THE RELIGION OF JESUS:

ITS MODERN DIFFICULTIES

AND

ITS ORIGINAL SIMPLICITY.

A Course of Sunday Evening Lectures,

BY

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I.

The Religion of Jesus; how it is ascertained.

THE main question of course, is what the religion of Jesus really was. And this, which we now proceed to discuss, is here raised only because some answer to it was absolutely necessary, if we are to obtain any satisfaction in regard to the main issue. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that the question now before us is subsidiary to our present course of enquiry; and all that can be fairly expected is the suggestion of a method, as to the soundness and the results of which every man of candour and common sense can, to a considerable extent, judge for himself. The method, however, is likely to be depreciated, unless the real reasons for our interest in the main issue are understood. On these, therefore, we must at once say a few words.

Why then are we so anxious to know what was the personal religion of Jesus himself? The times in which we live show a good deal of change in feeling about this subject; but still there are not wanting those who say "we want to know the religion of Jesus, because 'whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic

Faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.'" According to this view, correct theological opinions are necessary to secure everlasting happiness. Jesus taught correct theological opinions. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to know with infallible certainty what he taught.* Now I do not hold this view. I regard it as injurious to man and blasphemous against God. It is injurious to man; because it diverts his attention from character, which is the only key to the higher life; because it puts pride of intellect in place of lowliness of spirit; because it makes dogmatic confidence of more importance than loyalty of soul. It is blasphemous against God, because it charges Him with making salvation dependent on two conditions,—exhaustive learning or stupid credulity,—one of which is impossible to all but the very few, while the other degrades and even brutalizes those who comply with it. From such a conception of the reasons which give interest to the religion of Jesus I differ fundamentally, essentially and utterly. I repudiate the notion of salvation which it implies, as well as the means it supposes necessary for attainment. For me salvation has no meaning at all, except safety from sin, whether in this world or in any other. Theological opinions can have no merit or demerit in themselves; and would have no importance whatever, were it not for the influence which they directly or indirectly exert on character.

If then it is not in pursuit of correct metaphysical opinions about God that we go to Jesus, what is the real nature of our interest in his religion? We are floating far down amidst a stream of influences, which, collectively, are termed christian. But this stream has been swollen by innumerable tributaries, some entering high up, others far down the current, and each of them bringing with it some special qualities which sensibly affect the main stream. We talk of ritualism on the one hand, and rationalism on the other. We discuss the effects produced on modern christianity by lutheranism or ultramontanism. And learned critics can tell us what conflicting influences were exerted by Ebionite, Pauline, and neo-Platonist doctors in the primitive church. But after all there is one main stream, the deep bed of which has drawn all these tributaries into itself.

We may venture, perhaps, to carry the illustration a little

* It will be said that this description is exaggerated. Perhaps it is, if we had to do only with what people fully realize of their religious position. But much mental distress is caused by dim apprehension of the logical consequences of unrealized positions. Does the Athanasian Creed mean anything or nothing?

further. Here is a town on the banks of a fair river; and the whole reputation of the city rests on the health-giving qualities of the water. But this river has many contributing streams unequally exposed to pollution. As time goes on experience shows that the river water is losing both its purity and its healthful qualities; and it is proposed to remedy the evil by supplying the town directly from the upper reaches of the stream. But opponents of the project observe that all the tributaries have special qualities of their own; and they argue that these are essential to the complex properties of the river. That river grows, they say, in its medicinal virtues as it descends and increases in volume. True, the nearer tributaries are mere drainage, which might well be got rid of; but if you go beyond a certain point, about the exact position of which there may be difference of opinion, you will experience a distinct loss for every subsidiary stream you exclude. In fact, by a providential arrangement, the qualities of the original fountain are necessarily latent until they are developed by the infall of the earlier tributaries. However sacred the waters of the prime source may be, they are unavailable for restorative purposes until thus mingled. On the other hand, it is urged that however valuable the special qualities of the lower streams may be, yet these afford no sufficient compensation for the harm that is done by the peculiar liability of even the earliest tributaries to pollution. At all events, it may be said, let us try! Let us mount up to the prime source of all, the transparent fount that bubbles out of the living rock, and let us draw thence and drink. It may be that much may be wanting of what we are accustomed to; but on the other hand, the water there may have properties of its own, which have been dropped or neutralized in the windings and comminglings of the course. It may even be that we shall find there, in hitherto unimagined vigour, the qualities which make the river's fame.

Now christianity, or at least the church, which ought to be embodied christianity, has, with fine meaning, been called "the city of God," and it stands by the river of the water of life. But the tributaries of that river, as we know it, are many and various, and they are all alike exposed to pollution. We hold this to be true, not only of mediæval and modern influences which have affected the church, but of the very earliest streams of thought and feeling that swelled the tide of its life. For it can hardly be denied that even the teaching of apostles shows considerable traces of theosophic speculation and metaphysical elaboration, en-

tirely foreign to the original simplicity of Christ.* It may of course be said that the maturer teaching of the apostles was necessary in order to give practical efficacy to the profounder elements, which, from the beginning, lay hidden in the wisdom of Christ. This may, or may not have been so; but, inasmuch as the prime impulse of the christian movement was indisputably given by Jesus, it is surely worth our while to study the original ideas of the great master himself, apart, if possible, from their later elaboration by others. There must have been something very wonderful in the first outburst of that mighty spiritual force, which afterwards absorbed so many and such diverse intellectual and moral energies into itself. Are there left any records which may enable us to frame for ourselves a conception of the mode of its operation? There is much in the theories and reasonings of St. Paul, for instance, which we feel that we cannot now appropriate without doing violence to intellectual habits of judgment, and moral habits of feeling, such as have obtained an unchallenged supremacy over all ordinary affairs of life. Thus, his insistance on a vision in the sky, as proof positive of the physical resurrection of Christ, is entirely foreign to modern habits of reasoning. And no ingenuity of commentators will enable us to read the ninth or the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, without a sense of painful incongruity with our feeling of justice. Nevertheless St. Paul and the other apostles impress us with the idea of men profoundly moved by a grand impulse towards a higher life; and that impulse is clearly traceable to the ministry of Jesus. If we then, by any means, could put ourselves imaginatively in their place, is it not possible that we should feel that impulse too? At any rate, we long to know whether there is anything in the reminiscences of Jesus still extant, which can at all account for the extraordinary influence he exerted over such men.

And here we must not neglect a special reason for this desire; a reason arising out of the prevalent and irreversible tendency to depreciate miracle as an instrument of revelation. This tendency is almost as clearly marked in those who still believe in the historical reality of miracles as in those who entirely reject them. It becomes then most profoundly interesting to know whether, apart from the traditions of miraculous power, which have surrounded the memory of Jesus with a supernatural halo, there was sufficient in the

* As to the grounds of this assertion, let any one give one Sunday to the reading of St. Mark's Gospel, and another to the Epistle to the Romans or Hebrews, and he can estimate them for himself. As to St. John's Gospel, see below.

greatness of his character and the nobility of his teaching to account for the impluse he gave to the higher life of man. In other words, we want to learn whether, if the prevalent theology and the whole of its miraculous associations were abandoned, there is still that in the personal religion of Jesus, which would attract us to profess ourselves christians and to justify us in doing so.

But further, for those who surrender theosophical theories about the nature of Christ, there must arise special reasons of peculiar force for the present enquiry. For the influence he still exerts on the world is so immense, so profound and searching; the hold he has taken on the hearts of men so pathetic and inspiring, that the personal characteristics which account for these things must appear of transcendent interest. Indeed his career was, by all accounts, so short, his social position was so lowly, his national associations were, in the eyes of the western world, so despicable, his reported doctrines were so unworldly in spirit, and often so paradoxical in form, that the intellect is paralysed with astonishment, and appeals to the heart's experience of moral miracles, if perchance it may find a solution there. What keen purity of soul give vividness to the light that darts so far across the ages? What was the original music of the voice, whoes broken echoes charm us even in their dying? It is for the answer to such questions that we want to know what was the real religion of Jesus.

You have before you now two opposite reasons, or classes of reasons, for interest in this question. On the one hand, we are told that eternal bliss or endless misery is dependent on the answer. On the other hand, it is suggested that in the simple origins of christianity we may find anew an inspiration sorely needed by this age.

But let us note here that the sort of information desirable, as well as the degree of certainty necessary, is very different in the two cases. If you are called upon to cross a plank over an apparently bottomless abyss, you will need something not far short of infallible testimony before you trust it. But if you want to know what sort of spring-board will enable you to leap the highest, the slightest testimony in favour of any particular pattern may induce you to try it; and then experience will be all the proof you require. Just so, if you think that your deliverance from the flames of hell, or your enjoyment of the blessings of heaven, depends upon your choice of a theology, you may well desire supernatural and infallible testimony in favour of the system you select. To talk of experimental proof is out of the question here.

We may know by experience what excites and colours our hopes; but we cannot know by experience that these are justified, until we have passed the abyss of death. We are, therefore, dependent on the testimony of those whom we suppose to have had superhuman means of knowledge. Thus it becomes of crucial importance to us to prove, first, that such persons existed; next, that they had superhuman means of knowledge; thirdly, that they taught precisely these opinions and no others. But the case is very different when you wish approximately to ascertain what it was that gave the original moral impulse, of which Calvinistic and even Pauline theology seems in itself incapable. This question is of course susceptible only of a probable answer. But the mere probability may attract your attention, and then perhaps you can try it for yourself. In this kind of enquiry you can expect no supernatural authority to decide, and no infallible voice to direct. But you have this consolation; character is not formed by infallible dictation, but by pictured ideals and imaginative sympathy.

A description of the method on which we proceed in this enquiry will occupy the remainder of the present lecture. Keep in mind the nature of the problem. We are asking what was the personal religion of Jesus; not what it was thought to be by Primitive Church Fathers, nor even by Apostles. We are asking what there was original and distinctive in the religion of Jesus; not what ideas he held in common with the Jews. Further, we are instituting no enquiry now as to the historical outlines of his career. We take for granted the common basis of facts on which all historians, both sacred and secular, are agreed,—the lowly origin, the prophetic ministry in Galilee, the establishment of a circle of disciples, the excitement of opposition amongst the great religious authorities of the day, and the tragic death at Jerusalem. About these there is no dispute. The difficulty begins when we attempt to distinguish, amongst the reminiscences of unequal value and often conflicting testimony left to us, the probable germs of the stupendous results that followed. For these germs we are directed to certain books of various character and independent purpose, which, bound up together, make the New Testament.

Now, in taking up these for the purpose of enquiry, the first condition we make is that, we shall be allowed to treat them, so far as criticism is concerned, precisely as we should treat any other books whatever. So far as feeling is concerned, their venerable associations with man's highest life, and with our own holiest affections, necessarily put a differ-

ence between them and ordinary literature. But what we ask is, that, so far as it is possible to prevent it, this difference shall not interfere with the application of critical principles such as we instinctively apply to works like George Fox's journal, or to the most trustworthy accounts of Emanuel Swedenborg. In such books, common sense compels us to account for many exceptional experiences, and improbable assertions, either by misunderstanding, or visionary interpretations of ordinary facts, or by illusions of an excitable and morbid spirit. But an additional difficulty arises in regard to some few of the New Testament books, and particularly those of the utmost consequence to us in this enquiry. For in the proper sense of the word, they had no individual authors, but were a multitudinous expression of many minds, for which the first writer effected little if anything more than a transcription from the vagueness of social memory, to the distinctness of manuscript. In such a case, we shall have to allow for the possible refractions and distortions caused by the fluid medium of the social memory, as well as for inevitable personal errors. If any one thinks that this entire freedom of criticism is inconsistent with true reverence, or is not permissible in dealing with religion, he will do well not to attempt to follow us any farther. We will not argue with him now. The time-spirit will undeceive him, or at any rate his children.

Now at a first inspection of the New Testament books, a clear distinction is apparent at once between the epistles and the gospels. The epistles give us theories about Jesus. The gospels confine themselves for the most part to what he said and did. The epistles are very largely concerned with the ontology of the divine nature, and with the supernatural offices assigned to Christ therein; the gospels tell us mainly what Jesus was in this life, and his bearing toward human sin and sorrow. The epistles describe a system; the gospels exhibit a person; the epistles discover to us an inspiration hardening into a creed; the gospels show a creed dissolving under an inspiration. To which then shall we go—to the epistles or the gospels—with most hope of finding the religion of Jesus? Surely, however valuable the epistles may be for other purposes, to make them our prime authority in such an enquiry would be to obtain an answer as to what the apostles thought about Jesus, and not what he was in himself. But, as we have already said, this is precisely what we wish to avoid.

We will go then to the gospels; and in doing so it is impossible to suppress the questions, who wrote them, and

when were they written? The importance of such questions for our purpose, may be, and often is greatly exaggerated. There are many simple souls who appear to imagine that when they have thrown doubt on the apostolic origin and date of the gospels, all questions about them cease henceforward to have either interest and importance; and that we might as well make a bonfire of them at once. And of course if our object had been that which we have expressly repudiated, the discovery of an infallibly certain theology, there might be much force in such reasoning. But such is not our object, and therefore the reasoning is beside the mark altogether. For our more modest design, it is quite sufficient if we can find any probably anthentic record of the memories and affections current in the early church, one or two generations after the death of Christ. For whatever additions may, even so early, have been made to the actual facts, we may well suppose that a supremely great character and a creative spirit must have left traces which will be more or less discernible. We have no object then in exaggerating the antiquity of the gospels. The almost unanimous acknowledgments of very various critics are sufficient for us; while as to the authorship of these works, if it can fairly be made out, we are satisfied; and if it cannot, no theory of ours is disturbed.

At the outset, it is to be observed that there is as clear and palpable a difference in scope and feeling between the first three gospels, and the fourth, as there is between the gospels and epistles. The former three are called "synoptic," a word which means "seeing together,"—because they give substantially the same selection of anecdotes concerning Jesus. The fourth gospel stands apart, having a distinctly individual character of its own, and implying a much more elaborate theory of Christ's supernatural being than is found in the others. As to the synoptical gospels, it is possible or even probable that they existed pretty much as we have them before the end of the first century.* I do not say that these very books, identical in arrangement and wording, were handed about then with the names of Matthew, Mark and

* This assertion is fully justified by these facts amongst many others. Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century, quoted as documents well known in the church, certain "memoranda" or "memoirs of the apostles," and the quotations he gives, are for the most part free quotations of passages from our three gospels, or else are a medley from all three. Again, Papias, of Hierapolis, writing about the year 125, A.D., relates certain traditions he had received from "the elders," as to a Hebrew gospel written by Matthew, and a Greek gospel by Mark. But it is too bold a conclusion to say our first gospel is a translation of the former; or that the book assigned to Mark, was precisely identical with what goes under that name now.

Luke, attached to them; for that is scarcely made out. But a selection of anecdotes existed, "familiar as household words," in the mouths of the earliest christians. And this selection, besides a good deal more, contained the substance of these existing gospels. So much may be said with confidence, but beyond this we cannot go. We cannot assign a date within a range of thirty or forty years, to the *writing* of these sacred anecdotes. They certainly cannot have existed as books, when St. Paul was writing his epistles; or in his references to the events of Christ's ministry there must surely have been some allusion to them. This would shut us up to the last thirty-five years of the first century, and we cannot pretend to speak more exactly. The question of authorship, for reasons which will presently appear, is scarcely worth discussing. The real truth is, as just now hinted, that properly speaking they never had any authors at all; but only editors.

Here we must try to estimate a most singular and interesting feature of these synoptical gospels; we have seen how they differ from the epistles, and if you bear those differences in mind, you will acknowledge that in spite of what has just been said, they suggest strongly the priority of the gospels. I am sure that if the New Testament books were put into the hands of a scholarly and impartial critic, who had a feeling for the growth of literature, but knew nothing whatever of the theological issues supposed to be dependent on the question, he would judge from internal evidence that the gospels were earlier productions than the epistles. For there is about the primitive literature of any creative epoch a childlike freshness, a confidence independent of evidence, an unconscious fulness of life, a healthy outwardness of imagination, which cannot possibly be afterwards imitated by art. To expect a work like the Iliad from the age of Pericles, would be like expecting snowdrops in the blaze of summer. Now, although the case of the gospels is very different from that of a poem, yet they make upon us precisely the impression of childlike freshness, unconsciousness, and uncritical confidence inspired by imagination or affection. The epistles on the contrary, show a laborious effort to build up a system, a critical handling of older materials, and a self conscious logic. To imagine that the church could pass through this epistolary stage, and afterwards enter on the gospel stage, would be to suppose that a boy who had reached the pragmatical age, could ever again become a genuine child. The thing is impossible: and all the Dry-as-dusts in Germany can never persuade me that the synoptical gospels were *created* after the epistles had been written.

You will say then there seems to be here a flat contradiction, for on one hand we have maintained that these gospels could not have been written before St. Paul's epistles; on the other hand we declare that they bear all the marks of an earlier stage of church life. But the two positions are not so inconsistent as they appear to be, and the reconciliation is to be found in the highly probable suggestion, that the anecdotes of Jesus now embodied in the gospels floated about in an unwritten form many years before they were committed to writing. This is quite in accordance with what is known of the manner in which popular traditions were preserved before the invention of printing; nay, it is certain, that some great monuments of ancient literature, the poems of Homer for instance, were handed down in this way for generations before any written copies existed. Besides, this mode of preserving the thoughts and memories of departed generations was specially adapted to the customs of the jewish teachers; thus the Talmud, a vast body of detailed commentary on the Law, was developed to a marvellous extent between the captivity and final destruction of the Temple, without a word being written. Now it is not mere conjecture which leads us to suppose that the very first followers of Jesus pursued a similar plan, for there are certain appearances in the synoptical gospels which cannot be satisfactorily accounted for on any other supposition.

Take up the little "harmony" of the gospels, published years ago for Sunday Schools, by Mr. Robert Mimpriss, and founded on Greswell's "Dissertations". Disregard the introductory chapters of Matthew and Luke, and also the supplementary stories of the resurrection, in regard to both of which sections of the combined narrative, the attempted "harmony" is most conspicuously hopeless. Confine your attention to the actual period of Christ's ministry, beginning from his baptism and ending with his death. Exclude from view the passages violently thrust in there from the fourth gospel; and in the combined synoptical narrative which remains you will find the remarkable features to which we have referred. You will observe that the selection of anecdotes given, is to a large extent identical in all three; and if you compare the exact language used in any single instance as in that of the leper healed*, or the paralysed man let down through the roof†, the phraseology is strikingly similar but also curiously different. The similarity is such that you cannot suppose each writer to be composing an

* Matt. viii, 2. Mark i, 40. Luke v, 12.
† Matt. ix, 2. Mark ii, 3. Luke. v, 18.

independent narrative; for this similarity is found not only in reported speech, which we might suppose every author would try to reproduce, according to accepted accounts; but it is found also in the relation of events, which really independent narrators would certainly describe entirely in their own words.

On the other hand the differences are such that we cannot imagine all the writers to have had the same document before them, which they copied or altered according to their own views. Experience shows that such a mode of working would produce differences and agreements of a very different kind from those actually before us Three men having one document before them with one general aim, though with various views of detail, are morally certain to transcribe some considerable portions of that document word for word. Thus the whole three of them occasionally, and oftener two of them, will give a whole paragraph without an alteration. But such a case as this never occurs in a single instance, throughout the whole course of the synoptic narrative. Now on the hypothesis of a common document this is a most extraordinary circumstance. Whoever the writers were, they were men whose religious ideas were so much in accord, that attempts to point out minor differences between them generally look fanciful and arbitrary. Is it possible then that men having so much in common, and editing one single document, would never have agreed to reproduce a single paragraph of it unaltered? Their only reason for editing it must have been that it seemed to them valuable. It might require supplementing from their own traditional knowledge; might require alteration here and there. But it is in the or it highest degree improbable and unreasonable to suppose that they would not leave a single paragraph as it stood.

Again, the differences are such as cannot be accounted for on this supposition. Men editing a common document, which on the whole inspires their confidence, will not as a rule alter its wording, without some object in view; and this object it is usually in the power of criticism to detect. If for instance the original document, in relating the baptism of Jesus, made the impression that the descent of the Spirit upon him in the form of a dove was only an exstatic vision in his own soul, we can well understand why the third evangelist should add, as he does, the phrase "in a bodily shape"*. He felt himself perfectly justified in giving expression to the confident belief of the church circle in which he moved, that

* Luke iii, 22.

the miraculous appearance was external and real. And if all the differences were of that kind, although this would leave our previous argument untouched, the fact, so far as it goes, would be consistent with the idea of a common document variously edited. But the truth is, the differences are very rarely indeed of this kind. Not one out of a hundred variations in phraseology can be accounted for in this manner. In many cases it is only the order of the words that is different; and even when the words are changed, they mean very often precisely the same thing. On the supposition of a common document these verbal alterations must appear nine times out of ten, arbitrary, capricious and unnecessary. But proceeding, as we do throughout, on the supposition that human nature at the christian era was very much what it is now, we cannot believe that three reasonable men would gratuitously have given themselves such unnecessary trouble. The limits of similarity and the nature of the detailed differences between these gospels therefore constrain us to reject as improbable the idea that they spring from one original document.

On the other hand it is equally impossible to believe that these works are of entirely independent origin. It is inconceivable that three men, uninfluenced by any previously existing model, should have hit upon nearly the same selection of events for narration and should so often and continually have used a phraseology so similar. And so we come back to the suggestion mentioned, that the earliest, the original selection of gospel anecdotes current in the church, was not written at all, but existed only in an oral form. A simple experiment will prove that this supposition accounts for all the appearances just described. Let a tale be told several times over in nearly the same language to a number of intelligent young people, and let them afterwards write out from memory and entirely apart from each other, their recollections of the story. The result will be found to present several of the phenomena of these synoptical gospels. The arrangement and the wording will be so nearly alike as to imply a common source; yet the differences will be of such a character, and so capriciously distributed, as to suggest tricks of memory rather than deliberate variations from a copy.

The process in the case of the synoptical gospels must have been something of this kind. The words and deeds of Jesus were of course the subject of constant conversation amongst the apostles after his death. And as, little by little, their mission opened out before them, their immediate business was to make others acquainted with what had so powerfully

influenced themselves. But their conversations and conferences one with another had settled, by a process of what may not irreverently be called natural selection, the particular anecdotes most available for their purpose. These anecdotes therefore speedily became the common property of the Jewish church: and so long as the apostles lived, there was probably no thought of writing out these treasures of memory. But as these first fathers of the church died off, there would naturally arise a desire to have in some fixed form, the testimony popularly associated with their names. Thus many "took in hand" as it is said in the third gospel, "to set forth in order those things which were most confidently held" by the churches. And amongst these attempts, three finally eclipsed all others, probably because they were believed to give in an authoritative form the preaching of the three apostles, Matthew, Peter, and Paul.* The writers who wrote these various versions of the story followed the one oral gospel; but that oral gospel had differed in the lips of various preachers, and these differences were certainly not lessened by the reporters who wrote from memory. You will now understand what is meant when we said that the synoptical gospels had, properly speaking, no authors, but only editors. The writers neither invented, nor made researches, in our modern sense of the word; they simply wrote what they recognized as the common stock of christian tradition. In this way, such a gospel as that of Mark would be produced, which begins with the baptism, and ends, in the most ancient copies, with the mystery of the open tomb, but without any account of the resurrection. Gospels written later, or re-edited, were enriched with such stories of the birth and the resurrection of Christ as were current a few years afterwards, when curiosity on these subjects had been excited. And so we get the introductory and concluding chapters of Matthew and Luke, which have manifestly a different origin from that of the common synoptical gospel. These three narratives then give the imaginative memories that gladdened and hallowed the church at the very time when Paul was elaborating his new theology, and the elder apostles were alarmed at his innovations. They reveal an earlier stage of christian life than his writings do; although they did not assume a written form till his epistles were given to the world. On this account the gospels form a most interesting study.

Very little of what has now been said is applicable to the

* Mark was commonly believed to have been an attendant of St. Peter, and Luke of St. Paul.

fourth gospel, called by the name of St. John. On the question whether it is rightly so called, we can only say here that the balance of argument seems to be against the idea that St. John wrote it himself, but rather favourable to the opinion that this apostle founded a special school of doctrine of which this gospel is the outcome. According to the common belief, it was not written before the extreme end of the first, or the beginning of the second century, and it is quite possible that it was produced as late as the year 125, but hardly later.* Of more consequence for us, however, is the fact that it is not founded on the same cycle of anecdotes as the synoptical gospels, and that it differs very much from them in bearing all the marks of individuality, both in conception and execution. It is not at all improbable that the writer followed certain traditional memories specially preserved in the section of the church to which he belonged. But, however this may be, these memories certainly received the stamp of his own particular character and feeling; and this is even more marked in his report of the words of Jesus, than in his record of events. Thus, we do not seem to get as near to the reality of Christ's ministry in this gospel, as in the synoptics. Yet perhaps there is a sense in which it may occasionally take us even nearer. A great artist may treat the landscape before him very freely, and yet may call up more of the feeling impressed on actual beholder, than would be possible with a more correct representation. So it is in matters of history. The story of the crucifixion in the fourth gospel, is much grander than in the other three; and probably excites more of the feelings with which the dread scene was witnessed by sympathetic beholders. Nevertheless, there is for the most part a lack of the childlike freshness which is so charming in the earlier narratives. It does not present us with the impersonal memory of the church, but with the choice recollections of a particular school, edited by a man of uncommon genius and strong opinions. In fact, as was said, between the synoptical gospels and the fourth, we find very much the same difference which we remarked between the gospels generally and the epistles. And carrying out the same principle, we shall expect more information about the personal religion of Jesus from the synoptics, than from the later gospel. Still there are gleams of a special insight in this work, of which we shall do well to avail ourselves when we can.

* The late date assigned by some critics (A.D. 150—160) would leave its position in the writings of Irenæus entirely unaccountable, to say nothing of the evidence that it was known to the early Gnostics.

The three synoptical narratives offer us the richest mine. But even here it ought to occasion no surprise if we find much alloy. "The Jews require a sign," said St. Paul, speaking from his own experience; and certainly there are miracles enough here to answer the longing of the Jews. There are also interpretations of the Old Testament scriptures which savour much more of pedantic rabbinism, than of the simplicity of Christ. And there are apocalyptic visions which at best are only reflections of Daniel, Esdras and Enoch. But there runs throughout a vein of nobler metal, as clearly distinguishable from primitive church gossip, as yellow gold is from the hoary quartz and twinkling stars of mica amongst which it is found. There are words of loving wisdom; there are suggestions of piercing insight; there are gleams of a peculiarly exalted ideal of human life; there are pulsations of an universal charity; all of which bear the stamp of individual character, and are utterly foreign to the peddling prejudices of Judaism.

