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By RAMSDEN BALMFORTH

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RAMSDEN BALMFORTH

AUTHOR OF

"SOME SOCIAL AND POLITICAL, PIONEERS," "THE BIBLE (O. T.) FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE HIGHER CRITICISM," ETC.

"All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets."

"God is Love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him."

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PREFACE

THIS little volume forms a natural sequel to my previous work on "The Old Testament from the standpoint of the Higher Criticism." It deals with questions of faith and doctrine which lie nearer to our modern thought and life, and which therefore rouse deeper feelings and emotions, than do the questions which arise out of the criticism and interpretation of the Old Testament. But the methods of criticism and investigation which are applied to the Old Testament must also be applied to the New Testament if we are to gain a true knowledge of the growth of early Christian literature, and, through it, of the growth of the Christian consciousness. The religious experience of humanity is a vast field—we are only now beginning to realise how vast it is—

and no portion of the literature in which it finds expression must be railed off as holy ground, too sacred for the critic's hand. To do this would be to deny the possibility of rational interpretation. When men differ in their interpretations there is only one word to be said—charity.

One word with reference to the discourse on "The Relation of New Testament Teachings to Modern Thought and Life." An attempt is there made to deal with the vexed question of theological terminology. On such a question little can be said in the course of a few pages, and that little is liable to misinterpretation. Yet it is just here that we need to have clear and tolerant views if we desire to promote, in however small a degree, the religious unity of mankind, or perhaps I should say, the religious unity of those who are religiously minded. I believe that in the religious experience of a Jesus and a Sakya Mouni there are, essentially, more similarities than differences—yet how diverse is the expression of that experience! So, too, in our modern life. Some devout minds will pile superlative upon superlative in their attempts to express the inexpressible; others will use only abstract,

impersonal terms, or prune their words almost to silence. Yet, how near in spirit each may be to the other! Sometimes, indeed, the impersonal term will express more than the personal. On this point I am glad to find myself in agreement with Dr. Moberly, in his work on *Atonement and Personality* (chap. viii). I do not mean to say that terminology is not important, but that there is something which is more important still, and that this should be the binding link between men who are one in aim and in spirit.

It only remains for me to express my indebtedness to the many writers from whose works I have gained information and inspiration in preparing these discourses, amongst whom I may mention Drs. Keim, Hausrath, Pfleiderer, Hatch, Schmiedel, and Bacon. To my own teachers, Dr. Drummond and Prof. J. Estlin Carpenter, my debt is exceedingly great, though perhaps more to the spirit than to the letter of their teaching. Dr. E. P. Gould's excellent manual, *The Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, I found especially helpful. It is almost needless to say that all these writers would probably differ from some of my conclusions.

Should this little volume help to guide the reader to more careful conclusions of his own, and inspire him, not only with a deeper desire for Truth, but also with a determination to realise his conception of Truth in his own life, its aim will have been accomplished.

R. B.

CAPE TOWN.

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work which the New Reformation must set before itself—to bind together the moral and religious energies of men into such an effective and living unity as will make for the moral and spiritual betterment of humanity. "The sickly hue which is spread over the face of modern civilization," says Dr. Percy Gardner in his *Exploratio Evangelica*, "arises mainly from the fact that for the time the forces of negation have gained among us the upper hand over those of construction. This state of things has arisen principally from the rapid changes which have taken place in all our surroundings, physical, intellectual, and moral. Like the proverbial rolling stone we gather no moss: in fact, the strata which should form a solid basis for life and growth are becoming like the banks of pebbles thrown up by the sea on the shore, masses of rounded stones, constantly moving, and giving no foothold to vegetable or animal existence. This condition of the civilized world cannot last very long; we tell ourselves day and night that our time is a time of transition, and so it is undoubtedly. Meantime, while we watch for and foster the germs of a new order, we may also endeavour to preserve what is worthy of permanence in the order of the past, yet exists only in a state of progressive dissolution and decay."

In order, then, that we may intelligently promote the growth of this new order, and the cause of

religious unity, let us first ask ourselves whether a Creed is necessary to this order. Is a religious Creed necessary to the religious life of man? To that question there can be but one answer—a Creed, a profession of faith or belief, is absolutely necessary to the mind of man. Every man has a Creed, either explicitly or implicitly held. "The Moral Law—Duty—binds a man"—that is the creed of the moralist. "I will strive to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number with the least possible injury to the few," or, "I believe in equality of opportunity for all in so far as this is possible"—that may be the creed of the politician. "Love to God and love to Man"—the principle on which our own Church is based,—that may be the creed of the religious man, meaning, love of that Higher Righteousness, that Supreme Good, towards which we strive, and which, through Law, creates, and makes our own little good possible, and love of Humanity, through which this Supreme Spirit manifests itself at its highest and best. A Creed, then, is necessary to every man who would live a wisely-ordered life.

But now we must make a distinction—a distinction between the practical and the speculative. The creeds to which I have just now referred are purely practical in their tendency and aim, that is, they run out into lines of thought, action, conduct, which have, as their aim, *the formation of character.* But there

are many other creeds which are not practical, but rather, speculative in their tendency. They deal with things outside our experience, they begin with tremendous assumptions, their influence is confined very largely to the realm of speculative thought, and though they do—as all thought must—affect character to some extent, their acceptance or rejection does not *necessarily* imply that he who accepts them is a good man or he who disbelieves them a wicked man. Take, for example, one of the great creeds of the English Church: "The Catholic Faith is this—that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity . . . the Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal," and so on through thirty or more clauses. Now all that is purely speculative, it is beyond our experience. No man can say, absolutely, or from experience, that the Supreme Power at the back of things is composed of three separate personalities. A man may reject that creed, or he may accept it, and yet he may believe the more practical creed that "the Moral Law—Duty—binds a man," or that the supreme religious duty is "Love to God and love to Man." Hence the unwisdom of making a purely speculative creed the

basis of religious union. A speculative creed divides, it does not unite. It tends, if made a condition of union, to produce dogmatism, uncharity, bitterness, and narrowness of mind. It causes men to think that they *know* the "Spirit and Will of God" when, perhaps, they are far from that Spirit.

The true basis of religious union then is not, and cannot permanently be, a speculative creed, which changes from age to age with widening knowledge. The true basis must be practical, must have reference to that supreme need of all—the formation and right growth of character, for this, surely, is the end and aim of all our thinking and striving. And yet, a speculative creed may have its uses. It is well that men should think seriously about the mystery that surrounds our life, and that they should strive to formulate and express their thoughts. It is well that men should think, even though they may think erroneously, for thinking in itself shows energy of mind and character, and often serves to furnish a provisional working hypothesis for life and conduct. But they should never give these speculative thoughts or beliefs first place in their common life, never make them a condition of religious union. The practical creed, that which can be tested by experience, should have first place. "The Moral Law binds a man," that is, imposes a binding obligation upon him—that is attested not only by the internal authority of

conscience but by the added weight of centuries of experience; whereas speculative beliefs about the Bible, about supposed miraculous occurrences in history, about the constitution of the universe and the mystery at the back of things—all these change with changing circumstances and widening knowledge.

Let me emphasize this a little more in detail, for the point is an important one. All our knowledge comes to us through our sensations, or through the higher powers of understanding, reason, imagination, working upon the spiritual stuff which sensations produce. But our sensations have a physical basis, or, at least, act through physical media. Now, this physical basis is more or less different in each one of us. Hence, we all live, psychologically speaking, in slightly different worlds. We all *see* the world in slightly different ways, we all *interpret* it in slightly different ways, we all come to different conclusions about it. Take two cases which will make this quite clear. Take a child born with a great capacity for strong, vigorous, buoyant, healthy life. It lives on into manhood and old age, enjoying to the full all the gifts which Nature pours into its lap—the beauties and treasures of art, science, and literature, the joys of friendship, the still deeper joys and affections of family life,—and the man passes to his rest, blessing and praising God, from whom all these blessings flow. But now take the case of a child born with a

deep-seated hereditary disease. It has no great capacity for strong and healthy life, but much capacity for suffering. One half its waking life may be passed in dull pain and misery, the other half in joyless, hopeless existence. It may be dead to many of the pleasures which Nature offers so lavishly to the strong, and, through its disease, even the joys of family life may be withheld. As it looks out, sad-eyed, upon the world, and passes, after thirty or forty years of strife, to its rest, it may be inclined to say: "There is no God," or, "God does not care," or, at best, with Merlin:

> "Rain, sun, and rain, and where is he who knows?
> From the great deep, to the great deep, he goes!"

Now these two natures, though differing so widely in speculative beliefs, might yet be almost at one in the practical beliefs which work out in conduct. The one would say: "I will strive to pass on to others, or to make possible for others, the joys and blessings which God has sent into my life, and so make the life of my fellowmen fuller and happier." The other would say: "I will strive to prevent this bitter pain and suffering falling upon others, and will so order the little circle over which my influence extends, that all may live a fuller and happier life." And through these two natures, or, let us say, the Brownings and the Arthur Hugh Cloughs of the world, would naturally find different forms, and

modes, and words in which to express their religious feelings and aspirations, yet there are large fields of moral and religious activity in which both could work whole-heartedly together, and perhaps influence each other for good by contact and intimacy with each other's thought and life. And what a great gain it would be that they should thus agree to subordinate their speculative to their practical beliefs! These two cases are extreme, I know, but between these two we are all placed. The physical and spiritual basis of life is not exactly the same in any two individuals. We all differ in temperament and outlook. We all view the world through slightly different foci. Hence, our initial assumptions, our unexpressed premises, are slightly different. Yet we often work down to the same practical conclusions in conduct. This difference of assumptions explains the frequent failure of men to convince opponents of what they believe to be the "truth"—their underlying conceptions and assumptions are different, though their premises, expressed in the inadequate medium of language, may *seem* to be the same. What a great gain, then, it would be could we agree to regard these speculative assumptions—which cannot be tested by experience—as non-essential, though useful, and base our religious unions on our practical beliefs, which are, indeed, essential and eternal! What a great gain to charity, to tolerance,

to mutual help, to intellectual honesty, to the unfettered search for truth! We should still have different forms and modes of religious worship, but fundamentally, and in many of our religious activities, we should be at one, while even forms and modes of worship might be rationalized and brought into harmony with modern ideas. "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

Leaving, now, the individual aspect, let us turn to the larger field of history and experience. Here, the evidence and the lessons are so plainly writ, even in the history of Christianity alone, that it is surprising that men can still continue to make particular speculative beliefs a condition of religious union, or regard them as final statements of the truth. Every age shows how these beliefs have been slowly but surely modified, sometimes quietly, almost unconsciously forgotten, or dropped out of mind; how, where they have been unduly insisted upon, they have produced hatred, persecution, religious fanaticism, and war. Time, in its silent,

onward march, applies its sure touchstone to what is false or erroneous, helps to bury the transient elements in speculative beliefs, and so brings greater clearness, or shall I say a less blinding darkness, to the moral vision of humanity. That is so obviously the lesson of history that I need not stop to illustrate it. But the same question besets us now as it besets every age and generation. Everywhere, mixed spiritual materials—in ideas, opinions, beliefs, creeds —are presented for our acceptance ; everywhere, these materials are indissolubly mingled with men's prejudices, passions, interests, clouded as they oft-times are by want of knowledge, and all the egotism and narrow-mindedness which so often spring from want of knowledge. What, then, shall we say is permanent, and what transient in the religion of our time? What is likely to be touched and palsied by the hand of time? On the other hand, what is likely to endure, and become the eternal possession of humanity? And what shall be the basis of religious union, the house built upon the rock--the elements which are liable to perish, or those which endure? To me, there is only one answer to these questions—the answer we may derive from the lessons of the past. The permanent, the eternal possession of humanity, that which men pass on, by a secret spiritual influence, to their fellows, and which they bequeath to after generations, and which so

adds to the deposit of spiritual truth on which humanity is ever building, is the purified moral spirit—the wider sympathy, the deeper and truer feeling, the purer affection—which mankind so slowly wins from the lower, selfish elements in its nature. All these things are directly connected with our practical beliefs. But the question as to whether the Bible is a human or a divine book—a natural or a supernatural record; the question as to what kind of world man shall inhabit in the after life; the question as to whether the sacrifice of Jesus has some supernatural atoning power saving us from the supposed wrath to come; the question as to the ways in which God orders the destiny of men and nations, worlds and systems—all these are mainly speculative. Time is touching them with its wand, and slowly altering our conceptions about them. Good men differ about all of them. They do indeed —our beliefs about them—affect character in very subtle ways. That is their importance, and it is well that we should think about them, and compare opinions about them. But they need not be made the basis or condition of religious union, which should surely be something deeper and more abiding than merely speculative doctrines.

What men require now-a-days is a belief which has a practical and direct connection with their daily needs, and which they can test either by their own

experience, or the experience of mankind in general, as revealed in biography and history. Hence the questions I have named are slowly taking a position of less relative importance in our life, or they are being altered and stated with a much more practical reference to life and conduct. Not—Is the Bible a divine or a human, an infallible or a fallible book?—but, How can we work the great truths of the Bible into our moral life? How can we apply the teachings of the prophets and the great principles of the Sermon on the Mount to our social, industrial, and political life? How can we, by a daily practice of the Golden Rule, strengthen the diviner part in man, mould the lives of men and nations to a higher pattern, and so help to produce a brighter, simpler, juster, and lovelier world? Not—Is there a place of unalloyed bliss and one of inconceivable and irredeemable misery awaiting souls in the after-life? but—What kind of spiritual heaven or spiritual hell are we fashioning here and now by the characters we are forming hour by hour and day by day? or, in other words, what are we doing to perfect this mysterious individuality, this consciousness of ours, so that it may adequately fill its destined place in the great cycle of spiritual being? Not—Has the blood of Jesus a supernatural, atoning power? but—What are we doing to acquire the spirit of Jesus, his gentleness, his purity, his humility, his lowliness, his self-

sacrifice, in order to perpetuate, by example, a nobler type of manhood in the world? There is even a tendency to modify the doctrine of the Trinity into a more rational statement of faith, God, the Father, being defined as the source of all being, on whom all things depend; the Son as Humanity, "begotten of the substance of the Father;" the Spirit, as God revealing Himself through Humanity, directing and inspiring it towards higher life.[1] This has a distinctly ethical bearing and might almost be translated into Spencerian formula: God, the "Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed;" Humanity, the offspring of this Eternal Energy; the Spirit, the ethical motive and ideal, inspiring the life of man. Thus, Church dignitary and Agnostic are almost at one, certainly at one in practical aim.

All these things show the practical tendency of modern religious thought and life, the widespread desire to find a rational and practical basis for religious union. For these are questions which touch our life at every point, which mingle with our every thought, which are continually making demands upon our Reason, Understanding, Feeling, Imagination, Will, and which, rightly answered, tend to decreate afresh the very texture of our moral being. They are the enduring and permanent elements in religion, while speculative doctrines pass and leave

[1] See Canon Wilberforce's Sermons.

the heart dry and barren. That is why men always go for inspiration to the great words of religious teachers, which can so easily be disentangled from the maze of creed and doctrine which has grown around them: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am but as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." "This is my commandment, that ye love one another even as I have loved you." "God is Love, and he that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God, and God in him." "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

These, then, are the true principles of religious union, springing from our highest instincts and aspirations, and commended by our wisest and noblest teachers. True, we have to pass on from the statement of principles to the definition and application of them to all the details of our individual and social life. It is not enough to say "do justly," and "love mercy," we must define what justice and mercy and righteousness are, and what they demand of us. And this requires a boundless charity. So, too, in the intellectual life,—we may frame working hypotheses to satisfy the demands of the intellect, and these have their uses. Even the gods and myths of Paganism were not mere idols and fairy tales, they were the embodiments of generations of race-memories and race-ideals. So, too, the Athanasian creed—which

perhaps rested originally on myth—was not a mere metaphysical cobweb spun by a priestly brain, it was the outcome of centuries of intellectual strife. This, too, had its uses. The great mistake man made was to regard these things as the basic principles of religious union. We must never do that. Creed after creed, church after church, nation after nation pass away, but the ideas they were destined to develop are slowly woven into the moral and spiritual life of the race, making it richer and fuller, more complex, and more intense and abounding. It is for us, living souls in the midst of this weaving and unweaving of the spiritual fabric of our life, to live in and for the greatest and noblest religious ideas, to saturate our minds with them, and so make them not only part of our individual life, but part of our everliving humanity —the foundation of that new Church of the Spirit which man is beginning to build, but of which the superstructure has yet to be reared.

All this, as you will see, has special reference to this series of discourses. For the New Testament is everywhere looked upon as the fount of doctrine, and doctrine—speculative doctrine—is nearly everywhere regarded as the basis of religious union. If, then, I can show that the New Testament was made not only for man, but, *by man*, that it should minister unto, but not fetter, the human spirit, that even within its pages doctrine slowly changes, and that it is our duty

to elicit from its many voices its highest truths, then I trust that I shall have done something, however little, to widen the basis of religious union, something to enforce the truth, daily becoming more widely recognised, that speculative doctrines must always be subordinate to the spirit which produces them, subordinate, that is, to that wider good for which men of different creeds and doctrines can work in harmony.

II

HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS COMPILED

2. Corinthians iv. 7—"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels."
2. Corinthians iii. 6—"The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

In approaching the study of the New Testament, it is well to bear in mind a pregnant sentence of the late Benjamin Jowett's. "Religion," said Dr. Jowett, "is not dependent on historical events, the report of which we cannot altogether trust. Holiness has its sources elsewhere than in history." If we bear that sentence continually in mind the remembrance will save us from much bitterness and uncharitableness of spirit. It will help us to appreciate the fact that history, and the literature which records the events of history, must be judged by the spirit which makes history and literature—the human spirit; that there

can be no arbitrary line drawn between secular and sacred, natural and revealed, in the things which pertain to the development of this spirit. How often, for example, is it consciously or unconsciously assumed that the ordinary rules of criticism must be set aside when we approach the study of the Bible, and especially the New Testament. The fiery invectives of a Paul, the calm philosophisings of John, the fantastic visions of the Apocalyptic seer, are to be read with bowed head and bated breath, while extra-Biblical writings of the same period, dealing with the same subjects, are to be subjected to the most rigorous scrutiny and criticism! Dr. Jowett's warning will help us to rise above this partial and biased point of view; it will teach us to see that though men may demur to the speculations of Paul, or the visions of the author of *Revelation*, and even question the correctness of the Gospel records, yet "holiness has its sources elsewhere than in history," or in the supposed events which historical documents record.

We see this saying abundantly confirmed when we consider the way in which the various books of the New Testament, and the Testament as a whole, was compiled. Just as, in Old Testament times, we saw this classic Hebrew Literature growing slowly, as it were, before our eyes, so, in early Christian times, we see the New Testament literature growing in a similar fragmentary way, and being gradually sifted

from the mass of contemporary religious literature, of which it was only a comparatively small part. As in the case of the Old Testament, some of the books are built up out of fragments, representing different layers of tradition, these fragments being selected and compiled by a later editor. As in the case of the Old Testament again, the books we have represent only a part of what were originally regarded as "sacred writings." Some forty of these extra-canonical books have come down to us, others are lost, but that they once existed is known from the references made to them by early Christian writers. Some of these extra-canonical writings, such as the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the first Epistle of Clement, the Epistles of Barnabas and Polycarp, and the Shepherd of Hermas, were looked upon as of equal authority with our New Testament Gospels and Epistles, and were often read in the churches. How our present books were "selected" from this mass of early Christian literature we shall see later on. Here, as elsewhere, we see the law of evolution and natural selection at work. I mention the matter here in order to emphasize the fact that the rules of criticism cannot legitimately be restricted to one class of writings, and that it is impossible to draw a line between so-called secular and so-called sacred literature.

But let us get back to beginnings, in so far as this

is possible. And here it is necessary to bear in mind that the earliest Christian literature, the earliest books in the New Testament, are not the Gospels, but the genuine epistles of Paul. It is necessary to emphasise this point because the great controversy in which Paul was engaged, the controversy as to whether Gentiles should be allowed to become members of the Christian Church, has left its mark on the Gospels. The writers and compilers of the Gospels passed through this conflict, and they have left traces of the bias which this conflict naturally produced, in their accounts of the ministry of Jesus. First, then, the earliest books of the New Testament are the genuine epistles of Paul—I. Thessalonians, Galatians, I. and II. Corinthians, Romans, Philippians. Then,—with reserve as to the order, for there is wide difference of opinion amongst critics,—the Gospel of Mark, or the document on which it was founded, the earlier parts of *Revelation*, the epistle to the Hebrews, Colossians, and II. Thessalonians, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the first epistle of Peter, the epistle of James, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Pastoral epistles, the Gospel and the Epistles of John, the later parts of *Revelation*, and the second epistle of Peter. Nearly all the epistles, as we shall see, represent different stages of theological controversy in the early Church. Most of them were not written by the men whose names they bear, it being

a common practice in early times to issue writings under the names of well-known men in order to give them greater weight and authority. Fragments of some of these writings are almost certainly genuine, and doubtless appeared at earlier dates than the books as we now have them. Both the Old and the New Testament slowly emerge, bit by bit, out of darkness.

One or two examples will make this clear. The Gospel of Mark is now, by almost universal consent, admitted to be the oldest of the Gospels. Turn to the revised version of the New Testament and you will find in the margin, at the end of Mark's Gospel, a statement to the effect that the last twelve verses are not to be found in the oldest manuscripts, that is, they are a later addition. The same may be said of the supremely beautiful story contained in the first eleven verses of the eighth chapter of John. These are very patent examples of the way in which stories, incidents, and sayings were added to the early Gospel literature. Take again, the birth-stories and the genealogies of Jesus. Mark, the oldest Gospel, gives no birth-stories. That shows either that they had not then arisen, or that the compiler did not think it worth while to insert them in his Gospel. But in Matthew and Luke we have two quite different genealogies, both ending with Joseph, and both making Jesus a descendant, through Joseph, of the

great King David. What does this show? It surely shows that these genealogies were compiled at a time when everyone thought that Joseph was the father of Jesus, else why introduce Joseph at all? That is the first layer of Christian tradition, in which Jesus was universally supposed, amongst the early Christians, to be the son of Joseph and Mary. Then comes the second layer, in which Jesus, having become renowned as a religious leader, is said, like many other great men, to have been miraculously born, and so the birth-stories come into existence. Then comes the third layer, in which, as in the Gospel of John, Jesus is said to have had a pre-existence in heaven, as the off-spring of the Eternal Word, before He was "made flesh." All these different layers of tradition were slowly embodied in the New Testament.

So, too, with the story of the annunciation of the heavenly mission of Jesus as the Messiah. In Mark, the earliest Gospel, this annunciation takes place at the time of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John the Baptist, where, it was said, the heavens were rent asunder and the Holy Spirit descended upon him as a dove, saying: 'Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.' The dove, in the metaphorical language of the Jews, was the emblem of the Holy Spirit. This story, again, represents the first layer of Christian tradition, in which Jesus is

represented as a man, endowed, at a particular time, with the power of the Spirit. Then comes the later layer in which Jesus is represented as endowed with the power of the Spirit from and through his very birth ; then, the later tradition still, in which he receives his commission in the pre-existent life in heaven as part of the Eternal Word.

But one of the most striking indications of the weaving together of different fragmentary narratives into various wholes is to be found in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, where Jesus, after his denunciation of the Pharisees, is made to say: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites . . . prophets, and wise men, and scribes shall ye kill and crucify ; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city : that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar." Then he goes on to say, in his lament over Jerusalem : "Behold, your house [the temple] is left unto you desolate." Now this mention of the murder of Zachariah and the destruction of the temple gives us a fixed date. For the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem by Titus took place in the year 70 A.D. and Josephus, in his history, mentions this murder of Zachariah as having taken place shortly before this time. Here,

then, we have words, not uttered by Jesus, but put into the mouth of Jesus by a later compiler—words which refer to an event which occurred more than thirty years *after* the death of Jesus. The words were probably taken from an apocalyptic writing called the 'Wisdom of God,' for Luke, in his version, makes Jesus quote them as from the 'wisdom of God.'

The evidence, then, is overwhelming, that the Gospels, as we now have them, embody the floating memories, traditions, incidents, sayings, which circulated amongst the little Christian communities in the first two generations after the death of Jesus. When they were first written down, or what form they took, no one knows,—probably there first appeared a brief document containing some of the reputed sayings of Jesus, and then another giving a short account of his life. On these, later writers would build. How they built we may see in our present Gospels, for, according to Professor Sanday, more than one-half of the Gospel of Mark appears in Matthew and Luke, and this not merely in substance, for in some cases whole sentences are the same, following word for word in exactly the same order. This shows that Matthew and Luke must have used and built upon Mark. The same may be said, in less degree, of the other New Testament books,—that is, they are nearly all, with the exception of the genuine epistles of Paul, of anony-

mous and composite authorship. Let us remember, however, that this, in itself, does not detract from their moral and religious value, any more than the anonymity of Shakespeare, could it be proved, would detract from the moral value of the Shakespearean dramas. But it does put upon us the necessity for using greater care in our search for truth amongst these many and often inharmonious voices.

But now let us ask ourselves how all these books came to be welded together into one whole, which we now call,—the New Testament. This, again, was a work of many generations. Down almost to the middle of the second century there was no recognised authoritative New Testament literature. Whenever the word 'Scripture' was used it referred solely to the Old Testament writings, thus showing that the New Testament, as a whole, had not yet come into existence. The difficulty of selection was increased by this circumstance—that all the early apostles who claimed to be possessed by "the Holy Spirit" or "the prophetic Spirit" claimed inspiration for their utterances. Thus, even as late as the first half of the second century, the *Shepherd* of Hermas claims prophetic authority equal to that of any other New Testament writing. This work was read in many of the Churches. So with other "inspired" productions of the same period, such as the Gospel of Peter and the Gospel according to the Hebrews. About the

year 140, Marcion, an ardent disciple of Paul and an active missionary worker, introduced into the numerous Churches which he founded a "Scripture" of his own which consisted simply of Luke and ten of the reputed epistles of Paul. These he substituted for the Old Testament Scriptures. All this time a mass of anonymous writings were appearing, and it was not until the latter half of the second century that our present four Gospels began to take a higher place than others, though even then they were not by any means regarded as authoritative by all the Churches or the fathers of the Church. During the third century the growing tendency to read from New Testament writings in the now rapidly-multiplying churches tended to raise them to the level of inspired scriptures, and Christian writers began to distinguish between writings "generally received," writings "controverted," and "heretical" writings. But there was still wide difference of opinion as to what should be "generally received," and what regarded as "heretical," some authorities including books like the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the Gospel of Peter,[1] and the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which, as you know, do not appear in our New Testament.

Thus tradition formed itself very slowly. The New Testament, like "Topsy," growed, but at a much slower rate than Topsy. It was not until the latter

[1] Fragments of this work have recently been discovered.

half of the fourth century that the Council of Laodicea (363 A.D.) drew up a list of canonical writings, and forbade the reading of non-canonical books in the Churches, but even this list did not include the Apocalypse, and the most noted Christian writers still went on making and advocating their own canon. In the year 393 another Council was held at Hippo, at which a Canon was adopted which agrees with our present one. But the acceptance of this canon was by no means universal. Each Church, or each diocese, had its own selection of "inspired" books, and we are told that as late as the fifth century (453 A.D.) Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, found more than two hundred copies of a harmony of the gospels by Tatian, which he replaced by the works of the Evangelists as we now have them. Thus, the canon was slowly established by general use and custom rather than by the decrees of Councils, though these, of course, would help to strengthen custom in one particular direction by giving it the weight of episcopal authority.

As to the spirit which animated some of these Church Councils, Lecky, in his "History of European Morals," gives us a vivid picture. They were, to put it mildly, very human, and the "divine in the human" seems to have been almost absent from their deliberations. "After the Council of Chalcedon," says Lecky, "Jerusalem and Alexandria were again

convulsed, and the bishop of the latter city was murdered in his baptistery. About fifty years later, when the Monophysite controversy was at its height, the palace of the emperor at Constantinople was blockaded, the Churches were besieged, and the streets commanded by furious bands of contending monks. The councils, animated by an almost frantic hatred, urged on, by their anathemas, the rival sects. In the 'Robber Council' of Ephesus, Flavianus, the bishop of Constantinople, was kicked and beaten by the Bishop of Alexandria, or at least by his followers, and a few days later died from the effect of the blows." And Lecky also quotes Dean Milman to the effect that: "Nowhere is Christianity less attractive than in the Councils of the Church. Intrigue, injustice, violence, decisions on authority alone, and that the authority of a turbulent majority . . . detract from the reverence and impugn the judgments of at least the later Councils. The close is almost invariably a terrible anathema, in which it is impossible not to discern the tones of human hatred, of arrogant triumph, of rejoicing at the damnation imprecated against the humiliated adversary." And again: "Bloodshed, murder, treachery, assassination, even during the public worship of God, these are the frightful means by which each party strives to maintain its opinions and to defeat its adversary." This was hardly the

atmosphere or the spirit in which to attest the claims or define the limits of a supposed divine literature. It is interesting to note how the method of formation of the Buddhist sacred canon corresponded almost exactly with the way in which our own was formed. "During the life of Buddha," says the late Max Muller, "no record of events, no sacred code containing the sayings of the Master, was wanted. His presence was enough, and thoughts of the future seldom entered the minds of those who followed him. It was only after Buddha had left the world to enter Nirvana that his disciples attempted to recall the sayings and doings of their departed friend and Master. Then everything that seemed to redound to the glory of Buddha, however extraordinary and incredible, was eagerly welcomed, while witnesses who would have ventured to criticise or reject unsupported statements, or detract in any way from the holy character of Buddha, had no chance of being listened to. And when, in spite of all this, differences of opinion arose, they were not brought to the test of a careful weighing of evidence, but the names of 'unbeliever' and 'heretic' were quickly invented in India as elsewhere, and bandied backwards and forwards between contending parties, till at last, when the doctors disagreed, the help of the secular power had to be invoked, and Kings and Emperors convoked councils for the suppression of

schism, for the settlement of an orthodox creed, and for the completion of the sacred Canon. . . We here learn a lesson, which is confirmed by the study of other religions, that canonical books, though they furnish in most cases the most authentic information within the reach of the student of religion are not to be trusted implicitly; nay, that they must be submitted to a more searching criticism and to more stringent tests than any other historical books."

One word as to the New Testament text. There are five very old manuscripts of the New Testament, not one of which, however, is older than the fourth century; that is, they are copies of copies now lost or destroyed. They are all written in uncial letters, that is, in large capitals, without punctuation, and without any division of words or sentences, except to indicate paragraphs. This often leaves the meaning obscure, and the errors, corrections, and additions, of later copyists, tend to increase the obscurity and uncertainty as to the original meaning. Then, again, at the moments when the early apostles and Fathers felt themselves "inspired," or "possessed by the Holy Spirit," explanatory additions to the text would sometimes be made. Interpolations were also occasionally made by over-zealous copyists. The doxology to the Lord's Prayer, for example, is not found in the oldest manuscripts. Hence, there are an immense number of different readings, a number—taking all

the Greek manuscript copies, some 1700—estimated by the American Bible Revision Committee at one hundred and fifty thousand. Most of these are mere differences in punctuation,—which is very imperfect in ancient MSS.—spelling, or names of persons and places, but many of the differences extend to whole sentences and paragraphs, involving grave differences in interpretation. Chapter divisions were first made in the thirteenth century, and verse divisions first appeared in the sixteenth century.

In such ways was the New Testament compiled, and through such channels handed down to after generations. Fallible human media, indeed,—a treasure "in earthen vessels!" As a picture of early Christian Society the literature of the New Testament and of the early Church is, as Dr. Gardner points out, "terribly defective. To compose anything like a true historic picture of the period, we should need, in addition to the works which have come down to us, a mass of those which have perished. Our materials are hopelessly one-sided. The writings of the important Christian teachers who happened to be branded as heretical have mostly perished, or are only preserved to us in the fragmentary and misleading quotations of the controversialists who attempted to refute them. Of the religious systems which had the closest relations to Christianity, the Mithraic, Orphic, and Isiac faiths, we can gain with all our diligence

but a most imperfect notion ; so that of the interaction of influence between them and the nascent Church we can scarcely judge at all. Monks without literary conscience, and with a keen nose for unorthodoxy, have been our librarians, and have handed down to us only what they judged to tend to edification." * And yet these "earthen vessels" have preserved to us something of the "heavenly essence" as Dr. Martineau calls it—"the everlasting truth in the fragile receptacle." And that the Bible does contain everlasting truths is its great glory. The tender and gracious words of Jesus, the invincible faith of Paul the beautiful mysticism of John, the symbolism of the epistle to the Hebrews, the pure spirit and divine pity breathing through the author of *James*—all these will endure, will remain in the memory of man and so influence his moral life, for ever. And that surely is the test of Truth ! Only, to possess it, we must search diligently for it. We must not say that every word is divine. We must carefully separate, or try to separate—with all humility and charity, for it is a work demanding a pure and impartial spirit and a fine sense of discrimination—the "earthen" from the "heavenly;" the erroneous from the true; the fanciful, the legendary, the purely speculative and metaphysical from the truths which ring responsive echoes from our own hearts, and which give us a

* *Exploratio Evangelica*, chap. XXIV.

deeper spiritual life and power. If we refuse to use our faculties of perception and discrimination, and persist in demanding that all or none of the Scriptures be regarded as divine, or in saying that the Bible is not an "earthen vessel," then these faculties of discrimination and apprehension with which God has endowed humanity will remain blunt or dead within us, and we shall miss those tremulous lights and shadows, the beauty of those relative truths, to which, alas, our mortal sight is limited, but the perception and practice of which, perchance, is a necessary preparation for higher and purer vision. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

It is to this task of striving to apprehend spiritual truth—surely the most important task which our religious life demands of us, for "till the eye have vision the whole members are in bonds"—it is to this task that we must devote ourselves in this series of discourses.

