental source of evil in this world is the self-willed, selfish, sinful heart of man; and this, as every one admits, is not, of necessity, re-made or even re-formed by a re-shaping or re-arranging of our circumstances. You may educate men, and place them in the most fortunate circumstances, and yet they may continue to be the slaves of sin and the instruments of evil. The inner, secret self, the unseen spiritual seat of thought and desire and will, is not inevitably and always affected by a change in our outward circumstances. And so long as that inner self is unchanged, so long as we are sinful and self-condemned, linked fast to a guilty past and to an evil present, what the better are we of any change that may be effected in our surroundings? But change a sinful man’s heart and you change the whole world for him. Enable him to see the beauty of holiness, and to love and to have

confidence in truth and goodness, and you have made everything new for him. Give him the happiness, the hopefulness, the confidence, and the strength of those who are rejoicing in the consciousness of the forgiveness and love of Him who first loved us, who loves us still, and will always love us, and that man has entered another world, where “ he breathes a lighter air, sees an intenser sunlight, and moves to the impulses of a more generous spirit.”

Now, Christianity in this respect answers to the greatest and most fundamental needs of man. By revealing to us, in Christ, the length, breadth, height, and depth of the love and mercy of Him whose will it is that all men, even the chief of sinners, should be saved, and who is ceaseless in His efforts for the realisation of His loving purposes towards man, the Gospel can touch and soften the hardest hearts, can transform the lives that are most accustomed to evil, and can so strengthen and encourage us in holiness and well-doing that we are afraid no longer of even the strongest assaults of the Evil One. And yet, strange to say, in the very act of enabling us to perceive the lost ideal of our nature, Christianity deepens within us the consciousness of sin. ‘ Come unto me,’ said Christ, ‘ all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ And yet the first thing which the coming of Christ effected was to make careless, worldly, or sinful men uneasy, restless, and dissatisfied with themselves. The life which Christ lived stood up in solitary grandeur before the eyes of men, and it was in painful contrast with the life which they were living. And so they were shaken out of their carelessness and indifference, and they saw and realised their imperfections and sins as they had never realised them before, and they became uneasy, uncomfortable, alarmed. And as it was then, so it is now. The sense of sin has never perhaps been altogether absent from the heart of man, but it has been deepened and intensified by Christianity. We cannot think of Christ’s absolute sinlessness and of His perfect purity without realising the awful chasm that separates us from Him. When we look on this picture and on that we see at once that we have failed to realise the design of our being, that we have fallen from the estate wherein we were created, and that we have grievously sinned against the Lord. What a world of meaning there is in the simple words we repeat so often, ‘ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.’ But not only does the Gospel convince us of our sin and show us what we ought to be, it constrains and enables us to become that to which we are called of the Lord. We may not like the way in which what is called the doctrine of the atonement is often stated, but we know that God must of necessity hate sin, and we cannot help believing that our sins separate between us and Him whose approbation we earnestly desire. And thinking of the displeasure of a righteous God, our souls are disquieted within us, yea we are well nigh driven to despair. Now, when this is our condition, how is light to arise in the darkness?

How is hope to come to our despairing souls?

Words may then help us, but facts alone can bring complete relief. Hope may be ours, when we are told that God loves us in spite of our sins, and that with Him there is forgiveness for all who are truly penitent. But it is only when we see God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself that our hope is transformed into certainty. “ When,” says Harnack, “the Holy One descends to sinners, when He lives with them and walks with them, when he does not count them unworthy, but calls them His brethren, when He saves them and dies for them, then the terror of the awful judge melts away, and they believe that the Holy One is Love, and that there is something mightier still than Justice Mercy.”

If the Incarnation of Christ be the wise and fitting means used by God for showing Himself as He really is unto those who could not or would not know Him aright, then the sufferings of Christ are a profounder manifestation of God's love for man, and a more thorough realisation of His desire to save sinners than could have been possible otherwise: and the Cross is the culmination of the sufferings of Christ the ultimate experience in the sacrifice made for the salvation of sinners. "On the Cross Christ suffered what was necessary for the going forth of the divine forgiveness in all its fulness to a sinful world, and for bringing to bear upon it all those divine influences by which alone its salvation can be secured." The Cross is thus the measure of God's hatred of sin and of His love of the sinner. It is the realisation and manifestation of that love for man which even death could not conquer, that love by which the hearts of sinful men are touched and renewed, that love by which they are drawn away from their old sinful life and constrained to live for Him who suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. When we remember that the sorrows and sufferings of the Holy One and the Just were willingly borne for our good, though they were brought about by the sins of men, are not our hearts melted within us, and do we not feel drawn towards Him who hath done such great things for us? And when we remember that Christ our great Elder Brother, who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, has been completely victorious over temptation and sin, and that He appears before God as the Head of a redeemed humanity, and the victorious leader of those who are returning to the Father, do we not feel as if we had part and lot in an offering with which God must be well pleased, for it is a harvest of souls that can come to an end only when man has ceased to live upon the earth?

It is only, as it were, from a distance that even the best and wisest of men can obtain a glimpse of the truth on this great subject, but we necessarily miss much when we fail to bear carefully in mind the great fact of the solidarity of humanity.

We make a mistake when we look upon ourselves as isolated individuals, living a life wholly unconnected with the lives of others, a life in which we are unindebted to those who have gone before us, and uninfluenced by those who are round about us.

Doubtless every man has a distinct and separate personality of his own, a freedom of action which is undoubted, and a responsibility which cannot be denied. Our lives are practically in our own keeping, and to an unlimited extent we can make or mar them.

Nevertheless, the human race is one. For good or evil we are closely linked together, and innumerable multitudes of the dead and of the living have had something to do with the forming of every individual character and with the shaping of every individual life.

After all, we are the sons of our fathers, the descendants of our ancestors, the heirs of the past, the inheritors of what has come down to us, the outcome of our circumstances and surroundings.

"Old faces long buried look out of our eyes; voices from out of forgotten and unknown graves speak through our lips." Hereditary features, hereditary tendencies, hereditary characteristics; who has not noticed the existence of these things in those whom we know best of all? The negative side of this great truth is apparent to every one.

It is often because the fathers have eaten sour grapes that the children's teeth are set on edge.

It is true that sin is never our sin, or sin for which we are to be blamed, until we have given way to it and made it our own. Nevertheless, there may be in us a taint or tendency, a weakness or wilfulness which we have inherited from those who have gone before us, and which predisposes us to deeds of sin. Moreover, the evil done by men lives after them, and the thoughtlessness, the folly, the sinful-ness of the fathers may involve the children and the children's children in sorrow, mischief, and disaster. And we all know that men and women are often subjected to suffering and loss through the thoughtlessness, the selfishness, and the sinful-ness of others. Subtract from the sum total of our life's account the injuries directly or indirectly inflicted upon us by our fellowmen, and what reason would there be for the great majority of our murmurs and complaints? Nor does faith or piety or goodness exempt a man from the hostility of the worldly and the sinful. On the contrary, just because the spirit of the world is opposed to the spirit of faith and goodness, just because lies are in every case antagonistic to truth, the hatred of sinful men is often manifested in the most bitter and determined manner towards those whose characters and lives are altogether different from their own. But we must not overlook the fact that this truth has a positive as well as a negative side. And if we see the losses, we must not be blind to the gains that come from heredity.

Good as well as evil comes to us from the solidarity of humanity, from the fact that the human race is one, and that the individual members of it are closely bound together. In every domain of life we are constantly face to face with the blessings we have inherited from those who have lived before us. A sweet disposition, a good temper, unselfish inclinations; do not these things often seem to be inherited by us? The extent to which our country has been brought under cultivation, the wisdom of our laws, the worth of our system of government, the mechanical inventions which we owe to those who lived before us, the wealth of literature which has been handed down to us here, as elsewhere, we see the truth of the saying, 'Others have laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.' And in our ordinary daily experiences we may all see something of the way in which the lives of multitudes in every age are blessed by the un-selfishness, the self-denial, the self-sacrifice of those noble and devoted souls who consciously or unconsciously are followers of Him who suffered for us. Does it not indeed seem to be a fact pervading all Nature, as well as all human life, that there are results desirable, yea, absolutely necessary, which can only be brought about by self-sacrifice, suffering, decay, death? The hard rock has to be shattered and pulverised ere it can be the soil on which the shrub will grow. The leaves of the trees have to decay and die and fall, if we are to have that rich and nutritious earth so necessary for the support of vegetable life. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' The anguish and travail of the mother are the condition of the child's life, and the self-sacrifice of the parents is necessary for the proper up-bringing of their children. To advance the well-being, increase the happiness, extend the liberty, add to the knowledge and heighten the virtue of mankind this requires love, thought, toil, self-denial, and self-sacrifice on the part of many men and women. And ever and again for the accomplishing of some great end, for the carrying out of some noble purpose, it would seem to be expedient that one man should die for the people.

After all, it is not selfishness or self-assertion, but self-sacrifice, which is the greatest power on earth, "and the supreme act of sacrifice is death." Hence it is that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church: and hence it is that the life of Christ is "the archetype of all true lives."

It is true that there are burdens so peculiarly our own that each one must bear them for him-self. If, for example, we are conscious of the divine disapproval, the divine displeasure, the divine wrath, it

is because we ourselves have sinned. However much the sin of another may vex us and trouble us, it would not bring about the consciousness in us of the divine wrath against us. "The stings of conscience, the darkening of the moral perceptions, the extinction of the light of purity in the soul, the hateful bondage of evil passions, the bitterness of remorse, the shrinking from hateful memories of the past, the vague foreboding of the unknown future" these terrible penalties, says Principal Caird, come not to us from the iniquity of others, but follow in the train of our own sin: and however much we may be aided by the sympathy and the help of others, each one of us, so far as such things are concerned, has his own burden to bear. And yet even in reference to such things as these, it may be said of Christ that He suffered with us, and through us, and for us.

Christ had a fellow-feeling with us in our infirmities, and He could not look on suffering without suffering. From all frivolity and un-earnestness His pure and sincere soul drew back as with an instinctive recoil. To His divinely wise mind blindness and thoughtlessness and folly were a terrible vexation, and to His loving heart worldliness and sin were a grief past understanding. "Not only can a good man suffer for sin, but," says Principal Caird, "it may be laid down as a principle that he will suffer for it in proportion to his goodness. Not only can the sinless suffer for sin, but there are sufferings for sin which only he who is himself sinless can in the fullest measure undergo. It was possible for Him who knew no sin to bear on His soul a burden of humiliation, shame, sorrow for our sins, which in one aspect of it was more profound and intense than we could ever feel for ourselves." And so Christ was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. So truly, indeed, did He bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, and so surely was the chastisement of our peace upon Him, that for a moment, in the closing scene of His life, in the agony on the Cross, it seemed as if the face of His Father was turned away from Him. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' He thus experienced all the consequences of sin, though in them all He recognised and honoured the justice and righteousness of God's condemnation of sin. Yea, underlying them all He clearly saw the love of God for men who thoughtlessly or wilfully would destroy themselves by their sin. Our iniquities were thus laid upon the Holy One and the Just, and the willing manner in which He bore them, and the spirit of perfect love to man which was revealed in His profound sorrows and most tragic agonies, have touched the hearts and opened the eyes of multitudes of men and women, and have been the means of binding them to Him in the sure bonds of love and trust. Moreover, they have dispelled the cloud of separation which sin caused to arise between us and God, for they have given us the assurance that a loving Father yearns and strives for the return of every prodigal, and freely pardons and willingly restores to His favour all in whom is the earnest of better things to come in virtue of their union with Him whose life was one of perfect obedience to the will of God. And what a hopeful, helpful thing it is for us to know that there is forgiveness even to the chief of sinners. Does not such knowledge introduce into the lives of the most sinful a transforming influence which may renew their lives, and an upward current which may carry them on to the haven they vainly would reach, the end they earnestly desire to see.