Now suppose the diggers at Pompeii, should strike upon a sculptor's studio, where, in the confusion wrought by the volcanic overthrow of the city, there lie scattered the fragmentary remains of many works of art. In many of them there are traces of the poverty in thought, and sensationalism in feeling, which mark a debased provincial taste. Others show attempts at least towards a better ideal. But here is detected a godlike head, and there a divinely carved arm, and there again a grand torso, all of them betraying the conception of a single mind, with the unerring stroke of the hand that it directed. In such a case there is no hesitation. Here, cry all beholders, is the work of the master; and all the well meant rubbish around is no doubt the contribution of apprentices or journeymen. Just so we judge as to the fragmentary, often confused, relics left us in the gospels. The difference in value between the materials they afford is often too striking to escape the attention of even the most careless; though in other cases, an educated spiritual tact is needed to appreciate it.

In Matthew xxiv, 29, we read—"immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven." These words are said to have been uttered, amongst a number of similar predictions made, in answer to a question of the disciples who asked "what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?" And throughout these pas-

sages, it is assumed that the "coming of the Son of Man," the end of the world, and the establishment of the kingdom of heaven are different phrases meaning the same thing.*

But in Luke xvii, 20, we are told that when the Jews asked a very similar question, Jesus answered, "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say lo, lo, here! or lo, there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." These two descriptions of the kingdom of God are in clear, unmistakeable and palpable contradiction to one another. They cannot have been taught by the same teacher. And there can be no hesitation in deciding which of them we should attribute to the head and source of christian inspiration. The former passage is entirely in the style of Dr. Cumming. It has all the appearance of being a parody on the book of Daniel. And it is difficult to conceive that he who reproved men for morbid anxieties which betrayed a want of faith in God, would have stooped to gratify the vulgar appetite, always felt by ignorance, for a cheap insight into the mysteries of the future, apart from the divinely appointed labour of induction. But the other passage, in St. Luke, has a peculiar dignity. It is suggestive of a serenely contemplative spirit that can look both beneath and beyond the symbols of popular hope. It shows the sympathy that can appreciate the value of such symbols, and the inspired idealism which expands their meaning. It tells of a marvellous insight into the destinies of a traditional phrase. It reveals the master who taught St. Paul to say "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." †

Again, it is said in John vii, 31, that the appetite of the crowd for wonders being entirely satisfied, they asked "when Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done?" According to this signs were the accepted test of Christ's mission to men. And indeed the gospels appear to be generally written on this assumption. But here and there, we find words implying a conception almost startlingly different. And as this was contrary to all the prejudices of the disciples, it is more likely to have come from the master whom in many things they misunderstood. "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." The words sound harsh in their present connection, addressed to a father who applied for aid to a sick child. But what if they are a relic of Christ's remembered impatience with the desire of the people for wonders? In Mark viii, 11, we are told

* See Matthew xxv, 1,—31. † Note also Mark iv, 26, as equally in consistent with the visions of chaos and cataclysm referred to.

distinctly, that on one occasion being asked for a sign, Jesus sighed deeply in spirit and said "why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily, I say unto you, there shall no sign be given to this generation. And he left them and departed." *

The notion of sectarian privilege was strongly developed among the early christians; an inheritance derived perhaps from the overweening ideas of national privilege entertained by the Jews. Surely it must have been under the influence of such prejudices that they wrote how, in explaining the parable of the sower, for the initiated few, Jesus said, "unto them that are without all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted and their sins should be forgiven them." † How utterly opposed is such a speech in motive and feeling, to the words St. Matthew attributes to Jesus, when he found that rank and fashion scorned him, and that his mission must be amongst the ignoble multitudes who could render him no reward! "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." It was just these babes who could not understand the parable of the sower. And to our mind there can be no doubt which saying really reveals the heart of Christ.

It will very likely appear to many of you that the method we have now described must depend very much upon individual tact, and must always be uncertain in its operation. But the tact required is such as all may cultivate. It is not dependent upon scholarship. All it needs is such a sense of moral fitness between excuse and effect, as can detect in the misty but shining uplands of the gospels, the fountain heads from which the purest streams of moral influence in church history have flowed. Those whose business it is to deal with money, acquire, without scientific acquaintance with the process of assaying, a tactual and visual perception which enables them instantly to detect the difference between spurious and genuine coin. So those who make it the business of their lives to emulate the spirit of Christ, need not be slow to learn the art of practically distingushing the fine gold of His words even though otherwise ignorant of Biblical criticism.

Besides, we may now recall with advantage what was said about the absence of any need in such an enquiry, for infallible certainty. You may and you will fall into error.

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*See also Matt. xvi. 1—4. †Mark iv. 11.

But such errors do not make the difference between salvation and damnation; and with every step of progress in the spiritual life, our tact will become more subtle and our perception more sure. The more we realize the essential spirit of Christ, the more will all the complex elements of the gospels fall into their proper places, until we shall feel surprise that confusion should ever have arisen. How much disappointed travellers sometimes are with great pictures, to the sight of which they have looked forward as one chief end of their journey! The features of Saint or Martyr are obscure with stains of neglect and age, or with the blotches of more than one inferior artist. But if the travellers have eyes to see, they sometimes find that as they gaze, the familiar lines and colours of antiquity seem as it were to detach themselves from the corruptions of time, and to go back and back into majestic loneliness, until they stand apart in their own venerable sweetness, a miracle of art. Then the beholders wonder at their own blindness that could for a moment confuse the dust and daub of later ages, with the visions that first brightened the world. So perhaps it may be with the image of Jesus in the gospels. Primitive misconceptions have dimmed it; and sectarian passions have distorted it. But in some hour of sacred contemplation, undisturbed by prejudice or fear, we feel as though a miracle were wrought. Then

> " all at once beyond the will
> We hear a wizard music roll;
> And through a lattice on the soul,
> Looks thy fair face and makes it still."

At least the subject is worth farther thought, for no darkness of the past enshrines a more fascinating enigma than that of the wonder working speaker, who with the breath of his lips overthrew the temples of antiquity and on their ruins built the modern world.

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THE RELIGION OF JESUS:

ITS MODERN DIFFICULTIES

AND

ITS ORIGINAL SIMPLICITY.

A Course of Sunday Evening Lectures,

BY

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

II.

The Religion of Jesus; His doctrine of God.

It would be a great mistake if we were to expect, in the religion of Jesus, any philosophical explanation of the mystery of eternal power. Indeed, that is not the proper business of religion at all. The work of religion is rather to cultivate in men the temper most susceptible to the ultimate sanctions of morality. But our approach to those ultimate sanctions, is always approximate only; for they lie in the region of the infinite; and this is the reason, though we cannot admit that it is a justification, for the confusion persistently kept up between religion and theology. The influences that cultivate a moral susceptibility, and those that shape an intellectual scheme, though they may often be allied, are yet clearly distinguishable; and are seldom, if ever, wielded with equal force by the same man. In other words, prophets and philosophers are distinct races.

Nevertheless, a religion is ineffectual unless it to some extent satisfies intellectual as well as moral needs. The discovery of facts is a perpetual revelation. The world is hardly of the same size to two successive generations of men.

And in the growth of knowledge, some new born, but not newly created, religion is continually wanted, to elevate the moral temper of men, and fit it to appreciate the fresh aspect in which the same eternal sanctions of righteousness are from time to time presented. This is what the religion of Jesus did. And it did it in such a way as to afford a type, or method, that is always applicable when the same process is necessary again. But to clear this up, a slight digression will be necessary.

If, amongst pre-historic savages, the question was ever asked, what reason is there in the nature of things why I should not steal my neighbour's bow and arrows, now when his absence gives me the chance?—the only possible answer would probably have been, because he has set up a mighty fetish close by his hut, which will eat you up if you do. It would be a mistake to think such superstitions only ridiculous. For to my mind, they show the dawn of a recognition that the mysterious powers, which rule the world, take note of human conduct, and have established in the nature of things, a standard to which we should do well to conform. In other words, such superstitions showed some susceptibility, however faint, to the ultimate sanctions of morality.* But we shall not dispute that the intellectual idea of these sanctions was very grossly inadequate. It would lead us too far to trace the parallel development of theology and religion through the ascending grades of polytheism and monotheism. Most of you would admit, I presume, that there has generally been some kind of correspondence between the tone of morality, and the elevation of the sanction. Where the latter has been rude and base, the former has been low and coarse. Indeed, it may be said, we did fetishism too much honour to suppose that it was associated with anything that we should now recognize as morality. Wherever it is known in the surviving barbarism of the present day, all that it does, so far as we are informed, is to give the force of fear to the authority which binds men to the observance of apparently unmeaning customs in dress, food or language.

The polytheism of the Greeks originated in the personification of various powers of nature. And this is a much higher thing than fetishism. But even amongst them, the philosophers complained that morality was kept down by

* I may be told that fetishism was cruel, base and foul in its morality, if morality it could be said to have. But is it not possible that we know fetishism, as we know christianity, only in a degraded form? At any rate, it touched imbruted men with awe; and that is something. Without that feeling, there is no real susceptibility to moral sanctions.

unworthy ideas entertained about the Gods. The monotheism of the Mosaic religion furnished, in the sovereign will of the Most High, a far nobler sanction of the moral law, than any that was known to the poetic imagination specially characteristic of the Greeks. But still the Jews, who were forbidden to represent the deity by sculptured forms, certainly pictured him mentally as a magnified man. And the prophets frequently warned them against the dangers of such a conception. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," says the psalmist, speaking in the name of Jehovah. "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" "Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah," asks Micah, "and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? . . . . *He hath showed thee*, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" To what is the appeal in these last words? It can hardly be said that it is to the Mosaic law. For that is full of minute directions concerning sacrifice and ceremonial. The appeal seems rather to be to a common sense view of the facts of life, seen in the light of a sincere conscience. So again, when Ezekiel, in the name of the Lord, condemns the abuse of the proverb "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," and declares that there can be no transference either of guilt or merit, he appeals from a corrupt tradition to the actual facts of divine government, and especially to the inward facts of conscience.

In such instances, we have particular cases of a general law, which is this; that the movement from a lower to a higher stage, both of theology and morality, is effected directly or indirectly by a closer observance and a better estimate of facts, whether inward or outward, and generally of both. A higher intelligence showed that, as a general rule, the fetish did not act as was believed. An effort of moral courage proved that character did not suffer, and that a fuller inward harmony was gained by disregarding the petty rules of superstition. Outward facts proved that the world was not ruled on the principles assumed by tradition; and facts of conscience showed that a nobler life could be lived by abandoning them. But in this process, it is always the theological form given to the sanction of morality that is the most difficult to deal with. It retains its hold both on the affections and the fears, long after its incongruity with outward facts is apparent. The cry, "great is Diana of the Ephesians," will be roared from ten thousand throats, long

after the name has ceased to mean anything but an excuse for the trade in silver shrines. And this obstructiveness has always a reflex influence on advancing morality, tending to repress it to the level of effete ideas. In such circumstances, the arguments of philosophy have very little apparent effect. So far as they are directed against the prevalent theology, they are necessarily of a negative character; and men cannot live on negatives. But let men's attention be attracted to hitherto neglected facts, whether of the inner or the outer world; and the theology will transform itself. If you walk with a timid child along a dark road at night, it is not reason that can dissolve away the gaunt arms of the arboreal ghost that threatens at a turn of the way. But attract her eyes to the glowworm that sparkles under the hedge, and to the closed eyes of the sleeping daisies, and to the dewy gossamer touched by the rising moon; teach her to weave these into healthier fancies than those of the superstitious nursery; and when she faces the road again, there is no ghost to be seen.

To my mind there are many hints in the gospels, which would lead us to suppose that the real ministry of Jesus as a teacher was very much of the character here suggested. It so exhibited the interest of present facts as to change, so to speak, the spiritual centre of gravity. And so, to those whom he inspired, the world was insensibly transformed. "If any man be in Christ," said St. Paul, "there is a new creation; old things are passing away; behold all things are become new." Jesus found the Jews at just such a critical stage of spritual history as we have supposed. A haze of unreality had gathered over the ancient sanctities of their religion. And this unreality both warped their own consciences, and disguised their true relations to the outward world. There is no doubt that in old times their sacred songs, which proclaimed that "all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens," were instinct with a moral energy such as often gave the nation superiority on the battle-field. But this consciousness of a special inspiration had developed into the monstrous fiction, that they were singled out by the Infinite One to be his peculiar treasure, and that in virtue of this favour they were destined to world-wide dominion. Whatever we may say now about the spiritual fulfilment of such expectations, the notion, as they entertained it, was grotesquely false. They were *not* God's favourite people in any such sense as they supposed. And there was not the slightest prospect of their ever attaining again even the modest degree of political im-

portance enjoyed by Solomon. Indeed it was only the contemptuous indifference of their Roman masters which left to them, in their sanhedrim and synagogues, the semblance of self-government. But the long disappointment of their hopes, so far from leading them to doubt the assumptions on which those hopes had been based, only added a feverish scrupulosity to their observance of the letter of the law. There must, they imagined, be some reason for the shadow of divine displeasure that rested upon their fortunes. Some "accursed thing" must surely be cherished; some particulars of their ancestral religion must have been neglected. And therefore they redoubled their attention to ritual and feast and fast, to sacrifices and purifications, if by any means they might attain the perfect obedience which would bring back the blessing of God. The religion of the time, like that of many churches at the present day, was passionately bent upon a past and impossible, instead of a future and realizable ideal.

Now what Jesus did was to call these people back to reality. He insisted upon present, actual and undeniable facts, whether of their own consciousness or of the outer world. That these facts were often dressed in a figurative or parabolic form is no objection to this statement. For it is just in this form that they go straight home to the common heart of humanity. The image, the parable is but the feathering of the arrow which gives directness to its flight, and sends its point foremost to its aim. There are certain discourses indeed about the end of the world,* in which the ideal of Christ's religion seems to leave the earth and to become dissolved amongst the clouds of sibylline oracle. But the entire want of originality in these pictures contrasts so singularly with the inimitable individuality characteristic of both maxim and parable in other parts of the gospels, that we have grave reason to suspect the intrusion of some foreign element here. The disciples, living towards the end of the first century, probably drew largely upon such books as those of Daniel and Henoch in their own forecasts of the future, and they insensibly enlarged some ill understood expressions of their master by drawing upon such sources. This however is mere conjecture. What is certain is that those apocalyptic discourses are not original, but reproductions of earlier professed revelations. And it is precisely where the teachings of the gospel seem to come freshest from an original source, that they are characterized by

* *e.g.* Matthew xxiv, Mark xiii, Luke xxi.

an appeal from the phantasms of superstition to facts of present experience.

There is a curious testimony to the startling impression made by the words of Jesus when he first opened his lips as a teacher. All these synoptical evangelists agree in saying that what struck the people most was the "*authority*" with which he spoke.* The usual theological interpretation of this is, that he spoke as a divine being, having authority to give commands. But that is a poor meaning; and does injustice to the inherent moral weight of his words. Two of the gospels give us a hint of the real siginificance, when they contrast his manner with that of the scribes. "He taught them as one having authority *and not as the scribes.*" Now how did the scribes teach? They taught by adducing the authority of the great rabbis, as interpreters of the ancient scriptures. If they were discussing a question of perplexity, as for instance whether it was lawful to light a candle on the Sabbath day, they would refer to the views of various rabbis, just as lawyers now reckon up opinions pronounced from the bench. "Rabbi Simeon allows it; Rabbi Judah disallows it; Rabbi Joshua says the thing may be done under special circumstances." This mode of teaching was very dreary and dry; and the more so, because it induced a habit of technicality which dwarfed the subjects of instruction. There were no great broad issues manifestly affecting human life, and making a direct appeal to the heart. Their lessons bristled with points of law, and rasped the mind with arbitrary decisions.

Now only think of the effect likely to be produced upon people accustomed to that kind of thing, by a preacher glowing with a grave earnestness, who deals only with subjects interesting to every heart, and lets the truths he teaches carry their own witness to the conscience! "Blessed are the lowly in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." There was rarely any reference to sacred writings; and never any appeal to the wisdom of the ancients. The appeal was rather *from* such overrated authorities to common sense, right feeling and the manifest facts of life. "Ye have heard that it was said to † them of old time, thou shall not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall

* Matt. vii. 28. Mark i. 22. Luke iv. 32. In the last passage the English version has "power." But the Greek word is the same as in the others.

† The marginal reading is the better.

be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment." "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven." "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

Will it be said that the speaker in such utterances depended on a supernatural dignity, such as that time he could not have asserted, and which never was conceded before his death? I think it much more probable and reasonable to say that he depended upon the power of moral facts, to bear witness for themselves. "The light of the body is the eye;" he said, "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." Here is a case in which a figure of speech only gives force and point to the fact. For it is clearly reason and conscience, united in the faculty of moral judgment, about which the parable is spoken. And Jesus teaches that when reason and conscience are sincere, they are the highest judges to which we can appeal. They need training; they need information; they need careful guarding against perversion; and all the more so, because if they wholly fail, it is impossible that any light from earth or heaven can help us. "This it is which adds emphasis to the solemn warning; "take heed that the light which is in thee be not darkness." But so long as they are sincere, they judge, and in the main judge aright, however action may contradict them, what is best for the moral welfare of man. To them all arguments and motives, to them revelation itself, must appeal. Through them the light of God himself must shine. Happy the man in whom reason and conscience are most sincere, most free from beclouding humours of prejudice and interest! For, says Jesus, "then the whole man shall be full of light, as when in a humble dwelling, isled in darkness, the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light."*

We can now understand what gave so startling an air of authority to the teaching of Jesus, as distinguished from that of the scribes. He believed in the affinity of the human conscience for moral truth. And therefore he did not hold it necessary to argue much, still less to appeal to the dried-up wisdom of the ancients. He simply threw out his facts and

* Luke xi 36.

principles with force sufficient to bring them within range of the consciences of his hearers, assured that mutual attraction between the soul and truth would do the rest. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Did he announce this as a sort of supernatural expert, who had been behind the scenes at the making of the divine laws, and therefore knew their precise scope? It seems at once more reverent and more reasonable to suppose that he said it as one "who knew what was in man," that is, the facts of consciousness, and understood how to appeal to them.

Jesus had not so much to say about the external world, although no one knew better how to use it for purposes of illustration But when he had to deal with it directly he used precisely the same method. He insisted on facing the facts. And he would not allow that even the most specious sentiments were any justification for ignoring them. Thus on one occasion a number of Jews, partly with the object of laying a trap for him, partly it may be in the hope of finding sympathy for their own political discontent, asked him for a plain opinion on the dangerous question, whether it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not. The answer was characteristic. He asked for the tribute money, and pointed to the head of Cæsar stamped upon it. That head was symbolic of a great and palpable fact, the imperial power of Cæsar. The right of coinage was associated with supreme powers of government, and responsibility for public order. Acknowledge the facts, says Jesus. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." But lest he should be for a moment supposed to teach that physical might constitutes right, he adds "render unto God the things that are God's." The facts of the time made Cæsar's rule necessary and inevitable. And if the questioners supposed that the mere acknowledgment of this rule by tribute was inconsistent with allegiance to God, it only showed that they did not sufficiently estimate the divinity of fact; and completely misunderstood the relations of temporal and spiritual power. Another illustration of the same loyalty to facts, is the contempt with which Jesus dismissed the reasoning of those who argued, that the victims of accident or tyranny *must* in some way or other have been obnoxious to the special vengeance of heaven. "Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, suppose ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem?" He knows very well that this was notoriously not the case. Nothing but the sort of perverse ingenuity so often displayed in interpreting divine providence according to private judgment, could have given

the least show of reason to the inference. Jesus is certain that both the reason and the conscience of his hearers is against the supposition. And therefore without argument he says "I tell you nay; but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."

But whether he was dealing with the inner or the outer world, the consequence of his method, in appealing from fancy to fact, was a simplicity of feeling and a lucidity of thought, amidst which the soul fretted by Jewish superstitions moved with a thrilling sense of sudden liberty, like a prisoner set free from a dungeon. Indeed there is no mental feeling so near akin to sudden release from physical agony, as is the relief we gain, in the midst of perplexity, from loyal submission to facts. Through what haunted mazes of unhallowed confusion have many of us struggled in our younger days, impelled by a childish anxiety to reconcile scripture and geology! First we eagerly welcomed any patent method for hastening the slow movements of nature, so that the world's history might be packed into six thousand years. Then, when we found that would not do, we were devoutly grateful to the Septuagint version for giving us some thousand years additional, though, alas, we wanted a hundred millions. Then perhaps there was some mistake in the Hebrew figures. And we were glad to be informed by our learned friends that a jot or a tittle might make all the difference between ten and a thousand. What a stroke of genius seemed the suggestion of an ingenious person, that the winged fowl which appear inconveniently on the fifth day, between the "whales" of that day and the "creeping things" of the next, were after all pterodactyls, or flying lizards, which would be in their appropriate place. Still there was a sense of elaborate unnaturalness pervading our wonderful harmony, which every now and then shot a sharp twinge of pain from the intellect to the conscience. Till at last, in some happy moment, we quietly said to ourselves, Genesis is wrong, and geology right, and we passed from the Babel of fictions to the peace of reality. Nothing happened which we had foreboded. The foundations of character, and the objects of spiritual aspiration remained just what they had been before, only less encumbered by rubbish or mist. And being rid of an intolerable perplexity, we gained more instruction from the book of Genesis itself than ever we had done in all our previous abuse of it.

So we may conceive many of the more candid young Jews, in the time of Christ, to have been troubled in mind about the apparently irrational character of some of their religious

traditions. The heathen philosophers laughed at their notion that idleness on one day in the week could be gratifying to heaven. And had they not reason? How could it be pleasing to God for them to neglect obvious duties, on the plea that it was the sabbath day? What a delight then it must have been to them to have the knot of their perplexity not cut by logic, but dissolved away by healthy moral feeling! "It is *not* pleasing to God," said Jesus, "that you should neglect obvious duties; and it *is* lawful to do well on the sabbath day." So too, how fretting to any mind absorbed in the essentials of conduct, must have been the tendency, so marked on Christ's day, to magnify the washing of cups and pots, and brazen vessels and tables, as a religious rite. Unconsciously to themselves they might lack the moral courage to speak out what they knew to be the truth. But the words of Jesus must have been to them like the relaxing of a moral cramp. "Hearken every one of you, and understand! There is nothing from without a man that, entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile him. . . . . For from within, out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. These are the things that defile a man; but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man."* Thus one distinctive feature, perhaps we may even say the original motive of the religion of Jesus, was a claim of reverence for facts instead of falsehoods; an insistance on less attention to figments of tradition, and more care about the divine side of present realities.

It was this, his pre-eminent susceptibility to the divine side of present realities, which distinguished Jesus so supremely, and made him, in a spiritual sense "the light of the world." And this characteristic was specially marked in his method of dealing with the traditional idea of God. He neither controverted nor affirmed it, except indirectly. If we might presume to judge by the proportion of prominence given to subjects in these gospels, no church doctor ever talked so little theology as the great Founder of the church himself. He makes no pretence whatever of revealing any mystery of the divine nature; nor, if the apocalyptic discourses be excluded, any secret of the divine government. He simply accepts the sense of God which the people around him have inherited, and at the same time he endeavours to separate it from all degrading associations, and to correct it with all the brightest, best and purest experiences of life. He made no

* Mark vii, and Matthew xv.

attempt at any metaphysical conception of God. To ontological speculation, he had not the least tendency. But supreme providence, the ideal life, peace, righteousness, mercy and justice, all seemed to him to have the grandeur of eternity, and to be inseparable from the thought of God.

Suppose a blind child whom you loved, were to ask you, what is the sun? To tell him that it is an enormous globe, more than a million times bigger than the earth, would be to convey no real conception at all. Nor would it be of any use to say that the sun is the source of light; for light the child has never seen. Perhaps you would despair of answering the question directly, until the child is more mature. But you might lead him from the shadow into sunlight, and from sunlight into shade, that he might feel for himself the difference between the presence and absence of its rays; and he would think of it as a diffusive glow which only something intruding between the sky and himself can keep away. And you would lead him out where wallflowers, or honeysuckle, or roses bloom, and with the difference between that fragrance and the damp decay of winter, he would learn to associate the greater or less power of the sun. And you would make him listen to the lark, and the thrush, and the blackbird, as they burst into song when the morning rises, so that music and gladness should be added to the glow and the fragrance in which he has learned to feel the presence of the sun. So Jesus dealt with men in his doctrine of God. For men are born, and necessarily remain, blind to the ultimate glory of God. They keep on asking what is God? But it is a question which cannot be directly answered. Therefore Jesus sought to hallow the associations of the name. For he knew that the heart can take in far more of its meaning than the head.

He used the name of Father, indicative of all-pervasive, all-moulding providence. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." What did he mean by this, but that the presence of God is felt in the subtle sense of an infinite spiritual order, which only comes to those who are lowly and sincere? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." In these words the moral harmonies that are constituted by loving sympathies, are made specially divine; and they who seek to maintain and extend them, so manifestly do the work of God, that we see in them his image. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." The conjunction "and" here expresses identification rather than addition. Righteousness *is* the kingdom or God, because it is the rule of his spirit in the

heart. "If ye had known what this meaneth 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' ye would not have condemned the guiltless." No, surely; for mercy softens away traditional prejudice, and extends symyathy to every feeblest spark of the divine life. Thus a Father's heart, and purity and peace, and righteousness and mercy are all associated with the thought of him who is the ultimate mystery of all being. Or as some one (I forget who) has said, "God is the best that one knows or feels."

Do you ask me how this agrees with my view that the method of Jesus is to recall men from fancy to fact? Well, all facts are not like stones and bricks which you demonstrate by kicking your foot or bruising your hand. As we have often said, the most certain facts of all, are those of consciousness; for by these all others must be interpreted. There are facts of the heart's nature, as well as facts of gravitation and chemical affinity. And when Jesus recalled men's thoughts from morbid speculations about the prophecies, and told them they realised God best when they were loving and just and merciful, I say he did recall their attention from fancies to facts. And would to heaven their was some one to do so now! From the soul-choking theology of the rabbis he appealed to God's ever dawning revelation in the heart. He insisted that in exaltation of the moral life lay the best chance of realizing the immeasurable fact of God's being; that all the best feelings there, were like rays that the eye might follow back till they were lost in infinite light.

If the purpose and scope of these lectures did not forbid, I would undertake to show that there underlies such teaching, though never appearing on this surface, the ultimate philosophy of God, towards which all thought is tending. And though that purpose prevents my going farther, this I will say, that every one who finds a significance in Coleridge's lines

"'Tis the sublime in man, our noontide majesty,
to know ourselves,
Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole,"

must surely realise how all the virtues which subordinate self and magnify the eternal all in all, do verily bring us into the immediate presence of God.

But I hasten on to point out some specially practical advantages attendant on this method of Jesus in dealing with the doctrine of God. For (1) it did not directly attack any sacred traditions. And (2) it required no abstruse theories about God to be first established. And (3) finally it was capable of endless expansion, and is applicable at the present day.