III

THE ORDER OF THOUGHT SURROUNDING THE MENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF JESUS.

Luke ii. 40.—"And the child grew, and waxed strong, becoming full of wisdom."

At the close of our series of discourses on the Old Testament[1] we had reached the point at which the life of Israel was settling into that deep gloom which marked the close of its history as a nation. After the brief period of independence secured by the brilliant victories of Judas Maccabeus, the Jewish people, weakened by the partial dispersion of the race, and torn by internal strife, sank to the position of a suzerainty of Rome, with Herod the Great as its vassal King. Never, save in the dark days of the Exile or the fearful persecutions of Antiochus

[1] See Discourse XIII in the previous volume on the Old Testament.

Epiphanes, had the fortunes of the nation sunk so low. And yet a great religious hope still burned in the hearts of the Jewish people—the hope of a deliverer, a mighty hero, sent or raised up by Yahweh himself, who would destroy the hated heathen power, and bring back, not, perhaps, the golden age of David, but a reign of Righteousness in which Israel would be supreme amongst the nations. For were they not Yahweh's favoured people? Would he chastise and cast them off for ever? No. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so Yahweh pitieth them that fear him." Here, then, the religion of Judaism was at the crisis of its fate. Either Yahweh must intervene on its behalf and establish its rule over the nations, or its pretensions to Divine favour must fall to the ground, its formal and mechanical system of worship pass away, and whatever elements of good there were in it be absorbed into a higher religion, or, at least, into a religion which had the seeds of a higher development within it. It was at this spiritual crisis in the fate of Israel that Jesus, the Carpenter of Nazareth, was born.

Can we piece together the world of outward circumstance which surrounded the early life of Jesus, so that we can get a mental picture, as it were, of the forces and circumstances that moulded his young life? "The boy makes the man." The Gospels themselves, apart from legend, tell us next to nothing of the child-

hood of Jesus. There are, indeed, in the Apocryphal Gospels, some stories of his childhood which tend to amuse rather than to inform. We are told, for example, that on the journey to Egypt with Joseph and Mary, lions, panthers, and dragons fell down and worshipped the child, and followed fawning in his train; that, by a miracle, the infant Jesus advanced the caravan, after four days' toil, thirty days' journey in the twinkling of an eye; and that when Mary and the little one entered one of the Egyptian temples 355 idols fell down from their places. The Gospel of *Thomas* tells still more wonderful stories—how a dumb bride who kissed the child forthwith spake and heard; how a bandage from his body, made into a little shirt and worn by another child, saved the latter from burning; how the wonderful boy, after making some mud-sparrows, clapped his hands and bade them fly, and off they flew; how his father Joseph once took him on his rounds, and happening to cut his boards too short the little Jesus stretched them out to the required length,—and much more to the same effect. Here is a quaint and touching story from the Gospel of *Thomas*, which will serve as a sample of all the rest: "And after these things, a certain child among the neighbours of Joseph, fell sick and died, and his mother wept for him exceedingly; and Jesus heard that great grief and trouble prevailed, and ran in haste, and found the child dead; and he touched

him on the breast and said to him, 'I say unto thee, babe, do not die, but live, and be with thy mother.' And immediately the child looked up and smiled. And Jesus said to the woman, 'Take him and give him milk, and remember me.' And the crowd that stood by wondered and said, 'Verily this child was either God or an Angel of God, for every word of his is at once a deed!' And Jesus went out thence to play with other children."[1]

All this is obviously legendary, but it tells us at least one thing. It tells us that the age in which these things were written was an age of marvel and miracle, an age in which the people drank in the legendary and the supposed miraculous as readily as our forefathers in the Middle Ages drank in stories of witchcraft and of a personal Devil. It was in such an atmosphere that Jesus passed his life and in which the stories of his miraculous birth, resurrection, and ascension afterwards grew up and spread.

But let us look for a moment at the physical surroundings of Jesus, as these so often strongly, though unconsciously, influence the moral and intellectual development of childhood and youth. First, then, as to the country round about. Apart from the descriptions of travellers, we might easily infer from the parables of Jesus the kind of country in which

[1] B. H. Cowper's translation of *The Apocryphal Gospels*, sixth ed., p. 141.

he lived. Galilee has been called the Garden of Palestine; Gennesaret, the scene of much of Jesus' ministry, the Garden of Galilee. Nazareth, the home of Jesus, "lies in a little upland dale, on the side of a green hill rising above it two or three hundred feet. Below lie gardens and cornfields surrounded with hedges of prickly pear, bright in spring time with the flower of the almond,"[1]—a country of wheat and barley fields, of orchards, of vineyards, of forests of oak and olive trees, of gently-sloping uplands, of range upon range of hills with the sheep and oxen browsing upon them, and here and there a village or a town nestling among the fields and trees. The talk of Jesus is full of these homely and beautiful scenes—the lilies of the field, the sower and the seed, the labourers in the vineyard, the birds circling overhead, the shepherd and his flocks, the hen gathering her chickens under her wing, the fox slipping into his hole, the fields overgrown with thorns and weeds, or well-tilled and white with harvest. The parables of Jesus are full of these homely scenes and pictures, so graphic, so clear, so simple, that "the common people heard him gladly." Then—the home of Jesus! We may naturally suppose that it was very much like other humble Jewish homes. Nazareth

[1] See Carpenter's *Life in Palestine when Jesus lived*, and, for fuller details, Hausrath's *New Testament Times*, and Keim's *Jesus of Nazara*.

lies on a hill slope, the houses are chiefly of one story, with flat roofs, built of yellow-white limestone, with vines climbing along the walls. The poorer sort of houses consist only of one room. The floor is of hard earth, partly covered with sheepskin and goat's-hair mats. There is little furniture, no chairs or tables; the inmates sit on the mats or on wooden benches, taking off their sandals as they enter the house. The most important articles are a lamp, a spinning wheel, oil vessels, a number of clean earthenware jars for cooking and the storage of water, and some neatly folded bundles of clothing. These are the quilts and coverlets, which are unrolled at night and spread out on the floor for beds. You will remember how Jesus said to the man sick of the palsy: "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk,"—an easy matter in Palestine in those days. Outside the house there is a staircase leading on to the flat roof. Here, in summer, the family dine and sleep, for the Palestine summer is very warm and long. In March, the earth becomes a green and flowery carpet, and from May to September there is not a drop of rain. Here, also, on the top of the house, Mary, the mother, would dry her figs, and flax, and raisins, and clothes. The village spring from which she drew water for the household still runs to-day, and we can easily imagine her performing those simple household duties,—grinding wheat or barley for the bread, spinning the

wool for the children's clothing, preparing the meals in the large earthenware jars—all which make that ancient Eastern life so different to our Western civilisation. It is well to remember this when we read the Sermon on the Mount. Then, on the doorpost of each house there was fastened a little leather case containing a piece of parchment, on which were written certain verses of Scripture reminding the inmates that they were the "chosen people" of Yahweh. The verses are from the book of Deuteronomy vi. 4-9, and xi. 13-21, beginning: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house; and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house and upon thy gates." Those words, you will remember,—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one,"—were the words with which Jesus answered the Scribe. He had probably learned them at his mother's knee. Twice every day, morning and evening, the pious Jew was

expected to repeat them, and they would spring readily to the lips of Jesus as soon as the Scribe's question was asked.

In some such home as this, then, Jesus passed his early years. But what was his moral and religious training? There is a sentence in *Robert Elsmere* which Mrs. Humphrey Ward puts into the mouth of Grey, the Oxford professor, which makes us pause. "All the great decisive movements of the world," she says, "begin in the intellect." How far is that true in relation to the movement started by Jesus? We are too apt to think of Jesus rather as a man of feeling than a man of great intellectual force. Perhaps a glance at his training will help us to answer this question. How, then, was Jesus educated and trained, or rather, in what circle of ideas would his early religious life move? First, there is no doubt that Jesus would learn something of the great patriarchs, heroes, and traditions of his race—Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Solomon, the Prophets, the downfall of the Kingdom, the captivity in Babylon, the return from Exile, the heroic achievements of the Maccabees, the nation's long hope and dream of a coming Messiah, and the splendour of the far-off Temple worship at Jerusalem. Something of all this he would learn in the home. And he would learn also, as every little Jew and Jewess had to learn, almost by habit, the simple pieties of the home.

There are two beautiful Jewish proverbs which he would probably learn by heart and which might be hung in letters of gold in every home: "Paradise is at the feet of mothers;" and this: "God could not be everywhere so he made mothers." These are simply charming.

But it would be at the Synagogue, or possibly at the school in connection with the Synagogue, that Jesus would be trained in the lessons of the Jewish faith. Here, again, the most important lesson book would be the parchment rolls of Scripture—the sacred book of the Law, the writings of the Prophets, and the Psalms or Temple hymn-book. Parts of these each child would have to learn by heart, and particularly those parts which were enclosed in the little case on the doorpost of each house. The Synagogue services, also, would help to form the young mind. There were two short services every day, and on the Sabbath and Feast days a much longer service. On the Sabbath the men wore their scarves, and fringes, and tassels; and on their foreheads, and also on their left arm, near the heart, they wore two small leathern cases or boxes containing certain verses of Scripture. These were called phylacteries. "Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes." On completing his twelfth year Jesus would be recognised as a "son of the Law." He,

too, would probably begin to wear the sacred fringe and phylacteries, and as he grew older would occasionally be selected to read the Scriptures publicly in the Synagogue. Here, also, or in the home, he would hear phrases which would unconsciously frame themselves in his mind in the shape of a prayer. For it must not be supposed that the Lord's Prayer is entirely original. It is composed of sentences some of which were well known in Hebrew devotional literature. "Our Father who is in heaven."[1] "Be thy name magnified and hallowed in the world which thou hast created."[2] "Blessed be God every day for the daily bread which he giveth us."[3] "Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done thee, and then thy sins shall be pardoned when thou prayest."[4] "Whosoever is prompt to forgive, his sins also shall be forgiven him."[5] "Suffer not, O Lord, that we should be led into sin, or into transgression."[6] "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty . . . thine is the kingdom, O Lord."[7] These and like phrases Joseph, the father of Jesus, and Jesus himself as he grew to manhood, would be familiar with.

[1] Talmud.
[2] Jewish prayer, *Kadish.*
[3] Hillel.
[4] Ecclesiasticus xxvii. 2.
[5] Talmud.
[6] Jewish ritual.
[7] 1 Chronicles xxix. 11. For fuller details see J. M. Robertson's *Christianity and Mythology.*

Then, the Jewish Sabbath—you know how strict that was in ancient times, and how great an influence it must have had in shaping the boy's mind. No fires were to be lighted, no food cooked, no work done. A woman must not even carry a pin in her garments. Some of the stricter Rabbis said that a father must not even carry his baby; a stricter one still held that a man with only one leg must leave his wooden leg at home; that if a sheep had fallen into a pit it must not be drawn out until the day after the Sabbath. During the wars, in earlier times, many suffered slaughter rather than fight on the Sabbath day. You will remember the story of the man who, having gathered sticks on the Sabbath day, was stoned to death by order of the congregation, "as Yahweh commanded Moses." And you will remember also how Jesus, when he came to manhood, protested against all that. Still, the Jewish Sabbath had its good side. As far as was possible it was made a day of delight, and festivity and good cheer. Here is a parable of the Sabbath, taken from the Rev. W. C. Gannett's *Childhood of Jesus*: "On Friday night, when one leaves the Synagogue, a good angel and a bad angel go home with him. If, on entering the house, he finds the table spread, the lamp lighted, and his children in festive garments, ready to bless the holy day of rest, the good angel says: 'May the next Sabbath and all to come be like unto this! Peace unto this

dwelling—peace!' And the bad angel, against his will, is compelled to say 'Amen.' If, on the contrary, everything is in confusion, the bad angel rejoices and says: 'May all your Sabbaths and week-days be like this!' while the good angel weeps and says 'Amen.'" Thus even in those days it was recognised that 'Order is Heaven's first law,' and that disorder too often turns a home, a city, or a nation into a hell. The religion of the Law, then, despite its shortcomings and its strict formalism, had an educative and refining influence.

One other important influence I must mention as affecting the mental development of Jesus—the annual journeys to the Temple in the Holy City, Jerusalem. There were three great feasts or festivals in the year—the "Passover," the "Pentecost," and the "Tabernacles," on which, according to the Book of the Law, the men folk were required to go to the Temple at Jerusalem, the centre of their national life and faith. Sometimes they would take their wives and children. Nazareth was eighty miles from Jerusalem, and the journey was made in companies or caravans, and usually took three days and three nights, the men walking, the women and children riding on asses, and camping at desirable places on the road. Jesus, when a child, would surely look forward to one or other of these annual pilgrimages. They were all in the summer or autumn time, and

the greatest, that of the Passover, in the early summer when the land was cooled with the winter rains, and the earth covered with fresh green verdure. As the caravanserai went on its way it would pass the sacred historic places of the nation's faith, and Jesus would have pointed out to him by his father or his mother the fields of Saul's and David's victories; the village of Shunem where Elisha dwelt for a time; the pits of Dothan, where Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery; the famous Jacob's Well; Shiloh, where the great judge and seer, Samuel, had ministered in the Tabernacle; Bethel, where Jacob had dreamed of the angel-ladder; Mizpeh, where the tribes of Israel had gathered round Saul and proclaimed him the first King of Israel. Then, as the caravanserai reached the top of the last hill, there, before them, would gleam the towers and spires and minarets of Jerusalem, the Holy City, with the Mount of Olives, and Mount Zion, and the gardens of Gethsemane in view, but, most lovely and most beautiful of all, Mount Moriah, with its vast, white, marble Temple shining in the summer sun, the very spot on which, nearly two thousand years before, Abraham was said to have prepared to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Then, during their stay in the Holy City, Jesus would surely go to the Temple, he would see the money-changers in the porches and the courts, the doves and the sheep made ready for the sacrifices;

the priests, and the Levites, and the Rabbis; the gilded and golden decorations of the inner chapels, and the gorgeous ritual of the services. He would see and hear too, the Jewish doctors and teachers, some of the disciples of the great Hillel, and possibly, —but this is barely probable—he might hear mention, in the fragments of conversation, of some famous Greeks—Pythagoras, or Socrates, or Plato,—who had lived several hundred years before, and who had taught men to think nothing of gold or merchandise compared with the welfare of their souls, and that all men should do unto others as they would that others should do unto them. And the thoughtful lad would go back to his humble home in far-away Nazareth with his heart and mind filled with wonder and astonishment.

Now, for a few moments, let us look at the influences which would stream in upon the mind of Jesus as he passed from boyhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. There were four great religious parties in Judaism, with all of which he would almost certainly be brought into contact—the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Zealots. With the Sadducees Jesus would have nothing in common. They were the aristocratic, priestly, conservative party, who stood for Temple ritual and official piety, for the letter of the Law, for obedience to the ruling caste. They had no belief in immortality, contend-

ing that it was not taught in the Law. The Pharisees were the national or liberal party—respectable, church-going, democratic, and sincerely desirous of bringing piety into common life. They have been much misrepresented. From the New Testament we get a very one sided view of them, partly owing to the denunciations of Jesus and the inevitable conflict with them into which he was brought. Their good side was this—they tried to moralise religion and to bring it into every home. But they tried in the wrong way. They were progressive in their interpretation of the Law. While the Sadducees construed the Law according to its letter—"an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"—the Pharisees said "No, that is only figurative," and so they tended to broaden the interpretation of the Law. They were great and strenuous upholders of the national faith and life, believers in Judgment, the coming of the Kingdom of God, and a recompense beyond the grave. The gentle and noble Hillel, who said, "Where there are no men, strive thou to be a man," "Do not unto others that which thou wouldst not have others do unto thee;" Gamaliel, Josephus, Paul himself at one time, all belonged to the party of the Pharisees, so there must have been some good in them. Their bad or imperfect side was this—they tried to promote religion by extreme formalism. They separated themselves from ordinary folk into brotherhoods—Pharisee means

Separatist—and they refused to dine anywhere save at the houses of the brotherhood, for fear of being guilty of eating untithed food, for the tithes, they said, were due to the house of God. They were most precise in the use of dishes and the ceremonial washing of hands, they kept rigid fasts, made long prayers, wore large sacred fringes and big phylacteries, and observed the Sabbath and all its ordinances most devoutly. All this formal piety sometimes tended to degenerate into that hypocrisy which Jesus so fiercely denounced.

Then, there were the Essenes, who have been well called the "monks of Judaism." They separated themselves from the community even more strictly and exclusively than the Pharisees. They lived in settlements or communities where they had all things in common. You will remember how the Jewish Christians, some time after the death of Jesus, established a community on the same principle. The Essenes lived a pure and self-denying life. They ate no meat, drank no wine, had no servants. Slavery was unknown amongst them. The rich amongst them gave up all their wealth to the common fund. They had a common meal twice a day, to which they came clad in white garments, and with words of thanksgiving and praise. "The Essene, on joining the order," says Josephus, "swore to observe righteousness towards men; to injure no one either

of his own accord or by command of others; always to hate the wicked and to help the good; to keep faith with all men, especially towards those in authority; and if he himself should be in power not to use it insolently, nor to try to outshine those subjected to him by any superior dress; always to love the truth, and to aim at convicting liars; to keep his hands from stealing, and his soul pure from unhallowed gains." Though Jesus would have much in common with the Essenes it is not likely that one who sought "to seek and save those who were lost," would adopt their methods and separate himself from the world.

Lastly, there were the Zealots. These men were even more extreme than the Pharisees in their devotion to the political side of the national faith. They virtually said to the Pharisees: "You only talk, we believe in action." And so, in their hatred of the heathen power, and their desire to throw off the yoke of Rome and re-establish the Kingdom of the "Chosen People," the Zealots were prepared to go to the extreme of violence. Already, during the boyhood of Jesus, a rebellion had taken place, led by Judas, the Gaulanite. But the outbreak was crushed by the Roman authorities with cruel force. Amongst the disciples, you will remember, there was one Simon, a Zealot, and Jesus would therefore be sure to know something of their teachings and aims.

The mention of the Zealots brings me to the last

great formative influence in the life of Jesus—the great hope, the "gigantic dream," which haunted the Jewish mind for centuries—the Messianic expectation. This great dream had taken many shapes. First, a restored Israel, a return of the golden age of David. But, as the centuries passed and Judea was trodden under the feet of the legions of Empire, this form of the great hope passed away and the dream took other shapes. Yahweh, their God, would never desert his people; he would not cast them off for ever; Righteousness would reign *through* Israel, and the "Chosen People" would triumph over their enemies. The book of *Daniel*, (165 B.C.) pictured the "Son of Man" as coming in clouds of glory attended by signs of supernatural power. In the two generations immediately preceding the birth of Jesus this form of the great dream took deep hold of the heart and mind of the people. Every school and every party was penetrated by the ideas to which it gave birth. Quite a literature grew up around it, voicing, in burning words, the nation's hope, and picturing its realisation. The book of *Enoch*, for example, pictured the "Chosen People" under the symbol of a flock of white sheep, worried by heathen wolves, but the Lord of the sheep comes and sits on his throne, opens the sealed books, and passes judgment on the oppressors. You will remember the saying which John puts into the mouth of Jesus: "I am the true

shepherd." The *Psalms of Solomon* prophesy of the Messiah that "he shall bring together the holy people, whom he shall lead in righteousness, and shall judge the tribes of the people made holy by the Lord his God." Other books pictured the end of the present and the beginning of the "coming kingdom" as soon to take place amid startling signs and portents. The book of *Enoch*, again, spoke of the Messianic reign as a time when "sin shall go down into darkness for ever and ever," and the Book of Jubilees prophesied of the faithful that "their soul shall cleave to me and to all my commandments, and I will be their father and they shall be my son, and shall all be named sons of God, and all [sons] of the Spirit. And it shall be known that they are my sons, and I their father in righteousness and goodness, and that I love them."[1] Jesus, when he attained to manhood, would read these books. The universal expectation would take possession of him, moulding and preparing his mind for his own great dream and tragedy. The great question would be forced upon him: 'When and how will 'the Kingdom,' the Messanic reign, come?' and slowly the answer would frame itself in his heart and mind: Lo, the Kingdom of God must be within you as a spirit, a life, a deep yearning, ere it can come outside you as a great fact.

[1] See Carpenter's *Life in Palestine*, Hausrath's *New Testament Times*, and Kuenen's *Religion of Israel*, vol. III.

Finally, he would meet the great, austere prophet of the age, John the Baptist, with his raiment of camel-hair and leathern girdle; his hermit's diet of herbs, locusts, and wild honey; and his great, awe-inspiring message, which struck terror to thousands of hearts: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus, we know, was much influenced by John, and is said to have been baptised by him in the Jordan.

What unity of impression all these ideas and influences had on the growing mind of the boy, the youth, the man, none can say. We are told that Jesus, before entering on his mission, went into the desert for a time, and was there "tempted of the Devil." What is more likely to be true is that Jesus went into the wilderness, into solitude, for the purpose of meditation and self-communion on all these grave questions which were seething in his own mind and heart, and in the mind and heart of those around him, for John's preaching had caused widespread fear and consternation. There, "in the wilderness," in contact with the great silences of Nature, away from the noise and turmoil of cities, from the stress, and worry, and vain unrest of the madding crowd, by the quiet waters of the lake, in the loneliness of the sea-shore, or amid the stillness of woods and mountains, there, I am sure, amid his solitary self-communings, and with the thoughts of great teachers surging through his mind, the need and greatness of his mission would

be borne in upon him—that men must learn that fringes, phylacteries, vestments, ritual, ceremonial, upturnings of the eyes, are as nothing compared with the pure worship of the heart; that the Moral Law is the supreme commandment; that Love is the greatest thing in the world. "Greater Love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

In our next discourse we must examine some of the legends which grew up round the name of Jesus, so that, afterwards, we may be in a position to get a clearer idea of Jesus, the man.

IV

THE BIRTH-LEGENDS

Luke ii. 8-10.— "And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field and keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them and the glory of the Lord shone around about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them: Be not afraid; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people, for there is born to you this day a Saviour, which is Anointed Lord."

THE origin of legends, and especially such legends as are intertwined with our most sacred memories and associations, ought to have a special and peculiar interest for us. They have, at the heart of them, a deep moral truth. How do legends arise? They often arise out of deep and strong feelings which centre round some great or beloved personality. That God is said to have appeared and talked with Abraham, Jacob, and Moses; that the exploits of Joshua and Samson are surrounded by marvel and miracle; that

Elijah is said to have been carried into heaven in a chariot of fire,—all these legends show the deep and strong impression which these great personalities made upon their own and after generations,—impressions which, gathering force as the memory of their exploits deepened into tradition, gave rise to all sorts of stories and legends about them, some beautiful, some amusing, some that we might willingly let die. You know how in our own English life similar stories and legends have been woven round half-mythical or half-historical personalities like Arthur and Cymbeline, Macbeth and Hamlet—and what splendid use Shakespeare, and Mallory, and Tennyson, and Morris have made of these and like stories. Now we do not enjoy these stories one bit the less because we know them to be untrue to fact. Neither should our enjoyment of the Angel's Song be one bit the less because we know it to be untrue to fact. Why? Because it embodies a moral truth, a truth of the spirit, a truth of the imagination. That peace should reign on earth, and good-will penetrate the hearts of all men; that all men are sons of God, partakers of His spirit; and that all who are worthy, when the cruelties, the miseries, the misunderstandings, "the heavy and the weary weight of this unintelligible world," have passed away, shall live again in a world of inconceivable beauty and glory, and ordered by absolute goodness and justice—these were glad tidings indeed, for that

hard, soulless, cruel, corrupt, Pagan civilisation to which they were brought. And the man who brought that glad message, who lived it in his own life, who stamped it upon the mind and life of humanity with such power that it has never been forgotten,—that man deserved that all the beauties and fantasies of art, and poetry, and romance, should be woven around his great name. That is the moral truth at the heart of this legend,—the eternal hunger of the soul of humanity for a better time, a nobler order, a purer life,—and the more we appreciate that moral truth the stronger will be the moral spirit within ourselves, the deeper will be our longing, the more persistent our efforts to forward that nobler order, and to reach that purer life. Humanity first creates in imagination the things it longs for in fact. Our worship and adoration therefore should not be for the mere shell of legend, it should rather be for the moral spirit enshrined within it. If only for these reasons—though there are many others—it is well to trace the growth of these ancient testimonies to the love which men bore to Jesus, and their eagerness for the glad tidings which he brought.

When these birth-legends took their rise it is impossible to say. But it is very significant that the Gospel of Mark does not mention them. Now the Gospel of Mark is, by almost universal consent, the oldest, the first-written Gospel in the New Testament.

Although *Matthew* is placed first, it really comes after *Mark*. Now this fact, that *Mark* never mentions the birth-stories, goes to show that when the author of *Mark* wrote his Gospel either the stories had not taken definite shape, or that the writer of *Mark* did not think them worthy of insertion in his narrative. Neither does Paul, who wrote his Epistles before the Gospels came into existence, say a word about the miraculous birth. Matthew, who comes later still, gives the legend of the Annunciation and the story of the wise men. But it is the author of *Luke*, who comes latest of all, who goes into greatest detail, and who gives not only the legends about the birth of Jesus, but also additional legends about the birth of John the Baptist, of which the other Gospels say not a word. That is, it was nearly a hundred years after the birth of Jesus,—for the Gospel of Luke was not written till towards the close of the first century,—it was nearly a hundred years after the events described before these legends took permanent form.[1]

During the life-time of Jesus, and for the first two generations after his death, no one seems to have known anything about them. Ample time, as you will admit, for stories to grow up about the birth of a man whose home life was wrapped in poverty and obscurity,—stories which could not by any possibility

[1] Probably even later, for the Birth-Legends belong to the later strata of the Gospels.

be verified, all the witnesses being dead,—and yet stories which would have been in everybody's mouth had the events described really occurred. What clearer proof could we have that these legends were the fruits of the loving imagination of after generations, weaving round the memory of the Master the poetry of mingled affection and romance?

Luke, then, the latest Gospel writer, goes into the greatest detail, going back, not only to the birth of Jesus, but also to the birth of John the Baptist. Why does he go back to John the Baptist? Because John the Baptist was a great personality too. Many looked upon him as a second Elijah, the fore-runner of the Messiah. Jesus himself was baptized by him, and said of John: "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." (Matthew xi. 11). He was the great predecessor of Jesus, and preached, like Jesus, repentance and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Here is the legend as given by Luke, which I abridge from the excellent modernised version in the "Bible for Young People:" "Under the reign of Herod there dwelt in the mountain districts of Southern Palestine, a devout and virtuous couple, named Zachariah and Elizabeth. Both were of noble and priestly blood, yet they were people of simple life, preferring to keep away from the turmoil of the capital, living strict and irreproachable lives in accord-

ance with the precepts of the Law, and looking forward, like all pious Jews, with eager expectation to the founding of the Messianic Kingdom. But they had one great grief,—they were childless, and they felt this severely, for among the Jews it was reckoned a great disgrace to be childless, and Zachariah and Elizabeth knew not how they had deserved it. So they never ceased to pray that this disgrace, as they deemed it, might be removed, and their old age, like that of Abraham and Manoah before them, be blessed by the birth of a son. Now as Zachariah belonged to the priestly class he had to go occasionally to Jerusalem to take his turn in conducting the Temple services. One day, as he poured out the glowing coals upon the golden altar in the holy place, and strewed the incense and aromatic spices over them, as the cloud of fragrance rose above the altar and filled the Holy Chamber,—what was that he saw? Great terror came upon Zachariah. At the right of the altar, he discerned through the thick cloud of vapour, a heavenly form. A Divine messenger, an angel of God, stood before him saying,—'Fear not, Zachariah, thy supplication is heard; a child shall be given unto thee, and thou shalt call him John, and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit and turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord.' Zachariah could hardly believe the message, and as a punishment for his disbelief the angel announced that he should be

deprived of speech until the promise was fulfilled. When he came out of the Holy Place the people were astonished, for he could not utter a sound, and they understood that he had had a vision. Then he returned home full of joy, and in due time a child was born in the little mountain home; and when the neighbours came to offer their congratulations they said that the child must be named after Zachariah his father, but Elizabeth said that his name must be John, and Zachariah too wrote on a wax tablet the words: 'His name is John.' Then his speech came back to him, and to the amazement of all he poured out his heart in a lofty song of praise to God, for this wondrous child, he said, was destined as a pledge that God's great promise, the coming of the Messiah, would soon be fulfilled."

That is the story. It takes us to the very centre of the Jewish ideas of the time,—the intense longing for the Messiah, the re-establishment of the throne of Israel, which had been so long looked for, and so often predicted by the prophets. The story itself bears all the marks of legend. It did not take written shape until a hundred years after the supposed event. The angel who comes upon the scene, Gabriel, bears a Hebrew name. The story follows the well-known similar stories in the Old Testament, the promise to Abraham and Sarah, the vision of Manoah and his wife, the father and mother of

Samson, and the story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. In one of the Apocryphal Gospels, the Gospel of James, a similar legend is told regarding the birth of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Similar stories are told of Sakya Mouni, Augustus, and many others. That the story of Zachariah and Elizabeth is legendary may be seen from the fact that Matthew, Mark, John, and Paul, say not a word about it. Surely they would have mentioned the circumstance had such a marvellous thing occurred. Why, then, does the author of Luke introduce the story? Why! because he was filled with the idea that Jesus was the Messiah,—that John the Baptist was the herald of the Messiah, and so, not content with giving the legend about the birth of Jesus, he must needs, as he thinks, go to the very roots of the origin of Christianity, and so he includes in his history the legend about the great predecessor of Jesus. The wonder is that he did not include the story about the birth of Mary the mother of Jesus, which is to be found in the Apocryphal Gospel of James. But this came much later, and probably Luke had not heard of it.

But now, having prepared the way by this wonderful narrative as to the birth of John the Baptist, the author of Luke introduces his second cycle of legends. Six months after the angel Gabriel had paid his visit to Zachariah he comes down from heaven once more and alights on the home of a maiden named

Mary, who is betrothed unto Joseph, a carpenter in Nazareth. There he makes an announcement to Mary similar to that which he had made to Elizabeth, but adding this time that her son, Jesus, shall sit upon the throne of David, his supposed ancestor, and rule over Israel. This part of the prediction has never been fulfilled,—Jesus never did rule over Israel, but the prediction is a testimony to the widespread belief that Jesus would return as Messiah in clouds of glory to establish his kingdom upon earth. Then the story goes on to say that Mary paid a visit to Elizabeth, her kinswoman, in Southern Judea, and the two women saluted each other and gave utterance to their joy in songs of praise and thanksgiving. The rest of the story you know,—the supposed journey to Bethlehem, upon which critics throw great doubt, and the birth in the stable or outhouse of the inn. (Matthew, by the way, tells us that Joseph and Mary lived at Bethlehem, so there should have been no need to make a journey there). Then comes that part of the story which has charmed the heart of Christendom for the past eighteen hundred years. On the very night of the birth there came to the inn, to Mary and Joseph, certain men whose attire seemed to mark them as shepherds, who asked with eager expectation to see the new-born babe. They had wonderful news to relate. "About the time of the baby's birth," they said, (I quote again from the "Bible for Young People,")

"they were keeping watch over their flocks by night in the open country round Bethlehem. As they were sitting and lying about, talking to one another, or occupied with their own thoughts, a wonderful thing came to pass, which at first filled them with deadly terror. The darkness was suddenly dispelled by an unearthly glory as the light that shines round the throne of God flooded all the scene. An angel stood before them and quieted their fears. He brought good news for Israel. The long-expected Messiah was born that very night at Bethlehem. They would easily find him,—a new-born child laid in a manger. The shepherds had scarcely heard the news, and had not yet recovered from their amazement, when the heavenly music of angel choirs swept through the air in sweeter tones than earth had ever heard:

'Glory to God in the Highest
And Peace on earth!
His will is good toward men.'

Only a few moments, and the ineffably sweet and glorious vision was gone, and all was still. In another moment, the shepherds were hurrying to Bethlehem, to assure themselves of the truth of this great news. And there they found the humble scene just as it had been described to them! They told their tale to all who would hear it, and made known everywhere what God had announced to them about this child. The wondrous story waked

amazement far and near, and if many of those who heard it soon forgot it again, it was not so with Mary. Not a word was lost by her, and not only as the Shepherds, rendering high praise to God, were returning to their work, but often and often in after years, she pondered all these things in her heart, and remembered the vision and the song."

Charming legend! The sweetest and most deeply significant in the whole Bible. Tell it to your children, as you tell them other classic legends and fairy stories, for they have a right to know the most beautiful legends enshrined in the greatest literatures in the world. But, as the years pass on, teach them to distinguish between truth of fact and truth of imagination. That this story is not a truth of fact is becoming more and more widely recognised. Mark, John, and Paul, I say, apparently, know nothing about it. Early Christian and Pagan literature is full of similar marvels, which nobody believes. Roman historians of the time also say not a word about all these wonderful things. And, most significant of all, according to Mark, when Jesus attained to manhood, his kinsmen tried to get hold of him by force, because they believed him to be out of his mind. Surely, had Mary had these wonderful visions, had the song of the Angels been then known of and believed, that is, during his lifetime, the friends of Jesus would never have gone to such extremities

with the divinely announced and duly declared messenger of God. This, in itself, apart from much other evidence,[1] proves that these birth stories were added to the Gospels in later times, when beliefs about the Messiahship of Jesus had grown much stronger and tended to become crystallized into a creed.

