

GS368

DISCOURSE

BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT
BE SAVED.—*Acts xvi, 31.*

SUCH was the burden of the first teaching of the Religion upon which this venerable Christendom is based. Its first ministers appeared, declaring to all men, both small and great, that if they believed in one Jesus of Nazareth they would be saved.

What precisely was in their minds, when they thus talked of being saved, I do not undertake to say. But the fact that, believing in Jesus, a man was delivered from evil inclinations, and, beginning to be fashioned after a new and high standard, pure and humane, became conscious, not only of a sense of safety, but of an ineffable peace of mind, such as he had never known before,—this fact, I do venture to say, was a salvation in the fullest meaning of the word. If those first teachers had any other meaning than this, it could not possibly have been anything better, nor so good. This was a salvation worth giving one's life for.

It was strikingly illustrated in those first teachers themselves. From being private, obscure persons, they became

through their faith in Christ men of extraordinary mark, of indomitable energy, stirring the world with their speech, forming everywhere associations of men that gradually revolutionized empires, and, notwithstanding manifold sufferings, conscious all the while of a joy that made the prisons into which they were thrown ring with their glad hymns.

The same thing was shown also in great numbers of their followers, both men and women, in old men and tender girls, who, for their faith in Christ, with perfect composure, nay, with an air of triumph, confronted the horrors of the Roman theatres where they were flung to be consumed in flames or torn in pieces by wild beasts.

Is it not, then, a matter of great interest to ascertain how and why it was that, with faith in Christ, there came so vital a change, so great a salvation?

And it is the more interesting because there is still in these days what bears the same name, Faith in Christ. Whole nations are professing it. But it is not attended by anything like the same effects. Thousands signify their profession of it by solemn forms, but, between them and others, what difference is there to see to, unless it be that of the two, the latter are oftentimes the more agreeable in their manners, and the more trustworthy in affairs, while the former are noted chiefly for a punctilious observance of certain forms and a scrupulous abstinence from certain social amusements? Beyond this, what now passes for Christian Faith shows no remarkable force. It does not keep the heart pure, nor save it from being eaten out by pride, and intolerance, and a greed for money, that

leads men to do the meanest things and the hardest. It is no salvation from an abject deference to the way of the world, or from the fanatical ambition which is driving so many to sacrifice self-respect, honor, and conscience to a brilliant appearance and to social position. Does our modern faith in Christ inspire any special enthusiasm for Humanity, or what efforts in that behalf does it prompt, save in fashionable ways, and by popular methods, subscribing money and the like? It neither renders people more amiable, nor gives them the cheerful air of a great peace and joy in their believing.

Surely if our faith and that ancient faith are one and the same thing, it has undergone in this respect a mighty change. It no longer saves men in the old-fashioned way. It is claimed for it that it saves them from future and eternal torments. I do not know about that. It certainly does not, what it once did, save them now. Whence this great difference? What made the old faith such a power?

The first thing to be observed, as helping us to an answer to this question, is this: in those early times faith in Christ was not popular nor safe, but very unpopular and very unsafe. Indeed it was as much as a man's life was worth, so much as to whisper the name of Christ with respect in the ear of his bosom friend. It instantly exposed him to be shunned, pointed at, informed against by his nearest of kin, put in peril of being hooted at, mobbed, stoned to death in the street.

What then is the conclusive presumption? Why that no one in his senses could then have been found believing in Christ, unless he had been so mightily moved thereto

that he could not for his life help it, unless there had entered into him a power sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the marrow. Understanding, heart, conscience, all that was within him, must have wrought to create in him faith in Christ. What else was there to induce a man to believe in Christ? Everything else, every interest in life, went directly and most powerfully the other way, to drive men off, as they valued their lives, from so much as looking at his alleged claims. His bare name was odious in the extreme, a great deal worse than the name of Abolitionist some few years ago, and that was bad enough, as you all know. It stood for everything hateful, for the rankest Atheism, for the turning of the world upside down, for deadly hatred of gods and men.