1.—It did not unnecessarily attack any sacred traditions. Do not misunderstand me. There was no cunning reticence on the part of Christ. The modern plan of believing one creed and ostentatiously subscribing to another, for social reasons, or reasons of prudence, formed no part of his method. There were some traditions which were *not* sacred; and these he did not hesitate to denounce. The superstitions, for instance, that polluted the sabbath were in his eyes hurtful, from the spiritual pride and the morbid narrowness of conscience they inspired. Such superstitions he did attack openly and fearlessly, in the teeth of their devotees. He "looked round about upon them in anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." He wondered that the plain facts of God's manifest rule did not touch them with shame for their obliquity of vision. And if he were walking our streets on Sundays now—if he were to see those homes of intellectual light, those possible fountains of moral sweetness, our public libraries and museums grimly silent, dark and empty, while crowds roll in and out at the reeking doors of public houses, he would surely manifest the same emotions now. He would look round about with anger on us and our boasted civilization,—our lavishness in gunpowder and great guns, our timid parsimony in education, the torrents of drink that roll down our street, the sprinkling of popular knowledge that satisfies us,—and the fair future, which is to us what the kingdom of heaven was to the Jews, would receive its indignant vindication. "Woe unto you, ye hypocrites, for ye shut up the kingdom of knowledge against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."

But apart from such reactionary superstitions, Jesus accepted in the main, as a man of the age, the sacred traditions of the people amongst whom he was born. It was principally in his interpretation of the future which was to grow out of the past that he differed from his countrymen. He reverenced the ancient scriptures; but he saw a higher meaning in them than others did. He cherished the prophecies; but he gave to their material symbols a spiritual meaning. He worshipped the God of his fathers; but the glory of that God reflected in his heart was like a new revelation. And sects of considerable magnitude in the early church were so impressed by the difference between the Heavenly Father of Jesus, and the Jehovah of Moses, that they maintained they were not the same God at all. We shall not fall into their error. The ultimate mystery of being always and everywhere veiled under the name of God,

or gods, is the same to all generations, though they dress it in various forms and make of it very different applications. To the philosophy of the subject Jesus apparently gave no thought. He was only anxious that the abiding sense men have of eternal being should be used as an inspiration of the higher life. And this he accomplished by enshrining the Supreme Name, reverenced by all alike, in a halo of the best affections.

The example is one which we should do well to study at the present day. We should not trouble ourselves too much about theological opinions. Where they are clearly obstructive and degrading in their influence, we may of course be bound to expose their falsehood. Otherwise we shall do well to try what is the best use we can make of the various forms, in which men represent to themselves one ultimate fact. I know there are some people now, as there always have been any time these two thousand years, who exhort us to get rid of the name and extirpate the *feeling* of God. They might as well attempt to forbid the sense of infinity as we look up to the midnight sky; or of eternity as we gaze on the everlasting mountains. Far more sensible and more feasible is the suggestion of Mr. Matthew Arnold, that we we should think of God as the power impelling each creature to fulfil the law of its being; or as the power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. And indeed this last was very much the course adopted by Christ.

2.—By thus accepting sacred traditions, and giving them a higher meaning, Jesus avoided the necessity for any abstruse theories about God. It is very unfortunate that people will form their ideas of christianity from the three creeds, or from the Westminster catechism, rather than from thy synoptical gospels. The general notion seems to be that Jesus taught the doctrines of the Trinity and the Fall, and Original Sin. It is true that something very much akin to the first of these doctrines is laid down in the fourth gospel, which, for reasons already given, we cannot regard as an uncoloured description of earliest church memories. But in the synoptics we repeat that there is hardly anything which can be called theology, as this term is understood in the schools. There is nothing about divine ontology. There is very little, and that of doubtful origin, about the secrets of the divine counsels. There is only a loyal endeavour to give a nobler, moral and emotional interpretation to an accepted faith. Even the moral attributes of God are described indirectly, by taking it for granted that they answer to the human heart. "Love your enemies, bless them that persecute you, . . . that

ye may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust." "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in Heaven." In such words we have an assumption, justified by the whole scope and law of human progress, that generosity and sincerity and lowliness are pure and unperverted inspirations of the power by which humanity at large tends to fulfil the law of its being. Or think again of the words Jesus is reported to have uttered, when he was forced unwillingly to the conclusion that the learning and the fashion and the social power of the times had no ears for him, but that his mission was to the lowly and ignorant and poor. It is not resentment but contentment; not a superstitious notion of a divine judgment against learning and culture, but acquiescence in an inevitable law of human progress, that we hear in his address to heaven. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent * and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." That is to say, God cares for the poor, and makes them his mightiest instruments. The most decisive revolutions, whether ecclesiastical or political, begin from below and work upwards. There is a great deal about the method of God's government implied here. But it is founded upon no abstruse reasonings. It comes from identifying the impulses of philanthropy with the movements of the Divine Spirit.

3.—Finally, one most striking advantage of such a doctrine of God is its capacity for expansion in accordance with the growth of knowledge. This is a point of the utmost possible interest for us. For there can be no dispute but that men's notions of the world and of its order have entirely changed since the era of Christ; and if he had imposed on his immediate followers a definition of God suitable to their intellectual limitations, it must necessarily have grown more and more incongruous with the ideas of after ages. Indeed this is just what many assume to be actually the case. Taking their notion of the religion of Jesus from the creeds,

* The real matter of thankfulness is *not* that they were hidden from any one; but that they were revealed to simple folk *even at the cost of being hidden* from the learned. Let any one who thinks himself fitted to be Archbishop of Canterbury and finds himself only a scripture reader in a low neighbourhood, contrast his own feelings with those expressed in the text, and that will bring out its meaning.

rather than from the gospels, they insist that the "magnified non-natural Man," whom Christianity teaches us to worship, can find no place either in or beyond the universe as it is now beginning to be understood. And they have so much to say for themselves, that it sometimes seems as though a cheerless atheism were staring us into stone. But in truth we have no evidence that Jesus ever attempted any definition of God.* He simply accepted the sense of eternal being, which every man has, whether he knows it by that phrase or not; and he told men to think of that eternal being as the source of every impulse which impelled them to their best. He said nothing to depreciate the sacred tradition of a heavenly Monarch, the personal King of the Jews; but his method of dealing with the sense of eternal being was a solvent, under which that Jewish tradition was sure to pass away. And I think the same method is applicable now, amidst all the confusion of contending theologies. They all assume, and they rightly assume, a sense in man of eternal being, a unity in diversity, a whole comprehending all parts, an abiding reality which no passing shows exhaust. But then they try to give definite intellectual notions of this Eternal, and their notions are all different. One says that he is three persons in one God; another that he is the soul of the world without body, parts or passions; a third that he is an infinite person who thinks and loves. For our part we have no hesitation in allowing that all these notions have germs of truth. But as compared with the scale of the subject, the germs are so very small that we are constrained to regard them as infinitely distant from the reality.

Now if we would follow the method of Jesus, we should rather say,—hold to your sacred tradition if you will, so far as it expands and does not narrow your heart. But do not expect to realize in it the living God, the Father of your spirit. Rather he finds you and you find him in every impulse towards a better life. For as that Eternal Power inspires the lilies of the field to clothe themselves with more than Solomon's glory, and the birds of the air to provide by instinct for their young, so does he touch you with an impulse to fulfil the law of your being, in a noble life. And if you accustom yourself to it, this way of regarding God will grow upon you, until you have an abiding sense of a divine presence, and a constant incentive to that sort of prayer whose highest expression is work.

* The words, "God is a Spirit," supposing them to be authentic, are not a definition. They really mean "God is greater than any intellectual or ceremonial forms, and is to be approached by the heart."

Let me refer to the blind child again. I think, if you had told him of a mighty ball rolling, with enormous force, the little worlds around it, you would not have succeeded in conveying any adequate intellectual conception of the reality; but you would certainly have distracted his attention from the tenderer and to him the more real significance of the sun. But in establishing in his mind the association of some unknown and unknowable splendour with the glow of summer warmth, and the perfume of flowers, and the songs of birds, you would at once make the sun very real to him; and yet you would leave him free to adapt his ideas to every successive instalment of knowledge about the subject which he might prove capable of receiving. So it is with Christ's doctrine of God. It is not scientific. It is addressed to the heart. But the very absence of any attempt at scientific definition makes it as expansive as man's knowledge of the universe.

One word more. Such a doctrine of God suggests an Incarnation, which may be a permanent element in universal religion. "The light of the body is the eye," says Jesus. But surely the eye is not illuminative by itself. It is light, he says; because it appreciates light, and brings us into communion with light. Just so the God of the soul is conscience; not that conscience is eternal or boundless, but that through it we get that sense of eternal right, or fitness, or self-consistency, and that feeling of infinite authority on the one hand and limitless obligation on the other, which seem most to bring us into communion with God. It is always in a realization of the sacredness of duty that the sense of God is most impressive; always in the commanding sweetness of moral affections that the universal divinity seems to be specially present. And these experiences are more intensely human than any triumphs of the intellect. So God always comes to us nearest in the form of humanity. And William Blake seems to me to express in a few notes of music that doctrine of God which we have been labouring for an hour to explain when he sings—

To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love,
  All pray in their distress,
And to these virtues of delight,
  Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love,
  Is God our Father dear;
And Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love,
  Is man, His child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity, a human face;
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, a human dress.

Then every man, in every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In Heathen, Turk, or Jew;
Where Mercy, Peace and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling to.

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THE RELIGION OF JESUS:

ITS MODERN DIFFICULTIES

AND

ITS ORIGINAL SIMPLICITY.

A Course of Sunday Evening Lectures,

BY

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

III.

The Religion of Jesus; His doctrine of Man.

THE two main topics of every religious teacher are necessarily God and man. We have seen how Jesus dealt with the former of these topics. He accepted the sacred tradition, current amongst his countrymen, of an Eternal Power, at once the supreme fount of law and the universal inspiration of righteousness. But in his treatment of this great topic, he differed very much from most of the teachers of his time. To heighten the sense of God in the hearts of men, Jesus did not think it necessary to grope amidst the mouldering ruins of antiquity. He rather preferred to call attention to, and to insist upon, the divine side of present facts, whether the springing of the corn, the blooming of the lily, or the best ideals of the heart. In dealing with human nature, the method of Jesus was entirely similar. Whatever he may have thought of the story of Adam and the garden of Eden, he clearly had no theory whatever such as would require a demonstrable foundation in any forgotten and irrecoverable past. He took men as he found them, in their sins, in their sorrows, in their better aspirations; and

his only doctrine of human nature was a practical inculcation of the most obvious method, for making such better aspirations triumph over both sorrow and sin.

For such a doctrine of man Jesus had at least one pre-eminent qualification. He loved mankind with a purity and disinterestedness of devotion, such as in all the records, at least of western story, has never been paralleled before or since. Those skilled in the learning of the east, tell us that we may find in the philanthropy of Buddha, a striking parallel to the love of Christ for mankind. But such authorities also inform us, that Buddha looked upon human life as a wholly hopeless problem: and that he prized the exercise of the highest virtues only as the speediest means for getting rid of it altogether. Jesus, however, took a more hopeful view of the condition of mankind. He came, it is said, that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. The reminiscences of this sympathy in the gospels, especially where they bear the stamp of historic truth, are so brief as to imply far more than they distinctly state. But they are perhaps all the more touching because of their simplicity and unconsciousness. Thus, for instance, we read, in the first chapter of St. Mark, how on a certain occasion Jesus, wearied perhaps with the excitement of public employment, retired amongst the mountains that he might meditate and pray, thus refreshing his spirit with heavenly communion. But the multitude, who had learned to appreciate the blessing of his presence, hungered for him now in his absence as for their daily bread. So general and strong was this feeling, that his disciples were driven to search for him; and when they had found him, Peter said to him, "all men seek for thee." There is more in these words than mere curiosity. Indeed if our view of the gospel story be correct, it could hardly have been at that time the expectation of miracle which prompted this universal desire. The people felt that he answered to their deepest needs. He had a treasure to communicate, which was worth more to them than any earthly riches, and therefore they hungered after him as children after their parents. Now mark, how quick is the response on the part of Jesus to this tie between him and the multitude. His philantropic sympathies were stirred; he felt afresh the burden of his mission, "Let us go," he said, "into the next towns and villages that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth."

You know what is the effect produced on any feeling heart, by the sight of a great multitude. Ten thousand faces, ten thousand minds, ten thousand hearts, each one

opening a vista of life's experience, overwhelm us with the vastness of the interests which are embodied there. Now there are several hints, scattered through the pages of these gospels, which show how keenly susceptible Jesus was to this kind of impression. More than once, we are told how the mere sight of a great multitude of men stirred in him deep emotion. In the sixth chapter of the same gospel of St. Mark it is said, that when, on another occasion, Jesus had retired into a sacred solitude, some thousands of people were gathered together in the mountain glades waiting for his appearance. The story goes on, "and Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep having no shepherd, and he began to teach them many things." A passage in St. Matthew, referring to the same or a similar occasion, gives a touching detail of the reason for his feeling. "They were tired and lay down," it is said, as though faint, hopeless and desolate. Can you not picture to yourselves the scene? We may suppose that as Jesus turned an angle of the valley, he was suddenly confronted with the crowd. There were scattered on the grass slumbering men, worn out with weariness and hunger; there were lost children crying for their parents; there were mothers fainting under the drudgeries of life; there were anxious faces that seemed to tell of broken hearts. I like to think of the tide of feeling which arose in the heart of Jesus as he looked on such a sight. The enthusiasm of humanity was upon him, "the harvest truly is plenteous" he said, "but the labourers are few; pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." This feeling of quick and deep sympathy, stirred by the sight of a vulgar multitude, does not appear to have been very common in antiquity. And we may fairly see, in such emotions of Jesus, the first spring of that side of benevolence, which has covered the christian world with hospitals, missions and schools.

None can revive the moral life of men, without a deep sympathy for them in his heart. In vain will a teacher open before you the treasures of wisdom; in vain will he draw pictures of the works of God, unless he feels at one with the common instincts of humanity. Of course such philanthropic sympathies may be, and often are, simulated for selfish purposes. But such a cheat is always in the long run detected. For there are times when the true philanthropist must stand alone, because his very sympathy for humanity, and his realization of its true interest will drive

him to take up an attitude hostile to the passions of the time. Will he dare, for instance, to denounce a Russian war, when millions of throats are howling for human blood? Will he dare to oppose the brutalities of popular vindictiveness, whether directed against mutinous sepoys, or home enemies of society? A man that will stand such tests as these, however eccentric his opinions may be, has at least the good of his kind at heart. It might at first sight be supposed that, however obnoxious the teachings of Jesus were to the scribes and pharisees, his capacity of resisting more popular prejudices was never put to the proof. This however would be a great mistake. The word "Messiah," according to its ancient associations, led the people generally to anticipate a career of military victory, and the establishment of a world-wide dominion, the profits of which would have been enjoyed mainly by the Jews. A man who cared more for the applause of the people than for their good, would have known how to turn such expectations to his own advantage, even though he never entertained any thought of attempting to realise them. But the course of Jesus was very different. There are some hints in the gospels, which appear to suggest that, at first, Jesus shrank from the title of Messiah, and at any rate repudiated its public assumption. And when, from causes which we cannot now investigate, he allowed himself to be called by the name, he persistently gave to it a spiritual significance such as was directly contrary to popular prejudice. By this he showed that his sympathy for mankind was not assumed for any interested purpose, but was deep and strong enough to enable him to stand firm against prejudice, and ignorance, and perverted faith, in whatever quarter they were found.

So far then as love and sympathy will go, he was well qualified to deal with humanity. And though he professed no philosophy, and did not enrich the treasures of learning with any contribution towards a metaphysical analysis of human nature, we shall not regret the absence of such philosophical pretensions, if we find that he makes plain to us, both the need and the possibility of religion. We shall now show that, as in dealing with the name of God, so in regard to human nature, his method was an insistance on obvious facts of pregnant meaning, and an endeavour to turn them to the divinest issues.

Well then, in the first place, we must note his significant use of the word "heart." For by this term Jesus summarized and emphasized innumerable common and easily recognized facts of consciousness, which may be neglected,

but cannot possibly be denied. In the teaching of Jesus the heart represents the whole moral nature in its unity apart altogether from the metaphysical analyses which may be useful for science, but have nothing to do with religion. It expresses all the voluntary energies of human nature, which are, or may be, touched with a sense of responsibility. It included also the affections, which go with the voluntary energies, and partake directly or indirectly in their responsibility. "Where your treasure is, there will your *heart* be also," that is to say, the whole of your voluntary energies which are touched by a sense of responsibility. "A good man out of the good treasure of his *heart* bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoureth me with their lips, but their *heart* is far from me." This is of course a quotation from the prophets; but Jesus gives it a special reference to the ruling classes of his day. And when he says "their heart is far from me," what he means is, that however they may comply with sacred forms, the reason of compliance is not religion, because their voluntary energies are given not to God, but to society, to fashion and to their own interests. Thus you see Jesus makes no division between intellect and emotion, imagination and reason. He cares little for intellect and imagination in themselves, though he uses both for action on the moral nature. He rather strove to concentrate all attention on those voluntary energies touched with a sense of responsibility, which, as we say, he expressed by the word "heart." Now this is a part of ourselves which is surely more interesting than any other. For it is this which makes character, and character makes conduct, and from conduct far the greater part of our happiness or misery must ever spring.

Here, however, I anticipate a difficulty, certain to be started by some disputant, if we were holding a discussion. And it is as well to notice that difficulty, because it enables us to bring out more clearly the practical method of Jesus, which consists in dealing with the obvious facts of consciousness, and leaving all more subtle analysis to philosophers, whose province it is. The disputant, whom I have supposed to be present, would not patiently endure such a description as I have given of Christ's idea of the heart, as representing the sum of the voluntary energies. "Voluntary energies indeed!" he would exclaim; "but there is no such thing as freedom of the will at all. That is an old world notion which has long since been explained away. For of

course every human action is a link in the endless chain of causation. To suppose anything else would be to imagine that chaos and order can exist not only side by side, but intermingled and mutually co-operating. The thing is impossible and absurd; yet you preachers, with your talk about 'voluntary energies,' will persist in assuming, as a matter of course, what is demonstrably false."

To such a disputant I should say; my friend, you altogether mistake the subject in hand. We are not talking about metaphysics, but about religion. If indeed we were to enter on the philosophy of the will, I am very far from admitting that your case is so strong as you suppose. But whether it is strong or weak, we have nothing whatever to do with it just now. Do not mistake me; I am not about to back out of the argument, and then go on as though it had been decided in my favour. And to convince everyone of this, I will try to explain how the case really stands.

All that religion assumes is something known to consciousness as will,—something that we agree to speak of by that name. You may maintain, if you like, that the feeling of self-determination suggested by the word is only an appearance, or a phenomenon, which when it is examined turns out to be something very different. Well then let us call it the phenomenal will. All I say is, it is there; and like all other faculties requires an appropriate treatment. When the judgment goes astray it wants fuller information; when fancy fails it needs kindling suggestions; and when the will decides wrongly it wants persuasion, warning, or encouragement. And this stands good whether the power of self-determination is merely apparent or not. After all, phenomena are rather important things, and, not least, the phenomenal will. Everybody, whatever his metaphysical belief may be, recognizes, in his actual practice, that the voluntary energies,—those which are, as we have said, touched with a feeling of responsibility,—must be treated in accordance with their nature. If, for instance, you find a poor family stricken down with fever through bad drainage, and too ignorant to know what is wrong with them, you do not stop to reason with them. You take means to get the defect mended at once; and meanwhile you send them medical advice and medicine. "Poor souls" you say, "it is no fault of theirs; and the remedy is beyond their power." But if, on the other hand, you see a lazy father lounging about with his hands in his pockets, and starving his wife and children, you do not deal with him after the same fashion. You persuade him, you try to shame him, you

upbraid, you even threaten, if by any means you may affect his will. Not that you thus concede anything as to the metaphysical question of free will. That is not at all involved. But you do recognize some difference between the voluntary energies which you are trying to touch with a keener sense of responsibility, and involuntary properties, susceptibilities, or accidents. You show that you recognize this difference by your different methods in the two cases. Now that is just what the gospel does; no more. And we say that the gospel method of dealing with the heart, that is, the sum of the voluntary energies, is well worthy of your attention, no matter what the metaphysical sect to which you own allegiance.

"But," says another, "this method of dealing with the voluntary energies in a lump is most unscientific. We must distinguish; we must analyse. There is the great question of motives, and the power, possessed by attention, to single out of a hundred motives the one that shall prevail. There is the power of habit to be considered, and social sympathies, and hereditary tendencies. All these must have their due, if we are to have any rational conception of the voluntary energies." Certainly, I reply, if that is what you are seeking. But it is not what we are seeking at present. It is the business of philosophy to analyse. But religion, dealing practically with conduct, or with feeling, must treat the moral nature as a whole. In fact religion deals with the moral nature very much as the moral nature deals with muscular exertion. A lazy man does not like effort. But if he is not wholly devoid of conscience, moral principle says to him "exert yourself; pull with all your might at this rope; lift those stones out of the way." Now there is nothing more perplexing than the action of intention or purpose on the muscles. There are impressions made on the sensory ganglia of the brain. There is the conveyance of some impression from the sensory ganglia to the cerebrum. There is a co-ordination of action amongst various cells of the cerebrum. There are orders conveyed by the spinal column, and from this through one set of nerves called efferent, to the particular muscle to be exerted. There is a return message through another set of nerves called afferent, to inform the cerebrum of the progress made in complying with its decrees, that is to say, of the extent to which the muscle is contracted or expanded. There is a determination of a flow of blood to the muscle. There is the contraction of muscular fibre. All these facts anatomy has detected in what, to the consciousness, seems a very

principles with force sufficient to bring them within range of the consciences of his hearers, assured that mutual attraction between the soul and truth would do the rest. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Did he announce this as a sort of supernatural expert, who had been behind the scenes at the making of the divine laws, and therefore knew their precise scope? It seems at once more reverent and more reasonable to suppose that he said it as one "who knew what was in man," that is, the facts of consciousness, and understood how to appeal to them.

Jesus had not so much to say about the external world, although no one knew better how to use it for purposes of illustration But when he had to deal with it directly he used precisely the same method. He insisted on facing the facts. And he would not allow that even the most specious sentiments were any justification for ignoring them. Thus on one occasion a number of Jews, partly with the object of laying a trap for him, partly it may be in the hope of finding sympathy for their own political discontent, asked him for a plain opinion on the dangerous question, whether it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not. The answer was characteristic. He asked for the tribute money, and pointed to the head of Cæsar stamped upon it. That head was symbolic of a great and palpable fact, the imperial power of Cæsar. The right of coinage was associated with supreme powers of government, and responsibility for public order. Acknowledge the facts, says Jesus. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." But lest he should be for a moment supposed to teach that physical might constitutes right, he adds "render unto God the things that are God's." The facts of the time made Cæsar's rule necessary and inevitable. And if the questioners supposed that the mere acknowledgment of this rule by tribute was inconsistent with allegiance to God, it only showed that they did not sufficiently estimate the divinity of fact; and completely misunderstood the relations of temporal and spiritual power. Another illustration of the same loyalty to facts, is the contempt with which Jesus dismissed the reasoning of those who argued, that the victims of accident or tyranny *must* in some way or other have been obnoxious to the special vengeance of heaven. "Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, suppose ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem?" He knows very well that this was notoriously not the case. Nothing but the sort of perverse ingenuity so often displayed in interpreting divine providence according to private judgment, could have given

the least show of reason to the inference. Jesus is certain that both the reason and the conscience of his hearers is against the supposition. And therefore without argument he says "I tell you nay; but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."

But whether he was dealing with the inner or the outer world, the consequence of his method, in appealing from fancy to fact, was a simplicity of feeling and a lucidity of thought, amidst which the soul fretted by Jewish superstitions moved with a thrilling sense of sudden liberty, like a prisoner set free from a dungeon. Indeed there is no mental feeling so near akin to sudden release from physical agony, as is the relief we gain, in the midst of perplexity, from loyal submission to facts. Through what haunted mazes of unhallowed confusion have many of us struggled in our younger days, impelled by a childish anxiety to reconcile scripture and geology! First we eagerly welcomed any patent method for hastening the slow movements of nature, so that the world's history might be packed into six thousand years. Then, when we found that would not do, we were devoutly grateful to the Septuagint version for giving us some thousand years additional, though, alas, we wanted a hundred millions. Then perhaps there was some mistake in the Hebrew figures. And we were glad to be informed by our learned friends that a jot or a tittle might make all the difference between ten and a thousand. What a stroke of genius seemed the suggestion of an ingenious person, that the winged fowl which appear inconveniently on the fifth day, between the "whales" of that day and the "creeping things" of the next, were after all pterodactyls, or flying lizards, which would be in their appropriate place. Still there was a sense of elaborate unnaturalness pervading our wonderful harmony, which every now and then shot a sharp twinge of pain from the intellect to the conscience. Till at last, in some happy moment, we quietly said to ourselves, Genesis is wrong, and geology right, and we passed from the Babel of fictions to the peace of reality. Nothing happened which we had foreboded. The foundations of character, and the objects of spiritual aspiration remained just what they had been before, only less encumbered by rubbish or mist. And being rid of an intolerable perplexity, we gained more instruction from the book of Genesis itself than ever we had done in all our previous abuse of it.

So we may conceive many of the more candid young Jews, in the time of Christ, to have been troubled in mind about the apparently irrational character of some of their religious

traditions. The heathen philosophers laughed at their notion that idleness on one day in the week could be gratifying to heaven. And had they not reason? How could it be pleasing to God for them to neglect obvious duties, on the plea that it was the sabbath day? What a delight then it must have been to them to have the knot of their perplexity not cut by logic, but dissolved away by healthy moral feeling! "It is *not* pleasing to God," said Jesus, "that you should neglect obvious duties; and it *is* lawful to do well on the sabbath day." So too, how fretting to any mind absorbed in the essentials of conduct, must have been the tendency, so marked on Christ's day, to magnify the washing of cups and pots, and brazen vessels and tables, as a religious rite. Unconsciously to themselves they might lack the moral courage to speak out what they knew to be the truth. But the words of Jesus must have been to them like the relaxing of a moral cramp. "Hearken every one of you, and understand! There is nothing from without a man that, entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile him. . . . . For from within, out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. These are the things that defile a man; but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man."* Thus one distinctive feature, perhaps we may even say the original motive of the religion of Jesus, was a claim of reverence for facts instead of falsehoods; an insistance on less attention to figments of tradition, and more care about the divine side of present realities.

It was this, his pre-eminent susceptibility to the divine side of present realities, which distinguished Jesus so supremely, and made him, in a spiritual sense "the light of the world." And this characteristic was specially marked in his method of dealing with the traditional idea of God. He neither controverted nor affirmed it, except indirectly. If we might presume to judge by the proportion of prominence given to subjects in these gospels, no church doctor ever talked so little theology as the great Founder of the church himself. He makes no pretence whatever of revealing any mystery of the divine nature; nor, if the apocalyptic discourses be excluded, any secret of the divine government. He simply accepts the sense of God which the people around him have inherited, and at the same time he endeavours to separate it from all degrading associations, and to correct it with all the brightest, best and purest experiences of life. He made no

* Mark vii, and Matthew xv.

attempt at any metaphysical conception of God. To ontological speculation, he had not the least tendency. But supreme providence, the ideal life, peace, righteousness, mercy and justice, all seemed to him to have the grandeur of eternity, and to be inseparable from the thought of God.