Yes, the Advent of Christ is a fresh start for the human race a new beginning for the religious life of man. By becoming bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh Christ linked himself to humanity in the closest possible way, and gave an upward impulse to the life of man, so that we rise with Him into newness of life. "God as man elevated humanity from its own self-contempt," revealed to us the possibilities that lay hid in our being and infused new aims, new motives, new desires, new hopes, new energies into mankind. Yea, God as man has introduced a new life into the world of

men. ' I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' And this new and more abundant life ceased not when Christ passed away from the earth, but has been poured down upon man through the centuries, and still comes to us from Christ through the new and living way which he conse-crated and left open for ever through the sacred portal which He opened and no man shutteth.

There is a solidarity in the human race: a solidarity even in our salvation.

Say what we may of our individuality, we are closely bound together. In innumerable ways we influence each other for good or evil. Is it not a blessed thing for us to know, therefore, that while the good suffer for the bad, the bad are greatly blessed and benefited by the good that while the race may be cursed through the sin of Adam, it is blessed through the perfect righteousness of Christ. ' As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.' ' For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'

## 10 - Chapter 10

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X. CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE DIVINE TRUTH. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself (John 7:17). WHEN we study the teaching of Christ we soon perceive it to be thoroughly in harmony with the nature and character ascribed to Christ in the Gospels and in perfect accordance with fact and reality. Is Catholic doctrine Bible Truth? Is Evangelical doctrine Bible Truth? Questions such as these are naturally very interesting to many people, but there is a much deeper and more important question which we must not overlook, Is Christian doctrine Divine Truth? Is it in accordance with the nature of things? Is it true?

Nothing is more remarkable than the extent to which we can all verify in our lives the teaching of Christ. Indeed one of the strongest and most convincing proofs of the truthfulness of Christianity is to be found in the experience of those who have taken Christ at His word, and have responded to His gracious invitations. Everywhere and always they assure us that there is no life to be compared with the life to which Christ calls us, and that there are no such blessed experiences as those of the faithful followers of the Lord.

It is true that at first some at least of Christ's precepts are not very pleasing in the eyes of the natural man. So long as we are convinced that the things which we can see and touch and taste are the most important, yea, the only important things in the world so long as fortunate outward circumstances seem to us to be the only things worthy of our consideration so long as the blessedness of having plenty and of being environed with what must minister to pleasure, is the only blessedness of which we can dream for so long must many of the precepts of Christ appear to us to be doubtful, if not absurd. But sooner or later our experience of life must make such a position impossible for us. For the things which are seen are temporal, and sooner or later there must come a time when we pass from them or they from us. Sooner or later we begin to surmise that there are more things in heaven and in earth than are dreamt of in the philosophies of worldly men. Sooner or later the eye is not satisfied with seeing and the ear is not satisfied with hearing, and men begin to ask the question, 'What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Now, when light from another world thus breaks in upon us and when our worldly or sinful life becomes to us a weariness, a burden, a pain, there is nothing better for us to do than simply to respond to the words of Christ, 'come unto me,' 'learn of me,' 'follow me.' When we go to Christ and learn of Him we are undisturbed by those things which are constantly destroying the peace and happiness of ordinary men.

'Blessed are the meek,' says Christ, and when we are meek and lowly we are unaffected by those humiliations that destroy the happiness of those who are proud and self-satisfied.

'Love your enemies,' says Christ, 'bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.' How very irrational this precept

seems to be. And yet it is only when we abound in love to our neighbour that we see the possibilities of good which lie hid in him; and only then are we able to live and labour for the highest good of men, undeterred by the weaknesses, imperfections, sins which make themselves manifest in their lives.

' Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.' When our Saviour gave utterance to these words He did not mean to say that there is some peculiar virtue or blessed-ness in the mere fact of being persecuted. He here speaks of the inner satisfaction that comes to all faithful souls from zealous labour in a worthy cause, notwithstanding all the difficulties and troubles wherewith their efforts may be attended. Is there no pleasure to the noble soul in the consciousness of having done one's duty when it was difficult, or in being victorious over temptations which seemed destined to draw us into sin? Is there no pleasure in undergoing hardships for the cause which we value highly or in making sacrifices for those whom we love?

' Blessed are the pure in heart.' ' Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man.' Christ knew that the heart of man is the centre of his being, and that out of it are the issues of life. And so His mind is always centred upon what a man is, and not upon what he has got; upon his inner character, and not upon his outward possessions: for He knows that they only can be regarded as truly happy who are possessed of the best gifts love to God and love to man, and purity of heart and holiness of life and heavenliness of purpose and endeavour. And who can for a moment doubt whether Christ's method of looking at and speaking about these things is the right one? For what to us are even the most fortunate outward circumstances if our peace of mind is ruined by envy, malice, or uncharitableness? What to us is the greatest earthly prosperity so long as we feel ourselves to be linked fast to a guilty past, or know ourselves to be the slaves of some degrading passion or lust which is debasing our minds, sullyng our consciences or wrecking our lives. But let our hearts be right with God, and let us seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then, whatever our earthly circumstances may be, we have the blessing of heaven, and the peace of God which passeth understanding; that peace which the world can neither give nor take away. And those precepts of Christ which have more especially to do with a man's duty toward his neighbour, how true they are and how very important!

Christ always recognises the individual man, and it is always to the individual that His words are addressed. Religion is with Him a personal matter, and He calls men individually to repentance and reformation. But He never forgets that the individual is a social being related in innumerable ways to other men and women. And so, while all Christ's precepts have a bearing upon the social life of man, there are some which have specially to do with our duties towards others. And these precepts, how different they are from those in accordance with which most men usually regulate their conduct towards others, and yet how profoundly wise they are, and how greatly they are admired by the most enlightened consciences and by the noblest natures.

Christ calls us to self-denial and self-sacrifice, and yet, strange to say, He demands of us nothing that is inconsistent with our well-being, for our highest life can only be attained when we feel our unity with our fellow men and when our narrow, self-centred life is lost in the fuller and richer life that comes from communion with others.

' Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.' ' By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.' How apt we are to forget our duty towards our brethren; and this is often so, because we do not see how indebted we are to other people, and how necessary they are to our well-being, if not to our existence. Only too often do we think of ourselves as if we were isolated units, absolutely independent individuals, the sole creators of our fortunes, the unaided authors of our happiness, beings who receive little, if any, help or succour from those who are round about us. And thinking in this way, we make a very serious mistake. However important or unimportant we may be, we are all to a greater or less extent related to and dependent on one another. Society, in very truth, is composed of individuals necessary to each other's well-being, and who exist and work, unconsciously where not consciously, indirectly if not directly, each for all and all for each, so that in the state as in the body, ' the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.' If you possessed the world and were alone upon it, your position would not nearly be so enviable as that of the most miserable creature at present upon the earth. Your great possessions would not be able to purchase for you the necessaries of life. Your power and influence would not be sufficient to command one puny creature to do your bidding; with all your property you would have to do every-thing for yourself; and so for you the only question would be, How am I to keep soul and body together? Moreover, if you possessed the earth and were alone upon it, you would inevitably be a stranger to your finest thoughts and noblest feelings.

Affection, sympathy, love would be for you names and nothing more. Acts of kindness and deeds of self-sacrifice would become for you impossible. And your life, destitute of all these things, would scarcely be worth the having. And this leads me to notice the well-known words of Christ, ' He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.'

How absurd these words seem to be, and yet how true they are. We must die to our old sinful worldly self before that we can ever live that pure and heavenly life to which we are called. We must put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, before we can put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. When we do what we can to make the world better, we are helping to make the scene of our life more pleasant and desirable than otherwise it would be. We must love our neighbours if we are to call forth towards ourselves that affection and love which can so greatly bless our lives. " A deeper self-hood, a richer personality," says Dr. Momerie, " comes to a man from communion with others and sacrifice for others than he could possibly have gained by any amount of solitary contemplation or self-aggrandisement. It is only as our individual, narrow, exclusive, isolated self is developed into a larger, inclusive, sympathetic self that we come to our highest life. To go forth out of self, to have all the hidden wealth of feeling of which I am capable called forth towards others, and to receive back again this wealth redoubled in reciprocated affection and increased power of loving, this is to live wisely and well not to do this is to eliminate from life all that makes it most truly human, all that makes it most really valuable."

Take now the subject of Prayer. Does not our Saviour by example as well as by precept point out to us the true nature and the great value of prayer? He did not pray with others because He had no sins to confess, no pardon to ask. But ever and anon He resorted to prayer and communion with God, thus showing us that an answer to petitions is not the whole result of prayer.

One of the principal results of prayer is the change that is so often effected in the minds and hearts of those who pray often and earnestly. They may have begun by wishing to change the purposes of God with regard to themselves, but they have ended by being themselves brought into harmony with the mind and will of God. And when we have reached the stage when we are able to say, 'Not my will but thine be done,' what spiritual blessings may we not expect from prayer? "There exists around us," says Frederic W. H. Myers, "a spiritual universe, and that universe is in actual relation with the material. From the spiritual universe comes the energy which maintains the material: the energy which makes the life of each individual spirit. Our spirits are supported by the perpetual indrawal of this energy." To pray, therefore, is to put ourselves into direct communication with that mysterious power from which all grace and life and energy proceed. It is to have the strength of God made perfect in our weakness. It is "to attach the belts of our machinery to the power house of the universe."

If we ask and receive not it is because we ask amiss. 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.' But there are many other subjects on which Christ teaches with authority, for in reference to them His words are light-bringing and life-giving. So far as we can verify them His words are true, and we are persuaded that we can trust Him where we cannot see.

Take, for example, the subject of Sin.

Christ never makes light of sin. He never tries to persuade us that conscience is but a bundle of prejudices not entitled to respect. He never suggests that in certain circumstances a man may be wholly blameless when he sins. Christ never speaks of evil as unripe good, good in the making, though He gives us to understand that God can overrule evil unto good. He never says that the fall of man is necessary to his rise, though He tells us that a fall into grievous sin may awaken a man to a deep sense of his true position, and thus be the means of his rising to a height of holiness to which otherwise he might not have attained.

Christ does not think of sin as a thing to be avoided merely because pains and penalties follow in its train, nor of virtue as a thing that ought to be practised solely because of the pleasure or happiness which it may bring. With Him sin is that which is morally and divinely condemned, and which is therefore to be avoided whatever good things it may promise unto us. With Him virtue is conduct which is morally and divinely approved, and which consequently must be followed by us even when it involves us in loss, pain, tribulation, persecution.

'Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.' To Christ sin is doubtless an anti-social act, a wrong done by man to man: but it is more, for man is more than a social being. He is a religious being, conscious of being morally related to the Great Unseen. He is a rational and spiritual self, incapable by his very nature of finding perfect satisfaction in pleasure or gratified feeling. He has ideals of duty which he must try to realise, and visions of a common good for himself and others which he must endeavour to bring about if he is to be the possessor of that blessedness which Christ has promised to His faith-ful followers. And our Saviour tells us that it is not our acts merely but our motives, not our deeds but our intentions, not what we have done but what we have honestly striven to do, that is the divine touchstone of human character. Christ takes it for granted that the spiritual life is growth: sorely impeded sometimes a fight in which there is often a strong foe to be overcome. But He never has any doubt as to the result in those who are faithful. For God is in and with those who are His. And as God is stronger than Satan, and

goodness more enduring than evil, the purpose of God with regard to those who are His will not be balked what-ever the evil one may do. The profoundest compassion always characterised Christ's attitude toward the erring and the sinful, for He saw that circumstances and the law of heredity may affect us, and He knew that ignorance and thoughtless-ness are seldom wholly absent when we sin. But Christ's mercy and compassion never prevented Him from seeing the element of free-choice and self-will that is in every sin, however many and good may be the excuses which can be pleaded in extenuation. To Christ there is in human life something higher than heredity. It is a spirit, an inspiration from on high, a divine impulse which if responded to no circumstances should be able to overbear. And so with Christ sin is a personal fault and never wholly a misfortune a free act of the soul and never a necessity. It is a misuse of that freedom which, as we feel, we all possess. Moreover, it is always, to a greater or less extent, rebellion against God and the putting of our own will in the place of God's. It is the introduction of disorder and disturbance into a world in which otherwise law and order would everywhere prevail. And so, with Christ, sin is a most serious affair in respect of our relation to God as well as an evil which works untold mischief in our lives, and in the lives of others a doctrine with regard to sin which our own hearts, when consulted, will acknowledge to be true.

Take, again, the subject of Sorrow.

Sorrow is one of the sternest and yet one of the commonest facts in human life. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

There may be lives which have known little of true gladness, but there is no human life wholly ignorant of sorrow. Now, our blessed Lord and Master is the great comforter of all who are in sorrow. And what light does He throw on this important subject? Does He tell us that pain and sorrow are wholly useless, and that they ought never to have been in the lives of men?

Pain and sorrow He tells us are sometimes a punishment for sin; but even when this is so we have a manifestation, not of the vengeance, but of the righteousness and of the love of God. What kind of kingdom would the kingdom of God be if its highest interests could easily be trifled with? And would it be well for a sinful man if no notice were ever to be taken of his sin? Is it not well for the sinner when by correction he is driven out of his sin? Verily the severity of God is the outcome of His love and goodness. And even when pain and sorrow come to us not from our own sin, but from the sins and faults of others, they may be productive of great good in our lives. If they are borne in the right spirit they may tend to the improvement of our character.

It is natural for us to love the sunshine and the smooth way. It is natural for us to think that it is in every way best for us when we are fortunate and successful in our lives. And yet how few there are who have not been able to extract some blessing from the trials, the troubles, the sorrows to which they have been subjected. For these things break in upon our worldliness and selfishness, sometimes as with the crash of doom, compelling us to realise the relative importance of things temporal and things eternal, and forcing us to see how dependent we are at all times upon God. And so at the close of our disappointments and sorrows, or in spite of the continuance of them, we find ourselves sometimes giving utterance in all truthfulness to the words, ' It was good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.'

Take, further, the subject of death and what comes after it, and you will find that the teaching of Christ not only responds to our noblest hopes and longings, but also satisfies our sense of justice and becomes more real and true to us as we live under the power of it. When a man diej what becomes of him? Does he still exist, or was the last moment of earthly life the last moment of his existence? Now, all materi-alistic systems of philosophy assert or assume that life is a mere function of matter, and that the soul dies with the body: just as the music ceases when the harp is broken. But all systems of philosophy are not materialistic in their nature. Yea, the noblest thoughts of the greatest men have, as a rule, been antagonistic to the supposition that death ends all. And it is not difficult to understand why this should be so. Is there not something disappointing, something well nigh incredible, in the thought that just when good men and women have become most worthy of life, and most capable of living, they should cease to be? Is it not difficult to believe that men are to go on increasing in virtue and in godliness merely to find out at the end that they are but “ spray flung out of the deep to reflect the light of other worlds and fall back into the dead sea “? And is not our sense of justice unsatisfied with the supposition that death ends all for man? Are the inequalities of life to continue for ever? Are the injustices to which multitudes have been subjected never to be redressed? Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Is there not, therefore, a sense of relief and a feeling of satisfaction in the Scriptural as-surance that every one of us must appear before the judgment seat of God to receive according as we have done, whether it be good or bad? And does it not seem as if the sanctions of a moral life become much less effective when we have rejected the doctrine of a future life?

It may be true that virtue can exist without what may be called the lower religious sanctions the hope of the divine reward or the fear of the divine punishment in another world. But if virtue is to live and thrive, is it not necessary for her to be certain that she is not a passing, evanescent thing, a mere temporary disturbance, an unreal pheno-menon? If she is to flourish vigorously, does she not require the assurance that no worthy life is ever lived in vain, that our noblest aims and most faithful endeavours never come to nought, but survive with their effects and consequences even beyond the limitations of this world: enduring, at the heart of things, as a part of the eternal world? And is it not impossible to think of the immor-tality of virtue apart form Personal survival the Eternity of God, and what seems involved in it, or conditioned by it, the immortality of those who are truly virtuous? The Individual perishes if the human race endures. But if ‘ Heaven and earth shall pass away’ the human race as we know it may yet cease to be. And in that case how can virtue be thought of as surviving apart from the Eternity of God? “ Virtue can persist only if there is a survival, and if the right Will continues in an immaterial world.” And how can we as individuals be greatly edified and inspired by an immortality in which we are to have no personal share? How can we have that encouragement and help for the work and cares and troubles of life which we so greatly require if the future we are to look forward to is to be one in which we shall see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing, remember nothing, love nothing, be in-terested in nothing, be conscious of nothing?

“ Hath man no second life? pitch this one high: Sits there no judge in Heaven our sin to see?

More strictly then the inward judge obey: Was Christ a man like us? Ah, let us try If we then, too, can be such men as He.” This is noble teaching. It is to all intents and pur-poses the practical teaching of Christianity without the beliefs which help so powerfully to confirm and support such teaching. But many will draw an entirely different inference from the pre-supposition that there is

no God and no future life. And the great mass of men, if utterly destitute of the leading Christian beliefs, are not likely to live in accordance with the precepts given in the above lines.

It is true that there are some who appear to be of a different opinion. It has even been said that belief in a moral order of the universe may prevent the uni-verse from becoming morally ordered that belief in a Divine Being who overrules all things and whose righteous will must in the end be realised is almost certain to paralyse our energies by tempting us to stand idly by looking for support from above, or listlessly waiting for things to work out by them-selves the good which we desire to see. But any danger that may lurk in this direction is as nothing when compared with that which is to be found in the heartlessness and listlessness which are sure to overtake us when with hopeless hearts we look out on the great fight of evil against good, feeling persuaded that it is a losing battle we are waging when we match our human weakness against the overwhelming might of the powers of evil in the world. We are saved by hope; for it inspires us with strength and courage and activity. But what hope can we have if we cannot look up

“from the finite to infinity, And from man’s dust to God’s divinity “if we are not convinced that goodness and truth are divine and of the Lord, and therefore infinitely stronger and more enduring than evil and lies?

It is all very well for people who have been living throughout their lives in a religious atmosphere with religious influences constantly playing upon them, to speak as if it were quite an easy thing to retain the highly moral life required by Christianity after that we have divested ourselves of all the Christian beliefs. But the question is: Will the great mass of men and women continue to live as Christians ought to live long after they have ceased to believe in God and in the world unseen? Most thoughtful people will be inclined to answer this question by asking another. Can a grand superstructure exist without foundation? Can there be fruit without a tree on which it is to grow? Can a stream go on for ever completely separated from its source? If all our present moral sanctions and aids to a worthy life are scarcely able to keep us up to the standard that is required of us, how will it fare with us when the strongest and best of them are taken away?

We all know the power and persistence of habit and custom: but in this changeful world even they are ready to perish, when the reason that suggested them or the conviction that gave rise to them has ceased to be. And it is even so with faith and life, creed and conduct. Sometimes our creed sits lightly on us, for we have adopted it carelessly, and in much of it we can scarcely be said to believe. We are weak and fallible, and often we are untrue to our strongest convictions and holiest resolutions. But all the same, belief is the parent of action, and the lives of men and women on the whole are to a greater or less extent coloured and controlled by what they truly and thoroughly believe. And when conviction, with regard to God and the world unseen, perishes the life that flowed from it is smitten with death and soon will die. “ What if the flush of sunlight plays upon the horizon? The sun is set and ere long it will be light.” And here it may be noticed that Christians are often taunted with the peculiar selfishness which is supposed to be inherent in their religion. Men speak of the “ other-worldliness “ of Christianity, and they who tell us that virtue is its own reward are regarded as occupying a much higher standpoint. But the real difference between Christians and these critics of Christianity does not turn upon the question as to whether virtue is its own reward, but upon the question whether this reward can be sufficiently secured within the narrow limits of an earthly existence. Virtue is its own reward in Christendom not less truly than amongst

the purest and noblest philosophers. For the Christian life is not a life of virtue undertaken in order to win a life of worldly pleasure in another state of existence.

It is a life of righteousness, and the prize to which it looks forward is a life of the same nature and character, but in a sphere where "righteousness takes new and transcendental proportions and becomes its own crown and reward." But neither in Philosophy nor in Christianity can virtue be said to be its own reward to those who do not as yet delight in virtue, and who have to struggle unceasingly against temptations to worldliness, selfishness, and sin. And this struggle can only be rationally justified when we are convinced that the cause of virtue represents everything that is noblest and best and most enduring, and that no sacrifice we can make in the domain of worldly success, personal inclination, selfish pleasure, and sensual gratification is too great a price to pay for the blessedness which we feel sure must come sooner or later to those who delight in the things that are just and good and pure and true. When death is thought of as ending all for all men, then, in the opinion of many, the reward of virtue is not, in the great majority of cases, sufficiently secured.

"My own dim life should teach me this, That life shall live for evermore, Else earth is darkness at the core, And dust and ashes all that is."

Moreover, our noblest virtues would then seem to be deprived of that atmosphere without which they cannot thrive.

"Truth for truth and good for good: the Good, the True, the Pure, the Just Take the charm ' for ever ' from them and they crumble into dust." But when we believe in God and in the life eternal, are we not inspired with hope and courage and strengthened for the life and work to which God has called us? He that has this hope purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure. And when we are possessed of pure hearts and live in God and for God, how certain we become that because He lives we shall live also. ' Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die.'

It is difficult at times to believe in immortality. When the dull clods thud upon the coffin lid it is difficult for us to keep from believing that death ends all. When we look upon the cold, stiff, insensate corpse, fit only to moulder into dust, and contrast what is with what was, it is difficult for us to believe in a life after death. When we think of the selfishness, the meanness, the worldliness, the brutality, the bestiality of some men and women, it is difficult for us to keep from believing that man is merely an animal, " living a brief life and dying an unmeaning death." But when we live as do many of the children of God when we remember that time is a part of eternity when we realise the act that every moment of our lives we are in the presence of God when we live honest, conscientious, God-fearing lives when we covet the best gifts and follow after the things that are just and pure and lovely and of good report when we rise in spirit above the world and look constantly beyond it when we identify ourselves with, and live for, interests and causes and works which are of the Lord, and which are as eternal as God Himself, we cannot believe ourselves deceived, we cannot believe that man is mortal. We are sure and certain then, that we who believe in God, and live in and for Him, shall live for ever.

' If any man will do God's will he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.'

## 11 - Chapter 11

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### XI. WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

What think ye of Christ? (Matthew 12:42).

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16).

WHAT we think of Christ must depend, in some measure, on what we ourselves are: our mental and spiritual characteristics. This was true of those who saw Christ in the flesh, and to a greater extent it is likely to be true of those who can only see Christ through the eyes of others.