The Christian Faith of those days, therefore, must have been a most intimate personal conviction. It could have been nothing else. It was not a hearsay, a tradition, nor a phrase. It was no fancy. There was nothing to catch the fancy about a man who had suffered the vilest of deaths, but everything to shock and repel the fancy. It was not a mere opinion. Neither was it a faith which a man might assert that he had, but did not know for certain. It was the genuine thing, Faith, nothing less or other.

Now we all know that Faith, properly so called, is one of the greatest forces, if not the very greatest force, in all known nature. It is the support which upholds the commerce and prosperity of nations. Steam, electricity, magnetism, powerful as they are, are its household servants.

Mountains sink and valleys rise at its bidding. It is annihilating time and space. It is the men who believe in the things which they aim at, who turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones. They are the born rulers upon whom all things and all men wait. They discover and conquer new worlds. Such was the quality of Faith in Christ at the first. It was faith and no mistake.

Being thus a true, living conviction, it could not be concealed. It could no more be kept to itself, as you now keep your sceptical doubts to yourselves, than fire can be kept to itself in the midst of dry straw. I have no doubt that most, if not all, of those who, in those early days were brought to believe in Jesus were brought to it, at the first, with great reluctance. The instant there flashed upon them the consciousness of a favorable leaning towards him, what a shudder must have gone through them! It made their hearts beat quick, you may depend, and their cheeks flush and turn white, and the sweat to stand in great beads upon their foreheads, as there glared upon them the awful doom to be met, if they dared to yield to this new and dangerous influence. Thus they must have shrunk from it with affright, even while, and even because, they felt themselves drawn towards it.

The inevitable effect of the struggle to keep it off was to make them think, not the less, but the more, of the perilous subject that was drawing them to itself with a force not their own, as with the clutch of Fate. Was there anything that could drive it deeper and deeper into their hearts, like trying to keep it out, trying to forget it? The arrow that had pierced them was barbed. The effort

to get away from the object of their faith, forced them into closer acquaintance with it. And the nearer they approached it, the more powerful grew its attraction, and the more their interest in it increased, until they were so helpless to resist it that they had to speak out or die. They might keep it secret for awhile, so long as their dread of turning friends into foes and of suffering persecution was stronger than their new conviction. But this conviction, being alive, was sure to grow, as we have just seen, and to keep growing. The spring of a new life, opened within them, steadily rising, would, sooner or later, float them over all their fears, and bear them right onward into the very thick of the dangers that menaced them. In fine, the change, taking place in them, would be sure to betray itself, if not in one way then in another; most probably in the first place, by their lukewarmness in the observance of their old religious customs and by their neglect of the altars of the gods. A word spoken, nay, a word unspoken, silence, might blab it. Accordingly they would be forced, sooner or later, to confess the faith that they had embraced, or, rather, that had embraced them.

Here we see another reason why the primitive faith had such extraordinary power. The open profession of it instantly summoned into active service one's whole manhood. The best that was in a man had to come right to the front. There was an immediate necessity for all his courage and fortitude. Hesitation, fear, had to be trampled under foot. Do you wonder,—does it seem hard to understand,—how a simple faith in Christ, now so easy, should

have had such power, power to work the most difficult of changes, rarely witnessed, the change of the personal character, the salvation of the soul? The wonder ceases, the fact is in great part explained, when we consider the circumstances in which this faith was conceived and confessed. It was in the immediate presence of danger, and of death in the frightfullest shapes, and at the cost of the tenderest ties.

So that, without reference to the person of him in whom this faith was reposed, or to the power there was in him, we may readily perceive that the circumstances attending the public confession of it must have rendered it very powerful. An occasion, in fact a most urgent necessity, was created for the instant exertion of the utmost resolution. Those high qualities were put in immediate requisition, the possession of which is equivalent to a regeneration of the whole man, and synonymous with salvation. A man was at once made brave and true; and this he could not be, and be the same man that he was before, with his low worldly habits and his sins cleaving to him still. He was shaken all out of them, and translated into a higher condition, where the better nature had the ascendancy over the lower, the spirit over the flesh. Thus he had at once, on the spot, searching experience of salvation in the profoundest sense of the word.