Suppose a blind child whom you loved, were to ask you, what is the sun? To tell him that it is an enormous globe, more than a million times bigger than the earth, would be to convey no real conception at all. Nor would it be of any use to say that the sun is the source of light; for light the child has never seen. Perhaps you would despair of answering the question directly, until the child is more mature. But you might lead him from the shadow into sunlight, and from sunlight into shade, that he might feel for himself the difference between the presence and absence of its rays; and he would think of it as a diffusive glow which only something intruding between the sky and himself can keep away. And you would lead him out where wallflowers, or honeysuckle, or roses bloom, and with the difference between that fragrance and the damp decay of winter, he would learn to associate the greater or less power of the sun. And you would make him listen to the lark, and the thrush, and the blackbird, as they burst into song when the morning rises, so that music and gladness should be added to the glow and the fragrance in which he has learned to feel the presence of the sun. So Jesus dealt with men in his doctrine of God. For men are born, and necessarily remain, blind to the ultimate glory of God. They keep on asking what is God? But it is a question which cannot be directly answered. Therefore Jesus sought to hallow the associations of the name. For he knew that the heart can take in far more of its meaning than the head.

He used the name of Father, indicative of all-pervasive, all-moulding providence. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." What did he mean by this, but that the presence of God is felt in the subtle sense of an infinite spiritual order, which only comes to those who are lowly and sincere? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." In these words the moral harmonies that are constituted by loving sympathies, are made specially divine; and they who seek to maintain and extend them, so manifestly do the work of God, that we see in them his image. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." The conjunction "and" here expresses identification rather than addition. Righteousness *is* the kingdom or God, because it is the rule of his spirit in the

heart. "If ye had known what this meaneth 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' ye would not have condemned the guiltless." No, surely; for mercy softens away traditional prejudice, and extends symyathy to every feeblest spark of the divine life. Thus a Father's heart, and purity and peace, and righteousness and mercy are all associated with the thought of him who is the ultimate mystery of all being. Or as some one (I forget who) has said, "God is the best that one knows or feels."

Do you ask me how this agrees with my view that the method of Jesus is to recall men from fancy to fact? Well, all facts are not like stones and bricks which you demonstrate by kicking your foot or bruising your hand. As we have often said, the most certain facts of all, are those of consciousness; for by these all others must be interpreted. There are facts of the heart's nature, as well as facts of gravitation and chemical affinity. And when Jesus recalled men's thoughts from morbid speculations about the prophecies, and told them they realised God best when they were loving and just and merciful, I say he did recall their attention from fancies to facts. And would to heaven their was some one to do so now! From the soul-choking theology of the rabbis he appealed to God's ever dawning revelation in the heart. He insisted that in exaltation of the moral life lay the best chance of realizing the immeasurable fact of God's being; that all the best feelings there, were like rays that the eye might follow back till they were lost in infinite light.

If the purpose and scope of these lectures did not forbid, I would undertake to show that there underlies such teaching, though never appearing on this surface, the ultimate philosophy of God, towards which all thought is tending. And though that purpose prevents my going farther, this I will say, that every one who finds a significance in Coleridge's lines

"'Tis the sublime in man, our noontide majesty,
to know ourselves,
Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole,"

must surely realise how all the virtues which subordinate self and magnify the eternal all in all, do verily bring us into the immediate presence of God.

But I hasten on to point out some specially practical advantages attendant on this method of Jesus in dealing with the doctrine of God. For (1) it did not directly attack any sacred traditions. And (2) it required no abstruse theories about God to be first established. And (3) finally it was capable of endless expansion, and is applicable at the present day.

1.—It did not unnecessarily attack any sacred traditions. Do not misunderstand me. There was no cunning reticence on the part of Christ. The modern plan of believing one creed and ostentatiously subscribing to another, for social reasons, or reasons of prudence, formed no part of his method. There were some traditions which were *not* sacred; and these he did not hesitate to denounce. The superstitions, for instance, that polluted the sabbath were in his eyes hurtful, from the spiritual pride and the morbid narrowness of conscience they inspired. Such superstitions he did attack openly and fearlessly, in the teeth of their devotees. He "looked round about upon them in anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." He wondered that the plain facts of God's manifest rule did not touch them with shame for their obliquity of vision. And if he were walking our streets on Sundays now—if he were to see those homes of intellectual light, those possible fountains of moral sweetness, our public libraries and museums grimly silent, dark and empty, while crowds roll in and out at the reeking doors of public houses, he would surely manifest the same emotions now. He would look round about with anger on us and our boasted civilization,—our lavishness in gunpowder and great guns, our timid parsimony in education, the torrents of drink that roll down our street, the sprinkling of popular knowledge that satisfies us,—and the fair future, which is to us what the kingdom of heaven was to the Jews, would receive its indignant vindication. "Woe unto you, ye hypocrites, for ye shut up the kingdom of knowledge against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."

But apart from such reactionary superstitions, Jesus accepted in the main, as a man of the age, the sacred traditions of the people amongst whom he was born. It was principally in his interpretation of the future which was to grow out of the past that he differed from his countrymen. He reverenced the ancient scriptures; but he saw a higher meaning in them than others did. He cherished the prophecies; but he gave to their material symbols a spiritual meaning. He worshipped the God of his fathers; but the glory of that God reflected in his heart was like a new revelation. And sects of considerable magnitude in the early church were so impressed by the difference between the Heavenly Father of Jesus, and the Jehovah of Moses, that they maintained they were not the same God at all. We shall not fall into their error. The ultimate mystery of being always and everywhere veiled under the name of God,

or gods, is the same to all generations, though they dress it in various forms and make of it very different applications. To the philosophy of the subject Jesus apparently gave no thought. He was only anxious that the abiding sense men have of eternal being should be used as an inspiration of the higher life. And this he accomplished by enshrining the Supreme Name, reverenced by all alike, in a halo of the best affections.

The example is one which we should do well to study at the present day. We should not trouble ourselves too much about theological opinions. Where they are clearly obstructive and degrading in their influence, we may of course be bound to expose their falsehood. Otherwise we shall do well to try what is the best use we can make of the various forms, in which men represent to themselves one ultimate fact. I know there are some people now, as there always have been any time these two thousand years, who exhort us to get rid of the name and extirpate the *feeling* of God. They might as well attempt to forbid the sense of infinity as we look up to the midnight sky; or of eternity as we gaze on the everlasting mountains. Far more sensible and more feasible is the suggestion of Mr. Matthew Arnold, that we we should think of God as the power impelling each creature to fulfil the law of its being; or as the power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. And indeed this last was very much the course adopted by Christ.

2.—By thus accepting sacred traditions, and giving them a higher meaning, Jesus avoided the necessity for any abstruse theories about God. It is very unfortunate that people will form their ideas of christianity from the three creeds, or from the Westminster catechism, rather than from thy synoptical gospels. The general notion seems to be that Jesus taught the doctrines of the Trinity and the Fall, and Original Sin. It is true that something very much akin to the first of these doctrines is laid down in the fourth gospel, which, for reasons already given, we cannot regard as an uncoloured description of earliest church memories. But in the synoptics we repeat that there is hardly anything which can be called theology, as this term is understood in the schools. There is nothing about divine ontology. There is very little, and that of doubtful origin, about the secrets of the divine counsels. There is only a loyal endeavour to give a nobler, moral and emotional interpretation to an accepted faith. Even the moral attributes of God are described indirectly, by taking it for granted that they answer to the human heart. "Love your enemies, bless them that persecute you, . . . that

ye may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust." "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in Heaven." In such words we have an assumption, justified by the whole scope and law of human progress, that generosity and sincerity and lowliness are pure and unperverted inspirations of the power by which humanity at large tends to fulfil the law of its being. Or think again of the words Jesus is reported to have uttered, when he was forced unwillingly to the conclusion that the learning and the fashion and the social power of the times had no ears for him, but that his mission was to the lowly and ignorant and poor. It is not resentment but contentment; not a superstitious notion of a divine judgment against learning and culture, but acquiescence in an inevitable law of human progress, that we hear in his address to heaven. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent * and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." That is to say, God cares for the poor, and makes them his mightiest instruments. The most decisive revolutions, whether ecclesiastical or political, begin from below and work upwards. There is a great deal about the method of God's government implied here. But it is founded upon no abstruse reasonings. It comes from identifying the impulses of philanthropy with the movements of the Divine Spirit.

3.—Finally, one most striking advantage of such a doctrine of God is its capacity for expansion in accordance with the growth of knowledge. This is a point of the utmost possible interest for us. For there can be no dispute but that men's notions of the world and of its order have entirely changed since the era of Christ; and if he had imposed on his immediate followers a definition of God suitable to their intellectual limitations, it must necessarily have grown more and more incongruous with the ideas of after ages. Indeed this is just what many assume to be actually the case. Taking their notion of the religion of Jesus from the creeds,

* The real matter of thankfulness is *not* that they were hidden from any one; but that they were revealed to simple folk *even at the cost of being hidden* from the learned. Let any one who thinks himself fitted to be Archbishop of Canterbury and finds himself only a scripture reader in a low neighbourhood, contrast his own feelings with those expressed in the text, and that will bring out its meaning.

rather than from the gospels, they insist that the "magnified non-natural Man," whom Christianity teaches us to worship, can find no place either in or beyond the universe as it is now beginning to be understood. And they have so much to say for themselves, that it sometimes seems as though a cheerless atheism were staring us into stone. But in truth we have no evidence that Jesus ever attempted any definition of God.* He simply accepted the sense of eternal being, which every man has, whether he knows it by that phrase or not; and he told men to think of that eternal being as the source of every impulse which impelled them to their best. He said nothing to depreciate the sacred tradition of a heavenly Monarch, the personal King of the Jews; but his method of dealing with the sense of eternal being was a solvent, under which that Jewish tradition was sure to pass away. And I think the same method is applicable now, amidst all the confusion of contending theologies. They all assume, and they rightly assume, a sense in man of eternal being, a unity in diversity, a whole comprehending all parts, an abiding reality which no passing shows exhaust. But then they try to give definite intellectual notions of this Eternal, and their notions are all different. One says that he is three persons in one God; another that he is the soul of the world without body, parts or passions; a third that he is an infinite person who thinks and loves. For our part we have no hesitation in allowing that all these notions have germs of truth. But as compared with the scale of the subject, the germs are so very small that we are constrained to regard them as infinitely distant from the reality.

Now if we would follow the method of Jesus, we should rather say,—hold to your sacred tradition if you will, so far as it expands and does not narrow your heart. But do not expect to realize in it the living God, the Father of your spirit. Rather he finds you and you find him in every impulse towards a better life. For as that Eternal Power inspires the lilies of the field to clothe themselves with more than Solomon's glory, and the birds of the air to provide by instinct for their young, so does he touch you with an impulse to fulfil the law of your being, in a noble life. And if you accustom yourself to it, this way of regarding God will grow upon you, until you have an abiding sense of a divine presence, and a constant incentive to that sort of prayer whose highest expression is work.

* The words, "God is a Spirit," supposing them to be authentic, are not a definition. They really mean "God is greater than any intellectual or ceremonial forms, and is to be approached by the heart."

Let me refer to the blind child again. I think, if you had told him of a mighty ball rolling, with enormous force, the little worlds around it, you would not have succeeded in conveying any adequate intellectual conception of the reality; but you would certainly have distracted his attention from the tenderer and to him the more real significance of the sun. But in establishing in his mind the association of some unknown and unknowable splendour with the glow of summer warmth, and the perfume of flowers, and the songs of birds, you would at once make the sun very real to him; and yet you would leave him free to adapt his ideas to every successive instalment of knowledge about the subject which he might prove capable of receiving. So it is with Christ's doctrine of God. It is not scientific. It is addressed to the heart. But the very absence of any attempt at scientific definition makes it as expansive as man's knowledge of the universe.

One word more. Such a doctrine of God suggests an Incarnation, which may be a permanent element in universal religion. "The light of the body is the eye," says Jesus. But surely the eye is not illuminative by itself. It is light, he says; because it appreciates light, and brings us into communion with light. Just so the God of the soul is conscience; not that conscience is eternal or boundless, but that through it we get that sense of eternal right, or fitness, or self-consistency, and that feeling of infinite authority on the one hand and limitless obligation on the other, which seem most to bring us into communion with God. It is always in a realization of the sacredness of duty that the sense of God is most impressive; always in the commanding sweetness of moral affections that the universal divinity seems to be specially present. And these experiences are more intensely human than any triumphs of the intellect. So God always comes to us nearest in the form of humanity. And William Blake seems to me to express in a few notes of music that doctrine of God which we have been labouring for an hour to explain when he sings—

To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love,
  All pray in their distress,
And to these virtues of delight,
  Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love,
  Is God our Father dear;
And Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love,
  Is man, His child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity, a human face;
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, a human dress.

Then every man, in every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In Heathen, Turk, or Jew;
Where Mercy, Peace and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling to.

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THE RELIGION OF JESUS:

ITS MODERN DIFFICULTIES

AND

ITS ORIGINAL SIMPLICITY.

A Course of Sunday Evening Lectures,

BY

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

III.

The Religion of Jesus; His doctrine of Man.

THE two main topics of every religious teacher are necessarily God and man. We have seen how Jesus dealt with the former of these topics. He accepted the sacred tradition, current amongst his countrymen, of an Eternal Power, at once the supreme fount of law and the universal inspiration of righteousness. But in his treatment of this great topic, he differed very much from most of the teachers of his time. To heighten the sense of God in the hearts of men, Jesus did not think it necessary to grope amidst the mouldering ruins of antiquity. He rather preferred to call attention to, and to insist upon, the divine side of present facts, whether the springing of the corn, the blooming of the lily, or the best ideals of the heart. In dealing with human nature, the method of Jesus was entirely similar. Whatever he may have thought of the story of Adam and the garden of Eden, he clearly had no theory whatever such as would require a demonstrable foundation in any forgotten and irrecoverable past. He took men as he found them, in their sins, in their sorrows, in their better aspirations; and

his only doctrine of human nature was a practical inculcation of the most obvious method, for making such better aspirations triumph over both sorrow and sin.

For such a doctrine of man Jesus had at least one pre-eminent qualification. He loved mankind with a purity and disinterestedness of devotion, such as in all the records, at least of western story, has never been paralleled before or since. Those skilled in the learning of the east, tell us that we may find in the philanthropy of Buddha, a striking parallel to the love of Christ for mankind. But such authorities also inform us, that Buddha looked upon human life as a wholly hopeless problem: and that he prized the exercise of the highest virtues only as the speediest means for getting rid of it altogether. Jesus, however, took a more hopeful view of the condition of mankind. He came, it is said, that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. The reminiscences of this sympathy in the gospels, especially where they bear the stamp of historic truth, are so brief as to imply far more than they distinctly state. But they are perhaps all the more touching because of their simplicity and unconsciousness. Thus, for instance, we read, in the first chapter of St. Mark, how on a certain occasion Jesus, wearied perhaps with the excitement of public employment, retired amongst the mountains that he might meditate and pray, thus refreshing his spirit with heavenly communion. But the multitude, who had learned to appreciate the blessing of his presence, hungered for him now in his absence as for their daily bread. So general and strong was this feeling, that his disciples were driven to search for him; and when they had found him, Peter said to him, "all men seek for thee." There is more in these words than mere curiosity. Indeed if our view of the gospel story be correct, it could hardly have been at that time the expectation of miracle which prompted this universal desire. The people felt that he answered to their deepest needs. He had a treasure to communicate, which was worth more to them than any earthly riches, and therefore they hungered after him as children after their parents. Now mark, how quick is the response on the part of Jesus to this tie between him and the multitude. His philantropic sympathies were stirred; he felt afresh the burden of his mission, "Let us go," he said, "into the next towns and villages that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth."

You know what is the effect produced on any feeling heart, by the sight of a great multitude. Ten thousand faces, ten thousand minds, ten thousand hearts, each one

opening a vista of life's experience, overwhelm us with the vastness of the interests which are embodied there. Now there are several hints, scattered through the pages of these gospels, which show how keenly susceptible Jesus was to this kind of impression. More than once, we are told how the mere sight of a great multitude of men stirred in him deep emotion. In the sixth chapter of the same gospel of St. Mark it is said, that when, on another occasion, Jesus had retired into a sacred solitude, some thousands of people were gathered together in the mountain glades waiting for his appearance. The story goes on, "and Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep having no shepherd, and he began to teach them many things." A passage in St. Matthew, referring to the same or a similar occasion, gives a touching detail of the reason for his feeling. "They were tired and lay down," it is said, as though faint, hopeless and desolate. Can you not picture to yourselves the scene? We may suppose that as Jesus turned an angle of the valley, he was suddenly confronted with the crowd. There were scattered on the grass slumbering men, worn out with weariness and hunger; there were lost children crying for their parents; there were mothers fainting under the drudgeries of life; there were anxious faces that seemed to tell of broken hearts. I like to think of the tide of feeling which arose in the heart of Jesus as he looked on such a sight. The enthusiasm of humanity was upon him, "the harvest truly is plenteous" he said, "but the labourers are few; pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." This feeling of quick and deep sympathy, stirred by the sight of a vulgar multitude, does not appear to have been very common in antiquity. And we may fairly see, in such emotions of Jesus, the first spring of that side of benevolence, which has covered the christian world with hospitals, missions and schools.

None can revive the moral life of men, without a deep sympathy for them in his heart. In vain will a teacher open before you the treasures of wisdom; in vain will he draw pictures of the works of God, unless he feels at one with the common instincts of humanity. Of course such philanthropic sympathies may be, and often are, simulated for selfish purposes. But such a cheat is always in the long run detected. For there are times when the true philanthropist must stand alone, because his very sympathy for humanity, and his realization of its true interest will drive

him to take up an attitude hostile to the passions of the time. Will he dare, for instance, to denounce a Russian war, when millions of throats are howling for human blood? Will he dare to oppose the brutalities of popular vindictiveness, whether directed against mutinous sepoys, or home enemies of society? A man that will stand such tests as these, however eccentric his opinions may be, has at least the good of his kind at heart. It might at first sight be supposed that, however obnoxious the teachings of Jesus were to the scribes and pharisees, his capacity of resisting more popular prejudices was never put to the proof. This however would be a great mistake. The word "Messiah," according to its ancient associations, led the people generally to anticipate a career of military victory, and the establishment of a world-wide dominion, the profits of which would have been enjoyed mainly by the Jews. A man who cared more for the applause of the people than for their good, would have known how to turn such expectations to his own advantage, even though he never entertained any thought of attempting to realise them. But the course of Jesus was very different. There are some hints in the gospels, which appear to suggest that, at first, Jesus shrank from the title of Messiah, and at any rate repudiated its public assumption. And when, from causes which we cannot now investigate, he allowed himself to be called by the name, he persistently gave to it a spiritual significance such as was directly contrary to popular prejudice. By this he showed that his sympathy for mankind was not assumed for any interested purpose, but was deep and strong enough to enable him to stand firm against prejudice, and ignorance, and perverted faith, in whatever quarter they were found.

So far then as love and sympathy will go, he was well qualified to deal with humanity. And though he professed no philosophy, and did not enrich the treasures of learning with any contribution towards a metaphysical analysis of human nature, we shall not regret the absence of such philosophical pretensions, if we find that he makes plain to us, both the need and the possibility of religion. We shall now show that, as in dealing with the name of God, so in regard to human nature, his method was an insistance on obvious facts of pregnant meaning, and an endeavour to turn them to the divinest issues.

Well then, in the first place, we must note his significant use of the word "heart." For by this term Jesus summarized and emphasized innumerable common and easily recognized facts of consciousness, which may be neglected,

but cannot possibly be denied. In the teaching of Jesus the heart represents the whole moral nature in its unity apart altogether from the metaphysical analyses which may be useful for science, but have nothing to do with religion. It expresses all the voluntary energies of human nature, which are, or may be, touched with a sense of responsibility. It included also the affections, which go with the voluntary energies, and partake directly or indirectly in their responsibility. "Where your treasure is, there will your *heart* be also," that is to say, the whole of your voluntary energies which are touched by a sense of responsibility. "A good man out of the good treasure of his *heart* bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoureth me with their lips, but their *heart* is far from me." This is of course a quotation from the prophets; but Jesus gives it a special reference to the ruling classes of his day. And when he says "their heart is far from me," what he means is, that however they may comply with sacred forms, the reason of compliance is not religion, because their voluntary energies are given not to God, but to society, to fashion and to their own interests. Thus you see Jesus makes no division between intellect and emotion, imagination and reason. He cares little for intellect and imagination in themselves, though he uses both for action on the moral nature. He rather strove to concentrate all attention on those voluntary energies touched with a sense of responsibility, which, as we say, he expressed by the word "heart." Now this is a part of ourselves which is surely more interesting than any other. For it is this which makes character, and character makes conduct, and from conduct far the greater part of our happiness or misery must ever spring.

Here, however, I anticipate a difficulty, certain to be started by some disputant, if we were holding a discussion. And it is as well to notice that difficulty, because it enables us to bring out more clearly the practical method of Jesus, which consists in dealing with the obvious facts of consciousness, and leaving all more subtle analysis to philosophers, whose province it is. The disputant, whom I have supposed to be present, would not patiently endure such a description as I have given of Christ's idea of the heart, as representing the sum of the voluntary energies. "Voluntary energies indeed!" he would exclaim; "but there is no such thing as freedom of the will at all. That is an old world notion which has long since been explained away. For of

course every human action is a link in the endless chain of causation. To suppose anything else would be to imagine that chaos and order can exist not only side by side, but intermingled and mutually co-operating. The thing is impossible and absurd; yet you preachers, with your talk about 'voluntary energies,' will persist in assuming, as a matter of course, what is demonstrably false."

To such a disputant I should say; my friend, you altogether mistake the subject in hand. We are not talking about metaphysics, but about religion. If indeed we were to enter on the philosophy of the will, I am very far from admitting that your case is so strong as you suppose. But whether it is strong or weak, we have nothing whatever to do with it just now. Do not mistake me; I am not about to back out of the argument, and then go on as though it had been decided in my favour. And to convince everyone of this, I will try to explain how the case really stands.

All that religion assumes is something known to consciousness as will,—something that we agree to speak of by that name. You may maintain, if you like, that the feeling of self-determination suggested by the word is only an appearance, or a phenomenon, which when it is examined turns out to be something very different. Well then let us call it the phenomenal will. All I say is, it is there; and like all other faculties requires an appropriate treatment. When the judgment goes astray it wants fuller information; when fancy fails it needs kindling suggestions; and when the will decides wrongly it wants persuasion, warning, or encouragement. And this stands good whether the power of self-determination is merely apparent or not. After all, phenomena are rather important things, and, not least, the phenomenal will. Everybody, whatever his metaphysical belief may be, recognizes, in his actual practice, that the voluntary energies,—those which are, as we have said, touched with a feeling of responsibility,—must be treated in accordance with their nature. If, for instance, you find a poor family stricken down with fever through bad drainage, and too ignorant to know what is wrong with them, you do not stop to reason with them. You take means to get the defect mended at once; and meanwhile you send them medical advice and medicine. "Poor souls" you say, "it is no fault of theirs; and the remedy is beyond their power." But if, on the other hand, you see a lazy father lounging about with his hands in his pockets, and starving his wife and children, you do not deal with him after the same fashion. You persuade him, you try to shame him, you

upbraid, you even threaten, if by any means you may affect his will. Not that you thus concede anything as to the metaphysical question of free will. That is not at all involved. But you do recognize some difference between the voluntary energies which you are trying to touch with a keener sense of responsibility, and involuntary properties, susceptibilities, or accidents. You show that you recognize this difference by your different methods in the two cases. Now that is just what the gospel does; no more. And we say that the gospel method of dealing with the heart, that is, the sum of the voluntary energies, is well worthy of your attention, no matter what the metaphysical sect to which you own allegiance.

"But," says another, "this method of dealing with the voluntary energies in a lump is most unscientific. We must distinguish; we must analyse. There is the great question of motives, and the power, possessed by attention, to single out of a hundred motives the one that shall prevail. There is the power of habit to be considered, and social sympathies, and hereditary tendencies. All these must have their due, if we are to have any rational conception of the voluntary energies." Certainly, I reply, if that is what you are seeking. But it is not what we are seeking at present. It is the business of philosophy to analyse. But religion, dealing practically with conduct, or with feeling, must treat the moral nature as a whole. In fact religion deals with the moral nature very much as the moral nature deals with muscular exertion. A lazy man does not like effort. But if he is not wholly devoid of conscience, moral principle says to him "exert yourself; pull with all your might at this rope; lift those stones out of the way." Now there is nothing more perplexing than the action of intention or purpose on the muscles. There are impressions made on the sensory ganglia of the brain. There is the conveyance of some impression from the sensory ganglia to the cerebrum. There is a co-ordination of action amongst various cells of the cerebrum. There are orders conveyed by the spinal column, and from this through one set of nerves called efferent, to the particular muscle to be exerted. There is a return message through another set of nerves called afferent, to inform the cerebrum of the progress made in complying with its decrees, that is to say, of the extent to which the muscle is contracted or expanded. There is a determination of a flow of blood to the muscle. There is the contraction of muscular fibre. All these facts anatomy has detected in what, to the consciousness, seems a very

simple process. In fact the consciousness hardly detects any parts at all. It wants to move an arm and it moves it, without the slightest notion of the delicate and complex machinery of which it is making use. To this day, many questions as to the mode in which that machinery operates remain entirely insoluble even by the latest scientific discoveries. But does that, in the slightest degree, affect the ordinary relations of the moral nature and the muscular system in the lazy man? Fancy the opening which such a suggestion would give to the sort of person called by sailors a "sea-lawyer." "What is the use of ordering me about?" he would ask, "your words certainly reach my sensory organs; but really the connection of these with my cerebrum, and the co-ordination of the various ganglia there are anything but satisfactory. Besides, I am greatly perplexed about the action of the afferent and efferent nerves, and the more I think about it the less can I control my limbs" All this would be very ridiculous; but not in the least degree more so, than it is to interpose, between religion and the moral nature, your ingenious metaphysical analysis. The case supposed would be ridiculous, because, in the consciousness, determination and exertion appear to be a single act, practically dependent for its energy on the amount of good will thrown into it. And this is all that is assumed by exhortation, persuasion or warning.

So is it with the proper influence of religion on the moral nature. Mental anatomy may do good service in its own place. But it cannot possibly alter the facts of consciousness, which testify that imagination, affection, reverence, all unite to make one act of homage by which a man bows to the eternal sanction of righteousness. Thus, by a simple practical view of the moral nature, as a unity in consciousness, Christ puts the gospel outside philosophy; aye and above it, inasmuch as conduct is the issue, and character the highest aim of knowledge. However wise and analytical we may be, we want some power to take us as a whole, to inspire the instinctive movements of desire and affection; and so to mould directly the grand evolution of increasing purpose, by which a life is built up. Therefore it is that the power of Jesus over the moral nature of man, a power testified by the experience of eighteen centuries, is well worthy of our study.