But why do I insist so strongly on this difference between truth of fact and truth of imagination? Because if we believe a thing as a truth of fact when it is not true, or go on pretending to believe it to be true in fact when we know that it is not true, we shall be either ignorant or dishonest in our belief, and we shall tend to regard it as a basis of dogma making for our own individual salvation. In so far as our belief is a result of ignorance our conception of the truth is so far limited, and the growth of our moral nature thereby stunted. In so far as we profess to believe what we know to be untrue we are dishonest and insincere in our religion. What, then, is the truth of imagination on which I lay stress? It is the truth of aspiration, of sympathy, of feeling, which lies at the basis of all legends. As I said at the beginning of my discourse, we do not believe in the absolute historic truth of Shakespeare's Hamlet, though a Hamlet, a prince of Denmark, once existed, but we do believe

[1] See the article on the Nativity in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*.

in the great truths which Shakespeare's imagination revealed through Hamlet,—the cruelty and treachery of sordid passion; the hatred of enthroned wrong: the sadness of unrequited love; the baffling perplexities of human life; the despair of attaining absolute justice, or perfect happiness here,—all these find an echo in our own hearts as we see the great drama move upon the stage. We *feel* the truth, we feel that these deep emotions are the substance of which our own souls are wrought. Whether Hamlet, a Prince of Denmark, really lived or did not live, that is no matter. Whether we are animated by the same hopes and fears and passions, and purified by the manifestation of them, that is matter enough. So with the myths of the Greeks. We do not believe in the story of Ulysses, and Œdipus, and Prometheus, but we do believe that these great legends embody deep spiritual truths concerning the passions and the emotions which move the human heart, the grave thought about human sorrow and human fate which fills every thoughtful mind.

So it is with these legends about Jesus. And the Evangelist, as the author of the "Bible for Young People" so well points out, is something of an artist too. Note his contrasts,—on the one side, the Imperial decree of the great Cæsar, representing the greatest power in the world, commanding the enrolment which brings the father to Bethlehem!—on

the other the helpless child, Jesus, representing the new power which was destined to dominate the world! On the one side again, the obscure birth, the deep poverty, no room for Mary even in the inn, the cradle,—a manger! foreshadowing that life of struggle, of rejection by the world,—often finding not so much as a place to lay his head,—and at last beaten, scourged, and crucified with the vilest of criminals, he passes to his eternal rest. On the other side the message and the song of the Angels, the applause and joy of heaven, as against the indifference and condemnation of men. The glad tidings of the angels' song are brought by humble shepherds, typifying the friendship of Jesus for the poor and lowly; and throughout the whole story there is the eternal contrast of the vulgarity of material power and splendour, with the simple beauty and moral grandeur of the power of the spirit! In the whole religious literature of the world there is no more beautiful legend than this, save, perhaps, in the story of the Buddha. And yet, this week, after eighteen hundred years of the recital of this legend, I read of a wedding in New York at which the bride's dress cost £5000, the pulpit was buried beneath banks of orchids, every trace of stone was hidden beneath plants and flowers, female hooligans fought for places as though they were not human, hats were torn and crushed, and dresses ripped from their gathers, and two bishops,

in full priestly regalia, respresented the lowly Carpenter of Nazareth, born in a stable and cradled in a manger! What then is the lesson for us? It is this—that our belief in the spiritual truth embodied in this legend must influence our hearts for good in a far deeper and stronger manner than the belief in the supposed historic truth has influenced the hearts of these Christian barbarians in New York. Let us get to the root, the heart of things. It is not belief in any historic fact that will save us,—it is faith in the strengthening of those primal feelings of the human heart which, purified, will produce the perfect life. That was the faith of Jesus himself,—not belief in some fact, or supposed fact, of the past, but faith in the purity of the moral life, here and now, and the glorification and perfection of that purified moral life in the future. See how the acceptance of this legend as a truth of the imagination enlarges and widens our faith! For the first Christians the legend only meant that Jesus was the Messiah, sent to secure the fulfilment of strictly Jewish hopes. For the Christians of succeeding ages it only meant that those who accepted the dogma should be admitted to the pure joys of Heaven. For us, it means that the Angels' Song is realized here and now, in every heart, for every man, in so far as he lives the true Christian life, and is filled with the Christ-like spirit.

"Christ cometh not a King to reign,
The world's long hope is dim,
The weary centuries watch in vain
The clouds of heaven for him.

"The letter fails, and systems fall,
And every symbol wanes,
The Spirit over-brooding all,
Eternal Love remains."

And it is just because Jesus exemplified to the full this Eternal Love at its highest and best, it is just because humanity, after its first mad fit of scorn and calumny and cruelty, recognised, and bowed down before, the lofty spiritual heights which Jesus revealed, that we, too, take up the Angels' Song as a poetic symbol of the life for which we should strive and pray. It is the old, old cry, which has broken out from the heart of humanity ever since the time of Buddha, Zoroaster, Isaiah, Plato, Jesus,—the cry for a life of perfect purity, peace, and love. Let us believe in the possibility of its fulfilment. Let our inner life but be charged with all the impulses to truth, and charity, and courage, which it brings; let it change us from a life of self-seeking to a life of self-surrender, not caring about position, or place, or power, so long as we are true to this higher spirit within,—then the Legend of the Angels' Song and the miraculous birth will not be a mere sandy foundation of dogma requiring intellectual assent in our minds, it will be a poem of the feelings and of the imagination, inspiring us to realise it as actual fact in our hearts and lives.

V

THE FIRST THREE GOSPELS AND THE PERSONALITY OF JESUS

Mark x. 18.—"Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God."

Luke vi. 46.—"Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

"BACK to Christ!" that is a phrase which has become very common of late years. The saying, or rather the temper of mind which it betokens, is very significant. It is as though men said: "Let us put speculative creeds and doctrines, with all the disputation which they bring, on one side for a time, and try to get back to Jesus the man, the carpenter of Nazareth, whose life gave rise to them; let us try to picture him as he really was, and live as he would have us live." That attitude of mind and temper is a great gain. It shows, at any rate, a genuine desire on the part of men to

get at something more definite and more practical than speculative creeds, something which shall have a shaping and directing influence on their life. It at least makes them think, makes them ask themselves—What does my conception of perfect manhood require of me? And such self-questioning is always morally stimulating and useful.

All the same the intellectual and moral difficulties involved in the process of getting "back to Christ" are much greater than is ordinarily supposed. Over eighteen centuries of theological speculation and controversy lie between us and Jesus, centuries which have left their mark on our creeds, catechisms, prayers, hymns, and churches, on our religious education and our whole system of worship. It is no easy matter to divorce ourselves from all these things—they influence our minds unconsciously. We are the children of our fathers, and we cannot, suddenly, make an entire break with their thought. "Back to Christ,"—that means back through the creeds of Protestantism, through the centuries of Roman Catholic tradition, through the controversies of the fathers of the Church, through the philosophisings of John and the Alexandrian school, through the speculations of Paul, through the great Jewish-Christian controversy which almost rent the early Church in twain, and through the "impressions" of his apostolic biographers! And our difficulties are increased by the paucity of

the materials on which to form a judgment. Jesus himself did not leave a single line of writing, or, at least, none that has come down to us. He is said to have lived some thirty odd years. But his ministry, according to the first three gospels, extended over only fifteen months, and of these fifteen months the gospels only record sayings and events comprised within thirty-five days, whole months together being apparently dropped in silence.[1] How much is here left to the imagination! Dr. Gardner, in his *Exploratio Evangelica*, makes a very pertinent remark in this connection. "Rénan," he says, "introduced into the life of Jesus something of the French sentimentalist, the author of *Ecce Homo* something of the English philanthropist. In the recent biography which is called *Pastor Pastorum*, Jesus appeared with traits of the idealised schoolmaster, with a likeness to Dr. Arnold. Each writer moulds the image of the Master after the character which he most admires." That is perfectly true, but how could it be otherwise? We know so little of Jesus that we are bound to fill in the details of the picture by the aid of our own imagination, and such filling in will always be done in accordance with our own particular temperament, knowledge, and bias.

[1] See Dr. Martineau's *Seat of Authority in Religion*, Book II, chap. ii. The fourth Gospel makes the ministry of Jesus extend over two, probably three, years.

Let us, then, try to get as clear an idea as we can of Jesus, bearing in mind that the Gospel writers themselves had their own particular bias, and that their views were coloured by their own preconceptions and the prevailing expectations of the time. Of this we must beware. We must first ask ourselves how far the Gospel narratives are trustworthy. I have pointed out before[1] that the epistles of Paul were written before our present gospels were compiled. Now what was the great controversy in which Paul was engaged with the disciples? It was, as you know, the great question as to whether non-Jews should be admitted into the little Christian communities. The disciples contended that Jesus, one of the "Chosen People" himself, had brought salvation to the Jews alone,[2] and that the Gentiles or "heathen" must first become members of the Jewish faith ere they could be recognised as true followers of the Master. They held that Jesus came to fulfil the Law, not to dispense with it. The only thing that divided them from their fellow-Jews was their conviction that Jesus, their Master, was the Messiah. They themselves, after his death, attended the Temple services regularly,[3] and observed

[1] See the discourse on the compilation of the New Testament.

[2] See the very singular sentence (probably an interpolation), in John iv. 23.—"for salvation is from the Jews,"—a sentence wholly out of harmony with the context.

[3] See Acts ii. 47 : iii. 1.

the Jewish ordinances as to circumcision, ceremonial, and meats. Paul, on the other hand, set himself to break down all that. His great cry was—Jew or Gentile, Roman or barbarian, bond or free, all may be followers of the Master and members of the faith. And when Peter showed signs of wavering between the two parties and set himself against Paul, the latter "resisted him" as he says, "to the face."

Now, my point is this—that this controversy lasted many years. It grew very bitter, and while it was going on the Gospel traditions were being formed. The question would always arise: What did the Master say? Hence, any passing phrase or sentence which the disciples remembered as having fallen from the lips of Jesus, and which told in favour of either one side or the other, would be caught up in the tradition, possibly expanded or accentuated according to the prejudice of the narrator, and, so expanded, would be embodied in the Gospel-story by the compiler, when, in after years, he came to construct his narrative. There is abundant evidence of these clashing traditions in the Gospels. Take, for example, this from Matthew xv. 24: "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That is evidently put into the mouth of Jesus by a Jewish-Christian writer. Compare it with the parable of the Good Samaritan; or with this from Luke x. 16: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he

that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth Him that sent me;" or with the well-known passage: "Inasmuch as ye have done these things unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done them unto me." All these are evidently from a universalist or Gentile-Christian source. Or take this from John iv.: "Salvation is from the Jews—" that surely is from a Jewish-Christian source. Compare it with this: "The hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth." That is obviously universalist. Or take this from Matthew x.: "Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That, again, is obviously Jewish-Christian. Compare it with this from the same Gospel (xxiv. 14): "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations;" or with this from Luke x., respecting the mission of the Seventy: "And he sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself was about to come . . . And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, *eat such things as are set before you.*"[1] These passages are

[1] See, even more emphatically, Mark vii., 19.

obviously from a universalist or Gentile-Christian source. They are evidently directed against the Jewish-Christian party, and are of late origin, for if Jesus had actually uttered these words to his disciples, "eat such things as are set before you," why should Peter, James, and John have had scruples about breaking the Law in eating untithed meats, and why should they so strongly withstand Paul upon the matter? But the whole story of the sending out of the Seventy is pure fiction, for we know from the Acts of the Apostles that the disciples started no missions and founded no Churches until some time after the death of Jesus. All this shows us how careful we must be not to ascribe to Jesus words which he never uttered, but which were attributed to him, and virtually put into his mouth by zealous partisans in later years.

Finally, in this connection, take this passage: "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished."[1] Compare these words with the fact that Jesus often severely condemns the formalism of the Scribes and Pharisees, advocates, both by precept and example, a less formal observance of the Sabbath, never

[1] See also Luke xvi. 17.

once speaks of the necessity for circumcision, is said to advise the eating of untithed food with Gentiles, and denounces the Temple and the Temple-priests as a "den of robbers." Surely these contradictory sayings, injunctions, and conduct, cannot consistently be ascribed to one man. They show the existence of two or more parties in the apostolic age, and each party records the traditions which tell in favour of its particular view, these traditions being brought together and embodied in the Gospel narrative by later hands.

Let us take a much more important point. You know what great stress the Jewish people laid on the expectation of the "end of the world," or the "end of the age," when God would establish the "coming kingdom," in which Messiah would reign; this great event to be accompanied, as they thought, by signs of supernatural power. And so the Gospel writers report Jesus as depicting this event in glowing and startling terms, and as about to take place speedily: "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be great earthquakes, and in divers places famines and pestilences; and there shall be terrors and great signs from heaven . . . And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear, and for expecta-

tion of the things which are coming on the world: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory . . . Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished." (Luke xxi.) Compare this startling prediction with the sayings about the Kingdom growing slowly like the mustard seed, and spreading silently like the leaven; and with that great sentence—which the disciples could hardly invent, so foreign was it to their thought—"The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, there! for lo, the Kingdom of God is within you." On every page of the Gospels we have to ask ourselves—Which is the true Jesus? What did he really say?

Now all these questions affect our conception of the personality of Jesus in this way,—If so much could be erroneously attributed or ascribed to Jesus by aftergrowth, tradition, and legend, may not the doctrine of his Messiahship have been an aftergrowth also? May not this claim, like others, have been put into his mouth by over-zealous disciples? The question is an interesting one, and great names are ranged on both sides. Dr. Martineau, for example, calls the doctrine of the Messiahship of Jesus "the first act of Christian mythology," and is of opinion that "the Messianic theory of the person of Jesus

was made for him, and palmed upon him by his followers."[1] The weight of critical opinion, however, is against this view, and in favour of the supposition that Jesus did claim to be the Messiah. The arguments on both sides are too intricate to be outlined at length here. But when all is said our judgment must be a hypothetical one. We are too much in the dark. We know that even in the Gospels there is a palpable growth of legend and doctrine in connection with the Messiahship of Jesus. In Matthew, for example, he is regarded as Messiah from and through his birth; but in Mark, the oldest Gospel, it is only a short time before his death that Peter, in answer to his inquiry: "But who say ye that I am?" answers—"Thou art the Christ." And "he charged them that they should tell no man." How strange this is if he was really Messiah by miraculous birth! A comparison of the two Gospels betrays a palpable growth of tradition, and if so, may not all the stories about his Messiahship be tradition, based, not on actual fact, but on the mere belief of the disciples. There is a still further growth of tradition manifested in the later Gospel of John as compared with the first three Gospels, for while, in the first three, Jesus never openly and publicly claims the Messiahship, in the fourth and

[1] See *The Seat of Authority in Religion*, Book IV, chap II, Sec. I, which should be read by all interested in the subject.

last Gospel he both makes the claim and defends it. Here, then, there is a further growth in the tradition, all taking place, of course, after Jesus had passed away, and when his actual words could not be verified nor, perhaps, correctly remembered. There is, I know, a good deal to be said on both sides, and perhaps the real truth is this—that the disciples, full of the popular expectation of a Messiah and anxiously looking for his coming, were ultimately brought, in their devotion to Jesus, to say, in their own minds—'Surely he is the long-expected one!' Jesus, perceiving the drift of their thoughts, would perhaps hestitatingly and unwillingly accept the position thus forced upon him, so unwillingly that he bade them "that they should tell no man." The whole subject, however, is wrapped in the darkness and obscurity of clashing traditions. Personally, I attach little practical importance to such questions, and I always feel inclined to pass over them with an "if." *If* Jesus really believed himself to be the Messiah, that is, a person miraculously sent by God; *if* he really thought, as he is reported to have said, that the end of the world would come even before that generation had passed away, and that there were some of them then living "which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom;" *if* he really believed, as most of his fellow-Jews

believed, that Paradise or Heaven was a place of angels and blessed spirits above the skies, and Hades a place of disembodied spirits beneath the earth—*if* he believed all these things, then, Jesus was mistaken. What, you say, Jesus mistaken! How shocking that sounds! And yet it is the literal truth. For there is one matter in which every sensible man now admits that Jesus was mistaken—that is, in the supposed casting out of demons. In his time, persons afflicted with epilepsy or similar nervous diseases were supposed to be possessed by demons, and Jesus, in several cases, is reported to have cast out these demons. He obviously thought that he was casting out demons. He was a child of his time. What he really did was to allay, by his great personal sympathetic and magnetic powers, a peculiar form of nervous disease. But Jesus is no more to be blamed for these mistakes than are the people who believed the sun went round the earth when that was the accepted opinion. But these mistakes do show that he, too, had the limitations of our common humanity.

Leaving aside, then, from the first three Gospels, all that is legendary, and all that is mere aftergrowth of doctrine, have we sufficient biographical material left to enable us to form a fairly clear mental picture of Jesus of Nazareth? I think we have, but the details of the picture will have to be filled in to some

extent by our own imagination. The picture we get is that of a man like, in nature, unto ourselves, but endowed with a remarkable moral and religious consciousness, and a remarkable moral will; a unique personality, which left a profound impression both on his own age, and, through his disciples, on after generations, and whose words still haunt our souls and help us to consecrate our life to unselfish ends. A man like, in nature, unto ourselves. He is born at a particular time and place. Joseph is repeatedly spoken of as his father. The other children of Joseph and Mary are spoken of as his brothers and sisters. When he is tempted in the desert he is made to reply: "Man liveth not by bread alone"—evidently with reference to himself. When he prays it is to "Our Father," not "My Father," thus placing himself on a level with his disciples. When the young man addresses him as "Good Master," Jesus says: "Why callest thou me good? none is good save one, even God." To others he says: "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," thereby making a clear distinction between himself and God. According to Mark, his friends and relatives, after he had begun his mission, sought to lay hold of him, thinking him to be insane, "for they said, he is beside himself"—a thing they would surely never

have done had they thought him to be the Messiah, or divine, or miraculously born. Even in the Gospel of John, which is full of the after-growth of doctrine, he is made to say: "Ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God." "My Father is greater than I." "I can of mine own self do nothing. I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." At the great preaching of the Apostles in the *Acts* he is simply: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you."

But it is in the progressive development of his life, and in the incidents of it, that we see his humanity most clearly. His intellectual and scientific knowledge, as we have seen, is the limited knowledge of his time. He is moved with indignation, as we all are. What depths of human passion lie behind those bitter phrases with which he assailed the Pharisees: "Hypocrites," "serpents," "offspring of vipers," "whited Sepulchres"! As he moves from Nazareth to Gennesaret and from Gennesaret to Jerusalem, from the freedom and confidence of the earlier preachings to the agony of Gethsemane and Calvary, how he is filled with human foreboding, sorrow, and despair! Was there ever a more human and despairing cry wrung from the heart of man than that cry on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is the cry of our own hearts

when we pass through deep darkness, often succeeded, let us hope, by clearer, warmer light, and the equally human and trustful cry: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

But we shall realise the rare quality of his humanity still more clearly if we look at his character,—his character as shown not in his words merely, but in his *deeds*. Always the friend of the poor and the lowly, yea, even of sinners, he moves amongst them full of graciousness, tenderness, and pity. He avoids the society of the chief priests of the Temple and the courtiers of Herod's palace. Great wealth, so far from being an attraction to him, has positive moral and spiritual disadvantages,—he lives, by choice, the life of a poor man. Though he sees his betrayal, and defeat, and death coming upon him, he moves not a single hair's breadth out of the path he has marked out for himself. How great, how grand, compared with our petty and puny worldliness! And with all this there is a mingled serenity and strength, dignity and humility, austerity and gentleness, indignation and pity, which makes him a master among men. He called them from their boats, their fields, their tax-booths, and they obeyed, because they felt themselves drawn and swayed by a mind and personality greater than their own. His preachings, as we shall see, show a deep moral insight, amounting to genius. His parables are full of natural and homely beauty.

His turns of phrase, when he meets opponents, manifest a subtle dialectical skill. His repartees show great intellectual penetration and discernment. All these, truly, are marks of moral and intellectual power. Their note is strength—strength of mind, strength of moral judgment, strength of will. It was this strength which, paradoxically enough, made his tragedy, and which makes the tragedy of humanity—the strength which faces the world, which will not bow to its passing ideals, which suffers martyrdom rather than compromise with evil.

Here, then, we have sufficient reliable material, not, indeed, for a full account of the life of Jesus, but for the construction of a well-defined ideal of almost perfect manhood. The far-off, impossible, legendary figure of the Churches and the Creeds fades away, and we are brought nearer to the tender sympathy, the divine pity, the calm serenity, the sure moral judgment, in a word to the deep responsive elements of the *human* heart, which make for fraternity, fellowship, love. These are the forces which lift us above ourselves and move us by their grace and power. Those who possess them—Buddha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Socrates, Plato, Paul, John, St. Francis—belong to the company of the Immortals, at whose shrine mankind bows in reverent adoration, and from whose spirit it draws the inspiration of Eternal Hope. And Jesus, whom men called the Christ, was one of these.

"Far hence he lies,
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on his grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down."

But his spirit, like the spirit of all the Immortals, lives and works to-day. Its temporary failure meant eternal victory, and spake and speaks to all the ages. It matters not that the theatre of his life and death was confined to a narrow strip of country peopled by a despised and comparatively unknown race, far away from the great centres of civilization, and that his outlook upon the world and the universe was bounded by the narrow vision and limited knowledge of his time. In moral development, as in other species of development, the microcosm contains, implicitly and potentially, the whole. As we shall see in our next two discourses, the principles of Jesus are capable of infinite extension and re-adaptation. It is for us, eternal children of humanity, who, like Jesus, may never see the fruit of the work of our hands, it is for us to apply his teachings to the society of our own day, and, in so far as we can, to follow in the footsteps of the Master. His aim is the supreme aim of every great teacher and reformer—the reign of justice and of love in the human heart and in human society. In the measure that we have that aim, and in the measure that, like Jesus, we strive to realize it, in that measure are we reaching toward that

state of spiritual perfectibility to which, whether we think of it as here or as elsewhere, we rightly give the name of "the heavenly life."

In our next discourse we shall try to get a clearer conception of the religion of Jesus and of the ideas and principles which animated it and him.

VI

THE RELIGION OF JESUS

Luke xvii. 20.—"And being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God cometh, Jesus answered them and said, The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, there! for lo, the Kingdom of God is within you."

Matthew v. 48.—"Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

We have seen, in the two previous discourses, that Jesus was a child of his time; that, as is the case with all men, his knowledge was limited and his outlook bounded by the thought, the circumstances, and the surroundings of his age. What, then, was the relation of Jesus towards Judaism, the religion of his age? Was he a child of his time there also, or did he condemn it and rise above it? The answer to that question is two-fold. Jesus was a Jew, and there can be no doubt that he started from Judaism as a basis,

—as a natural, and, to him, almost inevitable presupposition. But there can be no doubt, also, that he rose far above it. He builded better than he knew. This statement, that Jesus started from Judaism as a basis, may sound strange, so foreign does it seem to our wider modern out-look, and to modern interpretations of his teaching. It is nevertheless true. We are told that, shortly after his death, his most intimate friends and disciples attended the Temple services regularly; and they never thought, for a moment, of giving up the faith in which they had been reared. They would never have taken this stand if the Master himself, beloved even more after death than in life, had completely condemned and broken with Judaism. But the words of Jesus himself are clear enough. Apart from the passages—quoted in my last discourse—which seem to bear the impress of party controversy, there are other and more reliable passages which make his standpoint clear. When condemning the hypocrisy and formalism of the Pharisees he says: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hyprocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone." That is, judgment, mercy, and faith *first*, of course; but do not neglect the payment of tithe—that is his meaning. Again, in the

sermon on the Mount: "If, therefore, thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." When he healed the leper he bade the man go to the priest and offer the gifts which the Law commanded. The validity of the Temple ritual is therefore clearly recognised. Now, if Jesus had broken completely with Judaism he would not have recognised the validity of the Temple ritual at all. These and other passages show that he started from the religion of his time, the religion of the Law, as a basis. On the other hand, there is no doubt that Jesus tried to liberalise the law, and, what is more, *claimed the right to interpret it and test it by the inward authority of conscience*, just as we do with regard to the whole of the Scriptures. For example, he repeatedly scandalised the Pharisees by his teaching and conduct with regard to the Sabbath; he is said to have ignored the distinction as to clean and unclean meats; and when the Scribes asked: "Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with defiled hands?" he replied by quoting the words of Isaiah:

> "This people honoureth me with their lips,
> But their heart is far from me.
> But in vain do they worship me,
> Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men;"

and he proceeded—"ye leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men." Now this exactly defines the position of Jesus in relation to the religion of his time. Ritual, ceremonial, sacrificial ordinances—"the tradition of men"—these, with him, are regarded as quite secondary; but mercy, truth, justice, judgment—"the commandment of God"—these must always have first place. The moral part of the Law Jesus enforced even more strictly than the Pharisees themselves. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." The old Law said: "Thou shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all . . But let your speech be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of evil." The old Law said: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." The old Law said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you . . . For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the tax-gatherers the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." Surely, the obvious inference from all this is that Jesus claimed

to reform, amend, and improve the religion of his time,—the religion of the Law,—by the inward authority of conscience.

What, then, is the meaning of all this? It is this —that Jesus stands in the line, and at the head, of the prophets, as opposed to the priestly class in religion. That is a distinction which holds throughout the whole religious history of man, and it is essential that we should clearly grasp it. The priests have always tried to fix or crystallize religion in stated forms and precepts, to insist upon these as essential, and have claimed to mediate between man and God. The prophets, and Jesus especially, strove to break down all that. He took men straight to the spiritual principle, the spiritual power, to God himself, and bade them seek judgment, mercy, and forgiveness there, without the intermediacy of priest or ceremonial. In this he was a descendant of the great Hebrew prophets, and had doubtless deeply immersed his mind in their spirit and teachings.

But Jesus, in the fulness and perfection of his thought, makes an advance even on previous prophetic teaching. He not only, like the prophets, rises above the false religion of his time, but he restates moral and spiritual truth in terms which implied a religious revolution. It was in this that he builded better than he knew. For while, in theory, he tacitly recognized the religion of his day, the

development and practical application of his principles leaves it far behind. What, then, was this re-statement of spiritual truth? It is summed up in the phrase—"the Kingdom of God." We have seen how, through the book of *Daniel*, the apocalyptic writings of the age, and the preachings of John the Baptist, a universal and feverish expectation had filled the minds of the Jewish people as to the immediate advent of the "Kingdom" in clouds of glory. Even Jesus himself was infected by the spirit of the age, and is reported to have said: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. Verily I say unto you, there be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom." There, I say again, Jesus was the child of his age, and was clearly mistaken. No man can wholly detach himself from the superstitions of his time. But in all our criticism, whether of the Bible or of any other book, let us try to get the best thought out of it, to separate the accidental from the essential, and leave the erroneous elements to die. For in the teachings of Jesus with reference to the "Kingdom" there is profound spiritual truth. What, then, is this Kingdom? It is a condition of the spirit, beginning here and now in the heart. "Lo! the Kingdom of God is within you." It grows

slowly, like the mustard seed; it spreads silently like the leaven; it is a work of development, of discrimination between good and evil,—as the seed grows in good ground and as the husbandman discriminates between the wheat and the tares. And what is the condition of entry into this Kingdom? One, and one only—the striving to do God's will. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." And who are the members of this spiritual kingdom? They are the "poor in spirit," "they that mourn," "the meek," "they that hunger and thirst after righteousness," "the merciful," "the pure in heart," "the peacemakers." Compassion, sorrowfulness, meekness, mercifulness, purity of heart, peacefulness, hunger and thirst after righteousness—how far was all this from the external worship and elaborate ritual of Judaism! How far is it from the external worship and ceremonial of our own day! Time after time does Jesus insist on this inward moral spirit as a condition of entry into the kingdom. When the Scribe asked him—What commandment is the first of all? and Jesus answered: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," adding the two great commandments Love to God and Love to Man, the Scribe rejoined: "Of a truth, Master, thou hast well said that he is one; and there is none

other than he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And Jesus answered—"Thou are not far from the kingdom of God," again implying that the kingdom was not a place of outward glory but a pure state of the mind and heart beginning here and now. When the disciples, full of foolish notions and expectations of a kingdom of magnificent outward splendour, asked, in their simplicity: "Who, then, is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus, with infinite pity mingled with indignation, called to him a little child and set it in the midst of them, saying: "Verily, I say unto you, except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven." "If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and minister of all." Here, again, the kingdom is something invisible, something spiritual. Not the trappings of earthly greatness and the tinsel pomp of kings and prelates, but the simplicity, the innocence, the openness, the naturalness of little children—this is the spirit of the kingdom. "Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein."

The "Kingdom of God" then, in the best thought of Jesus, is an invisible, spiritual kingdom—a purified state of the mind and heart, the reign of righteousness, truth, and love on earth, and afterwards, in heaven. And, being a spiritual state, its judgments are always upon us. Not amid clouds of glory and the blare of the herald-angel's trumpet, not amid the crash of worlds and the thunders of impending doom, but here and now, the glory of the Spirit is around us, and its judgments are upon us with every thought we think, and every deed we do. Retribution and reward are "swift as the lightning," bringing slowly, and sometimes unconsciously to ourselves, the realisation of our ideals, burning and purging our selfishness and brutality out of us, and so preparing us for our full adoption as children of the Spirit. And though generations and centuries may pass ere we and society are changed to the fashion of the Supreme Ideal, yet, even now, it is slowly working amongst little groups of men, and will spread silently, like the leaven, until all the world be leavened.

"For not in far-off realms of space
The Spirit hath its throne,
In every heart it findeth place,
And waiteth to be known.

"Thought answereth alone to thought,
And soul with soul hath kin,
The outward God he findeth not,
Who finds not God within."

This, then, was the central religious idea of Jesus, —the thought of "the Kingdom of God" as spiritual. But what were the thoughts of Jesus concerning God himself? Here, again, his teaching marks a distinct advance on the thought of his time. For while others before him, Greek philosophers, Hebrew prophets, Buddhist monks, had taught the same truth,—that God is a Spirit of Righteousness and Love, who might best be symbolized in language by a term expressing a relationship as of parent to child,— Jesus declared the same truth with a confidence, a fervour, a fulness which created a deeper impression on the minds of men than had ever been created before. This truth had greater implications than probably Jesus himself saw. For if God is a Spirit, a Spirit of mercy, righteousness, and love; if the idea of a wrathful and avenging God is a figment of the imagination; then the whole system of outward sacrifices on which Judaism was built fell to the ground, and the temple of true religion must be built on new foundations. Had Jesus recognized the full implications of this thought he would hardly have advised men to attend the Temple services, and offer their gifts at the altar. But let us follow the best thought of Jesus. God, to him, is a Father—a Spirit so full of mercy that he sends his good gifts to all alike, making "his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sending rain on the just and the unjust.

No mediator, no outward sacrifice is required. The way to the good life, the good spirit, is always open. Forgiveness is unto seventy times seven, and only one condition is required—a sincerely repentant spirit. The moment the Prodigal Son is moved by this spirit the Father's arms are open, and the home resounds with sounds of rejoicing. How far away is this from the lurid pictures which have been drawn of God as an avenging Deity! On this thought of God as Father, Jesus reposed with supreme confidence, as a child reposes on the breast of its mother. He did not argue about it. He did not even state it in the reasoned form in which we put it to-day—that as we possess this spirit of love and goodness in our hearts, inasmuch as nothing can come from nothing, these spirits of ours must have had a spiritual Parent-source. He simply declared his faith—the Father-hood of God—as a truth beyond dispute. To him it had a purely ethical, not a metaphysical implica-cation. He had no doubts about "personality." The world to him was a little world, heaven above the skies, and the Father—though spirit—a Being with purified human attributes, awaiting the Judg-ment Day, that his children might return to him, and the veil of material things be taken away. Science had not yet revealed to man the millions of worlds, and suns, and systems, by which we are surrounded, or the illimitable ages during which development has

been proceeding, or the spiritual mysteries and problems which lie behind "development" and "initial capacity"—all which make the thought of an "infinite Personality," if not a contradiction in terms, at any rate inconceivable by us, all our notions of Personality, as we know it, being bound up with limitation.

Neither was Jesus troubled, as so many are troubled to-day, by the thought of the awful cruelties of nature, "red in tooth and claw," or the still more awful,—because conscious and intentional,—cruelties of man to man; a thought which plunges many finely-tuned spirits into agnosticism and despair, and makes them inclined to think either that God is asleep, or that he might have made his children less brutish. Jesus, I say, was untroubled by doubt. Life, in his eyes—if men would only live obediently to the will of Father—might be a delightful pastoral; the world of Nature was but the prelude to "the kingdom," and Death the passport to the purer joys of Heaven.

The kingdom of the Spirit, and the Fatherhood of God in that kingdom—these were two of the central thoughts in the religion of Jesus. Another, and vitally connected with these, was his teaching with regard to man, for Jesus looked upon man as a child of God, and therefore *akin to God in spirit.* The recognition of this spiritual kinship of man to God is essential to the full understanding of the

teaching of Jesus, for it has been much overlaid, amongst Christian theologians, by a directly opposite doctrine. With Jesus, this kinship of spirit was the ground of his appeal to men, and the motive force of his inspiration. Through it, his disciples and followers were to become "the salt of the earth," "the light of the world"—a light which was to shine forth upon man in conduct and character through the power of the indwelling Spirit. God had given them of his Spirit that they might become *one* with him; yet, at the same time, the Spirit is far mightier and holier than they, so that they could always fall back upon it as the infinite source of strength. This is the explanation of the seemingly contradictory sayings—"the Father [the Spirit] is greater than I;" "the Father [the Spirit] and I are one."

This spiritual kinship between man and God has far-reaching ethical implications, as we shall see more clearly in our next discourse. It implies that the service of man and the service of God are identical, nay, that God, the Spirit, can only be truly served by serving humanity—the highest embodiment of the Spirit. The great parable in which Jesus compares the advent of the kingdom to the coming of a King to judgment comes here to mind, for the principle of the judgment is this: "Inasmuch as ye did these things unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did them unto me."