Now, in these times, it is entirely different. There is nothing of this kind connected with the profession of faith in Christ. It long ago ceased to be dangerous and unpopular. So far from its demanding any strength of mind now, the weakest man may proclaim it aloud at the

street corners, without exerting any more force than is required to open his lips. Instead of calling for courage, it appeals to cowardice, to the most worldly motives. To profess it, we are under the necessity, not of reforming, but of conforming, a necessity very easily complied with. Thousands there are who, by upholding certain institutions, virtually profess to be Christian believers, when they have no intelligent personal faith whatever. And so it has come about that there has been generated the monstrous delusion that the most superficial, unthinking formalism of thought and observance is a religion, a religion unto salvation!

There are no two things in nature more opposite, the one to the other, than the faith of these our days and the faith of the first Christians, the modern Profession and the ancient Confession. The former is a garment woven by the world, having no more vital connection with the man himself than his clothes have, nor so much, for his clothes keep him warm, while his faith is worn, not for comfort, but for fashion's sake, that he may do as everybody else is doing. But the ancient Faith!—it was mingled with the heart's blood. Every nerve was thrilled by it. It was a flaming fire, blazing at the very centre of life. And it was thus vital, because it was no faith of man's making. It was kindled by Nature, by God himself. Faith came to men in those days, attended, not by the acclamations of their fellow-men, but by their curses, loud and deep. It came, through fire and blood, girt with lightnings and thunders, breaking in upon them, not by their will, but in the first instance, without their will,

and against their will. They did not choose it. It chose them, and made them all its own through struggles and agonies almost breaking their hearts.

Consequently, as they could no more shake their faith off than they could 'unessence' themselves, it was impossible for them to hold it lightly, as a superficial appendage, worn only for show. Why, it was nothing less than their very life. What else had they on earth or in heaven to sustain them amidst the horrors that surrounded them? What deeper interest had they than to know what it was that they were putting their faith in at the cost of all that they held dear on earth? They could not impose upon themselves, as we do now-a-days, with mere forms and phrases. They could not feed upon articulate wind. With the fierce flames of persecution darting right at them, they had to plunge in to the very heart of their faith and wring all the life out of it they could. Once committed to their confession, and face to face with a terrible opposition, they had to make good to themselves the fearful position which they had taken. They had to fortify themselves to the uttermost. As they could look for no reinforcements to come to their aid from without, as the world around them was all in arms against them, they were forced back, driven in, into the very citadel; where sat enthroned the Object of their faith, there to obtain the strength which was needed to make their resistance effectual and to secure the victory. Accordingly they knew the person in whom they believed.

And here, friends, we come to the last and main source whence the early Christian Faith derived its power. But

let me repeat briefly what I have said. It is worth while. Our subject is of great moment.

The first reason that I have given why Faith in Christ was so strong at the outset is, that it really was faith, a genuine conviction of the mind. Such it was of necessity. There was no earthly inducement to move any sane man to believe in Jesus, unless his understanding, his conscience, his whole soul compelled him to believe in him. There was nothing to lead him to imagine that he believed when he did not believe. There was not a loophole for any self-deception. There was everything to frighten people away from the thought of Christ, to deter them from so much as glancing in that direction, save with speechless dread. The faith then of those days was a real conviction. And a true conviction is never without power. Indeed, we see everywhere that personal faith is the power of the world.

In the next place, that early faith, being of the true quality, could not be hidden, kept to itself, although, doubtless, they who had it were prompted by the fear of the alienation of friends and the violence of foes to keep it as long as they could to themselves. You may rely upon it, they were in no hurry to publish what was sure to bring swift dishonor and death. The Christian faith could not, therefore, be confessed without the exertion of the utmost moral force. Thus the salvation of the believer took place, incidentally, undesignedly on his part, without his being aware of the great change begun in him. Forced to depend upon himself, he had to dispense with what is as the breath of our nostrils: human coun-

tenance and sympathy. When that can be done, there is a new birth. Self-trust is the indispensable condition of spiritual growth. In relying upon ourselves, we emerge from our minority. We cease to be children. We stand upon our feet. We go alone, leaning upon no crutches of authority, listening to no outward voice for our law, but becoming every one a law to himself, or, which is the same thing, the sacred law, listened to in the heart, asserts its supremacy over us. Thus, life, power comes to us from within, from the immaterial, unfathomable, immortal soul within. Thence it was that Faith at the first drew its extraordinary strength. There, within, the great Idea of Christ met the true believers and communicated to them such power that one of them exclaimed: "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me."