Most intelligent Christians are now so accustomed to see the Divine in the orderly uniform course of nature that they are surprised when they are re-minded that in the distant past there may perhaps have often been in nature vast upheavals and over-whelming catastrophes. So prone are they now to see the Divine in ordinary human nature that they do not know what to think of that marvellous manifestation of the Divine which was made in Jesus Christ. But there are still many with whom it is far otherwise. They can see the Divine most clearly, if not solely, in the unusual and startling, and they do not know very well what to make of those passages in Scripture which bring before us the human nature of Christ.

Take, for example, the attitude of Christian people towards those narratives in Scripture which give us the genealogy of Jesus.

Some Christians, full of the thought of the Divinity of Christ, are perplexed when they read the genealogies given in St. Matthew and St. Luke.

Why, they ask, should so much stress be laid on the earthly origin of the Virgin-born Son of God? And why should the descent of Christ be traced through Joseph, who is, according to common belief, merely the legal or putative father of Jesus? But this difficulty never presents itself to those who seek for the natural explanation of what seems to be supernatural, and who, perceiving that earthly evolution means heavenly involution, do not find it hard to believe that Jesus may well have been at once Heaven-begotten and Earth-born. Even to be born of a virgin is after all to be born of a woman, and to be born of a woman is to be born of humanity. But to be born of humanity is, we must remember, to be made in the image of God and to be closely related spiritually to our Father who is in heaven. Many people, accordingly, ask the question: Is not St. Luke a true evolutionist? for in tracing the genealogy of Jesus does he not go back to Adam, ' which was the son of God '? And do not the genealogies of St. Matthew and St. Luke remind us of the divine care with which at every stage the evolutionary process which ended in Christ was carried on? Does not the name of Abraham bring up before our mind the man who was to be the father of the faithful people in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed? And do not the other names in these genealogies lead us backward into the most distant past, and do they not remind us at every step of the fact brought out so clearly in the Old Testament, that the stock from which Jesus came was a spiritual stock, wisely selected, carefully tended, thoroughly trained, strictly disciplined, and so made

capable after many centuries of producing One who was born not for His own nation only, but for all the world? And are not some good Christians perplexed when they are told that physically, intellectually, and spiritually Christ had a development from infancy to manhood similar to our own? Thinking constantly of the Divinity of Christ they are prone to imagine that He must always have been what He only afterwards became, and they know not what to think when they are referred to passages of Scripture which are as the breath of life to other Christians.

' And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.' ' And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.' These words tell us that Christ grew up gradually under the influence of His home and natural surroundings: and that as His eyes opened to all that was around him, so did His mind gradually awaken to those divine truths which afterwards he uttered with authority and not as the scribes.

' And when the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a season.' These words remind us that the Sinless One was made perfect in holiness by temptation that temptation had upon Him as He grew to maturity something like the effect which it has upon all who conquer it by the grace of God and who feel themselves " lifted to a loftier moral greatness, a surer and more commanding strength than would have been possible without the struggle."

' It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.' ' Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.' These words tell us that suffering in a sense did for Christ as His powers and faculties developed, what it does for all who meet it and pass through it in the right spirit, and who feel that their sense of God's nearness is intensified, their humility deepened, and their sympathy quickened by the process. And what are we to think of Christ as He went out and in among men in the full exercise of His ministry?

Many people find no difficulty in the wonders and marvels ascribed to Christ in the Gospels. To them, indeed, Christianity would probably be incredible if it were not believed to be supported by the miracles of Him who is Lord in the physical as well as in the moral domain. The miraculous in the Person and work of Christ is to them a revelation of the presence and of the power of God a reminder that God still lives and works even in the ordinary processes of nature where our sin-darkened eyes are only too often unable to behold Him. But the position of many Christians is greatly different from this. To them the spiritual content of the Gospel is the main thing, and it is by Christ that they have thus been taught. They perceive the importance of the usual, the spiritual significance of the material, the supernaturalness of the natural, and it is Christ who hath opened their eyes to these truths. Can we be surprised when we find such people thinking and speaking as much about spiritual law in the natural world as about natural law in the spiritual world? Can we wonder that to them the uniformity of nature is a revelation of the presence and power and wisdom of God, and that they find it difficult to think of what seems a failure in God's plan of the world a failure whose consequences require to be prevented by methods which seem to be irregular if not lawless? The tendency to think after this latter fashion has been strengthened and deepened in modern times not merely by our increasing knowledge of nature's laws, but also by the conviction now almost everywhere prevalent that in the distant past the Christian Church in her legitimate desire for the confirmation and advancement of moral and spiritual truth was only too often careless and indifferent with regard to what may have seemed to her to be morally unimportant

matters, viz., the facts of history and science.

Great would appear to have been the credulity of men in what are called “ the ages of faith.”

Whatever supported or illuminated the claims of Holy Church did not to the great majority require proof. It carried within it the evidence of its own truthfulness. And so beautiful legends were no sooner imagined than believed; no sooner believed than they were written down as facts of history.

Wonders and marvels will never cease in the world or in human life; but miracles in the sense of violations of the laws of nature or arbitrary interferences with the established order of nature do not happen now.

They have gradually ceased, people assert, as men have become more careful with regard to their facts, and as they have required more exact and severe proofs in order to believe. As was to have been expected, some say, the supply of miracles ceased with the demand for them; and the demand gradually became a thing of the past as people came to see that there is law and order everywhere in nature, and as they refused to believe in a world guided by isolated acts of arbitrary inter-vention. And so multitudes of intelligent and earnest people are now inclined to think that the so-called Church miracles of the early and middle ages were only pious frauds, or ordinary natural phenomena which were mistaken for miraculous events. And some going backward further still are not afraid to ask even in reference to the Gospels, Is there nothing but history here? Is there not also an element contributed by the imagination of men, or due to their affection for a long lost friend, or to be accounted for by hopes and expectations which they fondly cherished and which they wished to see in some wise fulfilled? Even with regard to the question immediately before us the nature and character of the life lived by Christ the modern critical spirit suggests questions which would have startled our forefathers, and which must be very perplexing to ordinary believers.

It is true that some in these days do not put much stress on the historical truthfulness of the Gospels. They tell us that the Gospels are authori-tative for us even supposing them to be merely works of imagination utterly destitute of an histori-cal basis; for the authority of the Gospels is, they say, the authority of a moral ideal which need not be historical in order to be true. Even when we take it for granted, what few would venture to assert, that the Gospels are wholly imaginary, they still present us with an ideal of a morally perfect life. But a moral ideal once formed is certainly authoritative for man’s moral nature. “ Simply because it has constructed such an ideal it is morally bound to aspire to realise it” But although a man is bound to try to realise the ideal which he may have formed or adopted, surely the general historical truthfulness of the Gospel narrative its truthfulness in its main out-lines is a matter of much more serious importance than some people seem inclined to believe.

It must always be of great practical importance for man to know whether and to what extent his ideal has been realised in ordinary human life. For whatever man has done man may aspire to do, and whatever man has been that may man hope to become. “ We needs must love the highest when we see it “; but if the highest has never actually been seen by man, and if we are only possessed of idle fancies and of vague dreams with regard to it, then, however beautiful and uplifting our ideal may be, it is not likely to have for us that solemnising awe, that commanding

authority, that constraining power which a religion must have if it is to be of any great use to us. We may be subdued before the grace and grandeur of a moral superior; but is it possible for us to venerate our own idea? A fundamental element in religion is a sense of absolute dependence, but how can we have a sense of absolute dependence on a merely abstract ideal?

Moreover, we must remember how apt our fancies are to mislead us, and how prone we are to imagine things which have no existence. We may give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name, but it does not thereby cease to be airy nothing. We may speak as if the baseless fabric of a vision were some-thing real and substantial, but our words do not transform the vision into a reality.. It is true that spiritual truths may be taught by fancies and ideas as well as by parables and fables, for they as well as parables or fables may help to open our eyes to the existence of spiritual facts which at present we do not see. But when a man wishes to assure himself of God's presence and working, he must have more than words about God, however attractive they may be; more than fancies about divine things, however beautiful they may be; more than the ebb and flow of subjective feelings, however lively they may be.

If we wish to have anything like certainty on the matter we must be able to find outside ourselves facts through which God plainly reveals Himself unto us. We must go to nature, history, and human life for the confirmation of what we seem inclined to believe. If God is to reveal Himself to us it must be through facts which are an actual part of human knowledge and experience.

Now, it is just after this fashion that God comes to us in Christianity. Christianity is an ideal, but it claims to be an ideal revealed through a fact. It is a spirit, but a spirit revealed through a body. God is revealed to us in Christ, not through Christ's words merely, but also and more especially through His person and character, through His deeds of love and mercy, through His sufferings and death, through the love that was revealed in His passion the love that was stronger than death; for death itself could not keep Christ from His purposes of love to man.

But, a religion that thus comes to us through facts and transactions within the domain of historical knowledge cannot afford to be indifferent to his-torical evidence.

Doubtless the eternal truths taught us by our religion are all-important. But the contingent truths of history, in which they are realised and through which they are revealed, can never be un-important, but must always have for us " an abiding and inexhaustible value and vitality," not merely on account of what they are in themselves, or in the im-portant consequences that directly flow from them, but also, and more especially, because they reveal to us eternal truths about God, and about His purposes towards the children of men. What God is once, He is for ever: for with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. And every act of God is not only important in itself, but precious also in the inferences which it enables us to draw with regard to the character and the purposes of God. Just as a very small arc of a circle enables us to determine the whole circle, so any act of God in the past is a sure foundation for our faith in God in all the future. The coming of Christ into the world, therefore, is more than a contingent fact of history, whose tem-porary importance has long since been exhausted. It is a guarantee of God's continued love for His children and of His present strenuous efforts for their salvation. And the death of Christ is more than a great work done once for all. It is a pledge of all that God is now doing, and will yet do, in and for and by the children of men. ' He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? '

Now, it is just here that the intelligent Christian in our days finds a chief difficulty. Does the historical evidence of which we are possessed suffice by itself to bring home to us the reality and truthfulness of certain things generally believed by Christians? Christ's life, for example, was, we are told, stainless, perfect; and therefore a moral miracle as great as any physical miracle can be. But when we look closely into the matter we are at once confronted by a difficulty which may be expressed in the words, Can we, so far away from the time referred to, trust such human testimony as we have when it asserts that Christ was sinless and perfect? We are told that Christ's Personality made a marvellous impression on many of those who were brought into contact with Him; but to see our Saviour as He lived on earth, and merely to hear of the effect which His Personality had on those who saw Him, are two quite different things. "No mathematical fact is doubtful: no historical fact is certain." But if these words are true, there are many things in the Gospels which from their very nature cannot, on the mere ground of such historical testimony as we have, be regarded as more than highly probable. And so we are scarcely surprised when we meet with men who speak to us after this fashion: "The spiritual senses of fallible men cannot suffice to certify the fact of absolute sinlessness any more than their physical senses can certify the perfect sphericity of a ball." To all who take up a position of this kind it must, of course, be said that the testimony of a few fallible men is far from being as we have seen and shall see all that we have to found upon when coming to a conclusion on this subject.

It is impossible to accept the main Gospel facts in such a way as to pass under the power and pressure of them unless we read the New Testament with the necessary preconceptions and prior convictions. A whole series of prior convictions with regard to God, the slavery of sin, and the reason-ableness of redemption must be present with us if we are to feel the full force and power of the Gospel narratives. But we do not require to be ashamed of such preconceptions, for, as we have seen, they may be perfectly rational and in accordance with the facts of ordinary human experience. And is it not always possible for us to reason backward from an effect to its cause? How, for example, are we to account for Christendom except by pointing to Christianity? and how are we to account for Christianity apart from Christ! Unless we postulate the existence of a unique personality pre-eminent in love, goodness, and truth, and as like as may be to the Jesus of whom we read in the Gospels, it is impossible for us to explain satisfactorily the origin of Christianity or the existence of Christendom. The facts, therefore, through which God reveals Himself unto us are of great importance, and so we must give due weight to the evidence which helps to assure us of their reality.