2.—The next fact brought into prominence in the original simplicity of Christ's religion, is that of universal sinfulness. Here again there is an opening for endless analysis and disputation. What is the innermost secret of sin? How

did it at first enter into the world? Is it the attribute of a fallen race? or is it necessarily incidental to the existence of a progressive race, always growing towards a higher condition of life? Well now, in the synoptical gospels, and almost equally so even in the fourth gospel, Jesus seems to take hardly the slightest notice of such incidental questions. He simply notes the sinfulness of man as a palpable and a terrible fact, which must be recognized, weighed, and felt, by any one who would do any good to the world in which he lives. This is implied in the words attributed to him at the outset of his career. "Repent ye" that is, change to a better mind, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Human sinfulness is assumed, even in the beauty and sweetness of the beatitudes. "Blessed are they who mourn," surely not those who mourn only because of pain or affliction; but those who mourn for sin; because such sadness is already touched with the dawn of a better life. The same universal fact is implied in the contrast always drawn between the moral tendencies of men and the will of God. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" It is confessed in the prayer which Jesus taught to his disciples. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we also forgive them that trespass against us." It is not a superficial accident, but pervades the totality of the moral nature. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries." It is not individual but universal. "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone." "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye and forgettest the beam that is in thine own eye?" "Woe unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come." It tends to general ruin. "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." And the ruin to which it tends is utter and unremediable. "If then the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose himself or be cast away?"

Perhaps it may be said that there is nothing striking or original in mere insistance upon palpable facts. That is so. But perhaps there is some originality, in this *contentment* with palpable fact as a basis of religion. And though Jesus limits himself to a practical view of human sinfulness, many passages imply that the term was not used without a clear and intelligent significance. In the view of Jesus sin was a revolt from the will of God, a wilful or careless discord with the divine ideal manifest in the conscience. According to

the teaching of Jesus, the will of God is to be identified with "the best one knows or feels;" and whenever any one wilfully or carelessly falls short of his best, this is rebellion against the will of God. Accordingly it is in its aspect towards God that sin appears in its worst character. Thus in the parable of the unmerciful servant, the debt owing to this servant was only a hundred pence, while that which he owed his lord was ten thousand talents, a disproportion which is certainly intended to represent Christ's own estimate of the difference between our guilt as against God, and our guilt as against man. If you ask how is the will of God revealed according to the teaching of Jesus? we can only refer to what was said in the last lecture. It then appeared, on a general review of the doctrine of Jesus about the Divine Nature, that sacred tradition, association, nature, and experience, all unite to suggest an ideal life which pictures to us the will of God.

In all this there is no reference to the doctrine of "original sin," as commonly taught in theological treatises. Christ never mentions Adam or Eve by name; and only indirectly refers to them when declaring the primeval sanctity of the marriage tie. It is true that both moral and physical evil is apparently traced to Satan, as in the parable of the sower; and indeed in the Lord's prayer, when correctly rendered. But here Jesus is speaking according to the ideas of the time, and not according to the new spirit which he himself breathed. Besides, these references to the Evil One are just of that vague and passing character natural to a teacher, whose attention is more engaged by actual facts than by the popular forms under which he instinctively expresses them. Otherwise no one can read the synoptical gospels without feeling that when Jesus had traced sin to the heart, he was not in the least degree interested in tracing it any further. In the heart it must be attacked; in the heart it could be overcome; and so far as the direct operation of religion was concerned, there is no evidence that he encouraged or approved any farther speculation concerning the subject. Thus his doctrine of sin is not chargeable either with theological or philosophical sectarianism. The mystery of moral evil is still left open to any explanation which science or philosophy may hereafter hope to give.

In illustration of the openness of the speculative questions as left by the religion of Jesus, we may touch upon two possible theories about universal sin. According to the first it is the result of a fall from a previous state of perfection; according to the second it is rather a coming short of,

or a hanging back from, a higher and better life which is always being revealed to man. In the one case Eden is behind us, in the other case it is before us. To make our meaning clear, take as an example an innocent babe to whom you cannot possibly attribute any actual sin, whether your theological theory would condemn him as polluted by original sin or not. There is no actual sin, for the simple reason that nothing whatever is required of the voluntary energies of the babe; and therefore it cannot have come short of any requirement. But as soon as it grows to a child, and begins to learn lessons, the possibility of a higher life is set before it and forced upon its attention. But the attainment of this higher life requires disciplined exertion; and disciplined exertion is not always pleasant. Hence disobedience and bad temper. And here is the first manifestation of that "foolishness" or sin, which the proverb assures us is bound up in the heart of a child. Now it is quite possible to take either of two views about such beginnings of sin. You may say, here is a fall from the innocence of babyhood; or you may prefer to say, here is a shrinking from the better life which begins to dawn upon the opening consciousness. For myself I think the latter view is more in accordance with the facts. But if you prefer the other, I should never think of complaining, so long as the theory has no evil influence on your educational methods.

Just so in regard to the probable history of man; it may be argued that in the pre-human state,—whatever that may have been,—it would have been impossible to impute sin to him, because he was not conscious of any alternative between better and worse. Conscience did not require anything from him; and therefore he was as incapable of sin as a babe. But as reason awoke, law was conceived, and an ideal life began to dawn. However low and poor the earliest ideal of mankind might seem to us now, it was pregnant with the promise of a better future. But one great price that had to be paid for this revelation was the possibility and, alas, the actuality of sin. Now some still prefer to call this "the Fall of man." And some would even insist that the story of Adam represents actual facts. But others say that the only original sin is the innate conservatism of our nature, which always tempts us to hang back from the better life just within our reach. And all the significance they allow to the doctrine of the Fall is, that it is the projection backwards, in the generic memory, of that sharp schism between an advancing ideal and a lagging practice, of which the whole race is everywhere conscious.

But what we are anxious to insist upon now is, that whatever theory you may prefer, it ought not to make the slightest difference in your appreciation of the doctrine of Jesus concerning human sin. He says nothing about a fall, and nothing about the original awakening of conscience. He takes moral facts simply as they are, and his language concerning them answers to the feelings of the heart. Whatever may have been the origin of sin, no one can deny the soundness of the exhortation "if thy right hand cause thee to sin,* cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than thy whole body should be cast into hell."† And whatever may be the philosophical explanation of the general tendency amongst men to build on false moral principles rather than on sound ones, it is certainly true that when "the rains descend and the floods come and the winds blow," the structure raised upon them, whether life or character, will be exposed to ruin.

(3.) How entirely free from pragmatical theory was Christ's doctrine of human nature, is shown by his generous assumption of a natural and original tendency to good in man Theologians, more anxious about logical consistency of system than about faithfulness to facts, have asserted that, as a result of original sin, "we are utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to *all* good, and *wholly* inclined to *all* evil." ‡ Such a misanthropic conception of human nature was, however, no part of the religion of Jesus. Indeed the opposite is clearly implied in his reference to early childhood as an emblem of the better life. "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven." Surely such words are entirely incongruous with the notion that Jesus looked on little children as corrupt, condemned, and instinctively with germs of evil. "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." It is in vain to say that in such words he referred only to their freedom from actual transgression. It was rather because he saw in them the germs of all virtue, that he likened the beginnings of the heavenly life to them. Lord Palmerston, who on one occasion declared that all children were born good, may not have expressed himself with accuracy, as most parents know. But the heresy with

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* That is the meaning of "offend thee" in this passage.

† Hell—that is utter corruption; such for instance as the condition of a hopeless drunkard, or the moral state of the author of the Bremer Explosion.

‡ Westminster Confession vi 4.

which he was charged by so-called religious newspapers, breathed much more the spirit of the religion of Jesus than any doctrine of "total depravity."

Already, for other purposes, I have called attention to Christ's significant words about the light that is in every man. And they are equally available to prove that Jesus, however stern in his rebukes of sin, could never have taught that human nature was "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good." Indeed he teaches that sincerity is all that is necessary, to make this susceptibility to divine light the entrance for all heaven to the soul. For "if thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light." The existence of this susceptibility and tendency to good is also implied in several of his finest appeals to men. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." What desire could total depravity feel for divine perfection? "Love your enemies . . . that ye may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven." I do not think that creatures "utterly indisposed" to all good, would be likely to care much about the motive here. Again when speaking to the people of the signs of the times, he denied that they had any need of supernatural indications to enable them to distinguish "the power that makes for righteousness" from the powers of this world. They had an inward monitor to which they would do well to take heed. "Why," he asks, "even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?"*

When the young ruler came to him asking the way of eternal life, and professing surprise at the simplicity of that obedience to the commandments which was at first demanded, it is said that "Jesus, beholding him, loved him." It is true that he added a special test, which had a very humbling effect on the young man. Theologians of the Calvinistic school, therefore, can hardly contend that, in their sense of the word, the youth was a converted character. And the emphatic record which is made of the feeling Jesus entertained for him suggests that the great Master warmly appreciated the good elements that he found in the "natural man." The unsectarian breadth of sympathy, with which Jesus recognized the goodness of Zacchæus, affords another illustration of the same thing. All these reminiscences go to show that, amongst the earliest recollections of the teaching of Jesus, the doctrine of total depravity as well as of original sin, was conspicuously absent. And thus we confirm our position that Christ's view of the facts of human life was not warped by any theological or national prejudice.

* Luke xii, 57.

He accepted such facts as they were, and made such use of them as seemed best adapted to serve, not any theological school, nor any ecclesiastical institution, but the practical interests of universal religion.

Perhaps it will be thought that we have hitherto kept unduly out of sight the obvious difficulties of the subject. We have said nothing of Christ's claim to fulfil the Jewish prophecies concerning the Messiah. We have not touched upon the question of miracles. We have paid no attention to the germs of the doctrine of atonement, undoubtedly contained in the gospels. I quite acknowledge the importance of these points; and we shall not shrink from dealing with them in due course. But it is better in such a study first to fix our attention on the positive claims which the religion of Jesus has on our allegiance. It is a good rule not to neglect obvious truth because of doubtful questions with which it has been accidentally mixed up. Our observations, so far, go to show that there is very much in the gospels, at once fresh, vital, pointed, and clear, attractive to the sympathies of all humanity. This does not depend for its interest upon any miraculous stories; and therefore our judgment concerning them cannot affect our estimate of this more human element. In particular, we have seen much evidence that one distinctive characteristic of the teaching of Jesus was an honest recognition of facts as they are, apart from the perversions and prejudices of traditional superstition. But this is just an anticipation of the modern spirit cultivated by science. What constitutes such a recognition religious is the application that is made of it. Science looks at quantities, qualities and successions, in order to increase knowledge. Religion considers facts, whether of the inner or the outer world, only to sanctify the relations of the heart, the sum of our voluntary energies, to the Supreme Power which both sets of facts alike proclaim.

As to his essential condition and his ultimate destiny, man is no less mysterious, than nature. He comes forth from darkness, a spark of consciousness. He grows into magnificence, covering the historic heavens with a train of glory. But, as is the case with some comets, the curve of his orbit is as yet beyond all human calculation. All we can do is to note the facts of his nature and career; and turn them where we can to our own salvation. This was what Jesus did. How he did it we shall endeavour to learn when we consider his doctrine of redemption.

THE RELIGION OF JESUS:

ITS MODERN DIFFICULTIES

AND

ITS ORIGINAL SIMPLICITY.

A Course of Sunday Evening Lectures,

BY

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

IV.

The Religion of Jesus; His doctrine of Redemption.

We have seen how, in dealing with human nature, Jesus sought ever to divert attention from mere fancies, dreams, and superstitions, to actual palpable facts. His chief interest in human nature, lay in the moral faculties; but he did not consider the moral nature as it is seen in the last results of philosophical analysis. He rather considered it as it presents itself in the individual consciousness, in those activities which both form and exhibit character. He traced the evil that afflicts the world to its original root in the heart of man; but he clearly enough allowed that there is also in the heart of man a germ of good, capable of flowering out into all the fruits of holiness and peace.

The doctrine of redemption from this evil, acknowledged

and profoundly felt by Jesus, presents, in the form in which it has come down to us, greater difficulties than any of the subjects we have hitherto treated. To a much larger extent than has been the case with Christ's ideas of human nature, his doctrine of redemption has been presented to us in forms which involve forms of Jewish thought, which it is occasionally very difficult for us to translate into modern ideas and modern language. And this seems to have been the case because the hopes and feelings of Jesus himself, on this subject, were more affected by the imaginations of his predecessors concerning the future than his perception of facts were by Rabbinical interpretations. You must add to this, that the disciples were much more susceptible to the attractive splendours of dominion, pomp, and political power than they were to the charms of a present righteousness, and under the influence of this susceptibility they developed the very slightest hints that Jesus gave concerning the future into imitations of the prophecies of Daniel, and others immediately preceding the Christian era. Hence it must be allowed that our Gospels, as we have them, are not so consistent on this subject as they are in regard to the doctrine of human nature. We find that spiritual ideas conflict with material conceptions of the reign of God. In connection with the former—that is, the spiritual ideas as set forth in the Gospels—there are clear traces of the same simplicity which we have observed hitherto in all the teachings of Jesus; and we may find perhaps, that, however perplexing it may be to translate the other and more material conceptions into modern ideas and language, it is not very difficult to shew how they arose.

I shall, perhaps, best bring the whole matter before you by considering, *first*, the kingdom of Heaven as set forth in the Gospels; *secondly*, the conditions of heavenly citizenship; and *finally*, the idea of Jesus as the Messiah, so far as this idea seems to have been developed in the Synoptical Gospels.

(1.) *First*, we have to deal with the kingdom of Heaven. So far as we are aware, the first suggestion of this phrase—"Kingdom of Heaven," or, "Kingdom of God," is to be found in the book of Daniel. In Daniel ii. 44, we read:—"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the

kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Then again in the seventh chapter of the same book of Daniel, and at the 13th verse:—"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before Him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." This idea of a Divine kingdom proved to be exceedingly attractive to the Jewish writers who flourished in the centuries immediately preceding the birth of Christ. There was one very remarkable book written within one hundred years before Christ was born into the world, which was attributed to Enoch. That apocryphal book is quoted in the Epistle of Jude as though it were genuine Scripture, in the fourteenth verse—"" And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed." The quotation here suggests a description of the end of the world, and the triumph of divine justice over human rebellion. Such visions occupy a considerable portion of this book, which contains, perhaps, the most highly developed doctrine of the Kingdom of God and of the Messiah to be found in pre-Christian literature. You will understand, then, that as this idea had attracted so very much attention in the time immediately preceding the Advent of Christ, it was likely to be a subject of continual conversation and expectation during the period of his activity. There was a stedfast opinion prevailing, that all the troubles of the Jews were to pass away; and not only so, but that the injustice which triumphed at that time in all regions of the world should be vanquished and put down by a kingdom diverse from all preceding kingdoms, not only different in its attributes of supernatural power, by which it was to prevail over all others, but also, as regards its moral attributes, which should, for the first time in the history of the world, establish a universal rule of righteousness.

There was a feeling prevalent in Europe, especially in France, in the last quarter of the preceding century, which may well be compared to this stedfast expectation of the Jews. True, those who preached the Gospel of Humanity, according to Rousseau, expected no miraculous interference with the laws of Nature, as the Jews did. But they *did* expect, these preachers of the French Gospel, that, by some marvellous transition and revolution in politics, all old and imperfect forms of rule should pass away, and the reign of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" be established for ever. Those who remember anything of the excitement of men's minds during the years preceding the passing of the first Reform Bill—or those who have read attentively the history of the time, will understand how, at critical periods, a whole people may be possessed with the idea that the adoption of some particular law, or the triumph of some particular man, may bring about a perfect state of things in the world.

Now a man who would mould the future of a people must to some extent follow the forms of their imagination. If he cannot do this he must inevitably fail. Louis the 16th, and the glittering circle around him, had not sympathy enough to realize the attractions which certain forms of political imagination had for the people of the age; and therefore, though weakly good in his intentions, the poor king entirely failed to stem the torrent of revolution. Mirabeau, on the other hand, had a strong and deep sympathy with the forms of imagination popular among the people at the time. And though his view of things was far more wide and extended than theirs, his ideas of politics more expansive, and his realization of the difficulty of the problem before them far truer to the actual facts of the case, his sympathy gave him a power over them which enabled him to wield their feelings and wills with a sceptre mightier than that of any king. With much appearance of probability it has been conjectured that, had he lived, the whole course of the Revolution might have been changed. Other illustrations might be given from the history of our own country; but as that would lead us into the forbidden realm of politics, we must abstain.

Now Jesus had a deep sympathy with the forms of imagination prevalent among his countrymen, the Jews of His

day. He fell in with the idea of a time when injustice should give place to an equitable rule; but if we read the Gospels aright he gave a wider meaning to this idea than any before him. True, the prophecies about the final judgment of the world present great difficulties. But you will be able to anticipate the way in which these difficulties may be solved, by your knowledge that, in our view, these books are of a complex character, for the most part consisting of simple popular reminiscences, but occasionally out of a mere hint or germ in the sayings of Christ elaborating a portentous vision of the coming days.

Jesus, in speaking of the future, using the imaginative forms of language that the people loved, urging his hearers to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Now, please observe, the two phrases "kingdom of God," and "righteousness of God" may be fairly regarded as identical. And Jesus thus anticipated, or rather suggested, the phrase used by the Apostle Paul—"the righteousness of God which is revealed from heaven." Thus, by the "kingdom of God" it would appear that Jesus meant the rule of God in the heart; that is to say, he concentrated attention almost exclusively upon the moral attributes of this kingdom of God. It is as if he had said:—"I heartily sympathise with your longings; I join in your expectations. A better time is certainly in store for us in the providence of God. But that better time will never come till you have better hearts; for the root of the evil of mankind is there; and never can the better time come till the race is lifted into a higher level, and led to adopt a higher standard of life. This, I take, to be the meaning of the phrase in modern English. John the Baptist had the same idea:—"Repent (change to a better mind); for the kingdom of God is at hand." But Christ carried this moral conception of the kingdom of God much farther than John had any opportunity of doing, if indeed he had the moral capacity. There are some words which would amply justify us in saying that Jesus held this kingdom before his hearers as entirely and exclusively a moral condition of mankind; as for instance when he diverted the attention of his disciples from all possible external scenes, denying that they could see it in the outward sense in which they supposed it was to come, "For," said he, "the Kingdom of God is *within you.*"

Remember again, how at another time he sighed deeply in spirit and said "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." And his disciples were "astonished out of measure, saying who then can be saved?" What astonished them out of measure? They had heard him frequently discourse of the beauty of humility, the attractiveness of a lowly heart. They knew that he valued moral virtues more than political power or wealth, or the pomps of warlike triumph. But they had never yet realized how completely, almost exclusively, moral, was his notion of the kingdom of heaven. What he said was in his view of the kingdom, a mere common-place, a veritable truism. "How hard is it for them that trust in uncertain riches," who make these their idols, "to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Surely this indicates that a moral condition of the soul was an essential requisite, even to understanding the nature of that kingdom. It is not impossible that this spiritual conception was the "mystery" concerning the kingdom, which Jesus explained to his disciples so far as they were susceptible to these explanations, but which he distinctly said was, as yet, hidden from the eyes of the multitude, to whom he must needs speak in parables. But the parables are themselves full of this conception throughout. "So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first, the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear." Could any image be devised, so pregnant with suggestiveness concerning the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God as this? There is no miracle here, as there is no violence,—everything going on according to the law of vital processes. So is it with the kingdom of God. And the same truth is taught in the parable of the leaven "which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened." The progress here is noiseless, is imperceptible to ordinary observation, and it is also dependent upon a vital process. So far then the idea taught by Jesus was, that the Jews were perfectly right in looking forward to a time when righteousness should reign, and peace and love abound; but that it was a superstition on their part to identify it with any political dominion, or to suppose that it would be established to pamper their pride.

Now throughout the Gospels there is no absolute contradiction to this mode of conceiving the kingdom of God. But it must be allowed that there is another element in the synoptical ideas concerning it, intruding here and there, and causing no small perplexity to those who believe in the literal infallibility of the Bible. There is a certain externalism in the conception of the kingdom of Heaven, quite inconsistent with this teaching, and excluding this spirituality of thought which we have noticed in the parables just now mentioned.

This externalism culminates in the 24th chapter of Matthew, where the final triumph of the kingdom of God is described after the fashion of that passage in Daniel, where one like unto the Son of Man comes in the clouds of Heaven, and there is given unto him an everlasting dominion. Such modes of conceiving of the kingdom may have grown out of certain ideas of future judgment to which Jesus certainly looked forward. We find, for instance, in the end of the parable of the tares—"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of my Father." Such words as these seem not very far from the portentous visions set forth in the chapter just mentioned. At least, it would probably appear so to the disciples; but the distance between the brief and natural image on the one hand, and the apocalyptic pictures on the other, was too great to be traversed by him who spoke that parable of the seed dropped noiselessly into the ground and producing at length the harvest. In the parable of the tares, the sun-like radiance of the righteous, in the glory of their Father, is a mere incident of the judgment which should condemn wickedness. In the 24th chapter of Matthew the fearful portents in heaven and earth are the whole substance of the Gospel which is preached. I cannot believe that the man who conceived the kingdom of God as a moral and spiritual growth should also conceive it as a universal revolution or cataclysm. I therefore cling to the idea that Jesus sought as far as possible to spiritualize the ideas of His countrymen, Though he bade them not to say "Lo, here! or lo, there!" he sympathised with their outlook to the future, their eager expectations of better times. But he insisted that the germ of those better times was to be found in themselves. It was goodness which made all the difference between the kingdom of Heaven

and the kingdom of Hell. "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand," not because the sky is likely to fall, or the mountains to be swallowed up in the great deep; but because new aspects of truths are proclaimed, and new ideas are in the world, pregnant with glorious hopes for the future. Yet "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"—none of you shall have part or lot in the glory which is to follow; "for the Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

Is not there the lesson for us in the teaching of Jesus? *We* want better times, and there are many who cherish eager expectations of their coming. We look forward to a time when religion shall no longer be the symbol of division, but the emblem and guarantee of universal charity. We look forward to a time when our children shall cease to suppose that God is pleased with that universal compromise between Bible and beer, which seems to form the whole philosophy of contemporary politics. We look forward to a time when men will gladly spend on the education of their children, as much, at least, as they lavish on the means for destroying their fellow-creatures' lives. We seem to have waited a weary time; and therefore, some cry to God "Oh Lord, how long?" and some petition Parliament, and some harangue the working classes. Alas, the power that is to hasten that better time is neither in the thunder of the skies, nor in the clatter of debate; but it lies wholly in that which makes a higher standard of human good, whether in politics or in any otheraspect of human life. It is *character* that makes the difference; it is character wheih faces difficulties; it is character which contemns superstition. It is character which determines our ideas of good. Therefore character is the seed of the kingdom.

(2) Now let us glance at the conditions of heavenly citizenship. Throughout the synoptical Gospels it seems to be implied that the kingdom of Heaven shall be established on the earth. True, in the trouble and persecution which distressed and embarrassed the early followers of Christ the scene of that kingdom was shifted to another world. But we accept the idea of that kingdom as it existed in the original simplicity of the Gospel. In this kingdom of Heaven each individual man is not only an element, but a *type*, of the whole. Those who have read any outlines of the philosophy of the ancients, will remember that Plato,

speaking through the lips of Socrates, and desiring to expound the nature of justice, says, that it will be better to take a whole realm or state, instead of an individual man as an example; for the state may be regarded as an enlarged diagram of the individual; and in the enlarged diagram all parts are seen more clearly. So is it with the kingdom of heaven. What it is universally, that also it is in the individual man. When the kingdom of heaven is fully established on earth, the reign of righteousness, peace and joy will extend over all, simply because it has undisputed sway in every breast. We have been told, by a great scientific discoverer, that the blue of the firmament above our heads is constituted of an infinite number of infinitesimal particles, so inconceivably minute that they can vibrate only in response to the swiftest constituents in the ray of light. Thus each sends to our eyes the blue beam alone; and each little particle in itself contains the secret of the whole heavens, and is an epitome of all its grandeur. So is it with the kingdom of God; or so shall it be when it is established among men. Each man in himself shall shew forth the grandeur and purity which constitute the whole.

Well then, this kingdom of heaven which is to be realized on earth, and shine in each individual man, is characterized above all by the fulfilment of the law of God: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." Such words are most important for our instruction; because there is often a tendency to treat religion as a mere matter of sentiment or emotion. The religion of Jesus is obedience to law. It requires clearness of view, persistency of purpose, the full control of our faculties, which alone can enable us to shew loyal obedience to law. "Whosoever shall break the least of these commandments" (for you must bear in mind that the law of Moses was regarded as not only venerable but authoritative) "he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." He wished to intimate that during the period of transition to a different dispensation, which there are many hints that he foresaw, men must not loose their hold upon the bands of law, but must remember that the reign of God is a reign of law. His view of this divine law was utterly opposed to the idea of force; for it was to regulate,

not the actions only, but the affections and sympathies of the heart as well. "If ye had known what that meaneth, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice;' 'if your affections as well as your garments and your ostentatious observances of religious rites had been brought into obedience to the law of God, you would have shewn love and charity to your brethren.'" So when he cries "come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," he but gives utterance to the longing that he felt, to make his own obedience to the divine will the type and the centre of attraction that should draw all men into the sacred peace enjoyed by his own soul.

This obedience to divine law, as conceived by Christ, involves nothing short of an inward perfection of heart. Therefore he says, "be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect;" that is to say "your obedience must be rounded and complete, with an entire, unreserved surrender to the will of God. It was to be shewn by consistency between the outward and the inward man;—"ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt." In the kingdom of God the outward and the inward ever correspond.

One thing above all others, this subjection of the heart and feelings to the law of God involves; and that is unrestrained self-sacrificing love to God and man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" Everything was to be sub-ordinated to unreserved allegiance to this supreme attraction. "No man" he said, "can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other."

From this springs the doctrine of the cross; for no man can yield himself implicitly, unreservedly, to the supreme will of God, without meeting in the course of his service, many a time of trial when his own will is in direct contrariety to what he feels to be the will of God, and when the acceptance of the dictates of the divine Spirit, instead of the impulses of his own heart, means disappointment, means loss, means suf-

fering, means everything that is involved in that sacred emblem "the cross of Christ." But if we so far enter into the Kingdom of Heaven that the Will of God becomes our supreme law, then we shall love God more than ourselves, and set our duty to Him above our own pleasure.

"A bright and noble picture," you say; "but how is it to be realized amid the circumstances under which we live?" Jesus taught also his own idea of the method in which the kingdom of God was to be established; and if we show how it is to be established in every heart, we picture the process by which gradually it is to be spread over the world.