I have thus indicated two things which made Faith in Christ, a faith unto salvation. The third and the fountainhead of its power at which they who believed drank deep, and from which they drew a life, exuberant and immortal, was, the object of their faith, in one word, Christ.

Now in order to see what power there was in him to move men so mightily, we must endeavor to conceive what a wonder, what a surpassing miracle that phenomenon was: the appearance in the world of such a man as Jesus of Nazareth, considered simply as a man. I have no idea that he himself ever dreamed of claiming to be anything more.

His name now is representative only of creeds, of churches, of doctrines, which so far from commanding

the respect of the understanding, fetter and gag the understanding, and shock the heart and pervert the conscience;

Or, if the name of Christ still represents a person, it is a person of the Godhead, a vague fiction of the theological imagination;

Or, if a human person, still only a person of so shadowy an existence that he is hardly to be descried through the legends and fables, of which the accounts that we have of him are supposed to be made up.

It requires no slight effort, therefore, to put out of mind these present modes of thought, and to consider what a new, strange, wonderful thing the Story of Jesus,—told so humanly as it is told in substance when the record is read aright,—must have been in that distant age, long before our creeds and churches and doctrines of Trinities and Double Natures, and our critical and sceptical notions were dreamed of, and when men were everywhere worshipping military power, and when, too, with huge temples of stone and thousands of idols, and altars smoking with the blood of slaughtered animals, and long glittering processions of priests and countless imposing ceremonies,—when with such things all that is sacred was identified, and men hardly knew that there was anything holier or more venerable.

Just think, friends, what a new thing under the sun was the story that was told, told in the all-subduing accents of the sincerest conviction, in the voluptuous cities of Greece, and in the old warlike Roman empire, of a young man, of stainless purity, in the bloom of life, only thirty years of age, of humble origin, put to a most shame-

ful and cruel death for his simple truth's sake, who, while living, had gone about doing good, knowing not in the morning where he should rest his head at night, speaking such words of wisdom that people came to him in crowds from far and near, and followed him till they were ready to drop from hunger and fatigue. He told them stories (so went the fervid report), breathing fraternal love and the deepest human tenderness. He gave his blessing to the poor, the sorrowing, the gentle, the merciful, the pure in heart, the lovers of peace; and so fearless was he withal, as free as a child, as simple as the light and the air, amidst savage passions raging against him, going his perilous way straight to a foreseen, violent death just as he walked, just as he breathed, doing and saying the greatest things as the merest matters of course, self-possessed, self-forgetting, with heart open all the while as the day to the neglected and the outcast, transferring his own claims, whatever they were, to the lowest of his brother-men. No malice of foes, no treachery of friends, so it appeared, could exhaust or embitter the sweetness of his spirit. He took little children in his arms and blessed them. The wretched flocked to him as to a wide open temple of Mercy. The poor woman, sin-defiled, from whose touch the pious shrank as from a leper, he addressed in words of brotherly kindness. What a scene was that! The poor heart-broken creature bowing down and kissing his very feet over and over again, and, as her hot tears fell upon them like rain, wiping them away with her hair! Such are only some of the many things which were told of him, and which gave the world assurance of this new

and most original Man. Could we only read the narrative of his last few hours, as we should, if we read it now for the first time, Roman Triumphs, Royal Progresses, Coronation pomps, the Te Deums and Misereres of cathedrals would all vanish away before the mingled pathos and majesty of those scenes.

What a story, I reiterate, was that to be told to a world, 'shining all o'er with naked swords!' What a sensation must it have made! What attention, what interest must it have arrested! What sympathy! What adoring admiration!