All that we know of Christ comes to us through the minds and memories of others. Why Christ Himself abstained from writing we are not told, but we may easily conjecture. He foresaw that His own written words would be of little avail without a perpetual miracle to preserve them from corruption: and He knew how apt men are to be brought into bondage to the letter which killeth. But Christ came to bring in the Dispensation of the Spirit: 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.' And so Christ chose to be remembered in the world and to live on in the world, not by verbatim reports of His words or photographic pictures of His deeds, but by begetting His own mind and spirit in others by the marvellous impression which, as He knew, the Son of God must produce on those who had the eye to see and the ear to hear. And so it was enough for Christ to form a society which was to bear witness to Him found a living Church which, by His Spirit, was to be guided into all truth.

St. Paul is the earliest witness to Christianity; for many of his Epistles are, without doubt, older than the oldest of the Gospels. But in none of these Epistles is there any reference to the signs, wonders, mighty works of Christ. Strange to say, it is only in Acts ii. 22 and x. 38 that, outside the Gospels, there is any such reference in the New Testament. And this silence of the other parts of the New Testament on the subject of the miracles of Christ has induced some men to believe that the Gospels were written at a late date, and when there had arisen a desire to make Christ like unto the heroes and founders of other religions a tendency to decorate the story of Christ's life with "fictitious miracles." But when we are inclined to theorise on this subject, it will be well for us to remember that St. Paul believed in the greatest of all the miracles recorded in the Bible the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it would not be right for us to say that he had no real grounds for his belief.

Doubtless, the appearance of the glorified Christ may have at once suggested this belief to him, and have confirmed him in it. But evidence in support of it was quite within his reach, and we may be perfectly sure that it was not overlooked. When St. Paul went up to Jerusalem about three years after his conversion, it was we are told in Galatians 1:18 to see Peter: with whom, we are further informed, he abode fifteen days. But St. Peter, in the opinion of St. Paul, was a witness to the resurrection, for did he not see Christ 1 Corinthians 15:5 after that He had risen from the dead? Can we believe that such a man as St. Paul could remain with such a man as St. Peter for such a lengthened period of time without discussing the subject of the resurrection? And if there had been any serious difference in their beliefs, would it not have been somewhere stated by St. Paul? The fact that St. Paul is silent as to differences between him and St. Peter ought surely to make us feel certain that about eight years after the resurrection St. Peter and those who were associated with him at Jerusalem believed on this all-important subject exactly as St. Paul believed: and as, according to St. Luke, the Christians of Jerusalem believed a few days after the death of Christ. The Gospel according to St. John was written at a comparatively late date. But even the Synoptic Gospels, in point of time, come after many, if not all, of the Epistles of St. Paul. From this, however, it is not necessary to infer that the Synoptic Gospels have been seriously coloured by the later notions of men with regard to Christ. For, strange to say, we do not find in them many of those thoughts, ideas, phrases, methods of statement, and argument which are to be met with in the Epistles, and which seem to have grown up in the minds of the Apostles and of the first Christians in the twenty or thirty years which followed the death of Christ.

"Each Evangelist," says Dr. Chase, "edited and arranged the materials on which he worked, sometimes interpreting them, sometimes giving them greater point or fulness, sometimes adding information which he derived from some authority unknown to or unused by the others." But what were the materials on which the Evangelists worked? Even when we think of the Gospel that was second in point of time as indebted to the one that was first, and of the third as indebted to the first and second, it is necessary for us to think of one, if not all, of them as depending upon a Gospel narrative that was oral in its beginning a well known and generally received verbal or written account of the life of Christ, together with a record of His sayings. But even this ancient substratum this earliest form of the Gospel is likely to have contained narratives with regard to the miracles of our Lord: for miracles nature miracles as well as miracles of healing are to be found in the common tradition of the Synoptic Gospels, the matter which is to be found in all the three Evangelists, and which may be regarded as exhibiting "the closest approximation we possess to

some parts of the original narrative from which our Gospels are derived.” When writing the Gospels, therefore, St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke seem to have done their utmost to give us in its simplest form the Gospel Story which was taught in the first Christian Churches. In their well-arranged and orderly narra-tives they tell us those things which were most surely believed and most firmly established in the early Church, ’ even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.’

“ Whatever may have happened at the grave, and in the matter of the appearances one thing,” says Harnack, “ is certain: this grave was the birth-place of the indestructible belief that death is vanquished, that there is life eternal.” But if this belief took possession of the followers of Christ very shortly after the death of our Saviour, how are we to explain its origin apart from the resurrection and “the matter of the appearances”? We may say that Christ had displayed before human eyes “ the witness of a spiritual and ageless existence,” and had so powerfully impressed the disciples that they could not for more than a moment believe that all was over with Him when He was laid in the grave. When they pondered over His words of Promise, thought of all that He had been, and realised the power wherewith the remembrance of Him acted upon them still, it may have been easy for them to believe that Christ was risen, yea, that He had actually been seen by them. But if we can believe in a Personality so unique and so powerful in spiritual influence, why should we take it for granted that in every conceivable way He must of necessity have been holden of death? And why should we find an insuperable difficulty in our path when we think of accepting the emphatic and doubtless well-tested testimony of St. Paul, who assures us that Christ ’ was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present ’? But whatever we may think on this subject, it is well for us to remember that what the Gospels tell us about Christ is worthy of the most careful attention, for their words express the convictions of those who knew Christ best of all. And special confidence ought we to have in the words of the Gospels when the character of Christ is concerned, for in the moral and spiritual domain the disciples were as competent as witnesses can be. They knew Christ well; they had been chosen by Him; they had been taught by Him; they had become imbued by His Spirit.

They had been with Him in all circumstances of familiarity, and they must have been swift to detect any signs of imperfection or moral frailty in Him, for whose sake they had given up so much, and on whom their future so greatly depended. Their con-victions, therefore, are not to be lightly set aside. And yet, when we come to think of it, is it not difficult, in some respects, to distinguish between their convictions and the beliefs of many in these days, who are generally regarded as severely critical? “ The fact,” says Dr. Mackintosh in the Natural History of the Christian Religion, “ that men who were in hourly intercourse with him, while placed in the most trying and testing circumstances, could discern no evil in him, could even derive from his behaviour the strangely novel idea of a perfectly sinless being, is enough to establish his claim to a position in the history of mankind abso-lutely peerless... If already during his lifetime they formed such an estimate, it can only be regarded as a confession that there was in his character and conduct a phenomenal depth and beauty which baffled comprehension and rivalry.”

Men who think and speak after this fashion are, in one respect at least, not very far removed from the ordinary Christian position. To them has been granted a perception, indistinct and imperfect, per-haps, but still real, of that unique characteristic of Christ which believers call His Divinity a

characteristic which does not mar or distort His humanity, but which is revealed to us in and through His humanity, and which permeates, exalts, transfigures, and transcends His humanity. Not seldom has it happened that hesitating minds have been led forward to a fuller faith by looking closely at the marvellous portrait of Christ which is given to us in the Gospels, and by thinking of the way in which our Saviour is represented by the Evangelists as living and acting before the eyes of men. "The Gospel," says Rousseau, "has marks of truth so great, so striking, so perfectly inimitable that the inventor of it would be more astonishing than the hero."

It would not have been a difficult thing for the Gospel writers to have told us that Jesus was a wonder-worker, by whom miracles of all kinds were continually being worked. But the chief characteristic of Christ as He comes before us in Scripture, is the severe restraint He imposes on Himself in the use of His supernatural powers, the moral and spiritual purpose underlying the use of them, and the love and mercy made manifest in and through them.

It would have been an easy thing for the Evangelists to say that the character of Christ was flawless, perfect. But a chief feature in the character of Christ as He is presented to us in the Gospels is the balance and proportion of excellences which seem so contradictory. He is at once tender and severe: tender to all who are unfortunate, and severe in His attitude towards the insincere. He is a hater of evil, and yet He was merciful to its victims. He is loving and gentle, yet withal invincibly resolute. He is patient, and yet He is full of holy zeal. He is humble and meek; but look at the assertions He makes with regard to Himself and the claims which He puts forth in behalf of Himself.

It would have been a comparatively simple thing for the Gospel writers to have contented themselves with telling us that Jesus was Divine. But instead of doing this they bring this Divine Man down into the arena of ordinary human life, and depict Him as He went out and in amongst men, speaking, working, sympathising, sorrowing, suffering in the various situations in which He found Himself. The Gospels bring Christ graphically before us, and show us vividly how He demeaned Himself in all the varying circumstances of His changeful lot, whether believed in or rejected, followed or persecuted, loved or hated, revered or execrated; and in all they give us a life-like and consistent portrait of a singularly unique Personality. "If," says Rousseau, "the life and death of Socrates are those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God."

Now, the ablest of those who have attempted the task know how difficult it is to idealise a character, and how well-nigh impossible it is to keep that character distinct, clear-cut, and life-like, unless it has been suggested by a life that has really been lived, and which is to a greater or less extent known to them. How, then, is it possible for us to believe that the Fishermen of Galilee could succeed in a task infinitely more difficult than had ever been attempted before? How could they have imagined such a life as that of Jesus Christ, and how without innumerable inconsistencies and blunders could they have depicted the Divine Man as living, working, suffering, dying for and at the hands of sinful men? Only one explanation would seem to be possible. They had in their minds a real character a life that was actually lived. They produced a distinct, true, living likeness of Christ, not so much because "Heaven held their hand," as because they had before their eyes "the great original" one with whom they were acquainted, or whose life was well known to them. "It is," says J. S. Mill, "of no use to say that Christ is not historical, and that we do not know how much of what is admirable has been super-added by the tradition of His

followers. The tradition of His followers may have inserted all the miracles He is reputed to have wrought. But who among His disciples, or among their proselytes, was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imaging the life and character revealed in the Gospels?

Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee: as certainly not S. Paul whose character and idiosyncracies were of a totally different sort: still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that the good that was in them was all derived, as they always professed that it was derived, from the higher source.”

1 When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.’ When we think of the way in which events happened and affairs shaped themselves in the ages immediately preceding the coming of Christ, how apt many of us are to think and speak after this fashion: Christ was merely the creature of His age and circumstances, and any greatness which may be claimed for Him is due to the fact that He seized upon ideas which were already in circulation, and by speech and act expressed them more clearly and powerfully than others had done.

There is no new element in Christianity: it is simply “ the reproduction in collective form of the ideas contained in the religious and in the philosophical and ethical systems of antiquity.”

Now, when we are inclined to think and speak after this fashion it will be well for us to remember the facts and reflections which show us how impossible it is to account in this way either for Christ or for Christianity. In the first place, no truly great man is or can be merely the creature of his age and circumstances.