First of all the evil is to be recognised. There is to be no blinking of facts, either in our own consciences, or in the world around us. "Repent," seek a change of mind; not so much a change of opinion, as of aim and tendency. The necessity of this is not only declared in plain words, but it is implied in the practice of Jesus, who everywhere especially addressed himself to the lowly and the weak, who were moved even to tears by a sense of their own imperfection and the glorious possibilities of a divine rule. But under the teaching of Jesus, this repentance was not what it too often is according to the modern representation—of one type only. In the case of open sinners, whose acts daringly defied divine law and public sentiment, there was indeed a deep passion of self-condemnation, and bitter self-reproach. Thus, the Prodigal Son is pictured as saying, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants;" and the sinful woman is portrayed as bowing at the feet of Jesus, grovelling in the dust, and washing with her tears the feet of the Saviour.

But there are other types presented in the Gospels. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;" and in his encomium on such characters as Zacchæus, and, we may add, Nathaniel, we see that Jesus could recognize the blessedness of such yearnings after a better life as are found in guileless souls, who have never descended to the depths of iniquity to which others have fallen.

Another type is seen in the case of certain heathen who came to him and moved his sympathy by the artless simplicity of their bearing. The centurion, for example, who pleaded

with Jesus for his servant, and the Syro-Phœnician Woman who besought him on behalf of her daughter, had not received, so far as we know, the spiritual education which had been accorded to the Jews. They were humble people who knew nothing but the very first aspirations of the divine life; but they shewed that they were susceptible to the influence of better things, and therefore they had his hearty sympathy.

Again, repentance is to be followed by *faith*, the lowest degree of which we may suppose to be that required for the working of miracles; about which we shall say nothing now, because the subject of miracles is to come before us in the next Lecture. But the faith most spoken of in the synoptical Gospels is the willinghood of heart which readily answers to divine call of the better life proclaimed by Jesus. This kind of faith is continually implied, even where the word itself is not used. It is the sort of fruitful receptivity, in which hearing leads straight to action. "Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them I will liken him to a wise man that built his house upon a rock." Such words describe very clearly the sort of faith that is needed for moral improvement. It is an allegiance of the whole moral nature, that is, as we have said, of the voluntary energies touched with a sense of responsibility. The same meaning is also often clearly apparent where the word faith, or belief, is used. Thus Jesus said to the rulers at Jerusalem, "John came to you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward that ye might believe him." Belief, or faith, here evidently signifies the sort of hearing that leads to doing. It is the hunger and thirst after righteousness, to which satisfaction is assured. It is the allegiance of the soul to a moral power whose sway it has begun to feel, and from which it confidently expects a practical solution of the problems of life.

We shall perhaps understand it better if we look at its opposite, which is sometimes reprobated by Jesus. "Ye are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling to their fellows and saying, 'we have piped unto you and ye have not danced, we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented.'" There was nothing serious about them,

no recognition of the greatness of the problem of life. The same frivolity and want of seriousness is seen in the case of those, who on hearing from the King an invitation to attend the marriage supper, "made light of it," and went every one to his business. The opposite of this inate frivolity, the earnestness of spirit that burns for truth and right, is the noblest type of faith which we find in the Gospels.

On the whole then there does not appear to be necessarily involved in the process of conversion to the Kingdom of God anything unnatural or supernatural. We all of us want a better world, and we must all anticipate it in our own lives and characters. It is to be obtained, not by imagination, or sentiment, or emotion, but by obedience to the law of God. Happy he who, if need be, through the pangs and tears of penitence, with earnest devotion and loyalty of soul, gives himself to its realization.

(3) Now in a few words let us look at the idea of Jesus as the Messiah, so far as it is contained in the synoptical Gospels. We have noticed that Jesus does not, so far as we can see, seem to have wholly sympathised with the apocalyptic views of Messiah's office entertained by his immediate predecessors. But the views set forth in these apocalyptic visions had here and there a reverse side. This is notably set forth in Isaiah liii. A servant of God is pictured who, through his zeal for the divine will, becomes a subject of scorn and persecution to the prosperous wickedness of the world. Several prophets, whose works are not contained in the canon, afterwards describe this servant of God as the Christ, living a life of sorrow and toil, labouring, suffering and even dying in the service of God. Nay, within the limits of the canon—in the book of Daniel—the Messiah, it is prophesied, shall be "cut off, but not for himself." Let us bear in mind this reverse side of the image of the conquering King, which is to be found here and there in the sacred writings of antiquity.

Now, in the beginning of the life and ministry of Jesus there does seem to be an unwillingness on his part to take up the great title and to claim to be the Messiah at all. We cannot treat the subject exhaustively now; but you remember that he suffered not the demoniacs to speak because they knew him, and cried out that he was the Son of God. It is noteworthy that although three apostles are represented as accompanying him

to the Mount of Transfiguration, a strict injunction is laid upon them not to speak of it "until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." We seem to have in these reminiscenses clear hints of a certain unwillingness in Jesus to take upon himself openly the title and offices of the Messiah. The subject is perplexing and difficult; but I think it possible that, as Jesus realised more and more of the opposition inevitably to be offered by the world to his doctrine, he felt within himself an answer to the typical experiences ascribed to the suffering servant of God in the prophecies of Isaiah, and in the later visions. It is possible, it may be even probable, that he in his great heart comforted himself with the thought that by his poverty many should be made rich; and that by his endurance to the end many would be strengthened to triumph over every sin. Refer to that interesting and suggestive chapter, the 11th of St. Matthew, and you will there find the soul of Jesus is bowed down by the disappointment he must have felt in the uncertainty of John the Baptist concerning the work he was to accomplish in the world. This leads him to reflect upon his failure to reach the hearts of men; and then he lifts up his eyes to heaven, and says "I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." he means that his mission is a lowly one; and he winds up with the invitation to all who are labouring and are heavy laden, to come to him to be his friends and followers, that they may find rest.

Surely it is possible that this sense of a special burden imposed on him by human sin and sorrow might lead him to believe that he was bound to give his life a ransom for many. If so, we may say with some degree of confidence, that there is no such doctrine of Atonement contained in the Synoptical Gospels as is enshrined in the Creeds of the Churches. Yet a doctrine of Atonement and of reconciliation between man and the divine nature there certainly is; and it is intimately connected with the sufferings of Jesus both in his life and in his death. In the parable of the Prodigal Son there is beautifully set forth what may be called the generosity of the divine nature in its relations to human sin. The poor Prodigal comes shrinking into himself, with fearful and trembling steps, dreading the kind of reception he may meet with, dreading the first sight of his

father's figure, lest he should be met with strict justice and therefore with rejection. But when he was yet a great way off the father saw him. And an impression is given to the hearers, that before the son had caught sight of the father's form, the father had set out to meet him. He ran with eagerness and "fell on his neck and kissed him." Every one believes that in this Jesus intended to typify the eagerness, the readiness, the anxious willingness of the divine mercy. The father had been robbed, wronged, and had spent days and months of misery and anxiety about his sinning and wandering son; yet all this is forgiven when the miserable aspect of the son reveals the sufferings that the child of his heart had brought upon himself.

Now it does appear to me that Jesus in his contemplations of humanity felt himself to represent the Father's love. For he was one with the divine purpose, one with the divine idea. A feeling, ever stronger and nearer to his heart than any anger against sin, was a sense of the burden with which human waywardness and perversity pressed upon divine love in its effort to purify and ennoble mankind. This divine love reigned in his own heart; and in his consciousness of that, he represented the universal Father to men. He could not but know that it must ultimately triumph, that it must at length touch, and soften, and regenerate by its pathos and purity even the very hardest.

From the tumult of passion rising within him at the intolerable hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees at Jerusalem, how swift was the transition of feeling to that outburst of tears and pity with which he cried, "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen doth gather her chickens under wings, and ye would not!" The whole atonement, the whole truth in it, is there—a compassionate meeting of divine love with the human sin and perversity that has *wronged* it. And it is this that the memory, and the image, and the spirit of Jesus embody to us. Still, you cannot *go from* the better light before you without feeling that there is something in the Universe that yearns over you, and moves you to return. You cannot do any wrong without injuring society, and so crucifying afresh the Son of God, inasmuch as all humanity is embraced in the heart of God. If you are a father wronging a family by your vices, child-

hood is divine, and Christ pleads for its interests and rebukes its wrongs. If you are a hard tyrannical husband, womanhood is divine; and in the dealings of the Jews with the suffering Christ there is an emblem of your self-willed and cruel deeds. If you are a selfish, grasping, unsympathetic man of business, bent only upon greed and aggrandisement, humanity is divine; and its bleeding wounds cry to heaven against you and your indifference.

The first step towards entering that kingdom of heaven, of which we have been speaking, is susceptibility to voices such as these, as we hear them from the lips of Christ. "See then that ye refuse not him that speaketh;"—for, the heart that is steeled against the sufferings caused by its own sin is, we may well fear, past all possibility of redemption.

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THE RELIGION OF JESUS:

ITS MODERN DIFFICULTIES

AND

ITS ORIGINAL SIMPLICITY.

A Course of Sunday Evening Lectures,

BY

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

V.

The Gospel Miracles.

In pursuance of the plan announced at the beginning of this course of lectures, we have dealt first with those principles of Christianity which address themselves to the heart, and may safely be regarded as equally enduring with the moral nature of man. But I have not concealed, and do not conceal from myself, that the minds of my hearers have, probably, been haunted by speculations as to what is to be said about other and more perplexing questions, on which we have not hitherto touched. The broad, even, shining path we have hitherto traversed is bordered on either hand by jungles and quagmires of theology, and legend, the dread and horror of many spiritual travellers. Many, indeed, have been prevented from entering upon this king's highway of simplicity and truth, because of

the clouds and mists generated by the doubtful region on either side. But as even jungles and quagmires may be, and have been, reclaimed by cultivation, so a courageous application of common sense may possibly, will assuredly hereafter, make both theology and legend fruitful in a harvest of spiritual suggestions. It is to that task that we turn at the present moment, with no expectation of any great achievements, but forced by our own convictions to do the best we can towards helping those who may have suffered from perplexities similar to our own. Amongst the difficulties which, in modern times, surround the religion of Jesus as it has come down to us, none perhaps, is more crucial than that of miracles. Of no difficulty is the solution more decisive of the position which a man is to hold in the classification of religious opinion. In fact, observation leads us to think that all sects are being gradually swallowed up in two classes of thinkers, so far as religion is concerned, naturalists on the one hand and supernaturalists on the other. The distinction between these two sects is not merely one of less or of more belief. It is one that goes absolutely down to the very basis of our conceptions concerning the world and God. So far as our intellectual theory of the universe is concerned, there is more difference between the man who believes in one single miracle, though he may reject all others, and the man who accepts absolutely none whatever, than between the first man, accepting only one miracle, and an adherent of the Roman system with all its latest additions, including the Vatican decrees.

You will see, therefore, that I do not for one moment conceal the greatness of the *intellectual* issue. Nor is there any danger that that should be disguised from you. The real danger, at the present moment, is lest the *moral and spiritual* issue involved should be exaggerated. Against that danger I have hitherto done as much as I possibly could to guard. I have shown that all of Christ's religion which commends itself to the affections of the heart, and to the mystic susceptibilities of the spirit in contemplation of the works of God, must remain to us after we have made all abstraction of points which rest on doubtful evidence. Now the *heart* of Christ is surely much more precious to us than any wonders of his hands; and that remains to us when these are dissolved away into the mists of antiquity. The difference between these two sects, of which I have spoken, is not a spiritual difference. It

affects the intellectual theory held by different classes of men, and by no means the attitude of the heart towards the divine side of present facts. No rationalism can possibly dwarf the mystery of this universe in which we live. No analysis can ever neutralize the enchantment with which it kindles reverence, awe, and aspiration. If, then, we were to classify men, not by intellectual opinions, but by the feelings of the heart, and by spiritual susceptibilities, we should assuredly find that there are many naturalists in religious opinion, who are far nearer akin to such men as St. Francis, and St. Augustine, and St. Paul, than are many of the most fanatical upholders of miracles. The issue is not between religion on the one hand and no religion on the other. The issue is rather between dogma and conviction.

A word or two on the meaning of these terms may be necessary, in order to explain clearly the idea before my own mind. By dogma is properly meant any opinion that "seems good to" a sufficient authority. It is derived from— or rather it is simply a Greek word transferred into our own language, signifying that which has been decreed, or which has seemed good to a sufficient authority. Concerning most dogmas, it is to be remarked, that the assertion by the authority is the evidence on which it rests. It is at least unverifiable, even in conception, by far the largest portion of mankind. Conviction, on the other hand, signifies an opinion, always carrying some feeling with it, which is borne home to the mind and heart by observation, by personal experience, or by sympathy with the experience of mankind. Such an opinion, or the feelings associated with it, can always be tried for ourselves, and so verified, independently of the ruthority of others. In the doctrine of the Trinity, whether as stated in the Articles of the Church of England, or in the Westminster Confession, you have an instance of dogma. Whether it is to be regarded as true or not, it is impossible for any man to verify it for himself, and to know by experience that it is true. On the other hand, the spiritual fruitfulness of humility, concerning which Jesus has so much to say, and on which he so largely insists, is a conviction borne home to our own hearts, whensoever we open our eyes or our spiritual susceptibilities, by observation, by experience, by sympathy with our kind. Every man can try it for himself. Again, the doctrine of the Incarnation. In the last result the assertion of a presumably suffi-

cient authority is its only evidence; and it is certainly incapable of verification. But the blessedness of disinterested devotion, as the highest attitude of life, comes to us with conviction, when we have marked the manifestations of it in the example of others, whether living in the present day, or in past times. It is verified when we have imagined it for ourselves by sympathy with others, and above all when we have tried it in our own action upon the world around us.

Now the essence of the strength of dogma will almost always be found to depend upon miracle. Trace the evidence sufficiently far, and you will always find it ultimately to rest upon the assertion that it must be so, because certain portents were wrought in support of the doctrine declared. If then miracle should dissapear from men's sincere belief, dogma must, however, slowly and gradually, sooner or later disappear with it; and we must learn to be content with such convictions of the mind and heart as are verifiable by human experience at the present day.

I shall not waste your time and my own by any attempt to define miracle; because it is not necessary for our present purpose. Suffice it that certain events are related in the Gospels, which are allowed to be contrary to all our daily experience. It is alleged that thousands of men were fed with a few loaves and small fishes, that would not have sufficed as a meal for more than six or a dozen. It is alleged that people, from whom the vital spark had entirely fled, were called back to life; nay, in one instance that a man who had lain four days in the grave, and in whose body the process of decomposition must have made considerable progress, was, by a word of authority, summoned back once more to this earthly scene. It is alleged that by a touch, or by a word, the eyes of the blind have been opened; still farther, that veritable demons have taken possession of the bodies of men, and have been expelled by the charm of a spiritual authority. Such are but a few instances of the marvels that crowd the pages of the Gospels. That there are difficulties involved in such allegations, no one for a moment disputes. If we take, for instance, the miracle in which five thousand were fed by a few loaves and fishes, we find that the paradoxes involved in it are almost beyond computation, as well as imagination. Bread is the result of a certain process of vegetable growth, followed by one of

artificial manufacture. The same thing, the terms being changed, may be asserted concerning the flesh of fishes. It is the result of a certain process of animal growth; and when presented for food in a cooked form, is also the result of a certain process of artificial preparation. In the endeavour then to conceive, as a real transaction, what is alleged to have taken place on that occasion, we find that three suppositions only are possible. Either bread and fish were created at once, in a cooked form, out of nothing; or secondly, chemical elements were brought together from the surrounding scene, and in an instant of time transformed into the shape which usually requires months, if not a year, for its accomplishment; or thirdly, we should be driven to conclude that the miracle consisted in producing upon the people the impression that they had eaten a sufficient meal, and in dispelling their feeling of hunger, when the whole transaction was an illusion.

Now whichever supposition a man takes—and one of these must be taken—he finds that it does not at all fit into any corner of his mind. He feels as though he were struggling in a dream, with chimeras which set all sense and calculation at defiance. There can then be only one reason for receiving such a wonder as this, namely that it is *proved*, demonstrably proved, with a strength of evidence adequate to the enormous burden that has to be sustained To that question of proof then we at once proceed, and you will see that this justifies me in leaving on one side the definition of miracle.

In practical life, the value assigned to testimony or evidence, is always determined by two factors. One of these is the character of the evidence itself, specially its directness, and the trustworthiness of the channel through which it comes; while the other factor (too often forgotton) is the experience and the mental condition of the recipient. If the subject concerning which testimony is given, is one that naturally adapts itself to the experience and the mental condition of the person addressed, very little trouble is usually taken to enquire into the other factor, the directness and the trustworthiness of the evidence. Thus, for instance, you may have been seated, at some time in the course of a journey, on the box of a coach, and have been whiling away the time in conversation with the driver. "See that house Sir?" he says, pointing over his shoulder at a mansion on the hill side,

standing in the midst of an extensive estate. "Yes," you say. "Well Sir," he goes on, "the owner of that mansion twenty years ago, was a boy in our stable yard. He set up a coal yard on a very small scale, with a little money that he had saved; and being a sober, industrious, prudent man, he continued saving. He then bought a share in a coal mine. He bought his share at a very fortunate moment; for just then the price of coals suddenly rose, doubled in fact, and his fortune was at once made. So rapidly did his wealth increase, that he is now the owner of a third of the whole county." You scarcely thought at such a time of enquiring into the evidence. The fact that the story was told you by a man coming from the very stable-yard where this rich landed proprietor was stated to have worked some twenty years ago, perhaps prevented you from asking any farther questions. But the circumstances are by no means unprecedented; they are not even in these days extraordinary. They fit themselves to your experience, and to your knowledge of the world. Therefore you accept the tale without any farther enquiry; and if in the course of a month or two afterwards, you are driving in company with a friend along the same road, you repeat to him the story, as on your own authority, without feeling the necessity of giving any evidence for it. And similarly he being accustomed to such things, will receive it because you tell him so.

A little farther on, however, the same coachman says again: "See that house Sir? A very curious circumstance has taken place at that house several times. It is an old family that lives there, and whenever the master of that house brings home his bride, the ghost of a white lady parades the passages, goes up the stairs, enters the bridal-chamber, and then disappears. If you will believe me, Sir, I have seen it myself. For I was serving with the family at the very time when the present master was married. And at midnight, we were all of us on the look out, and there I saw as plain as I can see you, the white lady coming along the passage, and going up the stairs." Well, when you hear such a story as this, you smile. If you can avoid doing it outwardly, you keep your smile to yourself; but you are not in the least convinced. All your experience is against the reality of such an occurrence as this; while the same experience enables you to suggest many ways in which the

impression might be made upon susceptible people. But if a superstitious uneducated labourer be sitting by the coachman at the same time, he takes it as simply and frankly as you took the story concerning the landed proprietor, who had risen from being a stable-boy to being the richest person in the county. He is used to believe in such things. From his childhood such stories have been told to him by his companions, and by his friends; and the coachman's own personal testimony is amply sufficient for him. He goes his way and tells it among his boon companions at the public-house bar, or amongst his fellow-labourers on the harvest field. And they scarcely think of doubting it. The very love of marvel confirms their belief, and they go on circulating the story from one to another, so that it survives from age to age. This is the way in which, what is called by the Germans, "Sage"—and we have no English word which gives the meaning so well—or, to use the Latin term, it is the way in which legend arises. It is rarely to be traced to any personal source. In the present instance the coachman whom I am supposed to be quoting, was not himself the originator of the story; for it existed in previous generations. It grows up we know not how. It is in the air, or it is in the constitution of a race. And it is always alleged with a confidence which seems to require no evidence whatever. Have you ever noticed the way in which children will relate to each other the most extraordinary marvels, without the slightest appearance of doubt, or any suspicion that evidence is required? If you can go back to a sufficiently remote period in your own childhood or infancy, you must remember how you have told things to your younger brothers and sisters, for belief in which you had not the slightest trace of reason, but which nevertheless you did believe as firmly as you now believe in the multiplication table. At such an age no evidence is required. The very fact that, by any means whatever, a strong impression has been made upon the imagination, is sufficient to induce belief. Now be it remembered, that as the embryo of any living creature is said, and apparently with considerable truth, by physiologists, to pass through all the stages of development which have in by-gone generations preceded the attainments of the present form of the species, so the mind, in the course of its education, passes through all the early stages to which we

can hardly look back now by means of history or tradition, and presents all the phenomena that used to be manifested by adults in those days. Just as little children now, of a highly educated race, will tell to each other without the slightest suspicion of any uncertainty, the most marvellous tales, because by some unknown means a strong impression has been made upon their imagination, so in remote times and even now, amongst simple uneducated people, equally marvellous stories are related with a corresponding lack of any foundation.

But now let me ask, why do you disbelieve the coachman who tells you this ghost story on his own testimony? Do you doubt his word? No; it may be you are sufficiently acquainted with him to be assured that he is a thoroughly honest man, and that he has a character for truthfulness amongst all his acquaintance. But you disbelieve him because, in your own experience, you know that frightened and ignorant people are exceedingly apt to be deceived about ghosts. You know that they may mistake the play of a flickering moonbeam on the wall, for a white figure advancing towards them. You know that any piece of drapery left in an unaccustomed place, and fluttering in the draught at midnight, would make an impression that no argument could possibly destroy. You feel that it is far more probable that the experience should have been caused in such ways than that the ghost should have been an actual, an objective thing.

The extent to which this principle is to be carried, no doubt sometimes excites serious questions as to the justice of its application. All we do now, however, is to note that such is a principle commonly applied when we have to deal with stories of the marvellous, related on the very best attainable evidence. I dare say that most of this congregation have read some years ago, in common with myself, a statement made on the personal authority of a respectable nobleman, that he had seen a certain spiritualist float out of a window in the room where this nobleman stood, go through the air, and enter again at another window into the same, or into another room. The story excited a good deal of attention at the time. But how many people believed it? I dare say not half-a-dozen in this present assembly. And why not? Because you are aware that, however honest and thoroughly truthful people

may be, all are liable to some fallacies of perception and of memory; and that sometimes these fallacies take an altogether abnormal shape, which it is impossible to predict. In Dr. Carpenter's "Mental Physiology" you may read for yourselves a number of illustrations of these fallacies, which are given with the names of the authorities, most of them of high repute, on which they rest. I have spoken of fallacies of perception. Dr. Tuke, quoted by Dr. Carpenter, in his "Mental Physiology," relates that within his own personal knowledge, a lady interested in the establishment of drinking fountains for the multitude, was, on one occasion, on a visit with some benevolent friends at a distance from her own home. In walking along the road near to this house, she noticed what she took to be a drinking fountain, erected in admirable taste, upon which she distinctly read the inscription—"If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." Re-entering the house amongst her friends, and believing that to them, as the benevolent people of the neighbourhood, this public benefit must be traced, she congratulated them upon the admirable taste in which this fountain had been erected They opened their eyes in astonishment. They had never heard of any such drinking fountain; and they assured her upon their personal knowledge, that there was nothing of the kind in the neighbourhood. She, believing of course, as we all do, in rhe own senses, insisted that she must be right. The scene was re-visited, and no cause for the illusion could be discovered, except a few scattered stones in the part of the road at which she had seen this strange vision.

Another, Dr. Hibbert relates (also quoted in Dr. Carpenter's "Mental Physiology,") that on board a certain ship, the cook died of disease, and his body, as is usual, was buried in the sea. The man was lame, and always walked with a peculiar halting gait, so that his figure could scarcely be mistaken when once one had become acquainted with it. On a certain day, the man on the look-out cried out in horror that there the figure of the cook, walking with precisely his well-known lame gait, was to be seen pacing the waters of the sea, at some distance from the vessel. One after another came to observe; and all of them, the whole ship's company together, were convinced that they saw before them the wraith, or corpse, or ghost, of their deceased companion. Yet when the ship was steered towards it, it was found to be simply a piece of floating wreck that had deceived their vision.

Such fallacies of perception are often greatly heightened by fallacies of memory. Miss Cobbe (also quoted by Dr. Carpenter), relates, that on one occasion, when discussing with a friend the subject of table-turning and spiritualistic phenomena, her friend asserted that in her own experience, a table had rapped intelligibly to the hearers, when no one was within a yard of it, so that it was beyond the touch of any of the company. Miss Cobbe doubting it, asked how long ago this experience might be. Well, it was nine years ago, but it was as fresh in the friend's memory as though it had occurred the other day. The friend was asked, had she made any note at the time? Oh, yes, she had. And referring to her notes she found the memorandum to be, that the table had rapped *when the hands of six persons rested upon it.* Yet there was not the slightest intention on her part to deceive. The experience had simply become distorted in her memory, in the lapse of seven years. And every one can recall how difficult it is to reproduce exactly what took place some five or six, much more what took place some ten or fifteen years ago. Nay, how very hard it is to separate the events of one particular day, or even year, from another! They will come back in groups, strung together in a perplexity that we find it difficult to resolve. Those who have travelled rapidly through any new country, will be aware how continually a church belonging to one town, is by the imagination erected in another; how a circumstance which took place in one locality is by the memory referred to another. In fact, when anything of consequence is depending upon our memory, we have to use the utmost effort by recalling past associations, by looking up old letters, and memoranda, and diaries, to correct the mis-impressions that have grown into our minds by the lapse of time.

Another instance of the same kind may be mentioned here. At the time when the late Miss Martineau was taking very much interest in the phenomena of Mesmerism, she had a young female dependant, who was very susceptible to the mesmeric influence, and under it used to show some very strange phenomena. It was alleged currently amongst the friends of Miss Martineau, that this young woman was capable, in the mesmeric trance, of conversing in foreign tongues which she had never learned, with those who were capable of speaking them. Dr. Noble, who relates the incident, ventured to doubt whether it really were so. "Oh," he was assured,

"there can be no doubt whatever of the matter; Lord Morpeth himself bears testimony to it; he has conversed in foreign languages with her, and she has answered him with apparent ease." Not quite satisfied, Dr. Noble took the opportunity of mentioning the matter to a relative of Miss Martineau's. He said in reply that the story was not quite accurately related. It was true that the young woman seemed to understand Lord Morpeth, when he spake to her in foreign tongues, and that she answered him *in the vernacular*—in English Meeting Lord Morpeth some time afterwards, Doctor Noble asked whether *this* version of the story was literally correct. "Why, no," said his lordship, "not exactly. It is true I did address her in foreign languages, and she answered in a sort of inarticulate jargon which I took to be an imitation of the sounds which I was uttering." And so, by careful enquiry the whole fallacy was discovered. But amongst those who narrated it, on what they considered good authority, there was no intention to deceive. Their memories had simply got a misimpression through lapse of time, and they consequently related the incident in a different form from that in which they had received it.