The kingdom of the Spirit, the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of man—these are the central thoughts in the religion of Jesus. One other there is—his teaching as to the after-life of the soul. Here, again, Jesus was not original. The doctrine of an after-life had been taught by the Egyptians, the Persians, the Hindoos, the Greeks. But none had taught it with the certainty and force of conviction with which Jesus declared it. The Jews had taken the doctrine from the Persians, but it had not become part of their national faith, for the Sadducees rejected it. Hence, when, to that "hard Pagan world," with its cruelty, and brutality, and licentiousness, its unbridled luxury and degrading tyranny and slavery, Jesus brought his gracious message of a future kingdom of the Spirit where sin and wrong could never come; where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest;" where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain;" where the wounded, and the stricken, and the storm-tossed soul shall be received into the arms of the Everlasting Love; where the superficial and unjust judgments of this world shall be reversed and the first shall be last and the last shall be first; where, in a word, Mercy, Peace, Righteousness, Love shall reign and the deep things of the Spirit be all in all—can it be wondered that this great message of Jesus, this new Gospel, this "good news,"

these "glad tidings of great joy," caught the imagination of men and fell on their weary and despairing hearts as refreshing rain on parched and dried-up lands! No wonder that, with this faith and this vision, the apostles and early Christians went forth to conquer the world—to rot in dungeons, to meet wild beasts in the amphitheatres, to pass through flame, and sword, and horrible torture, that they might be worthy of "the life which is life indeed."

Objection has been made to the teaching of Jesus on this point. It is said that he here descended from his high ethical position, and promised men the good things of the kingdom as a reward for their goodness here, instead of enforcing the deeper moral truth that goodness or virtue is its own reward. It is true that he frequently spoke of the "reward which is in heaven" and the "recompense" which the Father will give, but I do not think he used these words in the sense of a bribe, but rather in the sense of an unfolding or development of the natural consequences of conduct. Just as, in speaking to a child, we say that the formation of good habits in childhood will bring a nobler manhood, we do not thereby hold out the prospect of nobler manhood as a bribe to the formation of good habits, but rather as the natural development of character from a certain course of conduct; so Jesus urged that a richer spiritual life in heaven would come as a natural development from

the practice of the good life here and now. This is implied in all his teaching as to the slow growth of the kingdom "within us."

Objection has also been made that Jesus made the judgment of God one of unalterable doom, and condemned the souls of the lost to eternal torture, where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Here, I think, we must allow something for the figurative and prophetic imagery with which the Eastern imagination was wont to clothe its thought. Jesus, I know, could be severe, and his severity is sometimes lost sight of. But it is hard to believe that one who taught goodwill to all, who told of a loving Father who was the upholder and sustainer of all, watching over even a sparrow's fall, it is hard to believe that such a one could teach a doctrine of never-ending material torments prepared by that Father for his children. As to the other point—that Jesus taught the doctrine of unalterable doom, and that the future state of the soul was fixed irrevocably by the Judgment—there are, it is true, passages, like the famous parable of the Judgment, which imply this. Here again, then, we are forced to the conclusion—assuming that the words were uttered by Jesus—that he was mistaken, that he was a child of his time, that he was limited in his moral and intellectual outlook by the prevalent opinions and the state of knowledge of his time. Such limitations necessarily

beset all of us. I cannot believe that these poor seventy years of life—years clogged and clouded by the barriers of the flesh and the half-sight of our mortal vision—fix and determine the future state of the soul for ever, arrest its moral growth towards perfection, and destroy the possibility of future development for even one soul. Let us rather say with Browning:

> "that man is hurled
> From change to change unceasingly,
> His soul's wings never furled."

Infinite punishment for finite sin is a monstrous doctrine. Men cannot be divided into sheep and goats. The degrees of merit and of guilt are infinite. And the parable of the Prodigal Son will surely hold good even in the after-life, when Death has taken away the veil from our eyes and we see ourselves as we really are. The great principle of Jesus, however, still remains—that judgment is based on moral distinctions, and is being continually recorded in the silent recesses of the spirit here and now.

The Kingdom of the Spirit; the Fatherhood of God; the Brotherhood of Man and his kinship with the Spirit; Death, the gateway to purer life—these were the central thoughts in the religion of Jesus. It may be objected that we modernise the teachings of Jesus, that we add our thought to his, and modify it in accordance with modern requirements. That is

true. Something, in all teaching, must always be left over for the recipient to merge into his own thought and life, to mingle with new moral and spiritual conditions, and re-adapt to new circumstances and surroundings. Revelation never ceases, and the Spirit is with us also. The world of Jesus, compared to ours, was a little world. To his disciples it would, as they thought, soon shrivel up and pass away, and Jesus, as Messiah, would come in clouds of glory to preside at the great assize. But our modern conceptions both of Jesus and of religion are more spiritual, and therefore more enduring and more ennobling. As Dr. Martineau so well says: "For those who believe that Jesus of Nazareth will send forth his angels and gather his elect, and set up his throne and divide the affrighted world with a 'Come, ye blessed,' and a 'Depart, ye cursed,' the titles of sovereignty, of judicial award, of rescue from perdition, have still an exact and natural meaning, as the symbols of a definite though monstrous mythology. But, when once our relation to him has become spititual,—a relation of personal reverence and historical recognition,—a looking up to him as the supreme type of moral communion between man and God,—must we not own that these terms not only cease to represent any reality, but become either empty or misleading as imagery? Between soul and soul, even the greatest and the least, there can be, in the things of righteous-

ness and love, no lordship and servitude, but the sublime sympathy of a joint worship on the several steps of a never-ending ascent. With the throne and the glory, and the chariot of clouds, and the retinue of saints in the air, and the trumpet of the herald and the voice of the archangel, must disappear the lordship too; and God alone, as Ruler of Nature, as well as Light of Souls, must be owned as the Sovereign whom we unconditionally serve. . . . Are we quitting an ancient sanctity in so divorcing ourselves from outworn professions of belief and definitions of doctrine? it is to enter on a truer and a higher. It is time to ascend to a more enduring order of relations, binding us to a larger world of sympathy, while infinitely deepening the long familiar ties. Let us take courage to be true, and make no reserves in our acceptance of the inward promptings of our ever-living Guide."

In our next discourse we must consider the religion of Jesus on its practical side, and try to ascertain the nature of its demands upon us as moral and social beings.

VII

THE ETHICS OF JESUS

Matthew vii. 12.—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them."
Matthew vii. 20.—"By their fruits ye shall know them."

In considering the ethical teachings of Jesus we are hindered somewhat in our interpretation and understanding of them by the fact that these teachings are given mainly in fragmentary utterances, from which we have to construct for ourselves a consistent whole. Jesus did not set himself to establish an ideal society, he issued no formal legislation, no rules for organisation. He was content to state the principles and show forth the spirit which should animate men and society. But if there is one truth more certain than another concerning the teachings of Jesus it is this—that morality is the essence of religion, nay, that morality, the purification of the inward spirit, comes before religion. "Blessed are the pure in heart for

they shall see God." "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that man should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." "By their fruits ye shall know them." Every one of the Beatitudes with which the Sermon on the Mount opens is concerned with *character* with an inward condition of the spirit, or with outward conduct; not one even mentions religious formularies or speculative beliefs.

This insistence upon morality as the essential condition of religion springs from the fundamental principle of Jesus—that man, in spirit, is akin to God, is a child of the universal Spirit, and so, being conscious of his high parentage, can aspire and strive to become one with God, to do His Will, to obey His Law, and so become like unto the perfect and supreme Spirit. "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Supreme goodness! that is the ideal aim of Jesus.

How, then, is this state of moral or spiritual perfection to be attained? It is to be attained, first, through the purification of the inward life. It is not only outward conduct by which we must judge,—for outward conduct may be but a cloak for inward corruption—but the motive which impels to conduct. Hence, what Arnold called the "method of inwardness" is the

first and necessary step towards spiritual perfection. "The things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart," and these are the things that defile the man. The inside of the cup and platter must be cleansed. The angry feeling, the impure desire, the selfish instinct, the covetous heart, the tyrannous spirit—these are the beginning of sin. Our thoughts and desires are the parents of our deeds. Hence, Jesus was most careful to insist upon inward purity as far above all formal righteousness. Evil and impure thoughts he severely condemns. Even our almsgiving had better be done in secret, as publicity may tend to self-glorification. Our prayers, also, should be offered in secret, as public prayer may tend to give a false reputation of sanctity—a thing which every minister surely knows to his cost. How fine that sentence: "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee." Neither must the prayer be for worldly endowments,—only for the treasures of the kingdom of the Spirit, mercy, forgiveness, deliverance from evil, love.

But this purification of the inner life, though a necessary step, is only the first. If effort stops there it is apt to end in selfish isolation and asceticism, in narrow self-righteousness, or in aimless sentiment. It must therefore embody itself in conduct. And if

opportunities for so embodying it do not come to us we must seek them. When the young man who had great possessions followed Jesus and asked: What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? saying that he had observed all the commandments from his youth, Jesus looked upon him as upon one he loved, and said, "One thing thou lackest: go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and come follow me." Jesus may or may not have meant that literally, but he certainly meant that there were heights of service which the young man had not touched and of which he had not even conceived.

What, then, is the spirit or the principle which must animate men in their efforts to realise the Divine, the perfect life? This also springs from the central thought of Jesus. God is Spirit, God is Love. Man is akin to God, is the child of God, in spirit. He must therefore strive to fashion his spirit, his inner nature, so that it may become like unto God, one with God, perfect as the Father is perfect, and so attain the unsearchable riches and beauties of the kingdom of the Spirit. Now this inner principle of life, of activity, cannot be won, and when won, cannot be strengthened and purified, save by practice, by experience. Words, and teaching, and professions of belief, and ceremonial will not give it, because men, like children, do not understand the full meaning of the words they use until they have passed through the experiences which

the words indicate. No, they must "live the life." Only thus, by practice, can they make "the life" their own, transform the inward spirit, and become gracious and beautiful within. Hence the hard rule that Jesus lays down: "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" That is, the more we cling to the lower life of selfish, animal, worldly impulse and desire, the less likely are we to win the higher life; and the more devotedly we follow the higher, the weaker will the lower instincts become, until they die away and leave the soul pure. Hence, also, the equally hard rules: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them," and "Love thy neighbour as thyself." The Golden Rule itself, however, must be interpreted in a spirit of love, for a mean and short-sighted nature which seeks after trivial and foolish things might seek also to give these things to others rather than the higher gifts of the Spirit.

Now these hard sayings have great implications, implications so great that some men, who have forgotten from what man has developed, have said that they are impossible of application in human society. They mean nothing less than the continual endeavour to realise the daily prayer: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy

will be done," not merely in a future heaven, but here and now, "*on earth.*" This can only be done, virtually says Jesus, by rising above the temptations and allurements of the world—the desire for riches, place, or unrighteous power, intemperance, bitterness, evil-thinking and evil speaking—and by making the spirit of Love, the spirit of God, the animating principle of our lives, for only so can God, who is Love, dwell in us and we in Him. Hence, the reversal by Jesus of the conventional morality of his time. "Ye have heard that it was said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy : but I say unto you, "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven. . . . For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the tax-gatherers the same?" And even more strongly : "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth : but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil. Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you. Whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." It is possible that Jesus, in uttering these counsels of perfection, stated them in this extreme form in order to emphasise his opposition to the more ancient Law and to the moral spirit of his time. Or he may have meant them primarily for the guidance of his disciples,

who were to be "the light of the world," "the salt of the earth," and whom any attempt at revolution by force would have instantly brought under the heel of Roman despotism. For Jesus himself did resist evil both in his fierce denunciation of the Pharisees, and in his scourging of the money-changers out of the Temple. But there can be no doubt that these teachings of Jesus do express the spirit and tendency of his thought and feeling, and there is no point on which the so-called Christian nations of the world so insult the memory of the Master as in their flagrant and arrogant violation of these teachings. So far from loving their enemies they seek to kill them. So far from setting themselves to moderate national anger, and hatred, and jealousy, and passion, by conciliation and courts of arbitration, they often seek to inflame their respective peoples to the point of war. Even now, in this lamentable conflict between Russia and Japan, how little is there of public sorrow and regret at the cruelty and carnage involved! How eagerly men scan the mail-sheets for news of victory or defeat, not in sadness of heart, but in a spirit of bloodthirsty triumph and exultation, or of sensational enjoyment of an exciting spectacle! And while the agonised death-cries of thousands ascend to heaven, and the air is heavy with the grief of women and children afflicted with nameless sorrow, men go jauntily on their way uttering feeble platitudes to the

effect that "one cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs!" Not until the nations of the world band together to insist upon and enforce Arbitration in international disputes; not until the news of victories is received, not with "Te Deums" and shouts of exultation, but with public manifestations of mourning and sorrow that victory should have to be won by such diabolical means—not until then can the various peoples take unto themselves the great saying of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Another subject on which the teaching of Jesus runs directly counter to conventional ideas and practice is that of the accumulation of wealth. There is no subject which touches most men so deeply, no subject which so keenly tests their conceptions of justice, and their daily attempts to practice justice. For justice is not merely a thing for lawyers to argue about, its very foundations lie in the proper distribution of wealth, in the fair reward of every kind of labour.

I am inclined to agree with John Stuart Mill when he says, that in our present state of society "the produce of labour is apportioned almost in an inverse ratio to the labour—the largest portions to those who have never worked at all, the next largest to those whose work is almost nominal, and so, in a descending scale, the remuneration dwindling as the work

grows harder and more disagreeable, until the most fatiguing and exhausting bodily labour [in our large centres of civilization] cannot count with certainty on being able to earn even the necessaries of life."[1] It is curious how the social teaching of agnostics like Mill and William Morris seems to approach most closely to that of Jesus. For the teaching of Jesus is that wealth should be regarded, not merely as a private, but as a public trust; that we make too much of it in our life; that the eagerness with which we pursue it leads us into selfishness and injustice, and fills us with needless worry and over-anxiety; that there is a spiritual danger in great riches. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!" Men "cannot serve God and Mammon." This does not mean that wealth in itself is an evil, for all the arts and refinements of life, the progress of knowledge and of society, are largely dependent upon it. But it does mean that the individual appropriation of great wealth,—wealth which society, and not the individual, creates,—is obviously selfish. It leads to antagonisms and hatreds; to the concentration of power in few hands; to the unjust use of that power; to the degradation of the many and their subservience to the few; to the pursuit of material well-being as an end,—a pursuit which, in the feverishness and over-anxiety

[1] *Principles of Political Economy*, Book II., chap. i, section 3.

which it engenders, tends to kill the higher life. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" This, indeed, is the teaching of all the great moralists and religious teachers of the world, from Buddha, Socrates, Jesus, down to Wordsworth and Ruskin—all condemn, in unsparing language, the private accumulation of riches, and the wantonness and luxury to which it leads; all lay stress on simplicity of life, or plain living and high thinking, on the improvement of the soul, on contentment with a modest competence. Jesus, indeed, felt so strongly on the subject, that he was sometimes led into extremes of statement. "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor," is not an injunction which can be wisely followed in our complicated modern society. Such a practice would create more evils than it would remedy. What the honest and industrious poor want is not pecuniary charity, but the opportunity of earning their daily bread, fair reward for honest labour, and provision for a leisured and honourable old age. And when society is really Christianised, not in wordy doctrines and frivolous ceremonial, but in spirit and in truth, these things will be abundantly possible for all, and we shall then more clearly realise the meaning of the saying: "Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the

body than the raiment? . . . But seek ye first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Certainly, a civilization that presents the contrasts of wealth and poverty that ours presents, cannot endure.

I have not time to enter into any detailed interpretation of the various parts of the ethics of Jesus—his insistence upon purity in thought, humility, forbearance, forgiveness, compassion, self-renunciation, the child-like spirit, the gracious temper. But I must lay stress on the two things by which the whole were bound together,—Love and Practice. I have already pointed out that the Spirit of Love was the central principle of the religious and ethical teachings of Jesus. Here the author of *John*, and of the epistles of *John*, is the best interpreter of Jesus. God is Spirit; God is Love. And he who would be most like unto that Spirit must make it part of himself. He who hateth his brother dwells in darkness, is afflicted with spiritual death, and the Spirit of Love must first enter and transform our being ere we can rise out of this spiritual death into life. This is the true *wealth*, for, unlike earthly riches, it increases within us the more we give or dispense it around us. But how far are we from this higher life? It is easy indeed to love our neighbour when it is our inclination to do so, or when it does not conflict with our interest. But to love him as ourself; to love him when it is against

our interest; nay, even to refrain from returning insult for insult; or to meet cursing with quiet dignity or even with blessing; or to say: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,"—what hard sayings these are! And yet, when we remember to how great an extent our love is selfish and impure, how much it is concerned with our own lower self,—our own getting-on, our ambitions, our lower inclinations, our intellectual and social advancement, our deliberate shutting out of view everything that grates upon our superfine tastes,—when we remember all these things, and how large a part they play in our life, we may well strive for a richer endowment of that higher love which seeks after goodness, beauty, truth, for their own sake, and which, like the Spirit of Jesus, lives serenely in that atmosphere, far above the cares and allurements of the world. He who possesses this higher love, though he call himself unbeliever, is surely not far from the Kingdom of God, for "he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him."

And practice—how incessantly Jesus insists upon that! For his fine moral insight made him see that only by practice, by experience, can men fully realise the depth and meaning of their thought and language; that only by practice, by experience, can they make their thought part of their very self, and so transform the inward spirit. "Except your righteous-

ness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." And certainly no one, not even his bitterest enemies, could say that Jesus did not practice the life he taught. As he proceeded with his mission he drew further and further away from official Judaism. We hear less and less of ceremonial ordinances and the formal worship of the synagogue. The Gospel of the Kingdom is proclaimed to all, in the streets and highways. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden." "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and maimed, and blind, and lame." Misery and wretchedness, in the most terrible forms which great cities can present, become the objects of his care. The helpless poor, whose poverty is their destruction; the leper, whom all shun; the beggar, whose sores the dogs come and lick; the diseased and demented "demoniacs" who gibber amongst the tombs,—all these call forth his sympathy and compassion. He seeks to save "those who are lost." Where shall we find three more beautiful parables, parables fuller of ethical truth and insight, than those in the fifteenth chapter of Luke! They are instinct with the spirit of love in practice.

It is true that the ethics, the moral principles of

Jesus, need re-adapting to the circumstances of our own time, that what he showed forth in his individual life we must show forth through those forms of organisation which bind us together in social service, and which should reach their highest point of efficiency in the organisation of the State. But this is only to say that the essence of his teaching is true for all time. That essential teaching, in the language of ethical science, may be stated thus: that it regards the universe as ruled by moral laws, and therefore guided towards moral ends, with which laws and aims we must strive to place ourselves in harmony. "Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." As the sun kindles the earth into the warmth of spring and the flowers grow silently towards their perfection in beauty, so humanity moves towards its goal, led by these master-spirits of the race, who draw mankind in their footsteps. Men and women of every creed—Catholic priests, High Church curates, and Dissenting ministers, fighting with disease and vice and death in the slums of our great cities, or stemming the tide of ignorance in our country places; Salvation Army Captains and Sisters of Mercy penetrating to the dens of the thief and the murderer; cultured Agnostic leaders of political and philosophic thought striving to permeate the State with their ideals,[1]—all these are

[1] See Mill's tribute to Jesus in his *Three Essays on Religion*.

animated and inspired by the spirit and the life of the ideal man—the Carpenter of Nazareth. It is true that they often miss the core of his teaching, it is true that they lay stress on things on which we should not lay stress, that superstition is often mingled with their worship, and that their theology is often crude and materialistic. But in the lives of all of us there is this mixture of good and ill. Sometimes our theology or our politics obscures our religion, but in the hearts of the best there is that spark of devotion to something higher than ourselves which the memory of Jesus fans into the high white flame of aspiration and of love. It is this power to appeal effectively to all sorts and conditions of men, to the student and the scholar, as well as to the humblest and poorest of men, that ranks Jesus so high above the Pagan moralists as a popular teacher. He makes men see, not only by precept, but by example, that there is something nobler than expediency, something greater than policy, something higher than intellectual culture, something wider than the salvation of their own souls. We rise above ourselves into a purer, holier region,—we become one with that world-purpose and world-struggle the end of which is hidden from us, but which, even as it concerns ourselves alone, is probably greater than we know.

In conclusion, let us ever bear in mind, first, that these ethical teachings of Jesus are not laid down

merely as principles of compensation to be applied in some future sphere of the spirit, they are laid down as the rule by which humanity is to live, the norm or standard to which it is to rise,—the kingdom of heaven, the democracy of the spirit of righteousness, on earth, which is to be made possible by the renovation of our moral and spiritual nature. A democracy, I say, because each one is to have the opportunity of sharing in these great spiritual riches. That is a great and all-absorbing end and aim, the thought of which might well transfigure the life of every one, but it is an end and aim towards which mankind can only slowly, very slowly move. Moral growth is the slowest of all growths, because it is the finest and most delicate. And yet,—and this is the second thing to be borne in mind—our human nature is so strangely and wonderfully wrought that if we but work faithfully and devotedly for the end, something of its far-off gleam will be reflected back into our own souls, and its radiance will help to illumine the darker spaces and periods of our life, preparing us, perchance, by the discipline and education of our earthly lot, for a higher kingdom than we now know. This reflected radiance, which each one of us may make our own, is surely something of what Jesus meant when he said: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or there! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you."

VIII

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PAUL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

(I) HIS LIFE AND WORK.

Galatians i. 1.—"Paul, an Apostle, not from man, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father."

Philippians iii. 12, 13.—"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but, ... Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

It is a very widely accepted belief that orthodox Christianity, or the doctrines and system of worship which it represents, sprang ready made from the life and teaching of Jesus, or, at any rate, that these doctrines and this system of worship were implicitly contained in that life and teaching. So far is that

from being the case that we might say that the far larger part of orthodox Christianity is an after-growth, springing, not from the teachings of Jesus, but from the theorisings of others about Jesus. No, Christianity, as we know it to-day, is a vast scheme of thought and life which Jesus would hardly recognise as a development of his own teaching—a scheme the outcome of generation after generation of theorisers and workers. Centuries passed ere it became formulated and crystallised into the Roman Catholic system of faith and worship; many centuries more passed away ere that system was broken down, or partially broken down, by Protestantism; many centuries more will pass ere the after-growths of Protestantism are swept away and humanity is penetrated by the spirit and the consciousness of Jesus. Within the covers of the New Testament we can see the beginnings of some of these developments taking place, but they are so limited in their scope and tendency that we can lay our fingers on the few names that dominate them. One of the greatest of these names is that of Saul, or Paul, the tent-maker, the great apostle to the Gentiles.

In order to understand the work of Paul it is necessary to recall to our minds the circumstances of the infant Christianity with which he was brought into contact. Soon after the death of Jesus his disciples formed a little community—not yet called

Christian—at Jerusalem, a community in which, as we are told in *Acts*, they "had all things common." They attended the Temple Services regularly, and observed the Jewish ordinances and ceremonial, the only thing that distinguished them from their fellow-Jews being that they regarded their dead Master, Jesus, as the Messiah who would soon come again in clouds of glory to establish his kingdom. In this little community there were a number of foreign or Grecian Jews, men who had travelled or been brought up in other lands, who spoke the Greek language, and whose intercourse with the thought, the religion, and the customs of other peoples had doubtless given them a more tolerant spirit than that of the severely orthodox Jews of Jerusalem. Differences soon began to make themselves felt in the little community. The Grecian Jews, or Hellenists, as they were called, complained that their poor and their widows did not receive their proper share in the daily distribution of food and goods. There was evidently some jealousy between the severe Hebraists and the more tolerant Hellenists. So the Twelve called the whole of the believers together and invited them to appoint seven of their number, men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom," to attend to these purely social matters, while they, the Twelve, continued "in the ministry of the word." It is significant that the Seven who

were appointed all bear Greek names, while most of the Twelve bore Hebrew names. It is still more significant that at least two of the Seven, Stephen and Philip, instead of confining themselves to purely social work, show themselves "full of grace and power," full, also, of zeal for the faith, and become enthusiastic missionaries. Stephen, indeed, showed himself particularly zealous. He had evidently much broader views than the apostles, and was said to have declared that "Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, [the Temple] and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us." This, in the eyes of the orthodox Jews, was the most dreadful heresy and sedition. Stephen was seized and brought before the Council, and he is there reported to have made a speech (the speech in *Acts* is obviously an invention of later date, possibly based upon tradition) which so exasperated the Jews that they "stopped their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him." And as they stoned him he fell down saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It is evident from this account that the great question of the relation of the infant faith to the religion of the Law on the one hand, and to the Gentile or heathen world on the other, was being forced to the front. The picturesque point in the

narrative, however, which brings us to our present subject, is the statement in *Acts* that the witnesses who stoned Stephen "laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul, . . . and Saul was consenting unto his death."

It is at this grave crisis in the affairs of the little community that Saul, or Paul, as we may now call him, forces himself upon our attention. The future history of Christianity surges around his name almost as much as around the name of Jesus. Who, then, was Paul? A glance at his early life, so far as we know it, will help us to understand his nature and character.

Paul, by both birth and training, was a strict Jew, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was born at Tarsus, in Cilicia. In early life, following the Rabbinical maxim—"He who does not teach his son a trade makes him a thief"—he learned the trade of tent-making, but there is not the least doubt that he had ample opportunities of receiving a liberal education. According to the author of *Acts*,[1] he sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel, the great Jewish teacher, in Jerusalem. His training was therefore essentially a biblical one—from his boyhood and youth up, reading the Law, the prophets, the psalms,

[1] It must be borne in mind that all the speeches in *Acts* were composed by the writer of that book,—how far they were based upon tradition it is impossible to say.

and the historical writings daily, undergoing catechetical exercises, learning the rules of interpretation, and gradually taking part in the controversies which arose from the various interpretations of Scripture. Paul's writings show to how great an extent his mind was influenced by this early training. They show, also, how his early mental development was dominated by the Jewish theology of the time. The main points of this theology were—that the Jews were the favoured people of God, and that God had given them divine guidance, especially through the Law and the Prophets, the sacred writings being regarded as the expression of the divine thought and will. Hence the importance attached to the interpretation of Scripture, which, by the typological and allegorical methods in vogue at the time, was often forced to bear fanciful and even ridiculous meanings. Paul himself frequently wrests the Scriptures to suit his own purpose. Other features of the Pharisaic theology which influences Paul's mental development, and which, transformed, re-acted on his consciousness after he had become a Christian, were the expectation of the Messianic Kingdom, the belief in the resurrection of the dead, the belief in demons and evil spirits, and the idea of a supersensible world of spiritual beings—"angels, principalities, and powers."

In person Paul was evidently small, weak, and afflicted with some constitutional disease. A writer

of the third century, the author of the *Acts of Paul* and *Thecla* (quoted by Dr. Hatch and others) represents him as "short, bald, bow-legged, with meeting eyebrows and slightly prominent nose," but "full of grace, for at one time he seemed like a man, at another time he had the face of an angel." He himself quotes his opponents as saying of him that "his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." His constitutional infirmity was evidently a great trial to him though he does not complain much of it. He speaks of it as "a thorn in the flesh," an "infirmity of the flesh," and "a messenger of Satan to buffet him." This infirmity or disease is thought to have been what we now call epilepsy, the attacks of which are often accompanied by high nervous strain and excitement, by unconsciousness, foaming at the mouth, and even temporary blindness. It is well to bear this in mind when we read the accounts of Paul's vision which came to him immediately prior to his conversion, where he is said to have been struck blind and prostrate, and was three days without sight. Mahomet and other religious leaders are said to have suffered from similar attacks, and to have had visions of a like nature. Despite his affliction, however, Paul was a man of immense energy, great intellectual penetration, and keen dialectical skill. A good hater, yet with great deeps of

love and tenderness within him; harsh and severe at times, yet forgiving; intolerant, yet full of sympathy and charity for those of his own household of faith; full, also, of a restless fire and determined spirit, and a moral and physical courage which never quailed before the greatest dangers or the most powerful and most rancorous opposition. How was it, then, that this man, from being one of the fiercest persecutors of the infant faith became the virtual founder of the Christian Church?

Could we trace the psychological development of Paul's intense and peculiar nature this question would probably be easy to answer. Before his conversion he had probably been deeply impressed by the fervour, the faith, and the devotion of the men whom he was so fiercely persecuting. The questions must have occurred to him—what could be the inspiring and animating spirit behind such devotion? Was it possible that Jesus was really the Messiah? Was it possible that he, Paul, was persecuting the cause of God? Hence, a moral crisis was probably impending in Paul's nature before the morbidly physical experience which helped to determine his whole future career. For the details of this crisis we are dependent on the *Acts of the Apostles*—a book full of marvel and legend, compiled about half a century after the events it describes. There are three accounts of the event in this book. They agree in substance

but differ materially in detail—one account saying that Paul's companions fell down with him on seeing the heavenly glory, another that they stood speechless; one, that they heard the voice but saw no one, another that they saw the light but heard no voice. It is curious that Paul himself, in his writings, though he refers to this event, never gives any details about it. However, the substance of the narrative as given in the *Acts* is this: that Saul was on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus, full of persecuting zeal, with letters from the chiefs of the Sanhedrin authorising him to bring any Nazarenes he might find there in chains to Jerusalem. Damascus was eight days journey from Jerusalem, and as he drew near to the former city, exhausted probably with the journey, lo, a great light shone out of heaven, and as Saul fell to earth he heard a voice saying: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And Saul said, Who art thou, Lord? And the voice answered: I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; but rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Then Saul rose up from the earth and was led by the hand into Damascus, and as a result of what we must call this nervous or epileptic attack, remained "three days without sight and did neither eat nor drink." What followed? According to the author of *Acts*, Paul, after an interview with one Ananias, immediately became a follower of Jesus, and at once set

about preaching the new faith as zealously as he had before persecuted it. But the account of Paul himself is wholly different. In his letter to the Galatians he says: "When it was the good pleasure of God to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me: but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned into Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and tarried with him fifteen days. But others of the apostles saw I none, save James, the Lord's brother." Then, as though his word had been doubted or his authority questioned by some one, he adds: "Now touching the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not." How long Paul stayed in Arabia is not known, but the phrase "went away into" seems to imply that it was some considerable time. For consider his situation. Up to this time he had been a zealous adherent of the Law, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, a fierce persecutor of the followers of Jesus. Then, partly, perhaps, as a result of his own misgivings and self-questionings, partly as the outcome of his peculiar, over-wrought, nervous temperament, he has what he deems to be a revelation from the spirit of Jesus himself. Now Paul was a man of great intellectual power. He had had a severe intellectual training. It is not likely that a

man of this type would turn completely round in a few days and suddenly begin to preach the very doctrine he had so recently persecuted. He would want time to envisage the new doctrine, to consider it in all its bearings, to adapt his mind to the new and wider outlook which it brought. He was not the man to seek guidance from others in matters of faith and of the intellect. "I conferred not with flesh and blood," he says, "but I went away into Arabia." Surely this, Paul's own account,[1] is far more likely to be true than the legendary account in *Acts*. Silence, study, self-communion—these would be absolutely necessary to a man of Paul's intellectual bent, in order that he might equip himself for the new and great work which lay before him.

We are now in a position to understand how the fierce persecutor of the Nazarenes gradually, not suddenly, became the ablest advocate and defender of the faith, how his attitude was not only changed, but completely reversed, towards the Law on the one hand, towards Jesus, as the Messiah, on the other. For if Jesus was the Messiah it meant nothing less

[1] Van Manen—whose articles in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* should be read by the student—contends that all the so-called Pauline epistles are forgeries (a very common literary practice in ancient times). Should this prove to be the case, early Christian history will need to be entirely reconstructed, and the personality of Paul retreats into a background even more vague and shadowy than that occupied by Jesus.

than a new dispensation from God. And this new dispensation, coming from God, must obviously cancel the old dispensation—the Law. Hence justification before God was not merely the privilege of a favoured few—the Jews—it was freely open to all through *faith* in the heaven-sent one, the Messiah, the messenger of God himself! Not the Law, but faith in the heaven-sent one; not a favoured race, but all races, Greek or Jew, Roman or Barbarian, bond or free, all might share, through Christ Jesus, in the blessings of the new dispensation! Oh! how deep and unsearchable were the riches of the grace of the Spirit of God that it could so open the way of salvation to all men! And how holy and merciful was this Spirit! Not the harsh taskmaster of the Law, but the Spirit of Love, and Mercy, and Peace, calling all men to the higher life through its servant, Christ Jesus! This was the new point of view of Paul. In the self-imposed solitude and self-communion amid the fields and villages of Arabia the Apostle of the Gentiles was born.