It is true that famous men often do owe much some very much indeed to their circumstances, and to those who have lived before them and prepared the way for them. Very often men seem to be great because they are standing on the shoulders of others, or because they have been able to complete that which others have nearly finished. But the real greatness of a man is to be measured not by what circumstances have made him, but by what he has been able to do in his circumstances or in spite of them. And judged by this standard, who can be compared with Jesus? His circumstances were not favourable to greatness or to reputation, or to the rise and increase of His influence. Never, indeed, was there a man who in many respects owed so little to His birth, His surroundings, His country, His time. And yet, who has made such a distinct contribution to the religious knowledge and to the spiritual life of the world? Who has made such a powerful impression, morally and spiritually, on his own age and on succeeding ages? Christ was born into an humble home in an obscure village of an unimportant country in which dwelt an isolated and exclusive people. But in Him there is not the slightest taint of class-feeling, provincial narrowness, or national exclusiveness. When He comes forth before the eyes of men He is full of grace and truth, the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely, so that in Him alone all men can find the true ideal of what a human life should be. And when He speaks all can listen, all are constrained to listen, for His words are applicable to all, containing as they do the eternal principles in accordance with which human life should at all times be regulated. In the second place, however closely connected with the past Christianity may be, it is not either as a theological or as a moral system the mere reproduction in a collective form of the ideas contained in the religious, philosophical, or ethical systems of antiquity. The God of Christianity is not “ the First Cause “or “ the Almighty Creator and Governor of the World “ of whom the philosophers spoke. On

the contrary, He is a self-revealing Spirit who, while He transcends the world, is immanent in it and at once realises Himself in and reveals Himself to humanity. Christianity thus brings down the divine into the form of an individual life lived under ordinary human conditions in order that humanity may perceive its own true character and be enabled to rise to the divine.

Even the more particularly Jewish conceptions are transformed by the magical touch of Christianity. "The sense of alienation and distance from God which had grown upon the pious in Israel just in proportion as they had learned to look upon Him as no mere national Divinity, but as a God of justice who would punish Israel for its sin as certainly as Edom or Moab is," says Dr. Edward Caird, "declared to be no longer in place; and the typical form of Christian prayer points to the abolition of the contrast between this world and the next which through all the history of the Jews had continually been growing wider: 'as in heaven, so on earth.' The sense of the Division of man from God, as a finite being from the Infinite, as weak and sinful from the Omnipotent Goodness, is not indeed lost; but it can no longer overpower the consciousness of oneness. The terms 'Son' and 'Father' at once state the opposition and mark its limit. They show that it is not an absolute opposition, but one which presupposes an indestructible principle of unity, that can and must become a principle of reconciliation." And the Christian Ethical System is different from all the systems that preceded it. It may be possible to collect from the pages of pre-Christian Pagan writers isolated passages which have a greater or less resemblance to some of the precepts of Christianity, but even a very considerable amount of success in this work cannot make us blind to the fact that there is in Christianity something which is distinctive and peculiar. "Ancient morality, like ancient astronomy, concerned itself," says W. L.

Watkinson, "with a narrow sky and a few stars; the morality of Christ, like the astronomy of Copernicus and Newton, lets us into the infinite heaven, with some constellations not seen before, and with new possibilities of character ever glowing into sight."

Before Christ's time intelligent men had their ideas more or less vague of duty, and their classification, more or less defective, of the virtues. But Christianity enlarged to a marvellous extent the range of duty, extending it to the minutest details of life, and demanding the highest principles in the ordinary work and commonplace affairs of our life.

Moreover, Christianity assigns great importance to many virtues which were inadequately realised or not recognised at all in pre-Christian Ethics.

Everyone will admit that the originality of an ethical system depends less on the elements of which it is composed, and which must in a sense and to a certain extent be the same in all, than on the value or importance assigned to the various virtues, and on the way in which they are "fused into a symmetrical whole."

Now, we all know that Christianity lays special stress upon virtues which were ignored or over-looked by the ancient philosophies.

Love to God and man is at the centre of the Christian system; and here a virtue to be great, yea, to be worthy of the name, must be penetrated by a spirit of love. And hence it comes about that reverence, devotion, purity, righteousness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, pity, mercy, unselfishness, self-denial, self-sacrifice, have a position in the Christian system of morals which they have in no other. Doubtless, all true virtues that were in the old systems such as wisdom,

courage, temper-ance, justice, patriotism, bravery are to be found in Christianity; but here they are so inspired by the divine spirit of love, and so broadened out in their meaning and significance, that it is difficult for us to recognise the old in the new. How different Patriotism, for example, becomes, when, instead of looking upon the people of other countries as enemies whom we are bound to hate, we are possessed of that humane spirit which leads us beyond the bounds of our own country and enables us to see our brethren in all the children of men, and especially in those who are ignorant, superstitious, downtrodden, oppressed, and in all those who stand in need of such help as we can render. How different bravery becomes when it ceases to be identified with the virtue of the soldier who will die on the field of battle rather than desert at the approach of the enemy, and includes the virtue of the soldier of the Cross who withstands principalities and powers for the sake of Christ's cause, who resolutely fights against evil wherever he may find it, and who in heathen and barbarous lands proclaims the gospel of God's love even when he has to face loss, tribulation, suffering, death.

No; Christ's circumstances did not make Him what He was, nor did the Religions and Philosophies of the ancient world make Christianity what it is.

It is true that the Old Philosophies had educated men on moral and spiritual subjects, and so well had they done this that people had become conscious of the imperfections of even the best philosophies. The Old Religions led up to Chris-tianity and prepared men for it; and in nothing was this more apparent than in the fact that the old religious beliefs were perishing because people had outgrown them and were already feeling after something higher and better. But to prepare the way for something better and to discover or produce it are two quite different things. There is some-thing in Christianity that was not in the religions and philosophies of the ancient world, and we do not account for Christianity when we say that it is a combination of pre-existent elements. We might as well try to account for the light of day by saying that it is the sum total of the light of all the stars, with an element of light contributed by the sun. The sun does make a contribution to the light of day, but it is a great one so great as to obscure the united contributions of the stars. And so Christ is the greatest Teacher the world has seen, not because He learned and reproduced all the wisdom of the wise who lived before His day, but because He dwelt in God and God in Him, and because He was thus the Revealer of God to man, the Light of the World, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Word made flesh and dwelling among us.

He now shines alone in the Spiritual Heavens, not because he has united in Himself the feeble twinklings of innumerable spiritual stars, but because He is the great Sun of Righteousness, shining by His own inherent light, and causing all other luminaries to pale their ineffectual fires.

“ Our little systems have their day, They have their day and cease to be, They are but broken lights of Thee, And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.”

It has been said that the ideal of duty and of human excellence given us in Christianity are perfect and final. If this be, as we believe, true, is it not difficult for us to think of its origin apart from its realisation in Jesus Christ?

Before Christ's time men had their ideals, which became nobler as the years passed by, higher and fuller conceptions of excellence taking, in the course of time, the place of those that were lower. Why did not this gradual evolutionary process go on for ever? Why at a certain period in the

history of the race did a perfect and final ideal of duty and human excellence dawn upon the world?

Before Christ's time many had endeavoured to answer the question, ' Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? ' No one had found out the Almighty unto perfection, but some had met with a certain amount of success in their attempts. It was reserved for Him who came in the fulness of time to be completely successful where others had failed. To His clear vision God and the other world were as truly visible as to His outward eye were the most obvious objects which lay before Him. What a marvellous revelation of Divine things comes to us from the words of Him who could speak with authority and not as the scribes from the life of Him who was able to say, ' He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'

Now, as we all know, character is the condition of moral insight. The pure in heart, and they only, shall see God. " Increasing purity," says Dr. D.

W. Forrest, " alone brings increased vision; but the increase is merely relative. Absolute insight implies absolute inner harmony of nature." If, therefore, Christ gives us, so far as circumstances permitted and human speech allowed, a full, true vision of God and divine things, a perfect and final ideal of duty and of human excellence, are we not going beyond the facts of the case when we say that the Jesus of History is essentially and fundamentally different from the Christ of Faith, and that the one was transformed into the other solely by the excited imaginations of credulous men? When we draw nigh to Jesus to learn of Him, do we not, as it were, feel God drawing us to Himself and making us possessors of the life divine?

" It is this that makes faith quite certain that this Jesus is not a human invention." " As surely as everything depends on the soul finding God and becoming one with Him, so surely is He the true Saviour, Guide, and Lord who leads the soul to God."

## 12 - Chapter 12

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### XII. A NEW EARTH WHEREIN DWELLETH RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for... a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). THE Christian Religion is a religion of hope; and we all know how fruitful for good a reasonable hope firmly held may be. What would our life be without hope? Who could live on through three score years and ten in utter hopelessness? Who could bear up under the troubles and trials, the sorrows and disasters of life if he had no hope of anything in heaven or earth?

Doubtless there are hopes which are false and spurious, hopes that will deceive us and fail us at the last, hopes that will encourage us in indolence, presumption, self-conceit, and lead us on to sorrow, mischief, and disaster. Nevertheless, any hope not positively sinful or wholly irrational is, perhaps, better for man than no hope at all; for, however poor and inadequate it may be, it will serve to keep him going until a worthier hope has taken possession of him. And we all know that the hope set before us in the Gospel is reasonable as well as adequate, worthy, holy, inspiring, ennobling, for it is founded on the conviction that God is the same yesterday, today, and for ever, and that His will must in the end be realised that all things serve God's sovereign will and carry out His plans and purposes, which are plans and purposes of love to man, that the things which constitute the character of God are worthy of our love, trust, confidence that goodness is infinitely more powerful and enduring than evil, truth than lies, love than hate that the great Judge of all the earth will most certainly do right that truth, righteousness, love, mercy " are principles to be carried out to the utmost extent, and to be trusted and followed in the direst extremity."

True, the time has been when the hope of Christians was not in all respects similar to our own. ' Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven.' These words were remembered by the early Christians and interpreted in a certain way they were a source of comfort and strength and joy. The expectation that the ascended Christ would shortly return in glory and in power for the sudden and miraculous establishment of His kingdom this hope sustained the early Christians in the darkest days, and enabled them with earnestness and confidence to do the duty that lay to their hand. When the Master in whom they so thoroughly trusted was taken away from them, when the whole world was arrayed against a handful of men whom it hated, despised, persecuted, how could the first Christians have hopefully set about the work to which they had been called, if they had not been persuaded that Christ would speedily return arrayed in glorious majesty, if they had not been convinced that soon He would emerge from His celestial chamber resplendent in glory, and attended by countless myriads of His Father's angels? When the early Christians were bitterly opposed and violently persecuted, when even their most faithful efforts

seemed unavailing and failure stared them in the face, it did them good to think that the day was coming, yea, was near at hand, when in the most sudden and unexpected way, by some signal manifestation of the power of God, a glorious trans-formation would be effected and men would behold new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. But in the meantime all things seemed to continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

Days, months, years passed, but Christ did not return in power and glory. Generation followed generation, but the mighty transformation had not become a thing of the past.

Nevertheless, during all these years the Christian Church had been increasing in numbers, power, and influence. Faithfully and effectively she had been giving herself up to the work of enlightening the world with Christ's word of truth, and of permeating the world with His Holy Spirit. And notwithstanding the difficulties and dangers which she had to confront, her work had been abundantly blessed of the Lord, and there had been a movement upward and onward all along the line. Everyone will admit that the nations have gradually become more enlightened, more righteous, more merciful, more humane. But just on account of this success, the attention of Christian men has now become centred upon other aspects of Christian truth. Men have begun to realise that God's Church is one on earth and in the heavens that the Church on earth is but the visible portion of a great invisible whole " bound together in the same order of supernatural life."

" One army of the living God, To His command we bow, Part of the host have crossed the flood, And part are crossing now."

We now see, as we never saw before, that the earth is also the dwelling-place of God, and the home of God's saints. And we are beginning to ask in all seriousness the question, whether we really have been honestly trying heretofore to make the earth worthy of the honour which has thus been conferred upon it, and whether we have been doing our best to bring about a realisation of the prayer, ' Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven '?