Such experiences as these then, of the fallacies to which both perception and memory are liable, justify us in suspending our judgment when anything strikingly contrary to experience is related, and sometimes justify us in an entire refusal to believe unless we are afforded an opportunity of personal verification. Some cases occur in which you can however scarcely impute a fallacy of perception or a fallacy of memory, and yet you are unable to draw the inferences from the occurence which those who narrate it would have you draw. Not very long ago, a remarkable circumstance was related by the *Times'* correspondent, dating from the city of Brussels, where, in emulation of the various sacred shrines, which have sprung up in all parts of the Continent—illustrative of the facility with which miraculous stories grow—a cave had been found in a garden in the suburbs which it was alleged the Virgin Mary was in the habit of haunting. Within this cave there was a well or fountain to which the presence of the Virgin, it was asserted, communicated miraculous powers. In Brussels, at the time, there was a lady, the wife of a well-known physician. The *Times'* correspondent would not give the name, because he said it was so well known throughout the city, but the case he asserted was notorious

to all. A lady, the wife of a certain physician, was afflicted with a disease of the eyes, that threatened entirely to destroy her sight. Her husband and the members of his profession whom he consulted, could give her no relief; and it seemed as if nothing but blindness was before her. Failing all other means of restoration, and when she had all but, if not entirely, lost the use of her eyes, she drove out to this enchanted grotto in company with a female friend. They prayed and performed their devotions in the grotto for nearly an hour, without any result being obtained. At length the coachman began to remonstrate, as he was impatient to return. In despair the lady dipped her handkerchief in the sacred water and re-entered her carriage. Wiping her eyes with the dipped handkerchief, as she journeyed back, she seemed to perceive a sudden brightness of sight, and this grew upon her, so that by the time she reached home she could see as well as ever. That very night a thanksgiving service was performed on account of the miraculous cure, in the church she attended. Farther, the next day a more public service was celebrated to commemorate the recovery, and you may be sure that the event lacked nothing for want of reiteration and circulation. Who thinks, now, of concluding from this that the story is true—that the Virgin Mary did haunt the grotto, and that the water possessed the miraculous power? You are completely baffled, you have no explanation to offer. All you say is, I will not accept the narration, I will not believe in the virtue asserted to have been communicated to the water by the Virgin Mary.

I have so far purposely dealt with incidents narrated in our own generation, alleged on the testimony for the most part of people now living. But it is necessary for a moment to go back to the days of antiquity. I read for instance in the work of Irenæus in refutation of all heresies, that the heretics were convicted of falsehood by their inability to work miracles. "As for us," he says "it is notorious, it is a common experience, that Devils are cast out, confessing as they come out, the power that is exerted. The sick are continually healed, *the dead have been raised* by the united reiterated prayers of the Church, and they have continued with us many years from the time of their resurrection."*

* The translation here is not literal. It was given freely from memory, but it is substantially correct.

This was written about the year 190 after Christ, and he testifies it on his own experience. According to Eusebius, Papias living in the early part of the second century, also alleges that a dead man was raised in his own time, and it appears to be implied, within circumstances of his own knowledge. Augustine, whose mind appears in many of its attributes above that of most of mankind, himself says that in the town of Milan, where he was then residing, at the time of his baptism, a revelation was made of the place where two martyrs, St. Anastasius and St. Gervasius were buried. St. Ambrose, who was then the Archbishop of Milan, had these bodies raised up from the earth, and they were carried amidst the acclamation of multitudes to the Cathedral Church. A certain man who was entirely blind, hearing the outcry, asked what it meant. He was told that the bodies of St. Anastasius, and St. Gervasius, were being carried to the Cathedral Church. Obtaining some one to lead him, the blind man made his way to the church, obtained admission to the shrine where the bodies lay, had his hand guided to the face-cloth of one of the sacred corpses, and applied it to his eyes. Thereupon, says Augustine, he received his sight. And the circumstance was known to the whole city, and excited their joy to a passion of gratitude. This is related of a city in which he was living, and of the very time that was likely to be most profoundly impressed upon him, because of the spiritual experiences through which he had passed, and the great step in life he had taken.

You will ask me, perhaps, what is the application of all these illustrations? Well now, I should be wrong both to myself and to you, if I were to attempt to give that application this evening. The time is too far advanced. I have felt it necessary to go into some amount of detail; and on the whole, I believe that my duty both to the subject and to you, will necessitate my delaying the completion of this lecture to next Sunday evening. It is a most important subject, having a vital bearing, not as I have already said, upon our spiritual life, but upon our intellectual theory of the universe, and upon the harmony of our spiritual life with facts as God reveals them to us at the present day. I dare not, therefore, run the risk of misleading you, or of causing any misimpression through the abbreviation to which I must necessarily submit my argument if I endeavoured to carry it out at the present moment.

So far as I have at present gone, I have tried to show you

that there are some assertions in sacred history, which do not commend themselves to our experience of life. There can only be one reason for believing the allegations made, and this is, that the proof is demonstrative, having a force of evidence able to bear the enormous weight that it is to carry. I have shown to you that, in dealing with evidence, we always have to consider two factors, first, the nature of the evidence itself, its directness and its trustworthiness, and secondly the mental experience, and knowledge, and susceptibilities of the persons to whom that evidence is addressed. I have then shown to you that in many cases where the event commends itself to personal experience, it is accepted without any strong evidence whatever. I have shown that the experience of many people, especially of children and child-like minds, adapts itself readily to marvels which are entirely repulsive to us. I have shown that in endeavouring to estimate the value of evidence alleged on behalf of any particular events, we have to make great allowances for fallacies of perception and memory. I have given many instances in which, owing to such fallacies, people have been led to believe what has turned out to be utterly false. I have shown that this is continually occurring in our own day, and I have mentioned some similar instances—hundreds of which might be added—which took place in centuries gone by. It will remain for us, next Sunday evening, to show how and to what extent, this argument is necessarily applicable to the wonders that are contained in the Gospel story.

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THE RELIGION OF JESUS:

ITS MODERN DIFFICULTIES

AND

ITS ORIGINAL SIMPLICITY.

A Course of Sunday Evening Lectures,

BY

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

VI.

The Gospel Miracles.

THE division of the present lecture into two parts, has, at any rate, this advantage; that it will enable us to give a somewhat fuller treatment to the subject than had been intended. It will be necessary for me, however in the first place, very briefly to remind you of the course of thought which was pursued last Sunday evening.

We showed then that the value of evidence depends upon two factors; the first of these being its own directness and trustworthiness; while the second consists in the mental condition, experience, and predispositions of the person to whom the evidence appeals. We showed that where any statement is made in accordance with our own ordinary experience, or expectations, we rarely think—unless the matter

is of very great and vital importance—of enquiring into the precise worth of the evidence on which the assertion rests. But on the other hand, where the allegation made is *contrary* to our own experience, or our predisposition to certain modes of thought, more and more evidence is required in proportion to the degree of opposition existing, until at length, in many cases, nothing whatever would induce belief, excepting the opportunity of personal verification for ourselves. We showed that on such principles, we do as a matter of fact proceed in all the ordinary transactions of life, and in the formation of our general opinions We showed, (and gave illustrations in detail which of course we cannot now repeat) that we are justified in taking this course, by many fallacies both of perception and memory, to which average minds are subject.

You will thus see, that the case here maintained, is not that miracles are impossible; but that in ordinary practical life, the most direct and apparently trustworthy evidence is not allowed to shake our faith in the uniformity of the laws which govern the universe. Here then, in setting out afresh, it occurs to me to notice two objections which we should not have been able to handle had we completed the subject last Sunday evening. It may be said that the argument, so far as hitherto pursued, would require that we should absolutely never believe in anything which is alleged in contrariety to our own experience. And we might be reminded of the well-known story of the Indian prince, who would believe any number of purposely invented fables concerning the civilization of western lands, but who, when told that at certain periods of the year, water could be carried about in a solid form, positively refused to listen any further, on the ground that he was evidently being duped. Here it may be said is a case in which a man would not believe, because something was alleged in contrariety to his own ordinary experience, and it is a case in which he was clearly deceived in his dependence upon that experience. Now on this I would observe that the contrariety to the experience of the Indian prince was only apparent, and not real. There was an apparent opposition, but there was no real inconsistency with his experience of the laws that govern the world around him. For had he reflected, he would have discovered many instances of different objects that exist now in a liquid, and now in a solid form. He might have observed that wax,

when exposed to the heat of a candle, speedily becomes liquid; and when the former temperature is restored, comes back to the solid form again. So many instances of this kind might he have observed, even in his own climate, that if he had sufficient intelligence, he might have seen some hint in these illustrations of a general law, going to show that the difference between a liquid and a solid form of any particular object does very frequently depend upon temperature. It might then have occurred to him that in lands where a greater variety of temperature was found than in his own country, a larger number of objects would be susceptible of these two forms than in the region to which he was accustomed. Thus in that case, although there was an apparent opposition to his ordinary experience of water, there was absolutely no inconsistency with the constant experience he and his fathers had had of the uniformity of the laws of nature. This is always found to be the case with alleged exceptions to this grand uniformity, that pervades the government of the world. The untutored savages, who first meet with the wonders of civilization, see and hear in the rifle, in its flash, in its report, and in its death-dealing force, a miracle, equal, in its suggestions of divine power, to the lightning and the thunder of the heavens. But a very little education enables them to see that here is only a special instance of exceedingly rapid combustion—lower degrees of which they must have known even in their own uncivilized arts. So again, if an ignorant countryman is told, that by looking through a little tube an astronomer is able to judge what chemical substances may be found in Sirius, or even in one of the far more distant nebulæ, it seems to him like a case of necromancy. But a little education will teach him, that various objects in combustion produce different kinds of light; and that these different kinds of light produce various lines upon the spectrum, which may be illustrated to him by every rainbow that spans the heaven. And when he has been taught this much, he will bring the novel experience within the order to which he has been accustomed in past times.

There is therefore nothing in our arguments which would lead us to deny, as impossible, everything that is apparently opposed to our own experience. It would only lead us to require as direct and trustworthy testimony as possible to

anything which *seems* an exception to the laws of nature, as we have understood them in the light of previous science. And our argument, so far, would go to suggest that in the case of any such apparent exceptions being really proved, farther light upon the subject will enable us to see how they fall under some still more general law than any we have known before, or some modified interpretation of laws that have been already understood.

Another objection to the line of argument hitherto pursued, is to be found in certain most profound and interesting lectures delivered by the Rev. Canon Mozley on the subject of Christian Miracles.* In the course of his argument he enquires what is the principle on which our belief in the uniformity of nature rests. He finds that the only proof that can be given is constant observation. But he replies, and it seems to me with very considerable acumen and force, that observation can only apply to past time, and can afford no certainty whatever as to the future. At any rate, you cannot found upon observation of past times any proof demonstrative of uniformity in the time to come. He acknowledges that if a certain phenomenon is seen to recur under the same conditions a hundred times, a presumption is excited that it will occur again. But if asked why this presumption should be excited, he alleges that the only answer to be given is that we are so constituted that we cannot avoid entertaining it; whereas, no logical syllogism can be set forth which will bear the weight of the proposition involved. The proposition is this: that if a physical phenomenon happens a considerable number of times under the same apparent conditions, we may be sure that this, and nothing else, will always happen under those conditions. Any attempt to prove this always sets out by assuming the fundamental uniformity of nature, which, in the argument, is just the point at issue.* I think that it is impossible to reply to this argument as regards future time, except on the ground which I shall mention.

But farther, if it is impossible to apply, with any *logical* demonstrative force, the observations made in past time, to the probabilities, or at any rate to the certainties of future time, so also it is impossible to say that any uniform results

* Bampton Lecture, 1865.

* I may be permitted to refer to my fuller discussion of this subject in "the Mystery of Matter." p. 149. Macmillan & Co. 1873.

derived from observation can certainly, and always, and infallibly, bind our conjectures as to any regions, or any times, over which our observation has not been extended. The fact that you cannot construct a syllogism which will bear the presumption that because a thing has happened half-a-dozen times it will therefore happen the seventh clearly implies, Canon Mozley argues, that you can never obtain any absolute certainty as to what goes on in unknown times or places. He grants that conduct is necessarily governed, to a large extent, by observations of what has taken place in past times. He holds that we are so constituted as to argue the future from the past, in order that we may conform ourselves to the general laws by which the world is governed. But he insists that it is impossible on such grounds to obtain any logical proof, that miracles are impossible, or have never happened.

I most cordially agree with him. I have never argued that miracles are impossible; nor am I going to say now that in no possible instance did anything of the kind ever occur. My ground is, as you may already have gathered, somewhat different from that. I hold with Canon Mozley, that it is impossible logically to prove that because a thing has happened a hundred, or a thousand, or a million times, it will necessarily happen the time after, under the same conditions. But I say, as he does, we are so constituted that a presumption of the kind is necessarily excited in our minds. And if we may for a moment indulge in a teleological argument, it would appear that we are so constituted, in order that we may live and work in harmony with the constitution of the world around us. Very well, then, I say, our assurance that the sun will rise to-morrow morning is a case of loyalty to our own constitution, and to the constitution of the universe around us. Here we find ourselves constituted so that a certain presumption arises in our minds whenever we observe a phenomenon to take place repeatedly without any exception under the same conditions. I should think that we were doing dishonor to the mysterious Power who so constituted us, if we did not practically *act* on the suggestions of such a presumption. But loyalty to the constitution of the universe is to my thinking an act of faith, just the religious virtue which is most insisted upon by Christian teachers. So the[illegible]

uniformity of the laws of the world is a matter of faith. On the other hand, if we are required to believe that, in any instance, these laws of the universe have been suspended, or have been overridden, we must have such proof demonstrative as will absolutely require us to act contrary to what is apparently a fundamental law of our own being—to be, to all appearance, disloyal to our faith in the constitution of the universe, out of a still more binding loyalty to the commands of manifest, demonstrable, clearly proved truth.

But the view generally taken as to miracles is very different from this. It is alleged that they are to be received with faith. Not so however, according to Canon Mozley's argument, nor according to the most reasonable views of the universe. It is the Divine order of the universe, that is the object of faith, exceptions to which, (if such there are) must be proved as clearly as any proposition in Euclid, before we can be fairly called upon so far to do violence to our mental constitution as to accept them.

This is the principle, we repeat, on which you act in dealing with every allegation that is made concerning the wonders of spiritualism, or concerning the miraculous powers said to have been exercised during the middle ages, or during the earlier ages of the Church. But if so, how is it possible for you, when you arrive at the first century of the Christian era, suddenly to change your mental attitude, and deal with the wonders alleged of that time on wholly different, nay, on absolutely contrary principles? It may be said that the stories recorded of that golden time are worthier, more beautiful, instinct with nobler moral motives, than the fables related by the spiritualists, or by monks of the middle ages. Granted. This only shows, however, that they originated amongst a people actuated by finer, purer, higher, moral feelings. It does not, and cannot in the least prove, that they are stated with more of historical accuracy; unless the evidence on which they who originated them relied, can be produced, and will stand the test of modern examination. Will you plead the sacredness of the ground upon which we have entered, and demand the reverence that is due to the manifestations of the Divine Presence? Such a plea we should be exceedingly loth to reject; and it will certainly encounter no want of sympathy on our part. But such a plea appears to

us to raise far different suggestions from those that seem to be implied. If the ground is sacred; if the age to which we look back is more instinct than others with divine inspirations; then there is all the more reason for sincerity and truth on our part, in dealing with its traditions. Never can falsehood adorn the shrine of the Most High. Never can insincerity, inconsistency, or double-dealing with ourselves, fit us the better for worship and aspiration. Here, above all, we must be true, if we would breathe the air of Heaven. Here, above all, we must cleanse that mystic eye, of which the Lord speaks in the Gospel, from all the dust and foulness of wordly expediency and selfish cunning; for says he,— "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

Coming then to the stories that are told of that age, and dealing with them on the same logical principles, or principles of historical evidence, that are constantly applied to all other cases of the kind, I think, if we deal candidly with ourselves, we shall be compelled to acknowledge, that it is impossible to mention one of the sources of confusion and fallacy noticed in the course of last Sunday evening's lecture, which is not present in the stories of the Gospels or the Acts. The testimony given to us, with a certain exception or exceptions, presently to be noticed, is not direct, scarcely even professedly direct, and with one or two trivial exceptions, it is impossible to trace that testimony to its exact personal source. At the end of the 4th Gospel we are told, in a supplementary chapter, and not in the main body of the work, that the narrative is the testimony of one of the Apostles of the Lord, who attended upon him during his earthly ministry. But the difficulty of believing that the vague assertion in that later addition to the 4th Gospel is strictly and literally true, is overwhelming. And if it be once admitted that another hand, however closely connected with the authority of John, has been employed in writing the Gospel, the *directness* of the testimony disappears at once. You would scarcely decide an ordinary case in a criminal trial upon indirect testimony. As you know, lawyers always shrink from it; and will only allow it even in extreme cases, when it can be supported or corroborated in a variety of other indirect methods. But in such a case as this there would be no corroboration possible, still less, any verification

on our own part. And if you consider the stupendous weight of the assertions in the Gospel to be sustained, you must feel that when once the directness, the clear and certainly proved directness of the testimony is gone, all possibility of attaching any overwhelming weight to it disappears likewise. Nay even if,—what is impossible,—it were to be maintained that this 4th Gospel is the handwriting of John, yet it is admitted on all hands that he could not possibly have written it till towards the extreme end of the 1st century, when he would be a man of some 90 to 95 years of age. Such a man, writing sixty years after the events, would scarcely be taken as a sufficient witness to allegations that go contrary to the whole experience of mankind. I have myself, as I have repeatedly urged, no sympathy with those German critics who make the synoptical Gospels to be a creation of the 2nd century. I firmly believe that, in an oral form, they arose as a cycle of narrative or anecdote familiar to the Church, during the twenty or thirty years after the departure of Jesus from the world. But it is impossible to call such narratives as these, personal testimony. If you will remember, we showed in the first of this series of lectures how they gradually grew up by repetition from mouth to mouth amongst the various Churches. We showed that they were wholly impersonal in their character, a trait which, it may be observed in passing, they share with all the most sacred parts of the sacred Scriptures of the world. It seems as though, in dealing with the mysteries of religion, men do not care much for personal testimony. They value rather the impersonal utterance of the heart of a whole generation, or of the heart of a race. And in proof of such impersonal utterance, the reality of convictions and feelings, is most valuable. But in evidence of any events alleged to have taken place at definite times in certain particular places, I need scarcely say that impersonal testimony of this kind is often untrustworthy. Now the very description of the synoptical gospels, as the Gospel not *by* Matthew but *according to* Matthew, the gospel not *by* Mark but *according to* Mark, the gospel not *by* Luke but *according to* Luke, would show that, even in primitive times, these books were not regarded as in any ordinary sense the personal testimony of the authors to whom they were traced. Whatever authors they may be supposed to have had, those authors only reduced to writing, as we

have seen, a cycle of anecdotes which were current in the impersonal memory of the Church.

But again, if the evidence cannot be shown to be direct, and personal, it is also exposed to objection on the ground of probable fallacies both of perception and memory. All the testimony we have on the subject goes to prove, that the early generation amongst whom these narratives arose, were of the kind described by the words of Jesus, when he said :—" Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." They were on the look-out for miracles They believed them to be an ordinary part of Divine manifestations in the past; and they looked for them therefore in their own experience. Such people are specially liable to what we have described as fallacies of perception. And years after the apppearance that excited in them the conviction of a miracle, they are also peculiarly liable to fallacies of memory. It is easily conceivable, for instance, that the commanding peace, which, I am well assured, the presence of Jesus always brought with it, had a healing influence upon the sick, whose homes he visited. Paroxysms of fever may have been assuaged by his calm comforting voice. And there was in him a loving authority that subdued passion, even demoniacal passion, as we in tumultuous hours are soothed by " the sound of many waters." A few instances of this kind, parallels to which may be found in medical records even of our own day, would be quite sufficient to excite amongst a generation like that which lived in Galilee, a belief in hundreds of similar instances,—would be enough to quicken imagination by their description, would be enough to give the firmest confidence in their circulation through the world.

But it may be said, there is one event above all, to which we have the clearest and directest testimony; and if that be proved, then all others may easily be believed, because they are far inferior to it in the demands which they make upon our belief. It is alleged that Jesus was crucified, and that his death was clearly ascertained, and that after he had lain one day and two nights (called three days in ordinary rough reckoning) in the grave, he suddenly arose, and manifested himself to his disciples. It is argued that these appearances of Jesus constituted their chief reason for belief in his divine power and majesty. It is urged that they must have been confident of what they had seen, because many of them sealed their testimony with their blood. Let us then,

most reverentially, look at the case as it stands with regard to the physical resurrection of Jesus. This wonderful event is recorded in the four Gospels which, as we have seen, are all of them of uncertain origin and date. Granting that we may well believe they were written before the end of the first century, or at any rate at the beginning of the second, still we cannot fix their authorship with any certainty within a few years. Now this in itself, in dealing with so stupendous an assertion as that which is before us at present, is a grave objection to the evidence adduced. But when we look farther, we find still more difficulty All four accounts given of the appearances of Jesus, are exceedingly fragmentary; just such as would arise from the excited utterances of some remote period, the experiences of which were never very particularly described. They are of a fragmentary character, which could scarcely have been permitted, if the narrations of this wonder had been set down in writing within a brief period of the time when it really took place. You know how careful men generally are, to set down memoranda of anything very extraordinary that has occurred to them. And they are the more careful to do this in cases where they witness extraordinary events without any passing excitement, and in the use of their ordinary reason. It does therefore appear at the very first onset most extraordinary, that, of an event on which the whole faith and expectations of Christians are said to rest, we should have only the most fragmentary disjointed descriptions, which scarcely fill a few pages of a small book.

But looking farther, we find that these fragments are entirely and hopelessly inconsistent one with another. In the first gospel—that of Matthew—we have related to us, first, a certain vision of angels to the women who went to anoint the body of the Lord. Secondly, it is alleged that on their return from the grave, Jesus appeared to them in person. Thirdly he is said to have appeared some time afterwards, (but when is not stated) to eleven of the disciples only, on a mountain in Galilee, of which eleven disciples it is said with considerable significance, "some doubted." So far for the first gospel. In the second Gospel the two oldest manuscripts give absolutely no narrative at all of the resurrection. In the Gospel according to St. Mark the narrative ends in those manuscripts, with the words, "Neither

said they anything to any man for they were afraid." * I grant that the previous words *imply* that Jesus had risen from the dead. But still it is not the less a significant circumstance, that the oldest manuscripts of this Gospel should cease at the 8th verse, and give no account whatever of any appearance of Jesus in the flesh. The narrative that is supplied from the 9th to the 20th verse, will be found by any one who carefully and candidly examines it, to be a mixture of the other narrations to be read in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. That therefore cannot count at all as any evidence on the question.

In the third gospel we find again the visit of the women to the tomb. All agree in this. Secondly, we are told of an interview which was granted to two disciples, walking to Emmaus, on the same day, the first day of the week. And in the course of the conversation with those two disciples going to Emmaus, it is certainly implied, if not distinctly stated,* that the women who went to the tomb in the morning saw nothing but a vision of angels. Here is a direct contradiction of the allegation contained in the narrative of St. Matthew's gospel. Thirdly, on the same day, the first day in the week, it is said that Jesus appeared to Simon alone. Fourthly, it is said that, still on the same day of the week—for there is no division of times—Jesus appeared to the eleven in Jerusalem as they sat at meat. Finally, it is said that, in the same day, or in the course of the night following, he led them out to Bethany, and thence ascended to heaven. You will see there is scarcely a single element in common between the narrative in Matthew except the ordinary circumstance that the women went to the grave in order to anoint the body of Jesus, and found, as we may well believe, the grave entirely empty. Not only is there no element in common beyond this; unless the divergent narratives of the angels be so accounted; but the one virtually contradicts the other, and all the efforts of harmonists have failed to reconcile them.

We proceed to the fourth Gospel. Here is alleged first a vision to Mary Magdalen, which is often connected with the vision to the women as narrated in Matthew. But certainly it

* Mark xvi. 8. The two manuscripts are the Sinaitic and the Vatican; both of which are assigned by Tischendorf to the 4th century.

* Luke xxiv 23, 24.

would scarcely occur to an ordinary reader that the same thing was intended. Secondly, we are told that Jesus appeared to the disciples the same day,—the first day in the week. Thirdly, we are told that he appeared to them eight days afterwards, in the same place; whereas in the Gospel of Matthew the women were directed to tell the disciples to proceed at once to Galilee. Fourthly, we have a vision in Galilee by the *sea*, and not on a mountain, as is alleged in Matthew. Now, looking at the inconsistency. the fragmentary character, the uncertain date and origin of these stories, we are compelled to come to the conclusion that, if they were related in connection with any other religion than that which we ourselves profess, or did they form a part of any ancient secular history, we should immediately conclude that they only testified to a general rumour reflected from many memories, and refracted through many thoughts.

But I might be reminded, were we engaged in conversation,—and such suggestions I always like if possible to anticipate—that the 15th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians stands on entirely different ground. I purposely read it last Sunday evening, in order that you might have ringing in your minds the clear and nervous utterances of the Apostle concerning his own experience, and that which he believed to have been the experience of other Christians as well. Here there can be no doubt as to the authorship of the testimony. The severest critics are agreed in saying that St. Paul wrote this first Epistle to the Corinthians. In the course of this first Epistle, the Apostle alleges that Jesus appeared six times and you will observe that his account of the appearances is another version, entirely different from anything that we have in the four Gospels. He says he was seen first of all by Cephas, "then, of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep, After that he was seen of James"—not mentioned in the Synoptical Gospels—"then, of all the apostles." And last of all he was seen of me also as of one born out of due time." The key to the whole of this passage is found in the last words, 'last of all he was seen of me also.' There cannot be the slightest doubt, of course, that St. Paul is here stating a veritable experience which he had himself enjoyed. But what was that experience? There is no clear description

given of it in his own words in any of his epistles. We therefore are obliged to have recourse to the Acts of the Apostles which do not stand exactly on the same ground of certainty. Still we may accept the accounts there as giving, in all probability, what was believed actually to have taken place. We there find then that on occasion of a journey to Damascus, when there is much reason for supposing that he was labouring under grave anxiety of mind, and reflecting anxiously upon his past course of life; when he was fatigued by travel and probably oppressed by the burning heat of the sun; he suddenly fell from his horse in a trance; and in this trance saw the figure of Jesus and heard a voice addressing him from the heavens. In such an experience there is of course nothing in the least degree incredible; nothing which we can have any difficulty whatever in imagining. But the point here is, that St. Paul places the experienne of the other disciples in precisely the same category as his own. If they had seen the Lord so has he; * he is not inferior to any one of them. If they have known Christ after the flesh so has he. Did not he listen to the voice of Jesus from the skies, and did not he see him in his glorious form?

Thus you see we must carefully bear in mind, in estimating the words before us, that the visions enjoyed by the other Apostles were in the mind of St. Paul precisely equivalent to what he had enjoyed himself. Now, will you say—bearing in mind the multitude of visions that men have had in abnormal conditions of their brain and nervous system—that this appearance to St. Paul could be nothing else but the very figure of Jesus floating in the heavens? Try to picture it—for any real thing ought to be capable of being pictured—dare you say that you can reverentially think of the body of the Lord Jesus floating suspended in the heavens, the very hands and feet, and lips and eyes, that had been known on the Galilean shore? Is there not something utterly unworthy of the whole dignity of the Gospel, in supposing that a piece of magic like this took place? How far more reverential it is to believe, that on the over-wrought mind and heart of Paul an impression was made—as vivid as the impression of the midday sun itself—that the figure of Jesus was there before him, and that the lips of Jesus addressed him in rebuke.