All this, which must have meant severe mental strife and affliction—for it is no light thing to break away from the faith of one's childhood and early manhood —all this brought a revolution not only into Paul's own life, but into the lives of the other apostles, and ultimately, into the little Christian communities. On leaving Arabia, Paul returned to Damascus, began to

preach the new faith, roused the hostility of his fellow-Jews by his missionary zeal, and soon found himself threatened by the authorities. Watchers were set at the gates of the city to seize him, but, reaching the house of a friend who lived on the great broad wall of the city, he was let down in a basket from a window and so escaped. Then he went to Jerusalem to have a friendly talk with Peter, and James, the brother of Jesus. But he did no preaching there and stayed only fifteen days. Then he set out on his first great missionary journey in the regions of Syria and Cilicia, making the then famous city of Antioch his headquarters. It was here that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians, a nickname given to them in mockery. Antioch was a city of half a million inhabitants, a centre of Greek culture, and, at that time, after Rome and Alexandria, the most noted city in the world. There, Jews and Syrians, Greeks and Romans, mingled in the freedom of commercial intercourse, a mingling which doubtless aided Paul's work, by promoting the deeper freedom begotten of intellectual and religious tolerance. Of his missionary work in Syria Paul gives no details, saying only that he worked in independence of the other apostles, and that his labours were richly blessed. Then, after fourteen years, he says, he went up again to Jerusalem to confer with the older apostles, taking two of his fellow-labourers, Barnabas and Titus, with him. What was

the object of this visit to the heads of the community at Jerusalem? Paul's work had been carried on quite apart from theirs, and on quite different lines. He had admitted Gentiles into the Churches which he founded; he had condemned the Judaistic Law as of no authority; and in the case of the Gentiles at any rate, had ceased to observe the rites and ordinances which all faithful Jews regarded as obligatory.[1] The older apostles, on the other hand, living at the very centre of Judaistic worship, were still faithful to the Law; many of them were most rigid and scrupulous in their observance of its rites and forms, waiting only for the return of their Lord and Master, Jesus, as Messiah. It was on this point then—the admittance of Gentiles into the little communities—that Paul went to Jerusalem, in order probably to win over the older apostles to his wider point of view, and so gain the weight of their authority on his side; for, he says, certain false brethren (by which he means the Judaisers) "came privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage." The temper in which Paul went to Jerusalem may be guessed from the fact that he took Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, with him, and refused absolutely to give way to the zealots on the point that Titus,[2]

(1) Our information is too scanty to enable us to trace the progressive development of Paul's thought and policy in its early stages.

(2) See *Galatians* ii. 3, 5.

being a Gentile, should submit himself to the ordinances of the Jewish Law ere he could be recognised as a member of the Christian community. There was evidently a bitter controversy on the question, and Paul made many enemies. But he gained his point, or at any rate he so far won over James, and Peter, and John, that they gave him the right hand of fellowship, recognised him as the apostle to the Gentiles, and only stipulated that he and the churches or communities which he founded should remember the poor or needy brethren in the primitive community at Jerusalem. This account of Paul's again differs very materially from that given in the *Acts of the Apostles*, as we shall see when we come to consider that book. This controversy between Paul and the older apostles is really the key to the understanding of one half of the New Testament, and it is essential that we should grasp it.

Paul, now the recognised apostle to the Gentiles, went his way, and the older apostles went theirs, still preaching a Judaistic Christianity. And so the question seemed settled. But this was far from being the case. A great principle was at stake, and whatever compromise might be arranged for the moment, such compromise could only be of merely temporary value. That principle was—Should the blessings of the new faith be limited to Jews, or to those who would enter Judaism and accept the ordinances of the Jewish Law, looking

for the return of Jesus as Messiah? or, to use the language of Paul, should the Law be annulled and the unsearchable riches of the spirit of Christ be open to all—Jew or Greek, Roman or Barbarian, bond or free? But much more was also involved, as we shall see.

Paul returned to Antioch and continued his labours. After a time Peter, from Jerusalem, visited the brethren at Antioch. What would he do? Would he recognise the heathen, the Gentile converts there, as fellow-believers with himself, although they lived in open disregard of the ordinances of the Law? He did. He openly associated with them. He entered into brotherly relations with the uncircumcised and the unclean. He sat at the same table with them, and probably transgressed the Jewish dietary laws. This was a great triumph for Paul, for Peter's example would carry weight. It showed that he was willing to recognise the heathen, those outside the Law, as members of the faith. But in a little while other fellow-believers came from Jerusalem, from James, to visit Antioch. They were strict Judaisers—men of stronger backbone than Peter, and when they saw how the latter had committed himself in eating with the heathen they remonstrated with him. How could they hope to convert their fellow-Jews to the faith if Peter, one of the leaders of the community, was thus openly setting the Law at nought! Then Peter

wavered. He drew back, and separated himself from the Gentile believers, and refused to eat with them any more. What was still worse, he carried many of Paul's Jewish converts along with him. Even Barnabas, Paul's friend and fellow-worker, fell away. This was more than Paul's fiery and impetuous spirit could bear. He saw that all the results of his years of labour would be endangered, if not swept away, by a narrow Judaism. He publicly charged Peter with his inconsistency. "When I saw," he says, "that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Cephas before them all,—If thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, how compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" And "I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned." The rupture was complete. There could be no compromise now. The conflict between Judaistic Christianity and a universalistic Christianity must be fought out to the end. Law, or Gospel; Forms, or Faith; Authority, or Freedom; the "Coming Kingdom" for a privileged race, or for all who would follow the Master! These were the respective watchwords on both sides.

And the conflict was fought out. For more than a generation the strife continued rending the little communities in twain. Paul left Antioch, probably as a result of the dissensions there, and spent the next six or eight years of his life in fresh fields of

missionary labour in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, constantly travelling from place to place and inspiring many of his converts with his own unbounded zeal. But wherever he went Jewish or Jewish-Christian emissaries followed him, trying to thwart or injure his work and to raise up enmity against him. Hard and bitter words were used on both sides. When Paul claimed that he had received his authority from Christ himself in a vision, they told him that visions might come from the devil as well as from God, and that if he were really a lover of Chirst he would not oppose the disciples of Jesus, who had known and walked with the Master in the flesh while on earth. Paul retorted by saying that he reckoned himself "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles," and by calling them "false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel," he said, with bitter scorn, "for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light. It is no great thing, therefore, if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works."

I have not time to follow Paul on his missionary journeys. They are all much of the same character—hardships by land and sea, restless activity, fierce opposition both from Jews, Jewish Christians, and Gentiles, ridicule, persecution, beatings, imprisonment, punishments almost unto death. In Galatia he was

well received and made many friends, for there they received him, he says, despite his infirmity, "as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus," and they would have "plucked out their very eyes" to give to him. After establishing a number of communities there he passed into Europe, first to Philippi, then to Thessalonica, then to Berœa, then Athens, then to Corinth, where he stayed a considerable time, labouring in the villages and towns in the neighbourhood. Sometimes he was unable to provide for his own support, but he would accept no help from those amongst whom he laboured, preferring to receive assistance from the wealthier and better established communities. What an immense task he had! In those ancient Eastern cities he had to meet and mingle with the extremes of wealth and poverty, of licence and asceticism, of wild superstition and keen philosophic speculation, of debasing ignorance and high culture, of half-savage heathenism and magnificently ordered religions, of the ecstatic outpourings of visionaries and fanatics, and the quiet self-possessed rationalism of the sage and the Stoic. But listen to his fine and pathetic defence of himself:[1] "I reckon," he says, "that I am not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, yet am I not in knowledge. . . . Did I commit a sin in abasing myself that ye might be exalted,

[1] If this defence, as Van Manen contends, was not written by Paul, the man who did write it was a very clever dramatist.

because I preached to you the gospel of God for nought? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them that I might minister unto you; and when I was present with you and was in want, I was not a burden on any man; for the brethren, when they came from Macedonia, supplied the measure of my want; and in everything I kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so I will keep myself. . . . I say again, Let no man think me foolish; but if ye do, yet as foolish receive me, that I also may glory a little. Seeing that many glory after the flesh I will glory also. Yet whereinsoever any is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am bold also. Are they [the other apostles] Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as one beside himself) I more; in labours more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: in labour and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those

things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things that concern my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. . . . Behold, this is the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be a burden to you: for I seek not yours but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. . . . Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

From Corinth, Paul went to Ephesus, where he stayed a considerable time. This town, also, he made a centre of missionary activity, strengthening existing communities and establishing new ones. From thence and from Corinth he sent some of his famous letters to his converts in distant lands, to strengthen their waning faith and to meet the attacks of the "false apostles,"—the Jewish Christians,—letters in which, without intending it, he gave to the world a new theology, on which later Christian doctrine was largely built. After spending three years at Ephesus, Paul returned to Corinth,—where he stayed a few months,—thence by the coast route to Jerusalem

to meet his opponents and to confer with the heads of the community there, his ultimate intention being to visit Rome, the capital of the Empire. But at Jerusalem he was brought into conflict with the Jewish and Roman authorities, the Jews being especially bitter against him. By the machinations of his enemies he was thrown into prison at Cæsarea and kept there for two years. Being by birth a Roman citizen he had the right of appeal to Cæsar, and to Cæsar he was sent, reaching Rome after many perils and still a prisoner, in the year 62. Here the curtain falls. History is silent as to the rest. It is conjectured that the great apostle suffered martyrdom in the fierce persecution under Nero in the year 64, in which some of the believers were crucified, others thrown to the lions, others tied to stakes of pinewood, smeared with resin and pitch, and lighted at nightfall to serve as torches. In this reign of terror Paul disappears in silence, but his spirit lived on. Diseased and small in body, fragile in frame, slow of speech, yet filled with a spirit which never quailed, his subtle and penetrating intellect dominated, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill, the whole future development of Christianity. His passion for liberty and his renunciation and condemnation of formalism preserved the new faith from spiritual blight, and opened the gates of its invisible Temple to all the world; while, alas, his theorisings and dogmatic interpretation of things

helped to forge new fetters for the spirit of man. But we may well recall with reverence the large heart and mighty spirit which animated his devoted and self-sacrificing life.

In our next discourse we shall see more clearly what were his teachings, and how, often wrested from their original meaning, they were made to build up a new and half-barbarous theology.

IX

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PAUL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY. (II) HIS TEACHINGS.

Galations v. 6.—"Faith, working through love."

Galations v. 13, 14.—"For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another. For the whole law is fulfilled even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

THE teachings of Paul, like the teachings of Jesus, were not given forth as a reasoned system of theology or religion; they rather sprang out of the spiritual temperament of the two men, and were called forth by, and adapted to, the situations and circumstances in which, at various times, they found themselves. It is essential, therefore, that great care be taken not to

over-emphasise this or that part of their teaching at the expense of the rest. It is this over-emphasis which is the special danger of the theologian, and Paul himself did not escape it.

But we shall gain a truer and clearer idea of Paul's teaching if we contrast his point of view with that of the disciples. The disciples had lived with and gone about with Jesus,—they therefore laid stress upon his life. Paul had never seen Jesus; he seldom refers to any incident in his life or any part of his teaching; he does not even mention the Lord's Prayer; but he lays stress, instead, upon the death of Jesus. Both the disciples and Paul looked for the return of Jesus as Messiah even while some who were then living were yet alive,[1] but while the disciples regarded Jesus as a man like unto themselves, Paul looked upon him as a heavenly being or "heavenly man," something between man and God, whose spirit had power to penetrate the consciousness of believers in him, and so give them a new spiritual life. The disciples sought to "justify" themselves before God by obedience to the Law, and so they maintained the validity of the Law; Paul, after his conversion, would have none of the Law, and sought to "justify" himself by and through the spirit of Christ alone. Whence arose these great and vital differences? They sprang partly out of the temperament, training, and experience of the two

[1] See 1 Thess. iv. 15-18.

parties, and especially, as far as Paul was concerned, out of the method of his conversion, which, also, was the outcome of *his* temperament. Temperament,—what a mystery lies there! It is at the root of all our differences in religion.

When Paul, then, partly as a result of his extraordinary vision, and partly as a result of his studies and reflections in Arabia, came to believe, with all his heart and soul, that Jesus was the Messiah, the heaven-sent messenger of God, the whole universe, material and spiritual, appeared in a different light to him. Jesus—the Messiah, the Christ, sent by God, crucified by man, raised from the dead, to return in clouds of glory to establish his spiritual kingdom! Jesus, the Christ! The centre of Paul's theology lies just there. Outwardly his faith did not seem to differ from that of the disciples, but to Paul's mind, and therefore, in spirit and in its implications, the difference was very great indeed. For if Jesus were the Christ, then he was an essentially different being from the ordinary, natural man,—a spiritual, heavenly being; and if from heaven, then from God; and if from God, he must have been sent to bring a new dispensation; and if a new dispensation, then the old dispensation (the Law) must be superseded by the new! These are the connecting links of Paul's thought so far as we can follow it in his letters. Still more was implied. For if Jesus, as Messiah or Christ,

came to bring this new dispensation, he must surely have brought it, not for a favoured race, but for all mankind. For, if he was a heavenly being, argued Paul, he must represent a new spiritual type of manhood into which men were to grow, as the original Adam represented the old, natural, earthly man who followed the inclinations of the flesh. God, said Paul, would surely never restrict the spiritual riches of this higher type of being to a favoured race. We can thus see how, once his premises were granted, Paul was led by invincible logic to become the apostle to the Gentiles.

But the Jewish Christians had their answer to all this. The Law, given by God himself, they said, was sufficient to lead men into this higher type of life, and Jesus had come to fulfil the Law—"not one jot or tittle of it should pass away until all had been fulfilled."[1] Nay, more. Should one fail to observe all the moral injunctions of the Law,—and the best might fail, for men are weak, and these injunctions were innumerable—then, by the ritual of the Law, by the private and public sacrifices which were daily offered, morning and evening, with all solemnity and magnificence, in the Temple,—by all this the pious Jew might atone for his sins,—for "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin"—and so he

[1] Whether Jesus really uttered these words—at any rate in this sense—may be doubted.

might win once more the favour and the blessing of God and find "justification" before him. But Paul, this heretic, this innovator, this "false apostle," would annul this sacred Law, and take away their very means of "justification!"

To this Paul replied with his great doctrine of sin and justification by faith. The Law, he says, good,—as coming from God,—for its time, is yet unable to effect the salvation of man, Nay, the deeper the consciousness of Law the deeper the consciousness of sin, for where there is no consciousness of Law the moral realm disappears in anarchy. But the Law, necessary to produce in man the sense of sin, was yet unable to release him or redeem him from it, because there was something in the very nature of man, the earthly man, which prevented his release and kept him in bondage to sin, that was,—the life of the flesh and all its low desires and inclinations, which warred against the higher life of the mind (spirit). What, then, could release man from this bondage to sin, "the body of this death?" One thing only—life in the spirit of Christ Jesus. For this spirit of Christ, coming from heaven, from God the Father, had something of supernatural power in it, and could therefore renew and glorify this earthly body, which would become dead to sin, and thereby be indeed a "temple of God." Put on, then, this life in Christ, said Paul, have faith in it, and you will be justified by your

faith, for you will find that its fruits will be "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control, against such there is no law." And here Paul adroitly turned the great argument of the Jewish Christians against themselves. I know, indeed, he virtually said, that "apart from shedding of blood there is no remission of sin," but did not Jesus, the Christ, the heaven-sent one, shed his blood for us by his sacrifice on the Cross? That is the true "propitiation." The blood of rams and bullocks availeth nothing. The blood of Christ, the Cross of Christ, which was to be our shame, is become the means of our redemption and our glory. "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?" By the works of the Law, by the sacrifices ordained by the Law, shall no flesh be justified, only by faith in Christ Jesus. We here get a hint as to the source of the later Christian doctrine of the Atonement—a word, by the way, which is not to be found in the Revised version of the New Testament. And we see, also, how readily Paul adapted his arguments to the situation in which he found himself, to the opposition, the doubts, and the difficulties, of the people by whom he was surrounded.

But his opponents again returned to the charge with an argument which brought out the dark and gloomy side of Paul's theology. If, they said, it was

impossible for man, by reason of his fleshly nature, to obey the Law and reach the perfect life, then God, who had created this fleshly nature, was responsible for his own handiwork, and man, in that case, could not justly be blamed. To which Paul replied: "What, shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why didst thou make me thus? Or, hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" God "hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth;" "for whom he fore-knew he also fore-ordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he fore-ordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Here, I say, Paul expounded a theology more gloomy than that which he attempted to refute. It was the doctrine of a favoured people over again, but in this case the favoured were God's "elect" for ever. Most certainly, if a potter make his pots defective, and without the power to fashion themselves into forms of use, and good, and beauty, and then, "willing to show his wrath," condemns them for the very defectiveness which he himself has caused,—the pots may well say: "Why didst thou make us thus?" Such a being—could we imagine such—casting aside moral responsibility himself,

could not claim, and would not deserve, the moral allegiance of others. We may say here, with John Stuart Mill, that if we cannot apply the word "good," —using that word in the large sense in which we employ it amongst ourselves, as meaning justice to all and the ultimate well-being of all—if we cannot use that word in this sense as applied to God, then the worship of a Being who is not "good" is not obligatory upon us, and, like Prometheus, we would endure the pangs of hell rather than bow down at his shrine. But, as a matter of fact, Paul, the man, was better than his speculative creed. Everywhere, in his moral appeals, he assumes that man is a responsible being, that he is not a mere "vessel" hammered into shape by an outside despotic power; that he *can* "work out his own salvation in fear and trembling;" that he must "press on unto perfection;" that he must be "transformed by the renewing of his mind;" that what a man sows "that shall he also reap." Paul himself must have felt the weakness of his position here, for he never attempts to reconcile this amazing contradiction in his argument,—the contradiction between the supposed irresponsible autocracy of God and the moral responsibility of man.

We see in all this how Paul was held in the grip of certain theological ideas, and yet how his spirit struggled with and strove to rise above their implica-

tions. We can see, also, how he, like Jesus, was a child of his time; how unconscious he was of our modern conception of law, both in the evolution of the cosmos and in the development of character; how he attributed to "the Spirit" frequent miraculous interposition with the natural order of things; how, like Jesus, he looked forward to the speedy coming of the great day when God would send the Messiah, —"for the Lord," he says to the Thessalonians, "shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

But the chief thing to note is the great distance which separates Paul from the spirit and teaching of Jesus. The dominant note in the teaching of Jesus, you will remember, is that man is the child of God, is akin to God in spirit, and that, by this very kinship, is able, through repentance, to throw off the old sinful life, the life of unrighteousness, and rise, by his own free volition, into the spiritual life of God. The dominant thought of Paul, on the contrary, is that the natural, earthly man, cannot do this; that he is bound down by the lower impulses of the flesh; and that he can only rise into the higher spiritual life by the grace of God,—not by works, but through

faith in the spirit of God's heavenly messenger, Jesus, the Christ. We see, also, how widely Paul differed from the teaching of the Twelve in this. For while the Twelve merely regarded Jesus as a man raised up by God to be the Messiah, and looked for his return in clouds of glory, Paul looked upon him as the embodiment of a heavenly, spiritual principle,—who had existed in heaven previous to his existence on earth,—through whom alone man could attain salvation. We are on the way, as you see, towards the apotheosis of Jesus.

Let us try to sum up Paul's theology, or Christology. To the great words—Sin, Christ, Faith, Grace, Salvation, Paul gives new, and fuller, and deeper meanings. Sin, to him, as we have seen, was a universal fact or condition, from which man could only rise, not through the works of the Law, but by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Christ was the embodiment, the representative of a new spiritual principle of life, having had a pre-existence in the heavenly world[1] with God, before his appearance on earth. Faith in this new spiritual principle of life is the condition of entry into it; it is the means of justification before God; the beginning of the "new man," who, through the power and vitality of it can "press onward" unto spiritual per-

[1] Romans viii. 3; Galatians iv. 4; Philippians ii. 6-8; 1 Corinthians x. 4.

fection. Grace is the manifestation of the wonderful goodness of God, who sent this great means of salvation, so that by absolute trust and confidence in it,—not by the "filthy rags"[1] of righteousness or the "beggarly elements" of the law,—his children can attain justification and salvation.

It is obvious that all these terms, and the arguments by which they were enforced—the machinery, as it were, of Paul's thought—were virtually forced upon him by the situation in which he was placed, that is, by the necessity of having to meet the counter-arguments of his Jewish, Gentile, and Jewish-Christian opponents, in order that he might enlighten and transform their minds. Hence, it is easy, and, indeed, tempting to a certain order of mind, to emphasise Paul's theology unduly, and particularly certain parts of it. Paul himself over-emphasised it, as we shall see when we come to consider the Epistle of James. From this undue emphasis on the part of theologians a very crude and harsh theology has arisen. Justification by faith has been taken to mean, not faith in the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Love, but justification by *belief* in certain creeds, or in certain doctrines about the birth and supposed resurrection of Jesus. Salvation has been held forth as the reward of this belief. The death of Jesus has

[1] Paul would not have used this phrase (see Isaiah lxiv. 6), but modern interpreters have not scrupled to do so.

been looked upon as a sin-offering, a propitiation of the wrath of God. The natural man has been regarded as lying under the curse of sin, and therefore of God; and fore-ordainment, predestination, election, have been so emphasised as to shroud both the present and the future life in gloom, and fill the mind of man with terror. Leaving all this aside as worthy only of oblivion, let us try to get at Paul's best thought, let us separate the essence and aim of it from its theological machinery. And let us beware of putting new wine into old bottles. Our duty is not to modernise, but to reject the bad, and hold fast to the good.

Paul's thought and teaching, then, revolve around his great word, Faith. But faith, to Paul, did not mean a mere intellectual assent to a series of theological propositions. It meant a certain disposition of the mind and heart towards the good life, towards the Christ-spirit. Once be possessed by this faith, said Paul, and the fruits of it will be "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." It will bring a new spirit into your life. Just as Browning says that

> "The great God-function
> Is to furnish a motive and injunction.
> For practising what we know already"—

So, for Paul, this great God-function was—this new Christ-spirit in the heart, and, having faith in it, to

"renew and transform one's mind" with it, to "put it on," so as, by its power, to overcome the snares of the world, the flesh, and the devil. For it is undoubtedly true that the flesh and the world,—covetousness and all kinds of sin,—do tend to draw us down. They are so fair-seeming and alluring, and so apparently harmless. We often give way before we know on what path we are going, and we can always find a hundred excuses for giving way. This is a fact of universal experience, and the great question with all of us is,—how to overcome these lower impulses; nay, not only to overcome the lower, but to take away the scales from our eyes so that we can see, and seeing, love the higher life. Though we "delight in the law of God after the inward man, we see a different law in our members, warring against the law of the mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin." This was the universal fact upon which Paul seized, and he met it by the corresponding fact,—a deep moral and psychological truth,—that if we would effectively and permanently live the higher life and make it our own; if we would meet at every point and at any moment the wiles of Sin, we must have *faith* in some higher principle, spirit, or person to which we will cling through every doubt and every temptation. That higher something,—and really it does not much matter what we call it, Goodness, Righteousness, Christ, God, so long as we are faith-

ful to it and are possessed by it—that higher something, for Paul, was expressed in the word,—Christ. Sometimes, indeed, he calls it the Spirit of God, into which we are "adopted," but more often the Spirit of Christ. Let us but be possessed by this Spirit, said Paul, and we then die to the old life of sin and begin to live in the new life of the Spirit. And what a revolution that meant for Paul! It meant a changed world, a new life, not to be won by outward sacrifices, and priestly incantations, and sprinklings of blood, but by making the Christ-spirit our own. The Messiah was the ideal man,—what all men are meant to become. This Christ-spirit, then, was the spirit which would at once free men from the bondage of the Law, and open to them the unsearchable riches of the Spirit of God. Its first-fruits were "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy spirit." It taught men, nay, caused them, to "walk in love," to "follow after righteousness, godliness, patience," to "lay hold on the life which is life indeed," to "love one's neighbour as one's self," to strive after "whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report." It manifested itself in two ways. First, in a changed inward life; second, in a spiritual unity of men, which, through charity or love, would make the faithful as citizens of one kingdom, members of one

body. And so Paul arrives at his great doctrine of Christian Socialism: "No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself"; where "one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it, or one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it"; for those who are possessed by the spirit of Christ are members of the body (the commonwealth) of Christ,—a passage which is almost a paraphrase of Plato's celebrated saying, that the best ordered State is that "which most nearly approaches to the condition of a healthy body, in which, even if but a finger is hurt, the whole frame, drawn towards the soul and forming one realm under the ruling power therein, feels the hurt and sympathises altogether with the part affected .... And when any one of the citizens experiences any good or evil, the whole State will make his case their own, and either rejoice or sorrow with him." How true it is that men imbued by the same spirit,—though ages and hemispheres apart in moral and intellectual training and development—seek the realisation of the same ends and ideals, while clothing those ends and ideals in different outward guise and calling them by different names—Kingdom, Republic; Church, State; Goodness, Christ; Righteousness, God.

Faith, then, with Paul, is not an intellectual principle, not a mere belief, it is a moral principle "working through love," and so working, purifies the

heart. Love is thus at once the spiritual means, the active principle, and the crown, of the "new life." And so, in that magnificent thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, which will live as long as human language shall endure, we get the essence of Paul's best thought. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. If I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, doth not behave itself unseemly; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth. Love never faileth. Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love." But even this is not the end of Paul's thought. For this love, working by faith in the Christ-spirit, will quicken and refine even our earthly consciousness; it will produce in us the "life" which will the more effectually prepare us for our new spiritual vesture in immortality, pure and luminous as the sunbeams. Sown in corruption, we shall be "raised in incorruption"; sown in dishonour, we shall be "raised in glory"; sown in weakness, we shall be "raised in power"; sown a natural body, we shall be "raised a spiritual body,—a life-giving spirit," in "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." For this event "the whole creation groaneth and

travaileth in pain," in hope to be "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." And "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O Grave, where is thy victory? O Death, where is thy sting?"

I have tried to give the best of Paul's thought. I have tried to show that with him, as with Jesus, the chief thing, the great end, is—the moral life, the good will, the pure heart; but he tried to reach this end by far different means to those employed by Jesus. His theorizings, his speculative machinery, his talk about election, and predestination, and fore-ordainment, and the second Adam, and world-judgment, and appeasement, and redemption from the wrath of God —all that we can willingly let die. And it is well that we should let it die. Religious thought is undergoing a transformation, and it is necessary that we should free it, as largely as possible, from erroneous elements. As Dr. Orello Cone, in his work on Paul, so well says: "A fellowship with Christ which is ethical instead of supernatural, an atonement which is only a reconciliation, a baptism which is a mere outward form, an eschatology which is an historical evolution without a catastrophic dénoûment, and a Spirit which works according to law, constitutes an emascu-

lated Paulinism. The indomitable tendency of modern thought toward these ideas denotes our departure from the greatest of the apostles, and indicates the transient elements in a teaching which for ages swayed the thought of Christendom." Let the transient elements pass then, but let us cling all the more to Paul's best thought—faith in the Spirit, "working through love." Here we are at one with the thought of Jesus also. It is a thought which is at the root of moral life and moral growth, moving us towards that Diviner life which no mere sectional or speculative belief will give us, but which lies waiting, upon action, upon experience, to be unfolded and developed out of the original elements of our own nature. This is the true "universal" faith, by which all men are regarded as "children of God," and all—Greek or Jew, Roman or barbarian, bond or free—may enter into the riches of the Spirit which feeds our life from divine springs, and nurtures our labouring wills for a freer and a purer air.

X

THE "ACTS OF THE APOSTLES" AND THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

Acts iv. 18, 19: "And they called them, and charged them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them: Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto ye rather than unto God, judge ye."

SOME time after the death of Jesus, his disciples, we are told, formed themselves into a little community at Jerusalem. This event, however, is wrapped in obscurity. We have no contemporary record of the doings of this community. The first Christian literature, the Epistles of Paul, seldom mention it. The *Acts of the Apostles*, which professes to give us a brief account of the work of the first followers of Jesus, was not written, or rather compiled, until at least half-a-century after the death of Jesus. The information it gives us is very meagre; it is largely

intermingled with legend ; and, as a historical record, it is exceedingly unreliable, as we shall see. There is a very good reason for this lack of historical material. The cardinal point in the belief of the disciples was the expected speedy coming of the "end of the age" and the return of Jesus, as Messiah, to establish his kingdom. Hence, there could be no intelligible motive for writing a detailed history. Even if any of the disciples thought of such a thing, the further thought would continually recur. 'What is the use? The Master will soon return and all things will be made new.' It was only when the immediate expectation of the Messiah had begun to weaken somewhat, that a formal record would be contemplated.

Let us see, however, what the book called the *Acts of the Apostles* has to tell us. The book, which is generally supposed to have been compiled by the author of the Gospel according to Luke, is virtually divided into two parts—the first twelve chapters giving the principal events in the early years of the primitive community of believers, the last sixteen chapters being devoted to an account of the missionary work of Paul. A portion of these sixteen chapters is written in the third person, a smaller portion in the first person, thus showing that the later author, or rather editor, was a compiler of other narratives, not a witness of the events he records. The earlier narrative begins by

saying that Jesus, after His death, appeared unto the apostles for "the space of forty days, speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God." As none of the Gospels or Epistles say anything about this period of forty days, and as the writer of the narratives in *Acts* himself gives us no particulars either of the sayings or the doings of Jesus under these extraordinary circumstances, we can only conclude that he has embodied in his narrative one of the many legends about Jesus which were current at the time. After giving an account of the supposed Ascension of Jesus, the gathering of the brethren together in Jerusalem, (the Gospels say that the disciples returned into Galilee after the Crucifixion, but the writer of *Acts* tells us that they remained at Jerusalem) and the election, by lot, of an apostle in the place of Judas, the writer describes the first preachings. Let us bear in mind that all the speeches in *Acts* are pure inventions, after the manner of the speeches which are recorded by some other ancient historians. No one thought of reporting the speeches of the leaders of an obscure sect, especially when the "end of the age," the great consummation, was believed to be so near at hand. The author of the narrative, then, draws upon his imagination, and, writing many years after the event, puts into the mouths of the apostles speeches which, in good faith, he thinks they *might* have delivered. We shall see this more clearly as we proceed, and we

must take care to allow for it or we shall never understand the New Testament writings. Even the preachings are mingled with legendary events, for we are told that tongues "like as of fire"[1] appeared and sat upon each one of the believers, "and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues," so that peoples of some fifteen different languages understood what these unlearned Galileans were saying. Some of the bystanders were amazed, while others mocked and said: "These men are filled with new wine." This gives us a hint as to the real nature of the facts which lie behind the legend. We know from Paul's description that this "speaking with tongues," was due to a kind of religious ecstasy or frenzy common amongst religious leaders in ancient times. It consisted of excited and broken utterances, incoherent sentences, sighs, groans, hallelujahs, and even inarticulate sounds. No wonder that some of of these meetings were a perfect Babel of sounds, and that Paul, with shrewd common sense, tells the Corinthians that he would "rather speak five words with the understanding than ten thousand words in a tongue," and exhorts them to "let all things be done decently and in order." As a result of Peter's preaching some three thousand souls, it is said, were con-

[1]Rénan accounts for this by the hypothesis of a violent thunderstorm and the playing of lightning, which filled the assembled believers with fear and excitement.

verted, more signs and wonders were wrought, and the believers formed themselves into a community where they "had all things common," continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and in the breaking of bread and the prayers. The whole story reminds us of a similar incident in the life of Pythagoras, who is said to have made two thousand converts by his first discourse, and that they, like the first Christians, lived in community. That the story is the product of a later age, embellished with legends peculiar to the times, is obvious. The writer does not trouble himself with such trifling details as to how it was possible for a community of three thousand people to take their meals together: and the supernatural interference of "the Spirit," producing signs and wonders almost daily, is a conspicuous feature of his narrative. Even Peter's shadow was believed to possess a miraculous virtue. It was an age of legend, of visions, of miracle, of ecstasy, of inspired messengers of God, of fanaticism, of outpourings of the spirit, of dreams of the coming kingdom.

We need not follow, at present, the story of the *Acts* in detail. There is an incident related in the fifth chapter which shows how untrustworthy the book is as genuine history. Peter and John, after having been released from prison by angels, had been brought before the Sanhedrin on account of their preachings, and the members of the Sanhedrin were furious with

them and inclined to take strong measures. Then Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel, rose and counselled moderation. Beforetime, he said, one Theudas had arisen, giving himself out to be somebody, but he and his movement had come to nought. Then "after this man," rose up Judas of Galilee, he also perished, and those who followed him were scattered abroad. "Refrain now," he continued, "from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them." Now this rising of Theudas, to which Gamaliel is made to refer, did not occur, according to Josephus, until some years *after* this time;[1] while the rising of Judas, which the writer of *Acts* makes Gamaliel place *after* that of Theudas, took place about forty years *before*.[2] This is conclusive evidence that the writer of *Acts* was not fully acquainted with the facts, and invents the speeches which he puts into the mouths of his characters, in his idealisation of the history of the primitive Church.

Another strange feature of the book is that though entitled the "Acts of the Apostles," it tells us next to nothing of the doings of the bulk of the Apostles. Far the larger portion of it is taken up with the work of two only,—and one of these was not one of the

[1] In the reign of Claudius, 41-54 A.D. See Josephus, Ant. xx, 5. 1.

[2] In the time of Quirinus, about 6 A.D.

Twelve,—namely, Peter and Paul. It is the relation of these two to each other, as given by *Acts*, that we must carefully consider, ere we can thoroughly understand our New Testament and the early history of the primitive Church.

First let us note that the author of this book so far idealises history as to divide the apostolic honours between Peter and Paul. Similar miracles are ascribed to both. Peter calls down the judgment of God upon Ananias, Paul upon Elymas. Peter heals a life-long cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, Paul heals a life-long cripple at Lystra. Peter has a vision which brings him and Cornelius together, and which leads him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles: Paul also has a vision which leads to a visit from Ananias (at Damascus) and to *his* preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Behind this division of honours there is obviously an unconscious idealisation of history.

But the most remarkable thing about the "Acts of the Apostles" is the complete reversal of the positions of Peter and Paul on the important question as to whether Gentiles should be admitted to the little Christian communities. You will remember how, according to *Galatians*, Paul and Peter had quarrelled at Antioch on that point; how Peter had at first shown his sympathy with the Gentile brethren, and had even joined them at their common meals, but when other Judaists came from the stricter James,

and remonstrated with him, he drew back and separated himself from the "unclean" Gentiles; and how Paul condemned him to his face. Paul, indeed, in his epistle to the Galatians, calls Peter the apostle of the circumcision, and says that he was specially "called" for that work. But here, in the *Acts*, Peter himself is represented as the apostle to the Gentiles; he is made to receive a message from God in a vision in which the Spirit bids him to make no distinction between Jew and Gentile; he baptizes Cornelius and other Gentiles; and he makes two speeches in which he is made to declare that the Law is "a yoke," that God is no respecter of persons, and that the distinction between "clean" and "unclean," Jew and Gentile, is abolished. All this was some time before the quarrel at Antioch. But if all this really occurred, if Peter received this message from God in a vision, if he really made these speeches, why should he have had any scruples about receiving the Gentile converts at Antioch, and why should he quarrel with Paul on the question?