Now, when we think of the earth as God made it, there can be no doubt that it was a suitable and fitting place for the abode of the Saints of God.

What a marvellous place is this earth on which we live, and which was meant to be to us, for a time at least, not merely a place of existence, but a home.

How interesting it is: how exceedingly fruitful; how surpassingly beautiful. The varied forms of life that are upon the earth, the growth of the way-side flower, the formation of a drop of dew, the coming of the rain, the origin of light and heat, the raising up of the hills, the laying out of the seas do we not find in these and in innumerable other things matters of the deepest interest and well fitted to exercise and educate our intellectual powers? And see how productive the earth is and how able " to provide without stint the main requisites of human happiness." Is it not a fruitful garden for man to dwell in? Is it not capable of producing in abundance food for our hunger and water for our thirst? And is it not a labouring machine constantly working for our good? The garden and the harvest-field, the forest and the glade, the mountain and the valley, the river and the ocean, the winds and the waves, the rain and the dew, the light and the heat do they not all in innumerable ways furnish us with the conditions and the means of healthy and happy living? And is not the earth beautiful as well as useful? Is there not beauty everywhere on earth and sky and sea for the eyes that are opened to behold it.

“ Every sort of beauty,” says Mr. Greg in his Enig-mas of Life, “ has been lavished on our allotted home; beauties to enrapture every sense, beauties to satisfy every taste; forms the noblest and the love-liest, colours the most gorgeous and the most delicate, odours the sweetest and the subtlest, harmonies the most soothing and the most stirring... Everything is bestowed in boundless profusion on the scene of our existence; we can conceive or desire nothing more exquisite or perfect than what is round us every hour.”

“ God made the country, and man made the town.”

It is only in a subordinate and qualified sense that there is any truth in these familiar words. For God made man, and God has given him strength and skill; and anything that man can do is simply a shaping into other forms, and a putting into new relationships the matter which God has prepared for his use. And it is to God that man owes the inspi-ration towards everything that is wise and good and worthy in his works in the country and in the town. But there is one thing in the life of man, whether it be in the country or in the town, which is not due to God. To the Christian the facts of nature are the acts of God; but to the Christian there is one thing in existence which is not a fact of nature, but an unnatural fact. Sin was not called into being by God. Evil formed no part of the original constitution of things. Man is himself responsible for sin and for all the sorrows and privations and miseries that have followed in its train.

God made man in His own image, and He meant man to love Him, and to live for Him. But He knew that a forced love is no love at all, and that a mechanical obedience is no obedi-ence at all. And so God endowed man with that freedom which is his grandest characteristic that free will without which real love and true service are impossible, but with which, alas, dis-obedience and sin may quite easily arise.

And, as we all know, man chose that alterna-tive which he ought carefully to have avoided.

Thoughtlessly or wilfully he preferred evil to good, the suggestions of Satan to the known will of God. And so the responsibility for the moral evil that is in the world rests solely with the free agents who have sinned.

We live in a Paradise of God’s arranging; but it is a Paradise where the lives of many have been made sad and miserable by the folly and the sin of man. “ The world which we inhabit is,” says B. F. C. Costelloe, “ the world our fathers made, and it is beset with the result of old ancestral sin: for it is the tragic property of wrong that its ill consequences affect not only him who does it, but also those to whom his life is bound in this great family of struggling souls.” And even now men cause evil things to be in what ought to have been a fair and delightful Paradise. Even now the sins of men cast a dark shadow where all ought to be purity and peace.

Even now men do what they ought not to do, and leave undone duties which they ought to perform. Only too often even now the evil hearts of men constrain and urge them on to vex and grieve and injure and persecute their fellow men and so they increase the evil that is upon the earth; that evil from which have come the trials, the troubles, the privations, the sorrows, the suffer-ingswhich are so often to be met with in the lives of men. But we who have faith in God do not believe that this state of matters will prevail upon the earth for ever. God’s in fctee heaven^, and so it must sooner or later be all right with the earth God is on His throne overruling all things, and we who have faith in God are persuaded that there is a limit to the mischief that can be done

by sinful man. Yea, because God hath already brought near His righteousness in Jesus Christ, we cannot believe that selfishness and injustice will characterise for ever the conduct of man towards his brother man. The spirit of Christ and His law will yet bear sway on the earth. Love and not selfishness will yet be the constraining power in men's lives, and justice and considerateness will yet be the distinguishing marks of all those rules and regulations in accordance with which the wealth of the world is distributed. We who have faith in God look for a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. We believe that the kingdom of God will yet come, and that God's will will yet be done on earth, as it is in heaven. And is there not, after all, a good reason for the hope that is in us? Are there not to be seen by us almost everywhere signs and indications innumerable of the coming of that for which we look?

For, notwithstanding the backward state of some countries, is there not on the whole an upward movement among the nations? In spite of the selfishness and sin still in the world, are not men becoming more righteous, more considerate, more merciful, more humane in their feelings and sympathies? The teaching, the example, and the spirit of Christ have had a wonderfully beneficial effect upon the hearts and lives of men, ay even upon the conditions under which and the surroundings in which men and women fulfil the task which destiny has set down for them. Christ's life has been a fountain of new life in the world, His spirit a source of inspiration, His teaching and example the light of the world, and love and loyalty to Him a mighty power in the lives of men, constraining them to all manner of good deeds.

It is true that some have been inclined to doubt the truth of this assertion.

"The nineteenth wave of the ages rolls now deathward since his death and birth, Has he fed full men's starved-out souls? Has he brought freedom upon earth? Or are there less oppressions done On this wild world beneath the sun?"

These are very clever lines, but the questions to which they give expression are inspired by the spirit of prejudice or exaggeration. Had the poet said that Christians have not always been so true to the spirit and teaching of Christ as they ought to have been, and that consequently the world has not made the progress it ought to have made, we could all have thoroughly agreed with him. But we cannot shut our eyes to facts, and so we must know something of the blessings which Christianity has brought or has been the chief agent in bringing to mankind.

Innumerable are the improvements and ameliorations and reformations which have followed in the train of Christianity. "The high conception that has been formed of the sanctity of human life, the protection of infancy, the elevation and final emancipation of the slave classes, the suppression of barbarous games, the creation of a vast and multifarious organisation of charity, and the education of the imagination by the Christian type, constitute together a movement of philanthropy which," says Mr. Lecky in his History of European Morals, "has never been paralleled or approached in the Pagan world."

Now, when we remember what has been done by Christianity in the past, and when we think of the way in which the spirit and the teaching and the life of Christ have commended themselves to and have taken possession of the hearts and minds of multitudes of the most intelligent and influential men and women of our time, we cannot but be hopeful with regard to the future; we must believe in the progress which is yet to be made by us if only Christian men and women are

true to the calling wherewith they are called of the Lord. But if we really wish to bring about that for which we look, we must endeavour to live up to our wishes: we must work along the line of our prayers. We must look to our hearts and lives, for out of the heart are the issues of life; and when we are cultivating the garden of our own lives, we are doing much to advance the Kingdom of God, for we are setting an example which, in the way of influence, must powerfully act upon the men and women who are round about us. And we must look to the way in which, in all our relation-ships, we act towards those who are brought into contact with us day after day. Think of the misery that is caused in this world by envy, malice, uncharitableness, evil-speaking, lies, dishonesty: and try to imagine what a changed place the earth would be if these things had no place in our hearts and lives, and if all men were true to Christ's golden rule, His new commandment, and His doctrine of the brotherhood of humanity. And we must carefully bear in mind the duties that devolve upon us as citizens, who in free countries like our own have practically the making of the laws in our own hands. It is our Christian duty to see to it that the laws of the land are impartially administered, and that in themselves these laws are equitable and righteous, and for the good of the whole community. How difficult it is to make such laws we all know! But that is all the more reason why men possessed of the spirit of Christ and anxious for the advancement of His kingdom should pay strict attention to the duties devolving upon them as citizens, for upon the nature and character of the laws of the land depends to a great extent the question of the approach of that for which we look a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Moreover, if that for which we look is at no very distant date to become a reality, we must cultivate that humane spirit which is ready to pass the bounds of our country and kindred, and to go on errands of mercy to the ignorant, the needy, the helpless, the oppressed, wherever they may be. On the face of the earth there are still many nations and tribes which are steeped in ignorance, superstition, or barbarism. There are still multitudes who need our prayers, our sympathy, our example, our help. And if they do not get these things it will be long, very long indeed, before that human eyes can see that for which Christians look a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. But we will not fail to help them we will not shirk altogether the white man's burden if we are true to the calling wherewith we are called of the Lord. Freely we have received, and freely will we give and nobly will we do, if we remember the example of Christ, and bear in mind His words, 'Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world.'

Now, when we cease to be 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,' when we are tempted to weariness in well-doing, when we are disappointed and disheartened by an apparent want of success in our efforts to advance the Kingdom of God on earth, it will help us greatly if we remember:

I. The inherent difficulty that there always is in the doing of good.

We all know how difficult it is to drive away the misconceptions and prejudices and superstitions and erroneous beliefs which have taken possession of the minds of men. And we all know how difficult it is to rid our-selves of evil habits which we have carelessly or wilfully formed. Bad habits are easily and quickly called into being, but to get rid of them when formed severely tries the temper and the strength of the best of men. For they come almost to be part and parcel of our nature, and to separate ourselves from them is like to self-destruction. But the formation of good

habits is an affair of the greatest difficulty. For here we have to go against the grain of the natural man, and our selfish desires and sinful inclinations and un-hallowed passions proclaim war against any and every attempt to control or restrict or restrain them. And when for a prolonged period we have been the slaves of evil habits the task which the self-reformer sets himself is difficult in the extreme. ' Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.'

We need not be disheartened, therefore, when we do not meet with all the success we could wish for in our many and varied efforts to serve the Lord and to advance His kingdom on the earth. To enlighten the minds of men, to purify their hearts, to ennoble their lives, to give an upward tendency to their thoughts and desires and wishes, to take part and lot with Christ in the regeneration of the world this is a glorious work, but it is a difficult and trying one, and he who would have a share in it must not expect to accomplish all his wishes in a moment, and as by the wave of a magician's wand.

II. We must carefully remember that there always is a harvest to our sowing a result from our faithful efforts to serve God and to advance His kingdom although we may not be able to see it in all its fulness or to put a right estimate upon it.

Some result from our labours, if they are earnest and worthy, we are likely to see. But the sum total of the results accomplished by us, we may never know. And the results which we cannot trace may be infinitely more important than those which we can trace. In the past the good work done in the world was not wholly accomplished by the few great men whose labours obviously have not failed and whose names have been handed down in honour to our day. In the past there were millions of unknown toilers whose humbler lives have done good service to mankind. Their labours were not in vain, though they are unremembered now, and though they were unnoticed even in their own day. And just so is it with ourselves. It is not the few but the many who are carrying on the world's work so that it may be well with those who are to come after us. Multitudes of men and women are blessing the world by their labours, and yet their labours are left unnoticed and we cannot trace the results of their good deeds.

Nevertheless, none of these good deeds are ever lost. They never fail of a good result. They leave indelible traces on the souls of those who do them: they are recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life: and they all go to the making of that mighty stream of goodness by which Providence fertilises the ages. The bread cast upon the waters may not be found for many days; but found at last it shall be by some one or other. The rain when it has fallen disappears beneath the surface of the earth, and for a time no trace of it is seen; but when the warm and genial weather comes again, it causes the earth to abound in vegetation. And equally productive and salutary are the good deeds done by men and women.