Furthermore, and here is the fact of supreme interest, the Story of the Life and Death of Jesus was a wonder, the like of which had never before been witnessed on earth, why? For what reason? Even because it was perfectly simple, thoroughly natural, essentially human. Being thus natural and human, it went straight into every open heart as its native home, and Jesus was welcomed there as the nearest of kin, the most intimate relative of mankind. In fact, that Story, although its apparently preternatural incidents affected the imagination greatly and made the world ring again, still was the most deeply touching in this: that it silently breathed a thoroughly human spirit, a spirit which was in far closer kinship to the deepest and best in human nature than any mere miracles or any affinity of blood could possibly claim. On this account it was that men took it in as naturally as their eyes received the light or their lungs the air.

And all the more deeply did it interest them because there was scarcely anything then to interest the popular

mind, that went beyond the eye and the passion of fear and the love of the marvellous. It was these only that were addressed and excited, nothing deeper. Consequently, when there went abroad, and from lips touched by the fire of personal faith in its truth, the Story of one, whose whole being throbbed with a spirit that struck to the very heart, quickening into full activity its noblest sentiments, people leaped to embrace him, the most formidable obstructions notwithstanding, by a sympathy as instinctive as that which makes the child cling to its mother's bosom.

By the way, we are accustomed to speak of Jesus as the Founder of Christianity. But, as I conceive of him, he had no thought of formally instituting a religion. He was and is the foundation of Christianity, but not the founder. It had no founder. It founded itself. And it was for this very reason, because he had no scheme of his own, because, in the freedom and simplicity of Nature, there went forth from him an effluence which was one with the deepest and best in the soul of man,—for this reason it was that a religion sprang from him which has lasted now for centuries, and will last for centuries to come.

But to return. When once we fully apprehend this fact that it was a simple human life, as natural as it was original, the fame whereof went abroad on the wings of faith, we begin to understand why it was that, notwithstanding the fearful circumstances attending the confession of belief in it, it at once took captive such a host of men and women. The increase of the first believers was amazingly rapid. Immediately after the death of Christ

they were numbered, according to the Book of Acts, by thousands. Thirty years afterwards, in the capital of the Roman Empire, and Rome was then a great way off from Judea, there was, as Tacitus informs us, a mighty multitude of them, '*multitudo ingens.*' The Catacombs of Rome are filled with the ashes of the early Christians, and their number is well nigh incredible.

The fact was, as I have said, the world was occupied with superficial formalities, altars, and statues, splendid rituals, sacrificial offerings, and holidays; things that engrossed attention, and so teased the conscience with petty scruples, that, as Plutarch states, on one occasion, a religious procession to propitiate some god, owing to some trifling deviation from the prescribed forms, started from the temple thirty-six times. Hardly anything deeper was appealed to than the love of sight-seeing, and the superstitious passion for the marvellous.

And yet, consider, friends, those ancient generations of Jews and Greeks and Romans,—they were human beings like ourselves, far more like than different. They had this same human heart beating all the while in their bosoms. They were brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, and on daily occasions were perforce following the kindly dictates of our common humanity.

In the midst of all that externality and child's play, there came, in a man, in a young man, the living, breathing power of sacred human affection, showing the true life to be, not a gilded ritual, but one ceaseless office of self-forgetting human love. Of course it came like the rain, like the former and the latter rain to the thirsty

earth. It went down, swift and straight, down to the central core of our human nature, whence it came, melting the hardness which had grown over it, setting its deepest springs flowing, and causing it to flower out in noble and saintly deeds.

Thus it is apparent, the one subduing charm was not any new truth or doctrine, addressed only to the speculative faculty. Far enough was it from being any system of theology. Neither was it any miracle, which, at the utmost, could excite only surprise and wonder. It is no image of Jesus as a wonder-worker; it is Jesus in the weakest condition of human nature, as a little child in his mother's arms, or as hanging dead on the Cross, that has for ages since taken the heart and commanded the homage of Christendom. It is no bewildering Tri-une God, but a mother, exalted above God, a human mother, to whom the tenderest worship has been long and widely rendered. The Madonna and the Crucifix,—to what myriads of suffering and dying men have these most human of symbols spoken of the Infinite Love! This it was, the purely human and humane spirit of Jesus, which through those who at the first believed in him, ran like quicksilver from heart to heart by the irresistible power of the indestructible sympathies of human nature.