But the transformation of the character of Paul by the author of *Acts* is even more remarkable. We know Paul's opinions from his letters. We know what a strong line he took on this question of the admission of the Gentiles; how he looked upon himself as specially called to be the apostle to the Gentiles; how he repeatedly declared that the Law was

annulled, that it was good only for its time, that by the works of the Law no man was justified, that it was superseded by the work and death of Christ; and how, when he went to confer with the apostles at Jerusalem, he took Titus, a Greek, with him, and firmly refused to comply with the request of the Jewish Christians that this uncircumcised Greek should be compelled to conform to the requirements of the Law ere he could be recognised as a member of the Christian community. But the author of *Acts* paints Paul in entirely different colours. He speaks of him as preaching to the Gentiles indeed, but he also represents him as a most zealous supporter of the Law. This of Paul, who repeatedly declared that Christ came to annul the Law! He tells us, through the mouth of Paul himself, that the latter went to the Temple to worship and to present offerings.[1] He also informs us that, at the instance of James and the elders, Paul actually purified himself in the Temple with four others to allay the hostility of the more strict Judaists, and to show "that thou thyself also walkest orderly, keeping the Law;" for "they have been informed concerning thee," they said "that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake the Law of Moses."[2] And Paul meekly accepts the suggestion and purifies himself in accord-

[1] Acts xxiv. 12, 17.

[2] Acts xxi. 20-26.

ance with the requirements of the Law! Nay, further, the author of *Acts* tells us that Paul himself circumcised his companion Timothy,[1] in order to allay the prejudices of the Jews amongst whom they were travelling. We may well ask—is this the Paul who tells us in his letter to the Galatians that he would not listen to the demand for the circumcision of Titus, "no, not for an hour?"

Still further, the account given by Paul, in *Galatians*, of his visit to Jerusalem and his conference with the older apostles on the question of the admission of the Gentiles, differs altogether from the account given in *Acts*. Paul tells us that as the result of the conference, James, and Peter, and John, gave him the right hand of fellowship, bade him continue his missionary work amongst the Gentiles, and only stipulated that he should remember their poor, which, says Paul, "I was also zealous to do." But the author of *Acts* informs us that as a result of the conference the Church at Jerusalem issued a formal decree laying down four conditions, by the acceptance and observance of which the Gentiles might be admitted to the Christian communities; that Paul himself accepted this decree and published it amongst the churches.[2] This decree, if it was ever really issued, was evidently a compromise. But if it

[1] Acts xvi., 3.

[2] Acts xv. and xvi 1-5.

was issued, and the question amicably settled in this way, why should Peter have had any scruples about receiving the Gentiles at Antioch? Why should there have been any scene there at all? And if Paul accepted it and published it amongst the churches, why does he never once mention it in his epistles, and why should Jewish-Christian emissaries continue to denounce him and try to thwart his work? To complete this transformation of Paul's character,—the author of *Acts* puts several speeches into his mouth, in only one of which does Paul make a slight reference to his great doctrines of sin and justification by faith,—a subject of which his letters are full!

There are other differences between this portrait of Paul, as given by the author of *Acts*, and Paul as we know him through his letters. But it is time we asked ourselves—How is it that these great and grave differences in the two accounts exist,—differences which cannot possibly be reconciled? There are, or rather were, two theories to account for then. One, the older theory,—that of the Tübingen school,—held that the *Acts* was a compilation of the second century, when the battle on behalf of the Gentiles had been won, and that the author or editor deliberately distorted history with the object of showing to his fellow-Christians how harmonious the relations of the early apostles and the life of the early Church

had been, and how the admission of the Gentiles was supported not only by Peter and James, but also by the direct revelations of the Holy Spirit. This theory is now entirely abandoned.[1] The later theory, which is now almost universally accepted, holds that *Acts* is a compilation, dating about the end of the first or the beginning of the second century, and that the compiler did not intentionally falsify history, but gave such an account of apostolic times as seemed to him, from his experience and the scanty records at his command, to be most true to actual fact. Perhaps the real truth is that the compiler, living at a time when the acute phases of the Jewish-Gentile controversy had become a thing of the past, assumed that the relationships of the early apostles were more harmonious than they really were, and so he was unconsciously led to draw an ideal picture,—real enough to him,—of the life of the early Church. The stormy life of Paul lies far behind him. He may have heard, and must, indeed, have known from Paul's letters, something of the scenes and ruptures to which Paul's work and personality gave rise but

[1] There is, indeed, a third theory, that of Van Manen, who contends that the whole of the Pauline epistles are forgeries, the production of a later Pauline "school." In that case the account in *Acts*, denuded of legend, may be substantially correct. But the difficulties in the way of this theory are so great that it has not been widely accepted.

he evidently did not believe that these differences could permanently embitter the relationships of the apostles, or thwart the endeavours of brotherly love and harmony in the upbuilding of the infant Church. Probably the decrees which he puts into the mouth of James as a result of the conference at Jerusalem were the product of a later generation, and were laid down as a basis of compromise between opposing forces, for we know that in the evolution of societies and churches, questions involving great principles are never settled by the complete victory of either side, but only by compromise after compromise.

But let us not hastily assume that because the story in *Acts* is so largely imaginative or ideal, that, therefore, it has little or no basis in fact, or is of little value to us to-day. It gives us a picture, by one living within the first century, of the early life and history of one of the greatest religions of the world. Parts of this picture,—the martrydom of Stephen; the courageous stand of Peter and John, and their great words: "Is it right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God?"—the great saying which the author puts into the mouth of Peter: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him;" the speech and parting of Paul from the elders at Miletus,—all these will live for ever. As

for the life of the little communities, we gather from *Acts* that it was very simple, apart from the Jewish ordinances. Jesus instituted no ritual.[1] He laid down no metaphysical creed. But the early Church seems to have adopted two rites, or customs, adapted from Jewish usuages,—baptism, and the common meal, which afterwards developed into the service of Holy Communion. The baptism, however, was not according to the Trinitarian formula,—which came much later,—but simply in the name of Jesus, as the Messiah, or Christ. Baptism was followed by the laying on of hands, which was supposed to confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

But though Jesus instituted no rite and laid down no metaphysical creed beyond the simple one beginning: "The Lord our God, the Lord is One," he left to his disciples and to after generations, something far more precious,—his spirit of love, and his ideal of a higher righteousness. In this spirit the first followers of Jesus met. They gathered together in private houses, in the humblest surroundings. There was no hierarchy of bishops or priests. One word, "elder," is used to describe all the chief officers.

[1] The words in Luke: "This do in remembrance of me," are thought by many scholars to be an interpolation. The only rite which Jesus seems to have intended to establish—the washing of the brethren's feet—is the one which the Church has most widely and persistently neglected. See John xiii. 4-17.

Anyone might baptize; anyone, who had gifts, might preside. Differentiation of function came much later. The great password of the brethren was *Maran-atha*, "The Lord will come." To this great day all looked forward in eager expectation. Meanwhile, the two great duties of the believers were, first, to persuade men to repent, for the kingdom of Heaven was at hand; second, to relieve the necessities of the widows, the orphans, and the poor. This has been the glory of the Jewish people from the most ancient times, their institutions were not merely political, but social, and they charged themselves, as a duty, with the education and maintenance of their poor. The little Christian communities, begun by Jews, simply developed this idea, deepening and strengthening it in the spirit of the Master. The common meal, served at first every evening, then every Sabbath, and later, transferred to Sunday, at once helped the realisation of the idea and deepened the feelings of love and devotion amongst the brethren. Sometimes, indeed, the repast gave rise to disorderly scenes,[1] but more often it was marked by gladness and joy, and as it was continued in remembrance of the Master it became associated with the most holy and reverential feelings and aspirations. For only those were expected to come to the holy meal,—which soon developed into a sacrament,—who were at peace with

[1] See 1 Corinthians xi. 17-22.

their conscience, pure in their inward lives, and living in amity with their neighbours.

> "Restore, O Father, to our times restore
> The peace which filled thy church in days of yore;
> Ere lust of power had sown the seeds of strife,
> And quenched the new-born charities of life."

No wonder that the author of *Acts*, moved to admiration by this charming and lovable ideal, should have pictured it in its most delightful colours and left out all the harsher features which were mingled with it. For "the multitude of them that believed," he says, "were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. Neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need. And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people."

We, with our modern spiritual ideas, and our knowledge of a universe sown with worlds, may smile at this primitive community of believers, with their childlike expectation of the speedy end of the

world, their faith in the immediate coming of Messiah in clouds of glory, their belief in the continual interposition of the Holy Spirit in mundane things, their conception of heaven as a celestial home just above the clouds, inhabited by angels dressed in white, and singing and bowing in adoration before the central throne. But let us remember that our pride of knowledge and of intellect sinks into insignificance by the side of the Moral Life. And those early Christians, in aspiring after an ideal society and rehearsing the life of a perfect world,[1] were nearer, in spirit, to the citizenship of the kingdom of Heaven, than many who secretly pride themselves on the immensity of their knowledge and surround themselves with all the treasures that art and wealth can give. For the early Christians had hold of the invisible golden thread which guides the destinies of humanity,—the aspiration after the pure heart, the just deed, the reign of righteousness,—an aspiration which, though often obscured by vain expectations and subtle speculative theorisings, yet illumines every page of the New Testament.

[1] See Dr. Martineau's *Hours of Thought*, vol. 1, p. 262.

XI

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES AND THE HIGHER LAW

James i. 25.—"He that looketh into the perfect law,
the law of liberty, and so continueth,
being not a hearer that forgetteth,
but a doer that worketh, this man shall
be blessed in his doing."

James ii. 24.—"By works a man is justified, and not
only by faith."

PAUL, the great apostle to the Gentiles, is supposed to have died in the year 64.[1] It is exceedingly probable that the epistle of James was not written until about the end of the first century. Between these two dates other New Testament writings, the outcome of other phases of doctrine and development, were produced. But I deal with the epistle of James

[1] Some authorities place the death of Paul in the year 58, and various dates, from the year 29 to 35, are given for the death of Jesus.

now in order to complete our view of this great controversy with regard to the Law and the admission of the Gentiles to the early Christian Church.

There are four Jameses mentioned in the New Testament,—James, the son of Zebedee, and James, the son of Alphaeus, both apostles; James, the son of Mary the wife of Clopas; and James, the brother of Jesus, known as James "the Just," and commonly supposed at one time to be the author of this particular epistle. But it is not likely that any of these wrote this much-controverted epistle, which Luther termed "an epistle of straw." It is far more likely, judging from its contents, that it was issued at a much later date in the name of James, the brother of Jesus, in order to give it weight and authority—a common practice in ancient times. James, the brother of Jesus, was a zealous supporter of the Jewish ceremonial law; he was one of the "pillars" of the church at Jerusalem, and, according to the author of *Acts*, he must have been instrumental in arranging the compromise by which the Gentiles were to be admitted to the Church in accordance with the decrees promulgated as a result of the conference with Paul. But this epistle says nothing about the ceremonial law; it does not mention the decrees regulating the admission of the Gentiles; it even seems to assume that the ritualistic and ceremonial part of the law has lapsed; but it attacks the

Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, and uses Pauline formulæ. It seems fair to assume, then, that this epistle was written at a later time, when Paul's great principles contending for the equalisation of Jew and Gentile, and the annulment of the ceremonial law, had triumphed, but when the means by which Paul had sought to establish that principle—his theological doctrine of justification—had by no means won universal acceptance.

There was every reason why Paul should have triumphed on the main issue. Apart from his own indomitable energy and spirit, the circumstances of the time were entirely in his favour. Three times within the first century the Roman Empire was virtually ruled by men whom we can only call monstrous moral abortions of humanity, producing a state of things which drove the better spirits to the consolations of religious contemplation and seclusion, and to the formation of small religious communities. There were many of these religious societies, conducted much after the same manner as those which existed amongst the Jews and the Christians. Each had its protecting divinity. There was the same "common meal," the same care for the poor. Within the societies, which were composed mainly of the poor and the humble, the slave and the free-born man were equal. Amongst the cultivated classes the Stoics taught and practised a pure and lofty morality,

and quiet endurance and fortitude in suffering; while the ignoble, the licentious, and the indifferent scoffed at both morality and religion. The world was waiting, as it were, for a new, universal religion, which would give it a new and nobler type of life. But it would never welcome a religion which was built on the idea of a favoured race, and which excluded from its blessings the great mass of mankind. Paul saw this. With the whole world before him his Gentile communities multiplied rapidly, while the Jewish-Christian communities, limited to the "favoured" people, grew but slowly. Hence, by the very nature of things, Paul's principle that "Jew or Gentile, Roman or barbarian, bond or free"—all[1] should have the right to freely avail themselves of the riches of the new faith, was destined to triumph.

But it was one thing to demand that Gentiles should be admitted to the little Christian communities, it was quite another thing to demand that they should be admitted purely on the ground of their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and to aver that they were "justified" by their faith, apart from their works. This was what the liberal Jewish-Christians objected to, and the epistle of James is the answer of the liberal Judaistic party to the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith.

[1] All the *elect*, that is,—to be exact. See the discourse on Paul's teachings.

In order to understand the central point in this great controversy, which has some relation to the ethical and theological controversies of our own day, it is necessary to bear in mind the distinction between the ceremonial part of the Mosaic or Jewish Law, and its moral or ethical contents. To the pious Jew both were bound together, dependent upon each other,—both were the very word and command of God. To us, living in these modern days, and especially to us Protestants who have almost given up ritual, such a condition of mind is so strange that we can hardly think ourselves into it. Sacrifices, circumcision, ablutions, purifications, ecclesiastical attire, rigid observance of the Sabbath,—all these, and especially the former, are so foreign to our mode of thought, that we can hardly imagine the strength of the age-long and inherited prejudices against which Paul had to contend. So far, however, he was clearly in the right, and the eventual outcome of the struggle proved that he was in the right. But when he went on in his polemic and declared himself against not only the ceremonial Law, but against the moral or ethical contents of the Law as well (sometimes even seeming to declare himself against Law as such)[1] as a means of justification, he was clearly in the wrong. We know, of course, how Paul was led to take this position. It was through his doctrine of the

[1] Romans vii. 7, 8; Galatians v. 18.

carnality, the inherent sinfulness of the flesh. "I am carnal," he said, "sold under sin. What I would not, that I do. I cannot do what I would because of this vesture of the flesh and its carnal desires. The Law is only good as showing me what I might become, but, living in the flesh, cannot become. Who, then, shall deliver me from the body of this death? Not the Law, not works,—only a new spiritual life which rises above the desires of the flesh, that is, faith in the spirit of Christ Jesus!"

On this point the liberal Jewish-Christians gave battle. They dropped the ceremonial part of the Law, and so far they became Pauline; but they declared for justification by works as against justification by faith. To them, the moral content of the Law was the very Word or Will of God,—as, to-day, the Moral Law is the Will of God to us,—and obedience to that Law the supreme duty of man. Let us see, then, what the author of James has to say in defence of this new point of view. He too, like Paul, believes that "the coming of the Lord is at hand," and he opens his homily,—for the book is a homily rather than a letter,—with a beautiful exhortation to patience, and an equally beautiful reminder that in the sight of God both "the brother of low degree" and the rich are of equal estate, because, "as the flower of the grass" all our earthly riches and grandeur shall pass away. "For the sun ariseth with the scorching wind,

and withereth the grass; and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his goings." Then he goes on to speak of the perfect moral life, and he shows how evil is first conceived in thought, and from thought is born into act, bringing forth sin and spiritual death. Then he comes to the central point of his religious philosophy. For how are we to prevent this entrance of evil into our thoughts? By receiving, he says, with meekness, the inborn word, or thought, or will of God, which is able to save your souls. "But be ye doers of the word," he continues, "and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth, but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doings."

Now if we can only realise the full force and meaning of these words, and especially of this phrase "the law of liberty," we shall begin to realise the strength of the liberal-Jewish case. For what is this "law of liberty?" It is the Moral Law, the inborn, implanted word, or thought, or will of God, which exists in all our hearts, and which, if we will but listen to it

and obey it, "is able to save our souls." Surely, this is an eternal truth, against which all forensic views of justification and propitiation beat in vain. Liberty, true freedom, is only to be found in Law. When we are children we want to go our own way uncontrolled by law, and if our parents and teachers do not impose upon us—or teach us to impose upon ourselves—a higher law than our own wills, we grow to maturity eaten up with egotism, selfishness, and self-will, which bring forth the fruits of sin and spiritual death. A butterfly has much apparent freedom; a bee has little, and rules itself by the law of the hive—which is the higher type of creature? From the growth of a blade of grass to the ordered movements of worlds and suns and systems, the Law is "alive and beautiful." Only by the acceptance of Law do we win true liberty and gain salvation from the chaos of unbridled impulse and disorderly desires.

James, having laid down his great principle of Law, premising that we must be *doers*, not merely hearers of it, now goes on to condemn Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and in lack of daily food, and one of them say unto them, go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet he give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself."

Then he takes the very case which Paul himself had cited, the case of Abraham, and shows how Abraham was justified not by his faith, but by his obedience, his willingness *to do* the things which he thought God commanded him to do. "Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren? . . . By works a man is justified, and not only by faith. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead."

All this is so plain that we can hardly conceive of any one disputing it. Paul knew, indeed, that faith used in his sense of the word, "faith working through love," would inevitably produce works. But he was led away by his theological notions—notions rooted in generations of ancestry as well as in the Jewish society around him—to make it the basis, the condition of salvation, *prior* to its development into works. Jewish theology, for ages, had centred in the idea of sacrifice, of propitiation, in order to win the favour and the blessing of God. Paul, steeped by birth and training in this theology, could not rid his mind of this idea, and so, with his great genius for theological adaptation, he tacked it on to his theory of the office and nature of Christ and his sacrifice on the Cross, and taught men that if they would but have *faith* in that, all would be well with them, and so they would win the riches of God's grace.

But the liberal Jews saw that all this subtle theoris-

ing was unnecessary. They saw that Law, in its fullest and deepest sense, the Law of God, contained *within itself* the provision for securing the grace of God. And that is our modern solution of the problem of sin. Law is Grace. *The Moral Law is Grace!* That is, we are sustained, we live, not only physically, but morally, by and through Law; only by and through Law can moral development proceed. If we sin, even in thought, if only for a moment, "retribution is swift as the lightning," and we sink to the lower levels. This Law is far-reaching, deep-searching. It is in the nature of things. We cannot escape from it even for an instant. It besets us behind and before. It is simply awful in its far-reaching retributive power. Awful, because, with every fall, we become blind and dead even to the low level from which we have fallen. This is the just side of Law, and justice is irrevocable. But there is another side of Law, the side of Love and Mercy. And the moment we turn, chastised and broken, from our darkness and our sin towards the path of rectitude, the side of Love and Mercy shines out upon us and draws us upward once more, if we will but listen and obey, as plants are drawn by the light and warmth of the sun. Or, to put the same truth in theological language: the nature of God, the Spirit—if I may presume to speak in this fashion, for we mortals should be very careful not to dogmatise overmuch about the nature of God

—the nature of God, the Spirit, has two aspects. The aspect of Justice, which he turns sadly and sorrowfully upon us when we depart from his ways, saying, I *must* punish, for punishment is the 'medicine of the soul' to purify it from disease and evil. But the moment new light breaks upon us and we follow, the moment repentance begins and we turn from the error of our ways, then the face of God becomes radiant with Mercy and Love. The way for our return is always open; and though the way may be long, there it is. The Moral Law *is* Grace!

"'Law is God,' say some. 'No God at all,' says the fool,
'For all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in a pool.'
"And the ear of man cannot hear, and the eye of man cannot see;
But if we could see and hear, this Vision—were it not He?
"Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

This, surely, is the true answer to all those theories of atonement, of reconciliation, which are based on the notion of God's anger and wrath, and the necessity for its appeasement or propitiation. It is not God who needs to be reconciled to us, it is we who need to be reconciled to God. The 'Way' sometimes seems hard and long, but we have to reconcile ourselves to it ere we can be *at one* with it and find peace

within. It is true, indeed, because we are members one of another, that the labours and the sacrifices of others who are greater and nobler than we, are necessary, to lead us towards the higher levels and take the thick scales from our spiritual vision. But this is in no sense a propitiation of God's anger, it is a means of His grace, through Law, working through the great and good in all ages, to bring the treasures of the Spirit to all. In the final resort, while helping to bear each other's burdens and so fulfilling the Law of Christ, we must also bear our own burden and make the Law our own ere we can reach the Mount of Vision and breathe its purer air. Can you not see, my friends, that men in all ages, in all religions, the Jameses and the Pauls, are labouring, with differing conceptions and language, sometimes with drooping wings, sometimes with glad and buoyant spirit, towards this great end which we call the Moral Life! Truly, the pure in heart, whatever their theology, shall see God.

But let us return, for a moment, to the epistle of James. We see now that though Paul was the more ardent, intense, and emotional spirit, James was nearer to the spirit of Jesus. The teaching of Jesus and James is predominantly moral and practical—that man is a child of God, the Spirit, and can rise, through this sameness of nature, into the godly, the spiritual life. There is no word of propitiation, election, fore-ordainment, predestination, in the teaching of Jesus

and James. Paul's mind, on the contrary, is predominantly speculative and theological, *but, for a moral purpose.* Man, to Paul, is not naturally akin to God; his fleshly nature is against him. He can only make himself akin to God by dying to the life of the flesh and putting on the spirit of Christ Jesus—and even this he can do only if he belongs to the "elect."

James, too, is very near to the spirit of Jesus in his treatment of the subject of the private accumulation of wealth. Some of his sentences our millionaires would do well to have specially printed on vellum, framed in gold, and hung in their drawing-rooms. In his exhortation to patience in bearing injury, and slowness to wrath; his condemnation of respect of persons, of profession without deeds, of covetousness and war, of the oath; his gracious courtesy and temper even in controversy; and his description of the Moral Law as a "royal law" of love—in all this he reminds us much of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount.

And yet—and yet—we may well ask: How was it that the world swung towards the speculative, theological spirit of Paul, rather than towards the moral spirit of Jesus and James? Was it because the path of the moral life, of moral development, was, and always is, harder than professions of faith, which tend to degenerate into merely formal beliefs? Or was it that mankind, still in its childhood, was not yet ready for the great declaration that "God is Spirit," and that the

only true life is to "live in the Spirit," but wanted, childlike, a human-god, whose very words it could ponder over, and whose supposed promises of salvation it could cherish in its heart? These questions I must leave you to answer for yourselves in accordance with your own knowledge of human nature and human history, and your own conception of psychological and religious development. The simple fact of history is that mankind did swing towards the side of Paul, nay, towards his worst side —his speculative, theological side, rather than his practical, moral side. And in doing so it was unfaithful to his spirit, for it changed his great doctrine of Justification by Faith into Justification by Belief. But the time will come, nay, is coming even now,—though the signs are at present against us,—the time is coming when mankind will approach nearer to the spirit of Jesus; when, dropping the half-barbarous theology of the great apostle to the Gentiles, with all its talk about blood, and propitiation, and election, and predestination, it will reconcile the spirit of Paul with the spirit of Jesus and James, and recognise that the Law of Liberty, the Law of Christ, the Law of God, the Law of the Spirit, are *One*, in which all true heirs and children of the Spirit will ever strive to live and move and have their being.

In our next discourse we shall see how the infant faith followed other lines of development.

XII

THE GROWTH OF DOCTRINE IN THE NON-PAULINE EPISTLES.

Colossians iii. 15.—"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."
Hebrews xii. 1. 2.—"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.

AFTER the death of the apostle Paul, Christianity came more and more into contact with other religious and philosophical sects. It had now got, in Paulinism, a more distinctive theology. Though the offspring of Judaism, and, to a great extent, allied to Jewish thought, it had, through Paul, attempted to cut itself aloof from the more ancient faith, and had set itself to meet the Gentile sects and schools on their own ground. Out of the conflict with these sects and schools more Christian literature arose, the chief of which, as far as my present discourse is concerned,

may be said to be, the first epistle of Peter, the epistle to the Colossians, and the epistle to the Hebrews. It is doubtful, and more than doubtful, whether Peter wrote this particular epistle which was issued under his name; it is equally doubtful whether Paul wrote the epistle to the Colossians; while the epistle to the Hebrews is now universally admitted to be an anonymous production. In these epistles the old controversy as to the admission of the Gentiles is left far behind. That battle has virtually been won. Both Peter and Paul, we may take it, have long since passed away. The infant faith is pressing on to the solution of new intellectual problems, the most important of which is the position, nature, and personality of Christ—his relation to God, on the one hand, to humanity on the other. In order to understand this later literature it is necessary to know something of the movement of thought out of which it arose. That movement is now known under the general name —Gnosticism.

What is Gnosticism? We are more familiar in our own day with the term Agnosticism. An Agnostic, as we all know, is one who professes or declares that he has no knowledge of God, or of an after-life. He does not deny the existence of God or the immortality of the soul. He simply says: "I don't know." The Gnostics were not so modest. They had a clearly-reasoned philosophy of the universe, and they pro-

fessed to know a good deal about the ways of God, and the constitution of the universe. The universe, they said, is made up of two principles—Spirit and Matter. God is pure Spirit; this lower world is vulgar matter and flesh, intermixed with spirit,—"a muddy vesture of decay." How, then, does the spirit descend into vulgar matter and flesh, and how does the imprisoned and impure spirit in the flesh re-ascend into the pure spirit of God? The answer of Gnosticism was that pure spirit has the power to objectify itself in ideas or æons, and these ideas become the types or the archetypes of finite things. But in the perpetual flux of things—in the descent of spirit into matter and flesh, that is, in the very act of materialising itself—an innate tendency—spirit becomes imperfect, a poor dim copy of the Divine idea or arche type. And yet, once it has entered on this process of descent, of involution, it must go through this imperfect stage of materialisation, of purification, of world-development or evolution ere it can become pure and fully conscious of itself again. Midway between vulgar matter and pure spirit, it reaches the stage—where it mingles with flesh—of psychical activity. Here it becomes conscious of its limitations, its transitoriness. It is in darkness—it must emerge into the light. It is impure—it must become pure. It is mingled with error—it must aspire to truth. It is imperfect—it must become perfect. It is of the Many, finite, transitory—

it must return to the One, and become eternal in its essence. The psychical stage is thus the all-important one in this process of world-development; through it a higher consciousness gradually dawns upon humanity, which, becoming conscious of its imperfections, and conscious also of a higher world—order of æons and heavenly beings, fixes its gaze on that eternal world, and strives towards its goal as a plant strives towards the light. Now, in this process of spiritual development, Christ, said the Christian Gnostics, plays an important part. For Christ, they said, was the highest embodiment, in the flesh, of the spiritual archetype, or Divine idea, existing in the Eternal Mind. Hence, through Christ, the spirit becomes more clearly conscious of its own essential nature. Just as the Demiurgus, the creator of the material world, the instrument of the pure Spirit and Wisdom of God, represents the descent of Spirit into Matter, Christ, on the other side, represents the re-ascent of the Spirit to God. But even Christ, they contend,—and this was what brought them into conflict with the New Testament writers,—even Christ, being born of earthly darents, was subordinate to the spiritual beings, the æons, angels, and other heavenly powers which existed in the super-sensible world.

It will be evident from this very brief outline of Gnosticism that it laid claim to a reasoned interpretation of the universe. It laid stress not upon faith

only, but upon knowledge, and it claimed to have the true knowledge of the ways of the Spirit,—of its descent through æons, angels, principalities, and powers to crude and imperfect matter, and of its re-ascent, purified, to God. Let it not be supposed that the Gnostics were not Christians. They claimed to be the true Christians. There was as yet no authoritative standard of orthodoxy. But they were what are now termed heretical Christians. Much of their philosophy was, indeed, taken up into Christian thought and speculation, and the new faith gained much in intellectual definiteness and precision by its contact and conflict with the Gnostic schools of thought. But there was much, also, that was in sharp conflict with the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. The antithesis of the two principles, spirit and matter, the connecting series of æons, the co-ordination of Christ with other divine beings to whom he was by some of the sectaries supposed to be subordinate, the whole process of spiritual world-development as against redemption through Christ alone—all this was in decided opposition to the more distinctively Christian view of the world. On these points at any rate, and especially on the points of the exalted dignity and redemptive work of Christ, the New Testament writers, attacked the Gnostic sectaries unsparingly. With a true instinct they saw that the issue was vital to the new faith, and they fought for the exaltation of Christ,

his supremacy over all created beings. The controversy forced the infant faith to fashion and perfect its theology, to emphasise the "true" knowledge as opposed to a "false" knowledge of spiritual things. Turn to any of the non-Pauline writings in the New Testament and you will see how strongly this doctrine of the supremacy of Christ is insisted upon, not merely in the sense of Paul's "heavenly man," but as something higher, diviner than that. The first epistle of Peter, written not by Peter, but by a later writer acquainted with Gnosticism and the Alexandrian philosophy, is one of these earliest anti-Gnostic writings. Turn to its pages and you will see how strongly the writer insists on this doctrine of the exaltation of Christ above all created beings, and on the companion doctrine of redemption through Christ alone. He speaks of Christ as being "on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." He refers to him as "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls," who was "foreknown before the foundation of the world." He calls him Lord, but this does not mean God, for it occurs in a statement that God is Christ's God and Father. Only through Christ, he says, can redemption and eternal glory be won. All this is obviously in opposition to the Gnostic theories of the subordination of Jesus to the angels. The epistle to the Colossians follows the same line with even greater emphasis.

Here again, the central thought is the exaltation of Jesus. It is an important point, for we see here religion in the making—Jesus being gradually exalted into a heavenly being, something more than man, but not yet God. Christ, says the Epistle to the Colossians, reigns not only over men, but over angels. In him "all fulness dwells," and he is "seated on the right hand of God." Still more emphatically, he is "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it was the good pleasure of God that in him should all fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his Cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens." "Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels." It will be seen from this how firmly the New Testament writers insisted, in opposition to the Gnostic sectaries, on the exaltation and

redemptive power of Christ, making him the highest being in creation, far higher than man, yet subordinate to God the Father. This is not a Trinity in Unity, but a dualism—God and Christ.

The epistle to the Hebrews, another anti-Gnostic document, carries the argument into other fields, and attempts to convert both the Gnostics and the Jews with their own philosophical weapons. This epistle is one of the ablest and most cultured of the New Testament writings. It meets the arguments of Gnostic and Judaist with a most persuasive and forceful statement of the spiritual development of humanity through Judaism, up to the time of Jesus. The exaltation of Christ and his superiority over angels, the manifestation of the divine glory in Christ, the sacrifice of Christ, through which a new law is written in the hearts of men, Christ as the mediator of a new covenant to supersede the old—these are the themes and motives of this great work. The writer, familiar as he was with Greek and Jewish thought, makes effective use of the Platonic doctrine that all things originate in the supersensible world, that is, in the ideas or images of things existing in the Divine Mind, and that material or earthly things are but poor and imperfect copies of the Divine. But there is a gradual progress upwards towards the Divine. Thus Judaism was but the imperfect copy of the Divine idea, and prepared the way for the more perfect copy in

Christianity. The Law of Moses was but the "shadow of the good things to come," preparing men for the more perfect Law in Christ, which is written, not on tables of stone, but in the heart. The system of outward sacrifices, the offerings of first-fruits, and bulls, and goats, was again but an imperfect type of the truer sacrifice of Christ and the Christian spirit, which freely offers up itself to do and bear God's all-perfect will. So, too, in the priesthood. The Jewish priesthood was but a crude and imperfect form of mediation, the mediation of self-appointed men, but Christ is the true heavenly type of high-priest, not self-appointed but divinely appointed, not passing away, but existing for ever in the heavens, not offering up material things, but freely offering his own very life and blood. Thus, again, the true offering is the offering of obedience, and the necessity for outward sacrifices passes away. The true Holy of Holies is not the earthly tabernacle, which again is but a poor copy or shadow, but the presence of God as seen in the pure spirit, to which all may have access, not in a particular place, but everywhere.

But for the realisation of this higher life not only knowledge of the true doctrine is necessary, but faith also, faith in the heavenly reality of which our earthly copies are but shadows. And the author goes on to show how, in the lives of the leaders of the Jewish race,—in Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon,

Samuel, David, and the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms and wrought righteousness, this power of faith has been at work. So, too, the Christian, inspired by this faith, "the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen,"—and encompassed by so great a cloud of witnesses, will "lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us," will "press on unto perfection," and "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" that "we may attain unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the spirits of just men made perfect."

In this book we see the combination of the philosopher, the priest, and the prophet. But the spirit of the prophet, the power of spiritual vision that everywhere pervades true poetry and prophecy, dominates the teaching. Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the second Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, Paul, the author of Hebrews, John—these are the great formative influences in Hebrew and Christian thought and religion. Sometimes the Rabbi comes uppermost, sometimes the Priest, but, through all, the Prophet leads the way.