“ We scatter seeds with careless hand,  
We dream we ne'er shall see them more;  
But for a thousand years Their fruit appears  
In weeds that mar the land Or healthful store.  
The deeds we do, the words we speak,  
Into still air they seem to fleet;

We deem them ever past, But they shall last:  
In the dread judgment They and we shall meet.”

Think, for a moment, of the greatest work that ever was done on earth. Think of that unknown life that for thirty years was lived at Nazareth.

Think of the three years' patient preaching amid abuse, insult, contempt. When Jesus died no life seemed so unsuccessful and so unproductive as His. When our Saviour hung upon the Cross His life appeared to be a total failure, for all His disciples and followers had forsaken Him, and the penitent thief seemed to be the only soul that He had for His hire. But the Saviour's Cross became the throne of His power. And ever since that day all eyes have been drawn to Him who, on the Cross, was lifted up; and even those who do not professedly belong to Him have had to admit that His influence on the hearts and lives of men has been, and still is, the greatest and the most beneficent the world has ever known.

Let us think on these things, and let us lay them to heart. Let us trust in the Lord and do good, assured of this, that no deed done for Christ ever fails of a result or of a reward.

' Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.' ' Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'

## 13 - Chapter 13

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XIII. THE COMPLETION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Are there few that be saved? (Luke 13:23).

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands (Revelation 7:9). THE ideas entertained by many with regard to the final completion of the Kingdom of God are a stumbling-block in the way of their faith. When they think of the future which awaits us they are perplexed and troubled, for they see vast multitudes falling under a doom that is awful banished for ever from the presence of the Lord to a place where God has forgotten to be gracious, or ceasing to exist at the stern fiat of Him who called them into being.

If only a few are to be saved, has not God made man in vain? Has not the mission of Christ been a failure? Will not Heaven be shorn of great part of its glory and joy? And will not ' the victory of God over Satan prove to be less complete than we now expect? But why should men have such ideas when they think of the completion of the Kingdom of God?

Nowhere in Scripture are we told the exact number of those who are to be saved. To the man who put the question, Are there few that be saved? our blessed Lord and Master replied: ' Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.' And these words remind us that when we attempt to answer this question definitely and precisely, we are trying to be wise beyond what is possible for us.

We do not know our own hearts perfectly, and we may be sure that our opinion with regard to what God thinks, or will think of others, is well nigh valueless. As we live in this world we doubtless have often to form judgments with regard to our neighbours, and there may be times when it is necessary for us to act upon such judgments. We may even find it incumbent on us to give expression to them. But we may take it for granted that such judgments are always more or less tentative and partial, and never wholly and absolutely true. Even when there is no beam in our own eye to obscure our vision, and no want of charity in our heart to bias our judgment, we cannot truly judge of the motives which are at work in another's mind, and we cannot fully know his difficulties and temptations and trials.

"Who made the heart, 'tis He alone Decidedly can try us; He knows each chord, its various tone, Each spring, its various bias.

Then at the balance let's be mute, We never can adjust it; What's done we partly may compute, But know not what's resisted."

It is foolish of us, therefore, to dogmatise with regard to the future weal or woe of even our nearest friend. It is absurd of us even to attempt to give a definite answer to the question as to the number of those who are to be saved. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons which the Father

hath put in His own power. It is not for us to dare to anticipate the judgments which will be pronounced on the great and awful day of the Lord. It is enough for us to make sure that all will be well with ourselves on that great day. It is enough for us to be certain that we are obedient unto the command, ' Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.' But although our Saviour has discountenanced all foolish curiosity and idle speculation on the subject of the number of those who are to be saved, He has never forbidden earnest and reverent thought about the future and about the completion of the Kingdom of God. And it is not difficult for us to understand why this should be so. Our hope with regard to what is to be influences our life in the present, and affects our destiny in the future. And so there is no reason why we should not, but every reason why we should, think earnestly and reverently sometimes about what we hope for, for ourselves and others.

Now, when we think about the future, the under-lying and determining thought with many is the love and goodness of God.

God is love, they remind us; and His purposes, which cannot fail, are purposes of love to us. And so they are full of hope with regard to the future of humanity. If not in this life, then certainly in the life that is to be, salvation will be found by every human soul. Far more confidently do they speak than does the Poet of the Larger Hope, to whom we are indebted for the well-known lines:

“ Oh yet we trust that somehow good Will be the final goal of ill, To pangs of nature, sins of will, Defects of doubt, and taints of blood. That nothing walks with aimless feet, That not one life shall be destroy'd Or cast as rubbish to the void, When God hath made the pile complete.”

They believe in the ultimate pardon of the wicked who are condemned at the Day of Judgment. They maintain that the Divine Purpose of love which will have all men to be saved will not for ever be frustrated by man's resistance. They assert that, “ sooner or later, after, it may be, the lapse of ages numbered beyond human ken,” all souls will rest, purified and renewed, in the bosom of the Universal Father.

Now, there is no reason why Christians should not entertain a pious wish, or religious hope, with regard to the future well-being of all men. To such a wish or hope we are prompted by some of our best thoughts and feelings.

“The wish that of the living whole No life may fail beyond the grave, Derives it not from what we have, The likest God within the soul?” And are there not many passages of Scripture which seem to speak of a final victory when God shall be all in all, and when all things shall be as God wills them to be? But when men proceed to dogmatise on this subject, and to assert that, because God is love, every soul which He has made must find salvation in this life or in that which is to come, then they are wise beyond what is written, and their dogmas are not justified by the teaching of Scripture or by the facts of the case. Does not our Saviour speak of the sin that hath never forgiveness, of the worm which dieth not, of the fire that cannot be quenched, and of the great gulf which none can pass? And do we not see the power and persistence of evil in this world? and does it not seem as if it were possible for a man to so indurate himself in evil in this life as to extinguish all capacity for goodness? And what is there in the future which must of necessity bring about a great change in hardened sinners whom the incidents and accidents of life have not affected in the slightest? “ If God is anywhere He is here; if He is near to the soul at any time it is

now; if a decision of eternal consequence can be taken under any circumstances, it can be taken in this world." Even now we are living under a canopy of love, and if, so circumstanced, men remain blind to the love of God, or if seeing it they can remain untouched and unaffected by it, what reason have we for asserting that something will be met with in the future that must of necessity bring every hardened sinner to repentance? God is love now, as well as in the future; and yet we can all see the terrible prerogative of man's freedom that freedom by which God's purposes may be daily frustrated that freedom by which men may, in the course of time, harden themselves into "an irremediable antagonism" to God and goodness.

How then can we possibly assert that no soul will remain for ever unreconciled to God? To speak after this fashion on this great subject, is it not to belittle our present life? to forget that time is part of eternity? not to speak of putting a great temptation in the way of the thoughtless and the careless. But with others, when they think about the future, the underlying and determining thought is the righteousness rather than the love of God the severity rather than the goodness of God. And when this is the predominant thought, there are always many considerations which tend to give a sombre aspect to our view of things. The conviction that sin cannot be forgiven till it is repented of and forsaken: the belief that without holiness no man can ever see the Lord or enjoy His favour: our knowledge of the power and persistence of evil in this world: the fact that many die and make no sign, that multitudes pass away without ever hearing of Christ: the widely entertained opinion that many of our Saviour's words assert or imply that our future destiny is determined during our life on earth: the stern and startling words of Jesus, 'Many are called, but few are chosen,' 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life,' these and many other considerations tend to darken our hope and to make us fearful and afraid when we think of the future of the great mass of men.

Nevertheless, in spite of all these things, it is possible for men and women who think often of the righteousness of God to entertain the larger hope as they meditate on the completion of the kingdom of God. For whatever else they believe in, they believe in the fairness and justice of God, and with confidence they can ask the question, Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

All men have not the religious advantages of which we stand possessed, but did not our Saviour give utterance to these words, 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required'? All men have not the knowledge of God that we have, but God has never left Himself without a witness on the earth, and no one is, or ought to be, wholly destitute of a knowledge of God's will for him. 'For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.' Many are still ignorant of the Gospel: many have not as yet heard the name of Christ; but has not St. Peter said, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.' We may believe that it is only while the lamp of life holds on to burn that the sinful man may return to God, and yet in our hearts we may entertain the hope that God's mercy at the last will be extended to multitudes whose case to our limited view may be desperate; for no man can truly read the heart or rightly interpret the life of a fellowman, and no one knows the germs of goodness or the earnest of eternal life that may be in men and women seemingly irreligious and godless. At death our fate may be fixed; and yet multitudes of those who die and make no sign may have

within them the seeds of holiness which, under altered circumstances and in a more congenial clime, shall yet spring up and become beautiful trees abounding in good fruit. The atmosphere is much, though it be not every-thing. It cannot sow the seed or plant the trees; but it may promote the life and growth of both, or bring about their decay or death. And so translation to another world may not be able to bring to life those who are really and truly spiritually dead; but surely in the world unseen we may expect to find that which will be favourable to the growth of love, purity, holiness, that which will revive the spiritual life that is faint and flickering, that which will bring to maturity whatever forms of half-developed good-ness a man has won his way to here. When we think on these things after this fashion, it is easy for us to believe in those words which are so full of hope: ' Be of good cheer: I have over-come the world.' ' I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.' ' Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' ' They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.' ' I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.'

However orthodox we may be, therefore, we can all be sharers in the larger hope. We can all avail ourselves of the inspiration and encouragement that come to us from many passages in the Word of God. But a hope of this kind was given for our salvation and not for our undoing. He who is possessed of it ought to purify himself even as Christ is pure. For the best way in which to bring about that which we wish to happen is to make manifest in our lives the patience and the faith of the saints. When we make our own calling and election sure we are adding to the number of the faithful. When we give ourselves unto the Lord we are increasing the number of those who are to be saved. But when we give ourselves to the Lord, live in His love and fear, identify ourselves with His cause, and yearn and strive for the advancement of His kingdom, do we not feel as if something were lacking to our joy in life so long as multitudes are still enemies to God and to His cause? ' There is joy in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth.'

These words tell us that God and the Heavenly Host are profoundly interested in the career of every soul that lives that to them there is a sense of loss, a feeling that something is lacking, when a soul made in God's image wanders into the paths of folly and sin that the joy of the Heavenly Host is in a sense bound up with the spiritual prosperity of men and women on the earth. And as it is in Heaven so is it with the saints of God on earth. The cause of God, the cause which we have so much at heart, is re-tarded by the faithlessness, the worldliness, the sinfulness of men. And so we are grieved by the sins of our fellowmen, and we rejoice in their faith and goodness. Our faith in God is strengthened by the fact that multitudes have faith in Him. Our joy and peace in believing are not lessened and weakened, but increased and deepened by every addition to the number of believers.

There is joy in the presence of the saints of God on earth over one sinner that repenteth.

How indeed should it be otherwise? Is not that sinful man now repentant our brother? And is he not, like ourselves, a son of God and a brother of the just men made perfect around God's throne? And so all earnest Christians feel necessity laid upon them to live not for self but for others. They are constrained to pray, to labour, to strive for the moral and spiritual redemption of that world for which the Son of God lived and died.

God grant that day after day this may increasingly be the case. And in order that it may be so may we put aside all tormenting fears and anxieties with regard to the completion of the Kingdom of God. May we remember and realise the truth that God is our Father in Heaven, and that His purposes are purposes of love to us. And while we strive to make our own calling and election sure, and earnestly labour for the salvation of others, may we with hope and confidence commit our own future and the future of others to the keeping of Him in whose hands we are in death as in life, assured that God will never fail in mercy towards us, and that when the day of eternity breaks, and the shadows of time flee away for ever, we shall, if we have been faithful, find ourselves in the presence of God and in the company of that countless multitude who have died in the Lord, and are now with Him where He is.

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