So was it at the first. How is it now? Now that Faith in Christ is no longer persecuted, no longer unpopular,—now that all is so changed in this respect, has the object of Faith lost its vitality? Can we no longer be saved by Christ as the men and women of old were saved by him?

Was the saving power of this Man of men exhausted in those early days?

It would argue but very feeble sensibility to the greatness of Jesus, it would indeed be doing him great dishonor, to forget that it is not possible in such a world as this of ours that so bright a light should arise and shine without gradually spreading itself far and wide, and, notwithstanding whatever clouds of ignorance and superstition may arise, should be reflected from unnumbered points, and, in the course of time, render the whole atmosphere of Life luminous and impregnate that with its saving efficacy, thus consecrating all Life to the ministry of human Salvation.

This it is that has taken place in the case of Christ. His spirit was caught by those in attendance upon him, and through them by a great host of confessors and martyrs,—a cloud of witnesses; and so there started into activity countless saving agencies, Christ-like lives and deaths, inspiring memories, humane institutions, revolutions, reformations, emancipations of multitudinous races; and through these, and through all the freedom and civilization which have followed upon his appearance in the world, Jesus is still carrying on the work of Salvation, of the blessings whereof all are, consciously or unconsciously, more or less partakers, even those who deny his influence, and question his very existence. The history of Europe, for now nearly two thousand years, is the history of Christ, still far from being finished. At this hour, as a philosophical writer has remarked, Europe is struggling onward to realize the Christian ideal.

Is it only, however, in this indirect way, by the spirit

which these reflections of his personal influence propagate, that he is still the Saviour of men? Has the full, rich spring of his personal power, which at the first so flooded human hearts, run dry, so that he is no longer able to command a faith in himself that shall be unto salvation?

Ah! dear friends, could he only be seen as he was, in his native greatness, our hearts would burn with something of the fire of saving faith which was kindled in theirs of old. But he is no longer visible. His person has been for long ages hidden in the distorting mists generated by the imagination, which the unprecedented novelty of such a life most powerfully stirred. The extravagant and irrational representations that have been made of him could not reach in to the central springs of our nature. They can only play upon the surface, and noisily agitate that. To the still deeps they cannot penetrate.

And now, when the metaphysical visions that have so long veiled the human person of Jesus are fading away, the case is hardly any better. For, to the blinding mists of Superstition have succeeded the mists as blinding of Scepticism; and to numbers he is only a myth. He is not known.

I should not presume to make this assertion, were not the reason plain why he is not known. The ignorance, the superstition, the monstrous dogmas, for which his name has been claimed, have driven even intelligent, learned, and conscientious men to the extreme of regarding with distrust, one might almost say with contempt, those artless accounts of Jesus, which have come down to us, and from which alone we obtain any knowledge of him

personally. Accordingly, while, on the one hand, these accounts are studied to find authority for some established creed, on the other, they are read only to feed the scepticism with which they are looked upon. Jesus must needs, therefore, be unknown when we seek, not for him, but for the confirmation of some system of faith, or of no faith. Murmur not, complain not, that you cannot see him. 'No man,' he himself is recorded to have said, 'no man can come to me unless He who sent *me* draw *him*.' Where is the single, earnest eye, to which alone, bent full and searchingly on the record, its meaning will open, and, emerging from the dimness of centuries, Jesus will stand in sunlight clearness before us with arms outstretched to save us?

Of all the great personages of History, there is no one of whom so individual and living an idea may be had as of Jesus. Such is my conviction. And for this reason, not only because the accounts of him, as I have found, are impressed all over and all through with inimitable marks of truth, but because, brief and imperfect as they are, they are, to a singular degree, made up of just such particulars as always afford the most satisfactory insight into the stuff and quality of the persons of whom they are related.