But let us now try to get to the kernel of the whole matter. "What have we to do," you will say, "in this, the twentieth century, with the mystical speculations and allegorisings of the Judaist, and Gnostic, and Christian sectaries of the first century? Is it not

better, in this age of multitudinous interests, to be thrifty of our time and energy, and to bestow our attention on the rich field of modern thought and the problems of modern life?" There is a certain amount of truth in that, but there is something of a fallacy also, for we cannot so fully and thoroughly understand the teachings of modern thought and the requirements of our modern life unless we know something of the course of ethical and religious speculation in past ages, and the strivings of the earnest minds of the past to see and realise the perfect life. For that, the perfect life, or some approximation towards it, is the great problem of every age, of every life, of every community and nation. And the great value of these New Testament writings is that they help us to understand these moral and religious aspirations and endeavours. The Christ-life meant, for the early Christians, first, moral purity, second, redemption from sin, or salvation hereafter. Hence, it both took away the persistent fear of the human heart at the thought of the Eternal, and gave to mankind, at the same time, a conception of a blessed life for which it could hope and strive. Is it any wonder that the fathers and founders of the Church strove to maintain this principle or idea of the exaltation of Christ, and insisted upon it with such strength and emphasis that the human side in Jesus, the side of teacher and prophet, became lost in the God, with all his supposed miraculous and redeem-

ing power? Here, again, we see the meeting-point of Hebrew, Greek, and Christian thought—just as in the Old Testament we saw the meeting-point of Babylonian, Egyptian, Hebrew, and Greek thought—all converging and labouring to produce this idea of the perfect life. How foolish it is for men to suppose that the word of God, the wisdom of the ages, expressing itself through man, is limited to one age, one race, or one literature!

Let us apply this idea, then,—this idea of Christ as the good or perfect life,—to the interpretation of the New Testament writings, and see how luminous they become. Note, on every page of these epistles, how this higher life is insisted upon, mingled, of course, with much mystical and fanciful speculation. "Be ye holy in all manner of living," says the epistle of Peter. "Purify your souls in your obedience to the truth." "If ye should suffer for righteousness sake blessed are ye, for it is better, if the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing." "Gird yourselves with humility to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." "Be sober, be watchful, . . . above all things being fervent in your love among yourselves, for love covereth a multitude of sins." To the women-folks he also gives a very necessary word: "Let not your adorning be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on [fine]

apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." "Finally, be ye all like-minded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tender-hearted, humble-minded; not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing." So, too, in the epistles to the Philippians and the Colossians: "Put away all evil things: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, (Christ) which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him. . . Put on, therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, and the word (thought) of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Substitute for the word 'Christ,' 'the perfect life' or 'the perfect spirit,' and the meaning is the same. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on

these things." "One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," that is, in the perfect life. So, too, in the epistle to the Hebrews: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. . . Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord: looking carefully lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God." "Let love of the brethren continue. Forget not to show love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; them that are evil entreated, as being yourselves also in the body. . . Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with good courage we say: the Lord is my helper; I will not fear: what shall man do unto me? . . . For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come." In all this the spirit of Jesus dominates the thought of the writers, and it is that spirit which we have to try to dissever from the fanciful and mystical speculations which so often mingle with it.

From these brief extracts it will be seen how the

thought of Christ was indissolubly mingled with the ethical ideal of the perfect life. We see, also, the steps of thought which led to the deification of Jesus. The conflict with Judaism produced the ideas of the redemptive power of Christ's blood and the pre-existence of Christ. The conflict with the Gnostic sectaries caused the further exaltation of Christ, as a heavenly being or spirit, into a world-principle of development. In our next discourse, when we come to consider the school of John, we shall see how this process of development was carried a step further and Jesus elevated almost to the rank of Deity.

XIII

THE SCHOOL OF JOHN, AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

John iv. 24.—"God is Spirit; and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

1 John iv. 16.—"God is Love: and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him."

THE fourth Gospel is one of the most fiercely disputed books in the New Testament. It stands quite apart from the other three Gospels. The account it gives of the life and teachings of Jesus is altogether different to that given by the synoptics. By universal consent it represents a more highly developed form of Christianity than those given in the first three Gospels and in Paul's epistles. Many scholars contend that this is owing to the fact that the Gospel was written by John in his extreme old age after he had

passed through the conflicts and controversies of the early apostolic and Pauline times; others contend that it was not written by John at all, but that it belongs to a later time; others again hold that John may have left a fragmentary account of the life and teachings of Jesus which was worked up into its present form by a later and more cultured writer—one acquainted with the Greek and Alexandrian philosophy.

Let us first note the great differences between John's gospel and the first three gospels, and we shall then be better able to understand its peculiar interest and value, and better able also to estimate its authority, and to answer the question as to whether it was composed, either wholly or in part, by the apostle John.

Many of the differences between the first three gospels and the fourth are obvious to the most superficial reader. The whole plan of the 'life' is different. In John, the ministry of Jesus extends over three years; in the first three gospels it is confined to fifteen months. In John, the chief incidents in the public life of Jesus are grouped in and around Jerusalem: in the first three gospels the ministry of Jesus is confined almost wholly to Galilee, and he visits Jerusalem only to meet his death there. The first three gospels, again, are full of homely sayings, and beautiful parables, and much teaching about the 'Kingdom of God'—a phrase which was often on the lips of Jesus; the fourth gospel does not

contain a single parable, and the great phrase, 'the Kingdom of God,' occurs only twice in it. The first three gospels give an artless and simple account of the life of a man, miraculously born; the fourth gospel says not a word about the miraculous birth, but it speaks of the pre-existence of Christ in heaven, and is full of beautiful mystic discourses, of most of which the synoptic gospels say not a word. The very language of Jesus, in the fourth gospel, is pitched in a different strain, entirely unsuited to the understanding of simple Galilean peasants and fishermen. It is as though a Bampton lecturer should address one of his learned theological discourses to a body of humble Primitive Methodists or a gathering of the Salvation Army.

Behind this very different treatment of the subject of his biography there must have been some motive existing in the mind of the writer of the fourth Gospel, and it is not difficult to discover the motive. Indeed, he tells us himself that "these things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that, believing, ye may have life in his name." The motive, then, is avowedly dogmatic and theological. The book was written with a set purpose. We have here not the actual words of Jesus, but some of the teachings of Jesus *with a theological bias*. Let us see how the writer selects his material and interprets his Master in such a way as to suit his purpose and his bias.

One of the strongest indications of this bias is the way in which the author of the fourth gospel presents his theory of the divine personality in Jesus. In the first three gospels we are told that Jesus was not proclaimed as Messiah until near the end of his ministry, and even then he is said to have charged his disciples strictly "that they should tell no man that he was the Christ." But in fourth Gospel he is proclaimed as the Christ in the very first chapter, and the whole of the 'life' is so arranged as to emphasise and confirm this view. For example, the account of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is omitted,—for why should the Messiah, the heaven-sent one, be baptized by an earthly servant! The story of the Temptation is also omitted by John—for how could a divine person be tempted! The agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and the story of the carrying of the Cross by Simon of Cyrene are also omitted—they are too human—but we are told instead that on his arrest Jesus uttered the words "I am he," and immediately, as though recognising his supernatural character, the whole band of soldiers fell to the ground—an incident of which the other gospels say not a word. The birth stories of Matthew and Luke are omitted also, and instead, Jesus is said to have had a pre-existence in heaven, as the Logos—the Eternal Word or Thought of God.

But it is in his additions as well as in his omissions

that the author of John shows his motive and his theological bias, and it is in these additions that he betrays the fact that he was not an eye-witness of the events he records. He alone records the incidents of the meeting with the woman of Samaria and with Nicodemus, and reports two long conversations as though they were the very words of Jesus. But the meeting with Nicodemus was by night, as Nicodemus, being "a ruler of the Jews," evidently did not wish his visit to be publicly spoken about. It is exceedingly unlikely, therefore, that any third party was present, or, if present, that any report of the words of Jesus would be taken down at the time. These speeches, containing very important doctrines, are not even mentioned by the writers of the first three gospels, they are entirely different in style and matter to the homely sayings and teachings of Jesus, but they are all in the style of the writer of the fourth gospel, and full of his peculiar mysticism. The same may be said of all the speeches in the fourth gospel: not a single parable is there—though Mark tells us that "without a parable spake he not unto them"—but, in both style and teaching, they are all in the manner of this great unknown writer, the head of the school of John. The brief, pointed sayings, the parables, the frequent teachings as to the "Kingdom of God," are all missing, but, instead, we have long mystical discourses, and the well-known allegories in which Jesus

is represented as the Bread of Life, the Door, and the Vine. Finally, the fourth gospel gives a date for the crucifixion different to that given by the first three gospels—the latter stating that this great event took place on the date of the Passover, that is, the fifteenth day of the Jewish month, Nisan, while the author of the fourth gospel tells us that it took place on the day of "the Preparation of the Passover," that is, the day before. It is difficult to believe that so serious a mistake about so important an event could have been made by a personal disciple of Jesus.

From all this, and from the further fact that John, as we learn from the Gospels and *Acts*, was an unlearned fisherman of a somewhat narrow type of mind,[1] it is hard to believe that this highly mystical and speculative treatise was written by the humble disciple whose name it bears. But what does it matter, you may ask, whether it was written by John or not? It matters this,—that it is in this fourth Gospel that Jesus is made to make those large claims for himself as to his pre-existence, his super-human relationship to God, his power to remit sin and to confer eternal life on believers in him. If then, this Gospel is not the personal testimony of a disciple of Jesus, but is simply an interpretation of the teachings of Jesus by a philosophic Christian of the beginning of the second century who puts his

[1] See Acts iv. 13; Mark ix. 38; Luke ix. 55.

own words into the mouth of Jesus, we see how these extravagant claims arose,—they were not made *by* Jesus, but *for* Jesus, by a second century theologian, and attributed by him to the Master. It is sometimes said that if Jesus was not what he professed to be he was an impostor. That does not follow. He may have been genuinely mistaken, as many religious leaders have been. But in any case we see that these claims that are made for him in the fourth Gospel were not made by him, but were attributed to him by a follower whose mind was steeped in mysticism.

Does it follow, then, that the fourth Gospel, deprived of the authority of personal testimony, is of no value? Not by any means. In some respects it is the most valuable of all the Gospels. It gives us an interpretation of the life and teaching of Jesus by a mind of wide culture, rich imagination, and deep spiritual insight. Here, in this Gospel, we see most clearly the meeting-point of Greek and Christian thought. We see early Christianity transformed into a system of spiritual truths by which our life is tried and judged, not at a far distant judgment-day to the accompaniments of material splendour, but at every moment of life with every thought we think and every act we do. The true knowledge, the knowledge of the Light of the World, the Source of truth, purity, goodness, love, whence

perfect life radiates as from a sun—this is the theme of this great gospel. Those who exist outside the light walk in darkness. Those who follow it or welcome it into their souls partake of the Bread of Life, are branches of the true Vine bearing good fruit, sheep of the Good Shepherd, and stand ever in the presence of the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who will "guide them into all the truth."

Let us see whence the author of this Gospel gets the fundamental idea underlying this great theme, and how he makes use of it. Some five hundred years before Christ, when polytheism was a popular belief and Gods were supposed to haunt every grove and stream, Heraclitus, the Greek thinker, laid down the doctrine that all the multitudinous changes and activities of the universe are governed by a rational order of sequences, in other words, by a universal Law. To this Law he gave the name which is translated "Word" in the Gospel of John—Logos. It really means the universal Thought or Reason. "In the beginning was the Thought and the Thought was with God, and the Thought was God." Succeeding thinkers amplified this idea of a universal Mind, and Plato, in particular, grafted on to it his theory of ideas, according to which the contents of the universal Thought or Mind are unfolded or manifested in the multitudinous objects of the material world—the dim, blurred, imperfect manifestations of the

Divine idea. The idea always precedes the fact or object. In a great picture, a great poem, a great piece of music, a great cathedral, every detail, every word, every note, every stone, curve, dome, spire, and ornament, is subordinated to the supreme controlling thought of the artist—the creative mind. So with the controlling Mind of the universe. The idea precedes the fact. But the fact—the object—being conditioned by its crude material elements and surroundings, is but a dim and blurred copy of the Perfect Idea. Now the educated and philosophic Jew, especially the Jew of the Alexandrian schools, when he was brought into contract with this Greek philosophy, saw that there was truth in it, and he wedded this idea of an immanent God to his own idea of a transcendent God who ruled the universe from outside. Thus he conceived the uttered Thought or Word as *apart of* but *apart from* God, just as we speak of our own thoughts as having a distinct existence and influence outside us. The material universe thus became to his mind the uttered Word or manifested Thought of God, and the chasm between Matter and Spirit was bridged. But the universal Mind does not exist alone in a material world of its own creation. The 'Word' rises to its highest manifestation on earth in the responsive mind or spirit of man, which interprets the all-embracing Word or Thought in accordance with its

own power of imagination and reason. Here there are degrees, and the most perfect mind and life is the highest manifestation of the Spirit—the Word or Thought made flesh.

Now the Christian mystic and philosopher who wrote the fourth Gospel simply adapted these great ideas to his conception of the life and personality of Jesus. Not only the wild-flowers at our feet and the stars in the firmament above are the visible expression of the Eternal Thought or Word of God, but, above all, the responsive mind of man. In the earlier teachers and prophets it had shone with flickering and temporary light, and had taken form as a rigid, ceremonial Law, but as the thought of the Master sank into his heart this great disciple thought that he discerned not the temporary teaching of a given age, but the very "Light of the World,"—that Light which, revealing itself to the responsive spirit of man, unveiled the glories of the Infinite Love, and disclosed the holiness, the tenderness, the pity, the sympathy, the compassion which is forever calling humanity to the higher realms of the Spirit. Read the fourth Gospel in the light of this Platonic philosophy and how clear its meaning becomes. "In the beginning was the Word, the Thought . . . . all things were made by Thought . . . and the Thought became flesh, and dwelt among us full of grace and truth." The disciple does not see that he is really

making a plea for the recognition of the Divine in all men—he is so filled with his idea of the exaltation of the Master as the most perfect image or manifestation of the Divine idea. "He came forth from the Father and returned to the Father, the Infinite and Eternal Spirit." He came forth (was born) from that spiritual, that ideal realm, "not to do his own will but the will of him that sent him." He is in the Father, the Thought, and the Thought is in him, but the Infinite Thought, "the Father, is greater than I." "As the Father, the Thought, gave me commandment, even so I do." "I go back to the Father and ye behold me no more . . . Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth." Read in this light, the light of historical thought, the whole of John's Gospel becomes understandable. It applies Plato's doctrine of ideas to the personality and teachings of Jesus, making Jesus himself the expositor; and when we remember that from these Greek and Alexandrian ideas there sprang many of the metaphysical creeds and doctrines of the Church we can see how great an influence Plato and his followers have had in fashioning Christian theology. We again see the meeting-point of the thought of different religions and civilizations.

But now let us see what splendid ethical use the author of the Gospel of John makes of this amalgama-

tion of Platonic idealism with the teachings of Jesus, how he lifts that simple, early Christianity out of the bonds of a hard and narrow Judaism and makes it a lofty, spiritual religion. "God is Spirit," (Thought), he finely says, "and they that worship him, must worship in spirit and truth." His Master, Jesus, is the highest and most perfect representative, or rather, manifestation, of this Spirit. He is the Divine Idea, the Word or Thought, made flesh. He seeks to bring the will of the Father, the parent Thought, into the hearts and lives of men,—to bring down the spiritual kingdom of Heaven to earth. But this Will, this higher kingdom, men will not receive,—they prefer the old ways of use and wont, they desire to have an easy religion of outward ceremonial which will give them as little trouble as possible and yet make them "safe" with God. And so, whoever dares to preach that higher kingdom and the life it requires, must be prepared to receive the hatred of the world, to be put out of the synagogues, and to be persecuted in the name of God even unto death. But this is the fate of the idealist; it is the fate of all men who strive to introduce new principles into human life; it was the fate of Jesus himself. But it is a fate which the idealist must perforce accept. "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before it hated you," because, that is, the higher spiritual principle is from above, and the world cannot understand it. "If

a man love me he will keep my word [this higher principle of the spirit] and do the things which I say. Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. This is my commandment, that ye love one another even as I have loved you," for this spirit is as "a well of living water," the "bread of Life," the fruit of the "true vine." Then, in that great epistle of John, which is certainly from the same school if not by the same writer as the unknown author of the fourth gospel, the mystical teaching is carried to its splendid practical application and conclusion. The highest manifestation of the Divine Thought, or Spirit, is Love. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light. He that hateth his brother is in the darkness. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer [in his heart.] . . . Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God. Let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. He that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." That is, the Moral Law, the ethical and religious principle of Life, is summed up in the word Love, and though a man may seem to be an unbeliever, if he has love in his heart and in his life, he is a true servant of the Spirit.

These are the sublime ideas of the author of the fourth gospel. If we want to get near to the spirit of Jesus it is to this unknown writer that we must go,—this great idealist and mystic who strove to convert Christianity into a spiritual religion. God is Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, of Light, of Gentleness, of Love,—the Spirit of Truth or Goodness, the Infinite Thought or breath, which, on earth, exists in its highest form in man, which is "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world," the Divine image of life as it "ought to be," the spirit which knows no obstacle between itself and its ideal save unfaithfulness to the right, the spirit which is unclouded by disappointment, unwearied by conflict, untroubled by defeat, but which ever mounts and mounts towards higher altitudes of thought and life. What does it matter to us that he uses words and phrases which belong to a past age, that he uses the language of a theology and a philosophy which were peculiar to the circumstances of his time? The great thing for us is his devotion to his beautiful ideal—the Spirit of Truth as embodied, for him, in the person of Jesus—a devotion which breathes out of every line, manifesting itself in the supreme principle of Love. That is the great lesson for all of us. We too, if our lives are to be worth anything, have got to be filled with the same spirit, the spirit which will charge our lives with a great love for something higher and wider than our-

selves, whether we call it Truth, the Ideal, Humanity, or God. This is what the unknown writer who gave his teachings to the world under the name of the disciple whom Jesus loved teaches us—devotion to the spirit of the Master, which, for him, is the visible manifestation of the Spirit of Truth, of God. He presents to us some of the fairest flowers of that higher kingdom, the Spirit of which, entering into our hearts, hungers after the perfect good, and which is ever re-shaping and re-constructing not only our own life, but the ever-growing life of humanity.

And yet—and yet — there is something missing even in this fourth gospel—the spirit of the Master himself. The author of the fourth gospel gives us perhaps the finest presentment and interpretation of the life and teachings of Jesus, but it is not Jesus himself. It is Jesus as viewed from the mystic, the contemplative, the philosophic standpoint. There are many passages in the gospel which Jesus could never have uttered, and some of the sayings are hard, harsh, bitter, and pessimistic. "No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him." There is a kind of fatalism there. "Salvation is from the Jews,"—Jesus could never be guilty of such narrow Pharisaism. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do"—such indiscriminate condemnation is not in the spirit of him who said "Love your enemies." And the

large number of passages in which Jesus is said to separate himself from "the world," and even in his last prayer is made to say "I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me"—all these betray an exclusiveness and a pessimism which is out of keeping with the spirit of Jesus. It is the exclusiveness and the pessimism of the mystic who follows the contemplative life. Jesus never separated himself from "the world." For the lowliest and the most sinful the way of return was always open. He even took special pains to identify himself with the sinner where sin seemed to be caused by weakness of will rather than hardness of heart, or where there seemed to be the least hope of repentance. So far from separating himself from the world in hopeless pessimism he set himself to reform the world. The author of John makes Jesus say: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," but Jesus himself said: There is a greater love still, for I lay down my life for my enemies.—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The special danger of the life inculcated by this gospel is a danger which besets many of us—the danger of the artistic, the mystic, the contemplative life, which, in its pursuit of beauty, and in weariness and disgust of ugliness, looks upon the world as blind of vision and hard of heart, and so separates itself

from it in scorn, saying, "Ye are of your father the devil." The highest religion says not so, but sets itself to give sight to the blind, pity to the unfeeling, and to convert even the devil himself.

And so we see that even the teaching of this most spiritual of the Gospels needs to be corrected by the spirit of Jesus himself. At his best, indeed, the author of John is animated by the spirit of Jesus, a union which gives rise to the great saying: "God is Love, and he that abideth in Love abideth in God, and God abideth in him."

In our next discourse we shall see how the New Testament writers, in the later books, strove to fix the Christian ideal, and to establish permanent institutions for Christian teaching and worship.

XIV

TENDENCIES TOWARDS ECCLESIASTICISM IN THE LATER EPISTLES.

Mark x. 43, 44.—"Whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all."

1. Peter v. 2, 3.—"Tend the flock of God which is among you not of constraint, but willingly; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock."

THE question is often asked—what form of Church, or Church government, should we support? Presbyterianism, that is, government by presbyteries through elected officers? Episcopalianism, that is, government by ordained and appointed bishops or ecclesiastics? Or Congregationalism, that is, self-government by each religious community or congregation? And the supporters of these various forms of Church

Government all appeal, with some show of reason, to the New Testament, in support of their views. As a matter of fact, the New Testament writers did not trouble themselves about any of these questions. Their religion was in the making, and they adopted those forms of church organisation and church discipline which the circumstances of the time and the needs of the hour forced upon them. Their first great need was unity—unity against the forces of Judaism, of Paganism, of heathenism, and unity against their own divisions and differences within. For we must remember that there were probably more sects in early Christian times than there are to-day. Do not for a moment suppose that the Christian Church of the second century was a happy community of believers all of one mind. Far from it. There were the Jewish Christians who looked upon Jesus as a purely Jewish Messiah; there were the Paulinists, who regarded him as a kind of heavenly being, and whose theology, as we have seen, was quite different from that of the older apostles; there were the followers of the author of the fourth gospel, who looked upon Jesus as the incarnation of the Divine Reason, the Thought made flesh; there were the millenarians, who looked for the return of Jesus in clouds of glory at any moment, and some of whom refused to recognise the institution of marriage or to hold property in view of the great day; there were the Docetists

who held that Christ's earthly body was a mere appearance or phantasm; there were the numerous gnostic sects, each with its peculiar interpretation of Christ's life and personality. All sorts of questions had to be decided. Was Jesus human, or superhuman? If he had two natures had he two wills? If he was God how could he die on the Cross? If he was the Son of God how could he be co-eternal with the Father? All these, and a hundred other questions of doctrine and discipline, had to be decided. Some of these controversies lasted for generations, and were very bitter. Families and friends were divided over the question as to whether "the Son was subordinate to the Father," and some of the fathers of the Church descended to the most vulgar personal abuse, Tertullian denouncing Marcion, one of the Gnostic leaders, as "fouler than any Scythian, more gypsy-roving than the Sarmatian, more inhuman than the Massagete, more audacious than an Amazon, darker than the cloud of Pontus, colder than its winter, more brittle than its ice, more deceitful than the Ister."

But long before these questions came to be definitely decided the later New Testament writers felt that some authoritative body was necessary for the ordering of public worship, the maintenance of discipline, and the settlement of disputed points in teaching and doctrine. No unity was possible unless some authoritative body could be found to define what was

to be regarded as the true Christian doctrine. What was that body? The answer was—the Church, or the highest officers in the Church. Hence, in the epistle to the Ephesians, which is probably of composite authorship, and which is certainly non-Pauline in parts, the Church idea and the unity of the Church is strongly emphasised. The Church is called the "body of Christ," and all the members are to minister "unto the building up of the body of Christ" until "all attain unto the unity of the faith," that they may no longer be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine." But it is in the Pastoral epistles—those to Timothy and Titus—which come still later, that we find the most explicit practical instructions laid down for the purpose of securing this unity. The growth of doctrine is very perceptible. While Paul had declared that the one and only immovable foundation of Christian truth was Jesus Christ,[1] later writers enlarge upon this, saying that the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the corner-stone, form the foundation;[2] but the Pastoral epistles, which come long after Paul, put the Church itself, as the interpreter of Christ, in the position of supremacy.[3] Here, then, we are in a different atmosphere. In these epistles we are no longer amid metaphysical argu-

[1] 1 Corinth. iii. 11.
[2] Esphesians, ii. 20.
[3] 1 Tim. iii. 15.

ments and controversies about the nature and office of Christ, but we have, instead, explicit instructions for the conduct of the Church. This is the mark of a late period, and these epistles are therefore amongst the latest of New Testament writings. The Church is feeling its way to organised life. The true and healthful doctrine is taken for granted. It is no longer assumed to be a matter of dispute. It is a sacred deposit in the keeping of the elders, presbyters, or bishops,[1] all these words, at that time, being applied to the same persons. This placing of "sound doctrine" in the keeping of the elders or bishops is very significant; it shows that the later New Testament writers had, by experience and natural development, hit upon the method of dealing with the dangers of heresy and schism—the method of authority, which became perfected in the Roman Catholic Church. We have here the germs, but only the germs, of Roman Catholicism. The early fathers felt that the Church, at all costs, must preserve its unity.

Another mark of these later books is the stress they lay upon organization and administration. In the earliest period the chief officers and teachers were men who had certain gifts conferred upon them by the Holy Spirit, that is, they were virtually self-appointed

[1] The terms 'bishop,' 'presbyter,' and 'deacon,' were in use ong before Christianity in the civil and religious societies of the Levant.

and exercised their functions because of their enthusiasm, spiritual fervour, or natural fitness. But here, in this later period, the authority they exercise is obviously conferred by appointment or election. Much advice and instruction is given as to the kind of qualities which are needed in an elder or bishop. He is to be a pattern to them that believe, in manner of life, in love, in faith, and in purity; apt to teach; to apply himself to reading, exhortation, and teaching; to take heed to himself and to his doctrine; to consider the needs and the moral worthiness of the widows and orphans who make application to the common fund; and he and his fellow-elders or presbyters are to supervise the management of the funds and the discipline of the Church. In their own lives they are to be without reproach, temperate, sober-minded, and orderly; gentle, not contentious, not lovers of money, and knowing well how to rule their own homes. In all this we see how the early Church, even in New Testament times, was labouring after unity. The type of teaching is to a certain extent fixed, and all who will not accept it are stigmatised as heretics and lovers of false doctrine.

It is always interesting to trace the growth and development of what science calls the rudimentary forms of life, and here, in these later epistles of the New Testament, we see the rudimentary forms, or rather, a tendency towards the rudimentary forms of

the later Catholic Church, for we have hardly, as yet, got beyond a very simple differentiation of function. Deacons are a strictly subordinate body, but elders, presbyters, and bishops are spoken of indiscriminately as one and the same type of official and body of men; and there are many bishops, i.e., rulers, in one Church. But if we take one step farther, into the first generation after the New Testament period, we find the tendencies towards greater differentiation of function, and the organisation of a Catholic Church, much more clearly marked. In the epistles of Ignatius, or pseudo-Ignatius, for example, which come just outside the New Testament period, the sacredness of the Church and the primacy of the bishop in the Church, even above the presbyters, is strongly insisted upon. The bishop, says this early writer, stands in the same relation to the presbyters as does God or Christ to the apostles. "All who belong to God and Christ," he says, "hold the faith with the bishop, and also all those who penitently return to unity with the Church, in order to live in conformity with Jesus Christ, will belong to God. But he who follows a schismatic does not inherit the Kingdom of God; if any one walks in a strange doctrine he has no part in Christ's suffering." [1] Note how the "Christian life" is defined, not as following Christ, but as following the Church, the Church being placed first. Only he, the

(1) Quoted by Pfleiderer in his *Paulinism*, vol. ii. p. 224.

writer goes on, only he who is not separated from the God of Jesus Christ, and from the bishop, and from the ordinances of the apostles, will remain unaffected by the poison of heresy; only he who is within the altar is pure. That is, the conscience is virtually placed in subordination to the Church. Even purely human affairs, such as marriage, are to receive the authorisation of the bishop. "As the Lord does nothing, either by himself or with the apostles, without the Father, with whom he is one, so also do ye nothing without the bishop and the presbyters." The voice of the bishop is supreme, and with him lies the ordering and direction of public worship,—"no one shall perform anything connected with the Church without the bishop."[1] Thus, as Pfleiderer says, according to the pseudo-Ignatian epistles, "Unity with the bishops is unity with God and Christ; separation from the bishop is departure from God and Christ, leads to the loss of the Kingdom of God, is, in short, the service of the devil! The Church, with its hierarchical organisation, steps in between God and man, determines man's relation to God, passes judgment regarding blessedness and the contrary, and rules over the entire moral life."[2]

We are a long way here from the simple commands of Jesus: "Follow me;" "All things whatsoever ye

(1) Ibid. p. 225.
(2) Ibid. p. 226.

would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them." We are a long way also from the simplicity of the first generation of Christians, when one fellow-believer baptized another even by the wayside.[1] On the other hand, we are also a long way from the elaborate creeds and ritual of the Roman Catholic Church, when the clergy became a separate caste, wearing a special attire, assuming sacred and even miraculous functions; when no layman was permitted to perform any rite; when creeds which Jesus had never heard of were imposed upon the human conscience; when, as Mosheim says, "the bishops assumed, in many places, a princely authority. . . appropriated to their evangelical function the splendid ensigns of temporal majesty; and a throne, surrounded with ministers, exalted above his equals the servant of the meek and humble Jesus;" when, in short, the Church had organised itself into a vast hierarchy of acolytes, deacons, priests, canons, bishops, archbishops, cardinals and pope, and claimed to preside over every province of human life. But between these two periods we see the principle of development at work; we see the germs of great creeds and great institutions taking upon themselves shape and form; in a word, we see religion, or forms of religion, in the making.

But let us turn once more to these Pastoral

(1) Acts viii. 38.

epistles and see how the thought and the spirit of Jesus in its ethical aspect, is still at work, dominating the growing life of the infant Church. It is true that the moral teaching in these epistles is not so pure and noble as that in the Gospels and the great epistles of Paul,—there is too much insistence upon obedience and subjection to rulers and authorities, rather than the cultivation of the inner life and conscience, and obedience to it as the supreme authority. The tone and teaching throughout are those of a later generation than that of Paul—a generation in which the infant Church has formulated a body of practical teaching which it is striving to enforce upon the lives of the superstitious and uninstructed masses of heathen and idolatrous peoples, from whom it often recruited its followers. But the teaching, I say, bears the impress of the spirit of Jesus: "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on the life eternal . . . Godliness with contentment is great gain: for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content. But they that desire to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which

some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows,"—a passage reminding us of Wordsworth's plea for "plain living and high thinking" and his teaching—

> "That virtue and the faculties within
> Are vital,—and that riches are akin
> To fear, to change, to cowardice, and death!"

Again—"the labourer is worthy of his hire." "To the pure all things are pure." And the women-folks are again admonished that they should "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shame-fastness and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment; but (which becometh women professing godliness) through good works."

There is a curious phrase in the epistle to Titus which speaks of Jesus Christ as "our great God and Saviour,"[1] curious because—assuming this rendering to be correct—this is the only place in the New Testament in which Jesus is spoken of as God, for the word *Lord*, which is so often used as synonymous with God in our own day, had no such meaning in ancient times. In these same Pastoral epistles, indeed, Jesus is distinctly spoken of as "himself man,"[2] while God is spoken of as "our Saviour," and

[1] Some authorities render the passage "the great God and our Saviour,"—a totally different meaning.

[2] 1 Tim. ii. 5.

"our Father," and Christ Jesus as "our hope," the chief place being always given to God the Father, "eternal, incorruptible, invisible, the only God."[1] All this is interesting as showing that the doctrine of the Trinity had not yet taken definite shape, did not do so indeed until long afterwards, and was not accepted as orthodox until some three hundred years after the time of Jesus.

But was not all this development of doctrine and organisation necessary? it may be asked. Christianity could hardly remain the simple religion of its founder. New times, new circumstances, multitudes of new adherents of different races and nations — all these would require new forms of administration and organisation to weld the various churches into something like unity. The struggle with Paganism and the Roman Empire compelled unity. And how, indeed, could unity be possible without some presiding and controlling authority? All this is quite true. But the great mistake that was made (if one is not to shut one's self up to a doctrine of fatalism in interpreting history)—the great mistake that was made was the attempt to stamp all these changing institutions, modes of organisation, and forms of faith, with the hall-mark of Divinity, and to claim that they were begotten out of high heaven. That is the besetting sin of

[1] 1 Tim. i. 17.

ecclesiasticism. It arrogates to itself an authority which, claiming to be superhuman or God-given, leads it to set itself above human criticism, and to put bonds and bars to the development of the human mind. Falling back, as it is bound to fall back in the last resort, upon force, it annuls the rights of the highest God-given thing in this world—the individual conscience, and drenches large portions of the earth with blood, forgetting its Gospel and its God of Love. This is exactly what happened in the development of Christianity, or rather, of ecclesiasticism. It was not merely that the Church, with its episcopal organisation, claimed to be the institution best suited to the needs of the time; its great defect was that it rested its claims on false pretensions to a Divine commission, by which it could mediate between man and God, and hold the keys of heaven and hell. The teaching of Jesus was the very reverse of this: "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister: and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all."

What then, is the true method of development, and how can the corporate conscience enforce its decisions in face of a wide diversity of beliefs? That

is too great a question to attempt to answer at the end of a discourse, but this much may be said: that in the region of speculative opinion, thought, and the expression of thought, should be absolutely free. It is better even that ancient superstitions, where they do not interfere with the rights of life, should be allowed to die a natural death than that they should be stamped out by force. To attempt to define the Infinite in words or creeds is puerile. For in this region of speculative opinion, especially in relation to the Infinite and the Eternal, who can be absolutely certain? Has the universe nothing more to reveal? Have not our minds to be continually adapted to our widening knowledge? Have not the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century altered our conceptions of Nature and of God? Surely the tendency of events is against the certain people!

But in the region of practical opinion, or of conduct, the corporate conscience can find room for its activities in voluntary associations and in the State. If the laws and decrees of the State are unjust, the individual can agitate against them; if they are inadequate to the living of the highest kind of life, he can try to improve and strengthen them. Here, thought and the expression of thought, is free. The State claims no divine or superhuman authority. The individual need fear no excommunication—no thunderbolt of heaven, no terrors of hell. Both the

individual and the corporate conscience have room and opportunity for development.

So it should be on the inner side of religion. Superhuman or divine claims to authority must be withdrawn. All creeds and doctrines, save the Eternal Verities, should be regarded as working hypotheses, fingerposts on the road to Eternity, but liable to revision in accordance with widening knowledge. By their fruits we shall know them. Opinion must win its way by the depth of feeling and fulness of knowledge which lie behind it. Even those who seem to deny God in words, so long as they have a sense of right, so long as they have charity, so long as they have love, have hold of those eternal principles which are the very word, thought, or being of God. For "God is Love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." In one word, ecclesiasticism, churches, creeds, must be animated and transformed by the spirit of the Master. They must become the servants, not the masters, of man. They must make themselves receptive of all the fuller knowledge and experience which are continually streaming in upon the human mind, for creeds and institutions are but the forms which wane and pass, while the spirit of religion ever remains to stimulate and revivify our life.

XV

THE RELATION OF NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS TO MODERN THOUGHT AND LIFE

Eccles. iii. 11.—"He hath made everything beautiful in its time: also he hath set eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end."

We have seen, in this series of discourses, how closely related is the literature of the New Testament to the deepest and gravest thoughts of man, to the problems of life and destiny which for ever vex and perplex his soul. God, the soul, immortality, the relation of man to man—these questions, and the grave and intense thinking to which they give birth, shine out on almost every page of this great literature. It will be worth our while to try to separate the essential from the accidental in all this, to discern old truths under the new phraseology to which Chris-

tianity gave rise, and to connect what is true and enduring with what is best in the thought of our own time.

Let us first, however, tabulate some of the after-growths to which the new religion gave rise, and with which we may well dispense. The supposed miraculous birth of Jesus and the legends connected with it; the bodily resurrection of Jesus; the pre-existence of Jesus; the existence of demons; the teaching as to the second coming of the Messiah in clouds of glory; the doctrine of eternal perdition; the substitutionary theory of atonement; the conception of heaven and hell as material abodes of the spirit; the doctrine of election and predestination,—all these we may well allow to die. I have great respect for those who still cling to these beliefs. But I must be true to my own convictions—I can do no other.

We may put aside, also, as non-essential, though interesting and edifying, the various forms into which early Christian thought was cast. The conception of "the kingdom" as something immediately possible; of the Church as "the body of Christ;" and the various forms of neo-Platonic speculation which were cast in Jewish and Christian moulds, and which sought for heavenly "types" in the previous history of the Jewish people—as in the epistle to the Hebrews—all these were so obviously the outcome of the religious and philosophic controversies of the time

that I need not dwell upon them just now. They had their value, as we shall see.

Let us pass on, then, to the essentials, which gave rise to all these things. God ; the soul ; the relation of man to man ; and the possible after-life of the soul. It will be at once obvious that our interpretation of these great words and phrases will depend on the largeness or the smallness, the depth or the narrowness, of the conception we have of them. It is because the New Testament literature has helped to enlarge and deepen man's conception of these things that it has been of such immense value in the religious education of the race.

(1) Let us take the first of these great words—God—and compare the thought of that day with the thought of our own. Here, a very striking spiritual phenomenon is to be noted. Jesus, in whom the moral and religious consciousness strongly predominated over the intellectual, reposed with confidence on the thought of God as a loving father. Only once, when he uttered his despairing and agonising cry : "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," did this thought fail him, to be succeeded almost immediately by a renewal of faith,—"Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." (I assume here—a large assumption perhaps—the accuracy of the record, but, whether accurate or not, this does not affect my argument). But when Jesus passed away

his followers almost unconsciously swerved from this high confidence. They still thought of God as supreme, as Father, but their thought of him was less prominent in their minds than it was in the mind of Jesus. As time went on this tendency became even more pronounced, until the thought of Christ, in the moral and religious consciousness, usurped the thought of God. It was as though the mind of man, unable to grasp the thought of God as Spirit, or unable to see him in his moral and affectional aspects, fell back upon the memory and the image of Jesus, whose gracious words still fell like music upon mind and heart. Now, much the same phenomenon may be seen in our own time. It is admirably illustrated in a saying which was current in Oxford a few years ago, a saying which satirically defined the attitude of the High Church party. "There is no God," the saying ran, "there is no God, and Jesus is his prophet." That is, men, unable to conceive of God, the Infinite Spirit of the universe, fall back on their highest ideal of humanity, as actualised in history, and worship that as God. So Jesus, a Unitarian above all men, ultimately became worshipped as God. It was not that the religious consciousness in men denied God, the Spirit, but that it laid the emphasis elsewhere,—and emphasis, in religion as in other matters, is the all-important thing.

But there was, and is, a reason for this emphasis

on the human-God, and if we can succeed in tracing that reason, we shall at once get nearer to the heart of the religious problem, and perceive more clearly the relation of the New Testament literature to the thought of our own time. What is that reason? It is this—that the intellectual consciousness of man cannot reconcile the facts of life and the order of the world with its moral and religious aspirations. To the intellectual consciousness the facts of life are simply crushing in their mystery and apparent unintelligibility. Here, as Keats says—

> "But to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs."

But the moral and religious consciousness does not trouble itself about the problem. It sees the facts, the evils, the pain and misery, and it offers itself as a sacrifice in mitigation of them, crying, not, 'I believe,' but 'I love.' So Jesus, in whom the moral and religious consciousness was surely most highly developed, offered himself in the intensity of his love, as a sacrifice on the altar of the world, and, while offering himself, still called God—'Father.' He saw the great good of life, the heights and depths and beauty of love, and summed up his gratitude and thanksgiving for all this in the word—'Father.' He did not think critically of the other and darker side of things except as something to be removed. Whether he ever thought of evil in a philosophic way as due to something in

the primordial nature of things which limited the power of God, is a question which need not detain us. The problem did not trouble him—his moral and religious consciousness so entirely predominated over every other side of his nature.

But there are other men, represented by, say, Lucretius and Marcus Aurelius amongst the ancients, and Mill, Spencer, and Arthur Hugh Clough amongst the moderns, in whom the moral and religious consciousness is more equally balanced with the intellectual consciousness. To them, the night side of things presents itself with most persistent questioning. They are equally strenuous with devout men, though in a different kind of way, in trying to relieve or mitigate its evils. But the activity of their intellectual consciousness changes the form of their devotion and their worship. The word 'Father' seems to them to imply too intimate an acquaintance with the ways of the Spirit, and indeed, to them—it falls short of a full expression of the facts of life. For, as applied to God, it is usually meant to express almighty power and infinite goodness. But the facts of life, as we know them, cannot be reconciled with almighty power and infinite goodness. It is no use saying that even God cannot make two and two into five, or rule by law and no law at the same time. These are abstract impossibilities which no one expects even God to be able to perform. But what men, especially those of a critical and philo-

sophic turn, do expect is: that absolute and infinite goodness should mete out exact justice to every living soul, nay, every living thing. The word 'Father' implies that. It is not an abstract impossibility, or, if it is, the world is essentially a wrong world and God's power woefully limited. This ideal of perfect justice is, at any rate, what we all strive after in our earthly life. Every true father tries to realise it in the home. We do not try to make two and two into five, but we do strive after this ideal of perfect justice. The former is an abstract impossibility, the latter is not, or at least, we feel that it ought not to be. Yet this ideal of perfect justice is thwarted and flouted every day of our lives, not only by man—which is understandable on the hypothesis of the freedom of the will—but by great Nature, the handmaid of God, herself. The ways of God, in Nature, and the ways of our human fatherhood, are at issue. We strive to mete out justice, nay, more than justice, to our children, to 'temper the wind to the shorn lamb.' God does not—or cannot. That is why, to a certain order of devout minds, the term 'Spirit' is preferable to the term 'Father,' not because this order of mind is less religious, but because it is penetrated with a deeper sense of the mystery of things; for, while 'Spirit' implies mystery, the word 'Father' implies intimate acquaintance.

Here, then, we come to the point both of connec-

tion and departure with New Testament thought. The early Christians, unable to grasp the conception of God *as Spirit*, unconsciously fell back more and more on the thought of Christ—the human-God.[1] To them he became the Revealer, the Mediator, the Inspirer of all their endeavours. We can trace the movement of thought, the exaltation of Jesus into something more than man, from Paul to the author of *Hebrews*, from *Hebrews* to the author of *John* onwards. But to the class of mind to which I have alluded,—the critical, but devout Agnostics,—the thought of Jesus, a human being, as God, is simply outside the bounds of possibility, though, indeed, Jesus may be as great an inspiration to them as to many who call him God. What, then, is the source and ground of their moral and religious life? Not God the Almighty Father—that implies too much, and, in their view, cannot be reconciled with the facts of life—but God the Spirit, the unifying principle which runs through all life, the underlying noumenon of all phenomena, which sends its tides of life into every nook and cranny of the universe, now material, now psycho-physical, now invisible; the Spirit of Goodness, who incarnates himself, in varying degree, in humanity, with whom we are all fellow-workers, and who somehow conditions the growth of our

[1] This movement became more pronounced after the New Testament period.

moral life. The questions of Monism and Dualism do not concern us here. These are questions for the intellectual, not for the religious consciousness, and though the intellectual must influence, it must not be allowed to dominate or repress the religious side of our nature. We see only in part. Everything earthly ends, for us, in mystery—but the conception of "the Spirit," and life "in the Spirit" furnishes a motive and an inspiration to moral and religious endeavour. The conception of an omnipotent Father, indeed, may give rise to an easy-going fatalism—that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds; while the conception of "the Spirit", limited somehow by the laws which condition its development, may give rise to a more strenuous endeavour to know the laws, so that, by knowledge, men may make themselves more efficient and devoted "fellow-workers" with it. This was evidently Paul's thought when he spake of men as being fellow-workers with God. Here, then, we get a basis for united religious endeavour—simply, that men shall strive to live "in the Spirit."

(2). And this brings us to the second essential thing in religious life—the duty of man to man. This, again, is one of the great themes of the New Testament. It is the burden of the teaching of Jesus—"Be ye perfect." "Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you." Not by belief, but by

action, by conduct, by labour, by love, the soul was to be purified. And so, in his own life, Jesus actualized the ideal life of "the Spirit." But here again, after generations, not having the same moral and religious consciousness as Jesus, fell away from his high ideal. Belief was substituted for love. Still, the ideal of the spiritual life, once given, had a great influence. Never were there such bold reformers as the early Christians. They literally turned the world upside down, and went cheerfully to the dungeons and the wild beasts of the amphitheatre in the fervour of their faith. In their enthusiasm they forgot that no one life can fully realise or embody the far-reaching heights and deeps of the 'thought' of God, the 'Divine Word.' In idolizing Christ, but more especially in forcing their idol upon others, they overlooked the fact that "the Word" comes to men in many different ways,—to this man, who has never known Jesus, through Buddha, to that man, through Confucius, to another, through Zoroaster, to another, through Socrates and Plato, to another, through Wordsworth. Even in the New Testament itself we have seen how "the Word" is the mingled product of Hebrew, Greek, and Christian thought. But in the New Testament the spirit of Jesus dominates all, from Peter, Stephen, and Paul, to the school of John. It gave to the world a higher ideal of duty, an ideal which the world, in its soul-selfishness, shamelessly

neglected for the easier way of creed and ceremonial. Was there ever a more shameless divorce between precept and practice than that which the modern world exhibits between the teachings of Jesus and the outward conduct of the so-called Christian world, with its worship of the Gods of Mammon and of War, and its gospel of material getting-on! To apply the principles of the Sermon on the Mount to all the complexities of our modern life, and to mould society in its spirit, will require generations of prophets and ethically-minded statesmen, but the work will have to be done if we are to retain, without hypocrisy, the Christian name. Yes, we do indeed want a return to the teachings of Jesus. The careful reader of the New Testament, reading it with some knowledge of the movement of thought of which it is the outcome, will recognise in Paul, in *Colossians*, in *Hebrews*, even in the writings of the school of John, the various points of departure from the thought of Jesus, but he will recognise also the inner meaning, the essential nobility, of the whole struggle. He need not trouble himself overmuch with the question as to whether things could have been otherwise. That question is always besetting the student of history. He will rather set himself to avoid the theological and ecclesiastical pitfalls into which the New Testament writers and the early Christians fell. He will cling to the teachings of Jesus, to the ideal life, to the

thought that action, labour, infinite patience, unwearying love, are the only remedies for the sufferings of humanity, the only true anodyne for the anxieties of the soul. And he will strive to make the little world in which he moves instinct with these ideals of the Spirit, not caring whether men call that world the body of Christ or the body of the Spirit, but caring only, as Plato would say, that they shall live after the manner of that ideal society of which a pattern is laid up in the heaven of thought, which he who desires may behold.

In trying, then, to trace the connection between the New Testament and modern thought, it is essential to remember that beneath the phrases of a changing theology, not only the gospels, but the whole of the New Testament writings echo and re-echo with these trumpet calls to the spiritual life. "Fight the good fight of faith." "Follow after righteousness, godliness, love." "Lay hold on the life which is life indeed." "If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk, for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." "Walk as children of light." "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." "Love your enemies." "Render to no man evil for evil." "Faith, hope, love, and the greatest of these is love." "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." "This is my com-

mandment, that ye love one another even as I have loved you." "He that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life." "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." These are eternal sentences, eternal truths, which will endure forever, and which will shine out in even greater clearness and splendour when the stereotyped phrases of creeds and theologies have passed out of human recollection.

(3) And now let us turn to the third great essential—the perfection of the soul in the after-life—and try to trace the connection here between the New Testament and modern thought. The teachings of Jesus no this point are open to very widely differing interpretations. The language is definite enough, but it is so frequently expressed, as was the custom in the East, in metaphor and striking imagery that one can never be quite sure where poetry ends and literal representation begins. As a matter of fact, all our thoughts about the after life—if they are wise thoughts — are bound to be expressed in poetry and metaphor. As to the reality, not the wisest of us knows. Here, again, Jesus showed himself a Master, but even he was hampered

by the thought of his time and the necessary limitations of human knowledge. His followers, however, had not the Master's wise reserve. They declared that his daring images were literal representations of the truth, and they painted the conditions of the after-life in gorgeous and lurid colours. Heaven was peopled with white-robed saints, eternally singing Hallelujahs around the throne of God; the underworld was peopled with the shades of the damned, suffering every conceivable form of torture. This conception held the Christian imagination, and awed and dominated Christian worship, for centuries. Now, under the influence of modern thought, the conception of the after-life has completely changed. In the first place, eternal condemnation for finite sin is revolting to our sense of justice, and degrades our conception of God. Secondly, the division of mankind into saved and unsaved, sheep and goats, does not satisfy our moral sense. Life, to us, is a much more complex thing than it was to our forefathers. We feel that the degrees of guilt and merit are infinite, that from this man much will be required, from that man little; that the complexities of character, environment, education, inherited weakness or strength of constitution, desire, and will, are too intricate and numerous to be sharply divided into absolutely right or absolutely wrong. The ancients invented the theory of an intermediate state for the

soul, to provide for these mixed characters of good and evil—an idea which the Catholic Church adapted to its theology. But this only minimises the difficulties involved. These sharply defined divisions run counter to our modern ideas of moral desert and moral growth. Lastly, the theory of evolution, of progressive development, has totally undermined the opposite theory of the arrest of moral growth and the crystallization of character by this poor seventy years of life. The human soul is not a fossil, and men instinctively feel that our poor human nature, even at its worst, should have another chance. Not only this—our human nature has such great potentialities, our faculties are capable of such immense if not infinite enlargement, that we feel that one poor life is incapable of satisfying our infinite desires and potentialities. Browning's words, in this connection, give a far truer indication of the aspirations of the human spirit than does orthodox Christian doctrine:

> "In man's self arise
> August anticipations, symbols, types
> Of a dim splendour ever on before
> In that eternal circle life pursues;"

man, says the poet in emphasising the same idea,

> "Man is hurled,
> From change to change unceasingly.
> His soul's wings never furled."

And this idea of progressive development meets all

that is essentially true in the doctrine of the atonement, for atonement can only be made, whether towards a finite or an infinite personality, by overcoming the evil and sin within us and so making ourselves *at one* with all that is pure and true in the moral or spiritual universe. That was the method of Jesus. It may be helped by the thought and example of Christ, but not by any substitutionary scheme. The call is to ourselves, and it is a work that must be accomplished *within*. Granting the continued existence of the soul, we have eternity in which to accomplish it.

On these three essential points—God, the duty of man to man, and the after-life of the soul—the thoughts of man have been immeasurably widened and deepened. We cannot go back to the intellectual point of view of the New Testament writers, but their moral strenuousness we can hardly excel. To-day, indeed, we are far below them in the moral sphere. Mammon is our God; Christian nations consider it compatible with their conception of human duty and human brotherhood to undertake wars of revenge, and to bestow the highest honours on men who make it their business to kill; the after-life is too often regarded as a reward for the questionable virtues of this. Where now can we find the sweetness, the gentleness, the humility, the absolute contempt of worldly honours and riches of a Jesus; the self-sacrifice of a Paul; the pure spiritu-

ality of a John; the self-renunciation of the early Christians!

The New Testament writings, then, though so far away, intellectually, from our modern point of view, will always possess a supreme moral value,—not merely as containing the story of the beginnings of one of the great religions of the world, but as containing, illustrating, and emphasising eternal moral principles, the very thought and 'Word' of the Spirit. Containing, also, in the record of the life of Jesus, an example in which these principles are embodied in actual life. Abstract principles men cannot understand, or they disagree about their application; but an actual, living personality, in whom those principles were embodied, fires the imagination and inspires the heart. Our task to-day, then, is to inform and animate our modern life with these high principles and ideals, to live by them, to find the forms of organisation and of society through which they can be made to prevail, so that our highest watchwords: "Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you"; "Love your enemies"; "Render to no man evil for evil"; "Thou shalt not kill," may no longer sound like mere lip-service and blasphemous mockery. "The Kingdom of Heaven on earth" may be, as the cynics and pessimists declare, a chimera, but, even so, we shall not have lived in vain if we perpetually try to bear the spirit of

Heaven in our hearts. We must live and die somehow, and we had better live and die aspiring to be angels, and failing, than in striving to be demons, marching through rapine and bloodshed to empire, and succeeding.[1] The New Testament, strictly followed, will teach us how to bear ourselves in these matters. The spirit of Jesus, Paul, John, and their disciples and followers, shines out on every page. It is the moral spirit in man striving to overleap the limitations of the world and make itself one with God. That is the task for all of us—for every man, for every age. The old words are eternally true: "God is Spirit; God is Love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." "He that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life."

[1] This was written during the Russo-Japanese war, but the remark applies to all our modern nations. Our religion, on this question of war, is diametrically opposed to our practice, and we shall either have to reconcile the two or go the way of previous civilisations.

XVI

IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD? IF NOT WHAT IS DIVINE REVELATION?

Deuteronomy xxx. 14.—"The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

Some of my hearers have mildly complained to me that my preaching is not sufficiently combative and "destructive;" that I ought to spend more time in exposing the illogical fables and absurd superstitions and practices which abound in many forms of religion, fables and superstitions which, in some cases, are said to derive their authority from the Bible. I am not quite sure that that would serve any good purpose. Criticism is necessary, but it must be criticism which *explains* the growth of things rather than criticism which denounces that growth. And when the process of growth and development, and the laws of growth and development, are explained, whatever is out of

harmony with the growing healthy life and mind, will fall naturally away, as a growing child leaves its fairy tales behind it, or as a healthy tree sheds its leaves and secretly prepares itself for the future years. Were I to spend my time here in showing that the first chapter of Genesis is bad science; that the chronology of the Bible is unreliable; that the stories of Joshua and his wonderful influence over the heavenly bodies, of Samson and his famous jawbone, of Aaron and his magical rod, of Elijah and his heavenly chariot, of Jonah and his marine experiences, are pure myth or legend; that the earlier conceptions of Jehovah represent him as a largely-magnified man who walks and talks with other men and who is even gratified by the smell of roast meat;[1] that some of the later conceptions, as those in the imprecatory Psalms, we should consider to be unworthy even of barbarous peoples to-day; that the legends of the New Testament, such as those of the Virgin Birth, the opening of graves and the walking about of dead people at the time of the crucifixion, and the marvellous stories in the *Acts of the Apostles*, are becoming more and more incredible to an increasingly large number of thoughtful people—were I to spend my time on all this, I have no doubt many of you would go away priding yourselves on your intellectual superiority over the people of past ages who could accept all these things, and you would for-

[1] Gen. viii. 21; 1. Sam. xxvi. 19.

get the great struggles through which they had to pass ere they reached a purer and larger spiritual life. Such preaching would only minister to your intellectual conceit, it would not deepen your charity or widen your sympathies. No. Let us fan the latent sparks of religion in men's hearts rather than cast stones at their superstitions; for after all, we in the twentieth century have our superstitions, and all our boasted knowledge is but as the light of a glow-worm in the surrounding darkness.

In trying, then, to answer the question: Is the Bible the word of God? I shall not dwell on these things. I need only emphasise the chief points on which I have insisted in these discourses—that the Bible has been built up in the same way as every other great literature, by the thought of man; that it is full of the errors, imperfections, contradictions, prejudices, passions, and struggling noblenesses which everywhere mark the work of man; that other races and civilisations, besides the Hebrew, have contributed to the formation of this literature; that the same ideas, customs, and institutions as those spoken of in the Bible are to be found in other races and civilisations, and that in these cases no one speaks of these ideas and customs as "divine;" that, as in the history of every other people, the literature was the natural outcome of the circumstances of the time; that it had its birth in the mind of man, was committed to the

fallible custody of man, and transmitted to after generations through the same fallible media as those which guard and transmit all literature. The Bible, then, is a human book, not a divine one in any supernatural sense. It is the work of man, not the work of God, except in so far as God works through man. It is human, in the same sense that the work of Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth is human. It is divine only in the sense that the work of Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth is divine. Indeed, there are parts of the Bible which are of far less moral worth or beauty than the nobler parts of the writings of great ancient and modern authors.

There are, however, many people who, while acknowledging all this in substance, do not like to give up the old phrases. They say: "No, the Bible is not the word of God, but the word of God is to be found in it." That is true only in the sense that the word of God is to be found in Shakespeare, meaning by the word of God eternal or imperishable truths. Let us not be afraid of stating our convictions in plain and definite language. It is a kind of moral cowardice, not to say dishonesty, to use old phrases with new meanings unless we clearly state what the new meanings are, and as we cannot always be doing this, it is better to drop the old phrases. There are some people who will persist in using the phrase "the resurrection of Jesus Christ," although they do not

believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Such a use of words is misleading. They might as well talk about the resurrection of Plato!

If, then, the Bible is a human book, is there such a thing as the Word of God, and if so, how can we discover it? In other words, is there such a thing as Divine Revelation? This question raises the further questions: What is the word of God? What is Revelation?

I have pointed out in a previous discourse that this phrase, 'Word' of God, is misleading. In Greek usage 'word,' *logos*, meant thought, not merely spoken or written language. If we bear this in mind we shall avoid the mistake of supposing that the Eternal 'Word' or 'Thought' is necessarily conveyed by the material or mechanical means of voice or book. Thought is spiritual, and it implies not only a Spirit-revealer, but also a Spirit or spiritual receiver who can perceive that which is revealed. That is, there is a kinship between the two, and the degree of receptivity of spiritual impression will depend partly on our innate capacities. We cannot appreciate the thought of Shakespeare unless we have *something* akin to the thought of Shakespeare within us. We cannot appreciate the music of Beethoven unless we have *something* of the spirit of Beethoven within us. We cannot appreciate the 'thought' of the Spirit unless we have something akin to the Spirit within

us. What determines the limit of our capacity of receptivity or perceptivity—that is one of the mysteries of life. Tell me that, and I will tell you 'what God and man is!'

The 'word' or 'thought' of God, then, is that world-order, or spiritual order, by means of which we are able to live our life at its fullest and best, to be perfect as the Spirit is perfect. At its highest, it is what we call the Moral Law. We are dependent on that 'Thought,' that spiritual order, for our very life. The deeper we penetrate into the meaning of it, the more fully we harmonise our lives with it or make ourselves 'at one' with it, the nobler do our lives become. If we disobey it, or ignore it, or try to set it at naught, we are punished, and we either become brutalised or our lives are fraught with pain and misery. It conditions all our growth and development. It besets us behind and before. If we ascend up into heaven, it is there. If we make our bed in Sheol, behold, it is there!

This 'Thought,' this spiritual world-order, which binds all things together as by invisible chains, reveals itself to us chiefly in two ways—first in the life of Nature; second, in the life of Humanity. It is usual to speak of these two methods of Revelation as 'natural' and 'revealed,' but the distinction is a purely artificial one. Both are natural, both the outcome of the one Spirit. The first method Dr. Martineau has described

with the precision and the insight of a master. The revelation of Nature "is that which we gather from the world of appearances, from the changes with which time and space are populous. If they speak to us not simply of themselves, or of antecedents like themselves, but as expressions of a higher cause; if their laws seem not to have scrambled into equilibrium, but to take the dispositions of intending Thought; if their order, which when recorded makes our science, and when copied makes our arts, must be, we think, an intellectual organism in its primal seat; if their beauty everywhere, and their play of light and shadow upon human life, which press from the soul the tones of poetry, report to us a creative artist who has set the strain; if, in short, as we look around us, we find a passage from the world to a Divine Mind as author of the world, we are disciples of 'Natural religion.'"

But, as I have already pointed out, these intimations of a Spirit higher than our own, by whose 'Thought' or spiritual order we live, could not be discerned by us unless there were something within us akin to it, an inward light, by which to read the outer laws and find the paths which lead to higher altitudes of being. And so we turn from the life of outward Nature to the life of man, to see what is revealed there. Here, the revelation may be said to be manifested in three great lines or ways. First, in the origination and development of the intellectual

faculties, by the cultivation of which man slowly attains to higher and wider conceptions of intellectual or scientific truths—a knowledge of the ordered 'laws' of the universe. Second, in the origination and development of the sensuous or æsthetic faculties, by the cultivation of which man learns to perceive and to appreciate truths of beauty—truths which are ever unveiling themselves to the growing consciousness, the seeing mind. Third, the origination and development of the moral faculties, by the cultivation of which man discovers the great moral truths of life, and so realises higher types of moral and social good. Of the first two aspects or deposits of revealed truth, I have not time to speak at present. They come to us through the treasuries of Science and Art, through the accumulated knowledge of the past, through all races, all nations, all civilisations. They are mingled with much error and superstition, but time and experience slowly sift and filter them until they become embedded and embodied in our growing life, and we feel that to give them up would be to return to barbarism. But the third aspect—that of moral truth—I wish to emphasise, because that is a universal and common possession, and therefore most fully illustrates my point. It is given to few of us to discover new intellectual or scientific truths, though we can all make use of those which have been bequeathed to us through the labours of the past.

It is given to few of us to create, by strength of imagination and energy of spirit, new types of beauty which will win the admiration and refine the lives of others, though we are poor indeed if we cannot appreciate the glories of the sunset, or the loveliness of the flowers, or the harmonies of form and sound and colour which are bequeathed to us by the great masters in Art. But to every one of us it is given to realise, in some measure, the truths of the Moral Law. These come to us, or are taught to us, first, in the form of Love. This, I say, is a universal possession. Where is the child that has no love for its mother? Where is the mother—save monstrous moral abortions of humanity—that has no love for her child? Here is the supreme and universal revelation of the Spirit, possessed, in some degree, by all. It is at once the inspiration, and, through conscience, the judge of our life—for what we love determines what we are. Beginning in very small ways it runs out into ever wider and wider circles, from the child to the family, from the family to the village, the city, the state, the nation, humanity, and to those invisible principles which fashion and control the life of humanity, and which we associate with the name of God. In the ordered life of Nature, in the unveiling of the infinite beauties of the universe, the Spirit reports itself to us from without, and we have to learn its truths and laws by the methods of science. But in our

moral nature it reports itself to us from within, and we feel our kinship with it not only by the laboured processes of reasoning but by the natural and immediate aspirations of the soul for something higher than itself. To use again the better words of Dr. Martineau: "The field which is entered through the scientific intuitions is the field of *Necessity*, either eternal and unchangeable as the nexus of mathematical properties, or simply durable as empirically unchanged, like the persistent sequences of physical law; and if this field were all, its lesson might be delivered and learned, from end to end, without a conception beyond this necessity, or a suspicion of the higher infinitude which lies around our prison walls. The field, on the other hand, which is entered through the intuitions of conscience, is the field *of freedom, of possibility, of alternatives*, i.e. *of spiritual action*, amenable, not to natural antecedents, but to preferential obligation, carrying in it the relation of mind obeying and mind commanding, both on the ground of a common righteousness. Here we are ushered by our own supernatural [spiritual] life (i.e., life beyond the range of Nature-necessity) into cognizance of our supernatural [spiritual] affinities: we walk in the presence, not simply of animals in the same cage, but of spirits other than our own; with whom we pass from creatures of nature into children of God . . . It may be true that God is not less immediately present with

us in the energies of Nature than in the authority of conscience. But it is an external and dynamic presence, simply executant of what is predetermined to be, and, as such, might as well be purely automatic;" but the inner presence has the character of conscious, though limited freedom, through which it may become a fellow-labourer with the Spirit.

The implications of all this are obvious. It is obvious, for example, that if the highest form of Revelation comes in this way, through the human spirit, it cannot be confined to one age, one race, or one literature. Every age, every race, every literature, brings its contribution, and it is our task to find the highest in each and to follow that.

> "Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,
> And not on paper leaves or leaves of stone;
> Each age, each kindred adds a verse to it—
> Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan."

It is obvious also that that will be the highest revelation—for us—which most aids the growth of our moral life. Here, then, we reach the secret of the greatness of the Bible—it contains a revelation of great moral truths exemplified in the experience of a great people. Other literatures, too, contain such revelations, but none of higher value than the Bible. There are parts of the Bible that are much over-rated. There are parts that we could well afford to lose. But there are other parts which are a priceless, an

eternal possession. Especially in the New Testament, in the life of Jesus, do we get Revelation at its highest, because there it shines out in the record of a Love which appeals to the same moral spirit in all of us. Socrates and Plato may appeal to the intellectuals amongst us. Dante, Shakespeare, Raphael, Beethoven—each brings his revelation, and each has his votaries. But just because love is universal and moral greatness is for ever supreme, and because there is something akin to Jesus in all of us, the revelation of the character of Jesus appeals to all and draws men by its beauty and its moral power.

Hence, Revelation is progressive; it never ceases. It is streaming in upon us day by day. In the truths of Science, in the glories and beauties of Art, but, above all, in the character and teaching of noble men and women, prophets and poets, and in the national and universal movements which yearn after greater justice among men, and which strive to beat back the hosts of wrong. When the Deuteronomist tells us that "the Word is very nigh unto us;" when Jesus appealed to men to cultivate the inner life as against outward formalism and told them that the kingdom of God was within; when Paul denounced the "beggarly elements" of the Law and urged his followers to live and walk "in the Spirit;" when Peter and John told the Judeans that they must hearken unto God rather than unto men; when

Socrates told the Athenians that he would obey God rather than men, and that he would teach the truth though he had to die many times; when Luther faced the multitude of papal and secular dignitaries with the words: "Here stand I; I can do no other; God help me;" when Iphigenia, in Goethe's tragedy, meets the objection—"It is no God that speaks, 'tis only thine own heart," with the answer—

"'Tis only through our hearts the Gods speak to us,"—

they were all appealing to a spiritual revelation in the heart which is of greater worth and validity than any written word; and they have all left a precious deposit of spiritual or moral truth which has been an inspiration to succeeding ages. When Dante, again, pictures man's insatiable thirst for knowledge, and tells us that the mind cannot be satisfied with anything less than absolute truth and goodness, he is simply putting into poetic form the philosophic truth that there is a realm of spiritual knowledge outside us, a "fount of life," to the revelations of which we must make our souls receptive ere we can climb the ladder to higher planes of Being. Divine Revelation, then, at its highest, is the revelation of Love, of the Moral Law, which every heart possesses in some degree, which is being continually unveiled by experience, and to which every age, every race, every literature, brings its spiritual contribution.

But these revelations of the Spirit come always

through humanity; always, they are mingled with the errors and imperfections of men. This again, has grave implications for us, for it places upon us the responsibility of trying to discern—each in our own little sphere—truth from error, moral good from moral evil; the responsibility of asking ourselves each day—"Am I loving and receiving into my nature the right things? Am I trying to think right thoughts, to do right deeds, to live a right life, trying to be a worthy fellow-labourer with the Spirit?" We may try to ignore and throw off this responsibility. We may go to Priest or to Church and say: "These shall be our guides and mediators, to ensure our salvation." But in doing that we should be untrue to the divine part of our own nature, and therefore untrue to the Spirit of God himself. For if we neglect or ignore this grave responsibility, if we refuse to set ourselves to these tasks of inward apprehension and spiritual discrimination which daily beset us, then the gifts of the Spirit tend to become blunt and dead within us, and the insight of conscience is dispensed with for the passing and varying commandments of men. So we become slaves to a system, to formulas, to churches, or to books, instead of free children of the Spirit.

Mediation between man and God, in the old sense of the word, there cannot be. Our best guides and mediators are our masters or teachers, living or dead,

who teach us to perceive fuller revelations, who educate us into wider truth and deeper love. Thus Jesus and the prophets, the poets and the philosophers, help us. But even these, alone, cannot help us. There must be something in us, some self-revealing spirit, which responds to them. Take this "Divine ground" away, and we become dead to the revelations which would otherwise stream in upon our souls. Here, again, we are in the region of mystery—the intensity or receptivity of each human spirit. Maybe it is our own experience which is the greatest revealer; which enables us, through ages and æons of development, to assimilate the necessary elements from the infinite resources of the spiritual universe; and which thus prepares us, perchance, for deeper revelations than any of which we now dream, but which will come to us in God's good time.

THE END.

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