Thus persuaded, I believe the time will come when it will be understood what manner of man Jesus was. As we learn to know him, and to appreciate his exalted character; as we thus draw near to him, his spirit will breathe upon us, and we shall receive the Holy Ghost. We shall be learning Veneration and Love. Thus will he quicken into a new life those best sentiments of our nature by which

it will be delivered from whatever now hardens or depraves it. In this way, Faith in Christ personally will again put forth its saving power. 'The idolatry of dogmas,' says Mr Lecky, 'will pass away. Christianity, being rescued from the sectarianism and intolerance that have defaced it, will shine by its own splendor, and, sublimated above all the sphere of controversy, will assume its rightful position as *an ideal and not a system, as a person and not a creed.*'*

There is, in these times, in one great respect, a special need of such a Saviour. The grasp of human authorities and hereditary faiths upon the minds of men is loosened; they cannot hold the world forever. In the free and progressive spirit which distinguishes Christendom, Science is advancing as never before. Theories of Life, of its origin and development, are becoming popular, which put to naught our old theologies, and are revolutionizing our modes of thought. Able and earnest men of Science are there who are investigating the universe, and can find no God. Startled and bewildered, as we listen and hear everything attempted to be accounted for by blind law and brute matter, we seem to be in a boundless desert, where is no Sacred Presence, where consummate order reigns, but no Infinite Love breathes.

In this state of things, what tongue can tell the worth of such a Person as Jesus? When the things told of him are established as historically true,—when he ceases to be

* History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe, p. 191. American edition, 1866.

a myth, and becomes a Reality, and we accept him as a Fact in Nature as truly as any fact that Science has discovered, or may discover, and in as perfect accord with Nature, then, as plants spring up under the air and the light, there will be created in us spontaneously an impregnable Trust, and an inextinguishable Hope, which, to all purposes of guidance and consolation, will be equivalent to Faith in God. The Idea of Jesus, enshrined within us, by the aspirations it will kindle for the Highest, will be a witness in our inmost consciousness of the Invisible and Everlasting. Beholding Jesus, we shall behold God and Immortality. And, moreover, what a testimony shall we have to the truth of our great Christian Ideas in the fact, that it was in them that he, in whom the highest condition of humanity has been shown, lived, and moved, and had his being! These it was that created him after so Godlike a fashion.

The great and the good of every age and country have ministered, and are forever ministering, by the inspiration which they breathe, to the salvation of mankind, as well from the gloom of unbelief, as from the darkness of superstition. But Jesus stands high, high above them all; not, it may be granted, in the abstract wisdom of his teachings, although it may be questioned whether, even in this respect alone, any other of the great leaders of the world have approached him,—have uttered so much of the highest truth as he; but in the overflowing fulness of his spiritual being, in the fact that he impresses us with the conviction that there was a great deal more in him than his words or even his acts expressed, an unfathomed reserve

of personal power. Who has ever moved the world like him? Who is there that, like him, has challenged centuries to define his position,—to take his measure? He so stirred the imagination alone, that for ages, poor peasant as he was, he has been held to be nothing less than the Infinite God himself; and this, too, not in the absence of information concerning him, inviting the imagination to so extravagant a flight, but in the face of explicit facts showing him to have been a man, a tempted, suffering, dying, all-conquering man. ‘Two things,’ said the philosopher Kant, ‘fill me with awe: the starry heavens and the sense of moral responsibility in man.’ To these two I add a third, filling the soul with faith and love and hope, as well as awe, **THE PERSON OF JESUS.** To the Spirit, in him made Flesh of our flesh, be this fair Church, risen from its ruins, every stone of it, and the living Church within, its pastor, my friend, brother, son, and his flock, dedicated now and forever!

DEDICATORY HYMN

BY ROBERT COLLYER

O Lord our God, when storm and flame
Hurled homes and temples into dust,
We gathered here to bless thy name
And on our ruin wrote our trust.

Thy tender pity met our pain,
Swift through the world the angel ran,
And then thy Christ appeared again
Incarnate, in the heart of man.

Thy lightning lent its burning wing
To bear his tear-blent sympathy,
And fiery chariots rushed to bring
The offerings of humanity.

Thy tender pity met our pain,
Thy love has raised us from the dust.
We meet to bless thee, Lord, again,
And in our temple sing our trust.