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

It may, however, be said, granting this in the case of Paul, and even granting that he was mistaken in supposing that his was an objective, or external sight of Jesus, yet the case of the other Apostles alleged by and known to himself, is so very different that we must put a different interpretation upon them. He was seen by eleven men at once. At another time it is said that he was seen by about five hundred brethren at once. Now, it is clear that here we labour under a difficulty, from not having the advantage of putting questions to the writer. You know how often such things are said, on what seems to the speaker himself the very best possible testimony, but which, when closely followed up to its original source, dissolves away into imagination, or the accumulations of various personal errors of observation and memory. "Above five hundred brethren at once"—we should naturally wish to ask who counted them, and how was there an assurance that they exceeded that number? Where were they? At what season of the year was it? At what part of the day? Was it on a bare mountain? Was it in a wood? Was it on a cloudy or a cloudless day? What was the condition of the saints beholding? Had they been fasting for any length of time previous? Had they any reason to suppose that some such vision would be manifested to them all? Upon the answers to questions such as these, would depend the whole value that we could assign to even apparently formidable testimony like this. And yet such questions can neither be asked nor answered at the present day. We know, as a matter of fact, that cases have occurred in which the same illusion has been experienced by several people at the same time. One illustration was given of this last Sunday evening, and I do not care to repeat it now; mainly because I desire to keep as far as possible from these sacred contemplations anything that might appear to have the slightest tendency to ridicule. But cases have occurred repeatedly, in which some object, not quite clearly seen, has made the same illusive impression upon a considerable number of minds at once. And failing the opportunity of asking questions, such as I have mentioned, it is impossible for us to say with any confidence that this alleged by St. Paul was not one of them. We do not know with how many Christians in Jerusalem he came into close personal converse. We know that he preferred rather to wander far off amongst the Gentiles; and that he was comparatively little associated with the

very first circle of Christian disciples. It is, therefore, easily conceivable, that a man full of enthusiasm as he was after his experience on the way to Damascus, would very readily receive any allegations concerning the personal appearance of Jesus, without caring closely to examine on what evidence they rested, or (what is possibly more important) under what circumstances they occurred.

Now, it is not sufficient in dealing with any matter of this kind ,to say that any possible theory leaves difficulties behind. Of course it does. But our position throughout has been that our faith, faith in the divine order of the universe, requires proof demonstrative, before we dare sin against it, by allowing that the laws of that universe have been suspended. And we may ask with confidence is such proof demonstrative before us here? Considering the fragmentary, contradictory character of the Gospel testimony, its uncertain date and origin; considering the manifestly visionary character of St. Paul's own experience, his identification of this experience with that of the other Apostles as well, and in the absence of any information as to the testimony that he himself required concerning the vision to the twelve or to the five hundred—we must candidly allow that, however much our hearts might otherwise lean to belief in this beautiful legend of Christian antiquity, we cannot, dare not, say in the sight of the God of truth, that the proof is demonstrative, such as is needed.

Again we insist, it is not for us to construct any theory. The question is whether the evidence supports the weight of the stupendous assertion. We can hardly maintain that it does. The experience of the primitive disciples may be for ought I know, utterly inexplicable to us now. But at any rate we cannot concede that the physical resurrection of the flesh and limbs of Jesus is the true explanation. If, however, we were pressed on the subject, we should say that what we know of spectral illusions, and what we know of the action of the mind on the nerves and senses, enables us to conceive some possible explanation. Think, what must have been the feelings of the disciples after that dark hour when the voice of Jesus was silenced on the cross. One dread cry of agony, pity, and prayer, and the voice that had been their music was silenced for ever on the earth. Do you not know what is the sensitiveness of a bereaved heart? Even in ordinary

life's experience, it seems impossible to realise that the so familiar form is vanished for ever,—that the lips, whose tones were so dear, can never stir again in articulate utterance,—that the fair and beautiful form on which we doted, must be irrevocably borne away into darkness. All the earth seems shrouded under a terrific pall. It is not the beloved form,—it seems rather the world itself that is dead, and we buried with it in the heart of a universal grave. In the intensity of silent endurance through which we pass at such hours, the mind, quivering in all its susceptibilities, is exposed to all kinds of illusions. And there are those here in this present assembly, who have seen vividly in dream the departed form of their beloved ones. Or even walking in the quiet meadow in the stillness of the evening, they have heard a rustle and have felt a touch, as though the dear hand were laid once more upon the shoulder, and the sweet voice were whispering again in the ear. If it is an almost insupportable agony, to lose those who are bound to us only by the ties of private affection, how complicated and accumulated was the grief of those men who had lost, not only the light of their eyes, but, as they verily, and indeed rightly believed, the light and hope of the whole world ? Quivering as they were with the anguish of that shock, any unusual sight or sound would be sufficient to stir in them the sense of the sacred presence of their master. And divine whispers in their own hearts, exhortations to endurance and self sacrifice, directions how to proceed in the the great mission upon which they were bent, would by exceedingly possible fallacies of memory, become translated into the bodily vision of their master and the articulate utterances of his voice.

Physiologists, some of them, tell us that the production of organic life from dead matter—if any matter is dead, which I am sometimes very strongly inclined to doubt—has only been possible in certain eras of past time, and under special conditions of nature. In the early days, it is suggested, when the crust of the world had not long solidified, and when all things were quivering with heat, certain chemical combinations might possibly be formed, which can never be renewed except by the process of life. And thus was originated the organic world. What the worth of that theory is I care not now for a moment to estimate. But it may be that there do occur crises in the

story of the human heart and soul, when visions and imaginations are possible, and inspirations are given, that are utterly unparalleled, and never to be recalled in any other age. So it may be conjectured that the condition of mind which produced the resurrection of Jesus, only existed once and can never exist again.

You will see that throughout the argument in which we have been engaged, I have never said a word or breathed a breath, to hint at any slight upon the moral character of the reporters of these events. The vulgar argument on the subject often has been, that it is more likely that witnesses told lies, than that miracles were wrought. In my incapacity to define what a miracle is, I can have no sympathy whatever with that argument. There are laws of the moral nature as well as of matter, which I should tremble to think could ever be set aside. I could almost as soon believe in the real arrest of the sun in heaven, or in the rising of the dead after the corruption of four days in the grave, as I could believe that a man, burning with the sacred fire of enthusiasm, like Paul, could ever do evil that good might come, or tell lies to establish truth. If, indeed, the elevation of the human conscience depended upon, or originated in, degrading falsehood, then all our notions of moral laws must fall into confusion. Then, truly, the words of Jesus are falsified, and we do gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles. Our holiest blessings may be traced back to the very pit of corruption.

> "Gracious deceivers who have lifted us
> Out of the slough where passed our unknown youth;
> Beneficent liars! who have gifted us,
> With sacred love of truth."

But it cannot be. The loveliest mirages spring up in the purest air. The bright daylight of the loftiest spiritual life, most removed from the ordinary world, is likewise most prolific in vision and miracle. The keenest imagination, for the most part, goes with the fullest heart. And be you sure, the hearts that were full of Christ in those days of old, must needs project their feelings upon the outward world, must needs picture to themselves his moral beauty in visions of outward majesty, that had no reality save in their own convictions and their own feelings.

We have, however, this consolation, that the wonders

related are in strict accordance with the feelings that the inspirations of Jesus must have stirred. No vengeful wonders are told of him. He manifested the love of God. No pride is ever hinted in his alleged disturbance of the laws of nature, nothing but benevolence, kindness, love, beneficence, pictured doubtless in imaginative and outwardly unreal forms, but most true to the reality of Christ's spirit and mission. Read you the Gospels in the light of such principles as these, and you will need to be haunted by no critical suspicions as to this and the other word therein. Irrational imaginations, where they exist, drop out of the mind. The image of the heart of Christ, the spirit of his inspirations remains. Indeed, reflecting upon the necessities of mankind, the darkness and the perversity of the generations through which the stream of traditions has flowed, one may give thanks that the Gospel took the form in which it has come down to us. Dry, clear, prosaic truth never could have affected the hearts of the simple as the same truth when arrayed in imaginative forms.

"For wisdom dwelt with mortal powers,
Where truth in closest words shall fail,
When truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors.

"And so the word had breath and wrought
With human hands, the creed of creeds,
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought,

"Which he may read, who binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef."

No prose could ever have told in so brief a space and with such telling effect, of a love that passeth knowledge, of a self lost in humanity, of a life which, through death, has become the inspiration of a world.

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THE RELIGION OF JESUS:

ITS MODERN DIFFICULTIES AND ITS ORIGINAL SIMPLICITY.

A Course of Sunday Evening Lectures,

BY

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

VII.

Revelation.

A CERTAIN friend of mine, one not unsympathetic with the feelings uttered in the present course of lectures, though entirely repudiating the opinions advocated, remarked to me, after reading the first two, that probably I did not believe in any revelation whatever. It was very difficult to answer such a question as this by a single word, whether negative or affirmative; for as I put it to him, either must necessarily create a mis-impression as to my real position. For if I had answered "No, I do not believe in any revelation," this would have given the impression that I recognise no certainty of any kind beyond the facts of sense; whereas to me, the existence of some immeasurable reality answering to the religious consciousness of mankind,

is at least as certain as any facts of sense, and, in a true meaning of the words, far more so. Or I might have given the impression that I denied the reality of any communion with the Spirit of God, in which communion I have a most unfeigned belief. But if, on the other hand, I had replied, "Yes, I do believe in a revelation," then it must have been supposed that I regarded, as real events in the history of the world, the supernatural communication to special men of secrets concerning the unseen world, which secrets are unverifiable by the experience of any others. This, however, I regard as a notion which is irrevocably doomed; and which cannot possibly survive the coming, or the third generation. The present lecture gives me an opportunity of more fully developing my own views on this point, which of course can have no importance whatever, save so far forth as they are able to attract the sympathies of those who listen, or to carry conviction to their minds.

The word 'Revelation' then signifies simply the throwing back of a veil, or the discovering of a prospect which had been previously hid. In certain gardens in the North of England, much visited by tourists, the walk of the visitors through the horticultural scenery there is made to culminate in a theatrical effect, which excites the pleased surprise of those who are subject to it. In a certain passage, between lofty banks of evergreens, a folding gate is suddenly thrown open. There stands revealed a wide shining prospect of flood and field, of woodland and of distant hills, which fills the mind with delight and admiration. So it has happened in the history of past times, that the intellectual vision of mankind, or, at other crises, their spiritual insight, has been more or less suddenly enlarged from the petty limits of former ignorance to a grander realm of order and of beauty, the sight of which has permanently widened the experience and the capacities of men. But Revelation has not been confined to any special crises of human experience. Mountain mists are not always instantaneously lifted; oftener they gradually melt away, or are broken here and there, revealing fragmentary vistas into distant beauties which you are not able for some time to bring into relationship one with another. So has it been with the expansion of human knowledge and feeling in contemplation of this measureless universe. There have been great moments in

the experience of mankind, when, as by a lightning flash the cloudy firmament of ignorance has been rolled away, and the eternal heavens of truth have been laid bare. But such experiences as these have been by no means frequent. More commonly the process of revelation has been gradual; "precept," as the prophet says, "has been upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little," as powers of human perception and reflection increased, until at length this present generation arose, which inherits the glorious prospect that has gradually dawned upon ages gone by. Time was, if we may believe certain philosophers of the present day, when man was simply one amongst the greater apes, having eyes capable of perceiving nothing but the promise of food, or the suggestions of physical pleasure. He was capable at that time of no mental emotions but, possibly, some dull confused curiosity about the more startling effects produced on his mind by the outward world. Now, however, his eyes perceive a myriad indications of order and of purpose in the world without. Now knowledge kindles imagination; and imagination swells the heart with rapturous delight, and the heart reacts upon imagination and knowledge; while the most precious fruit of all is that self abasement, which makes the spirit tender in contemplation of the Infinite. All this is matter of simple fact patent to all who are capable of studying the past. And therefore, revelation there certainly has been.

But generally, as you are aware, the word is used in a narrower sense, with which it would be uncandid on my part not to deal. For that narrower sense we must go back, not indeed to extreme antiquity, but to the after-glow of prophetic and apostolic times. In those days the government of the world was necessarily conceived, to some extent, after the fashion of oriental despotisms. Those who believed in one Ruler of the Universe certainly perceived a measure of harmony in the operations of Nature, and in the arrangements of Providence; but they did not realize any continuity of law. The operations both of Nature and Providence were supposed to be dependent upon a will, so far like human wills, as to be in a course of perpetual change. In a word, nature and human experience, the whole frame of material and spiritual things was supposed to be dependent upon the will of a monarch, mysteriously

shrouded from human observation, at whose behest the sun at any moment might be blotted out in midday, or rivers rolled back to their courses, or the march of the tide arrested. Like the unseen monarchs of oriental courts, this Supreme Being was supposed from time to time to issue decrees, or to make known secrets of his counsels to those who stood very near to him, and were his favourite servants; decrees and counsels, a knowledge of which was withheld from common men, unless indirectly communicated through these elect messengers. Such knowledge as this of the decrees of the Most High, or of the secrets of the unseen world, was for the most part imagined to be communicated by symbolic visions, taking place often in the night, and in unconscious sleep, or or at other times in waking visions, when the soul was wrapped from all external things, and bent only on the spiritual world. Such visions as these were not only miraculous in themselves, but oftentimes they needed supernatural communications for their interpretation. To such visions as these the name of a 'Revelation,' literally of an unfolding of the unseen, was specially and technically given. Of such revelations you have instances in the book of Daniel; also in the apochryphal 4th book of Esdras; also in the book of Enoch, quoted in the Epistle of Jude. If you compare these with the greater portion of the works of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, you must be struck by a very marked difference. Isaiah and Jeremiah undoubtedly do imply a sort of miraculous communication from Heaven to their souls. But for the most part they deal with moral exhortations and spiritual principles, such as carry their own witness to the hearts of men. The others we have named:—Daniel, Esdras, and Enoch, on the other hand, deal mainly with the mysterious secrets of the Divine decrees, with events of forthcoming times, which could not be in any wise known except by a whisper from Heaven, and which do not necessarily of themselves carry any spiritual lessons to the heart. It is to such as these, that the word Revelation came to be specially applied. Thus, for instance, it is the title given to the last book in the Bible, which deals mainly with such topics as those already described. Turn to the 14th Chapter of 1st Corinthians which we read this evening. There we find the Apostle giving a catalogue of the various exercises that occupied the Christian congregation, when they came together for worship:—"How is it then

brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a *revelation*, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." It is clear then, that the *doctrine* literally teaching—for you are for a moment to confuse it, with any theological dogma—was distinguishable in the Apostle's mind, and in the minds of those to whom he wrote, from this which is technically called a revelation. What that revelation was, we can only gather by analogy and comparison. Looking at the special use of the word to describe the last book in the Bible, with its visions of unseen things, we should suppose that it signified here some sudden, deep impression upon the mind of the worshipping Christians, concerning the wonders of the unseen world, or the events of the coming age. This distinction may also, I think, be discerned more or less distinctly in that chapter of the book of Jeremiah, which we read as our first lesson.* On this point I will not speak so confidently, for it must be confessed that the chapter is obscure. But there are reasons for thinking that this distinction between a heavenly message to the soul carrying its own witness with it concerning moral and spiritual truth on the one hand, and a miraculous communication of some secret that can have no testimony but testimony of a supernatural order, was in the heart of the prophet, as he uttered these words:—"When this people, or a prophet, or a priest shall ask thee saying:—What is the burden of the Lord? Thou shalt, then, say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you saith the Lord." And he goes on to denounce the use of this expresion, "the burden of the Lord," as though it were a most serious offence in the sight of Heaven. But why should he? Why should it be better to ask, "What hath the Lord answered? What hath the Lord spoken?" as they are here commanded, then to enquire after the burden of the Lord? The answer can only be conjectured from the significance of the word "burden." It is a word of double significance, and there is a play upon that double significance in the passage before us. It is originally derived from a verb signifying to "lift up," often to lift up the voice to an exalted strain of utterance. It was used then, to describe any charm or supernatural utterance, which was generally communicated in an elevated, singing tone of voice. We may illustrate this from

* JER. xxiii. see especially v. 33—38.

our English word 'incantation,' which means properly a singing or a chanting, but came to be applied exclusively to the charm, half muttered, half recited, in a singing tone, by the wizards or the witches of bygone days. So, in the days of Jeremiah, it would appear that certain prophets, against whom he inveighs in the course of this chapter, were in the habit of reciting their dreams, or their visions, or secrets supposed to have been communicated from the unseen world, in a whining, singing tone of voice, supposed to be specially fitted for discourses concerning religion. It is against this that it seems to me the prophet is inveighing. They are not to ask what is the burden of the Lord; or if they do, it will become in a very literal sense a burden to them. They are rather to ask, what hath the Lord answered them, what hath the Lord *spoken*,—that is to say, what plain message have you from our Lord and God, that can commend itself to our hearts, and consciences? Speak this and we will obey. Here I think is hinted, with tolerable plainness, the germ of a distinction between revelations, that deal only with alleged secrets of the unseen world, and communications from the Divine Spirit to the conscience, such as bring their own witness with them. Such a distinction, perhaps is still farther confirmed by the observation, that the name Revelation is rarely given to the preaching of Christ on earth, I say rarely because I do not wish to speak too strongly; but I think, I should be within strict limits if I were to say that it is never applied to the *discourses* of Christ, only now and then to the Gospel as a whole. The preaching of Christ was always described as the Word, either the Word of Christ, or the Word of God. He himself is represented as saying, "the sower soweth the word." The Apostles in the beginning of the Acts speak of "the Word God sent to Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ." But when the Apostles began to see visions for themselves, and to communicate secrets concerning the eternal world, then the word Revelation was applied to such utterances as these. Now I do not for one moment, mean to imply that these expressions, the 'Word of God,' or the 'Gospel,' the 'good news' on the one hand, and 'revelation' on the other, were always kept perfectly distinct. But certain it is that the word Revelation when used with full emphasis, and in a technical sense, did mean secrets about the unseen world, which do not necessarily carry any moral lesson with them

whereas the Word of God or the Gospel, "the glad tidings" generally, almost uniformly, does mean such spiritual teaching as carries its own witness with it to the heart. This distinction, I think then, is important in dealing with this subject of Revelation. Unfortunately, the distinction was not always kept up; the name of Revelation in its narrower and more technical sense, was gradually in the post-apostolic times extended to the whole body of Christianity. Afterwards it was extended to the Old Testament as well; and then, when the various books of the Bible were bound up together, *and not till then*, that is till a comparatively recent period—this word Revelation was applied to the whole Scriptures. And thus we are said to be deniers of Revelation, if we cannot hold that this book gives to us infallible certainty as to the will, and the works of God.

I am anxious that the distinction between these two things, 'Revelation' in its technical sense, on the one hand, and the word of God in its moral and spiritual sense, on the other hand, should be very plainly marked in the minds of all of you; because upon your appreciation of this will necessarily depend the conclusion to which you come, as to the probable tendency of doctrines such as those, which I have been preaching during the last few Sunday evenings. If you cannot appreciate that distinction, then, I can well understand your saying that the inevitable issue of such teaching must be godlessness and irreligion. But if you do appreciate that distinction, and will reflect upon it, then, however perplexed the subject may be at the present moment, I think you will gradually come to see, that so far are these doctrines from being fatal to real religion, that the only possibility of the survival of religion in the future age, depends upon the reality of such a distinction as this.

This use of the word Revelation in its narrower sense, must be reckoned amongst the most formidable difficulties, which entangle modern Christianity. For it necessarily divides all human knowledge into two branches, which branches come to be judged of, and estimated, on wholly different, and often entirely incompatible principles. In the one branch of knowledge we depend upon observation, upon experience, upon reflection, upon verification. In the other branch of knowledge, that is the knowledge of Revelation, we are made to depend, not upon the observed order of the Universe, or

the constant experience of mankind, but upon certain exceptions to that order and that experience, which exceptions have very rarely occurred, and the reality of which is dependent upon the directness and force of the testimony, given from old times concerning them. It must be evident to you that Revelation in its narrower sense is necessarily dependent upon *miracle.* If a man tells us, for instance, that beyond this world there are three heavens, and that departed spirits pass from one heaven to another, in accordance with certain degrees of progress made in virtue and spirituality, until at length they approach to the throne of God himself, we naturally ask how he knows this. If he replies 'because it is revealed from Heaven,' we are compelled farther to ask how are we to be assured that it is revealed to him from Heaven? The only possibility of having any certainty upon this point is necessarily bound up with his power to work some miracle, that shall be a sign or token to us of his receipt of the message from Heaven. I do not say that a miracle or wonder wrought by him would be proof demonstrative that he has such a message. But certainly, if he is unable to give any such token, or sign as this, then we have no evidence whatever to go upon, and we can only imagine that some very strong impression has been made upon his mind, which he takes to be a miraculous communication. You will see clearly, then, that if our views propounded, during the last two Sunday evenings as to the weakness of testimony to miraculous events are sound, and likely to prevail, then, Revelation, in its narrower and technical sense, cannot much longer be held to be a real thing. It is dependent, as we have said, upon special communications of the secrets of the unseen world, evidenced by miraculous powers. But the other branch of knowledge is dependent upon observation and constant experience. These observations, and this experience, are capable of renewal and verification from age to age. For instance, we know now that the atmospheric air consists of certain gases. We know the proportions in which they ought to be mingled, in order to secure safety for life, and continued health. When this discovery was made, it was a Revelation to mankind. We are so certain of it now, that we care not to investigate for ourselves, even if we have chemical knowledge to do so. We, however, are secured by the fact, assured to us on all

hands, that if we choose at any moment, now to make the experiment for ourselves, we can obtain just those gases of which air has been found to consist, in just the proportions, which have been discovered years ago. This is a fact that can always be verified; and our confidence that it can be verified, makes us comparatively easy about its truth. So with regard to principles concerning the organization of nations or society. We have found, in modern times, that free-trade is the true principle of prosperity. It was very long before people would believe it. But demonstrative arguments were discovered that convinced the minds of statesmen, and now we have verified their truth by our experience. We can appeal to all to witness for themselves; to see the successes that have been achieved by this principle. We are not dependent for this truth upon mere testimony from others; we can see it for ourselves.

But religious knowledge, on the other hand, if it is to be confounded with Revelation, in its narrower and more technical sense, is necessarily dependent upon the testimony given, by people in remote ages, to events of a most startling and inconceivable character. Thus while all other branches of knowledge have their testimony ready at any moment, for anyone who chooses to enquire into it, religious knowledge on the other hand, is made to be like an army ill-generaled, which is always moving farther and farther from its supports, and incurring continually increasing danger of being helplessly surrounded by its foes. Hence there is oftentimes on arbitrariness, and a perversity, in the arguments which are used to sustain belief in certain religious doctrines, of which the very men who use them, would be heartily ashamed if they were dealing with any other object whatever. These are some of the evils which come from dividing human knowledge into two branches, with which we must necessarily deal on completely different, and often on incompatible principles.

But besides, we have already seen the uncertainty of historical evidence. And this uncertainty specially affects those wonderful events, that are said to have been brought about by miraculous power. Just in proportion as this uncertainty increases, the insecurity of all religion dependent upon miracle must grow. And it is most sad and painful to

look into the future, when we for a moment think that religion is necessarily bound up with Revelation in this narrower, or more technical sense. It is impossible to dispute that people's common sense—I do not mean their scientific knowledge—their common sense, their ordinary tone, and habit of mind—is daily becoming increasingly intolerant of any apparent exceptions to the order of the universe; daily becoming increasingly intolerant, likewise of insufficient evidence concerning past events. And no efforts of ecclesiastical bodies, no decrees of Convocation on the one hand, or of Congregational Unions on the other, will ever succeed in fencing round this sacred area of religious belief from the constantly advancing waves of enquiry and certain knowledge. Farther still, this very uncertainty, which can hardly be disputed, begets in those who think it important to cling to revelation in its narrower, and more technical sense, evil tempers altogether inconsistent with religion; the *odium theologicum,* theological hatred, is already a proverb and a bye-word. If you yourselves have cared to study the reports, now and then given forth to the world, of debates that have been held between the professors of belief in miraculous revelation on the one hand, and the professors of unbelief on the other, one of the most painful impressions on your mind must have been the sense of the far greater patience and confidence of the advocates of unbelief, as compared with the advocates of belief. It seems as though the very uncertainty of the position irritated believers, and drove them to make use of abusive epithets, instead of arguments. Nay, you know yourselves, that wherever such questions as these are agitated, in any society, or in any neighbourhood, they are certain to give rise to angry feeling, and to abusive language; and in nine cases out of ten this angry feeling, and abusive language is found to be on the side, not of those who doubt, but of those who profess to be believers in miraculous revelation. Now, their natures are certainly quite as good as the natures of those who take the opposite side. We are not for a moment to believe that their tempers are necessarily worse; but uncertainty,—incapability of finding any foundation which commends itself as everlasting,—vexes and irritates the spirit, and so leads men to supply the lack of evidence by strength of language. So it comes

to pass that religion oftentimes is apparently bound up with moral evils, against which anciently it used to raise its most eloquent protest, and which, if religion does not destroy them, in the end will corrupt, incapacitate and slay it.

For such reasons as these, then, I cannot bear to think of the future of spiritual religion as bound up with the fate of so called revelation,—revelation in its narrower and more technical sense. But I should be utterly false to myself were I to admit for an instant that there is no such thing as revelation. Revelation, that is, the unfolding of the works and of the will of God to the consciousness of men, is perhaps the very grandest aspect of human progress. It comes, as it appars to me, through three channels: first, man's observation of the outward world, next the general experience of mankind, and thirdly the spiritual insight occasionally given to individual minds. Observation of the outward world, with its riches of divine fact, gives to us our creed; the experience of mankind gives to us the religious affections, feelings and aspirations associated with that creed; and the spiritual insight of some specially gifted individuals gives to us beauty and effectiveness of religious form.

Let me illustrate these observations in a very few words before I conclude. I have said that observation of the outward world with its riches of divine fact gives to us the creed of religion. I cannot myself doubt that the belief in one Almighty Maker of the universe, reigning for ever unapproachable and unrivalled in his glory, was suggested originally by the harmony of the works of God and the unity that manifestly stamps them. Indeed, we are told by philologists that the name most commonly given, at any rate by the classical races, to the Supreme Being, originally signified the shining heavens, the expanse of the firmament which binds or apparently binds all things in one. It was the contemplation of the mid-day, or the mid-night heavens, that overwhelmed the souls of good men of old with a feeling of the majesty and power witnessed there, and led them to regard the superstitions of surrounding idolaters as worthless falsehoods; while they bowed themselves in reverence before one supreme Maker of all things.

But if it is objected that most nations in antiquity did believe in a variety of Gods; I may rejoin, on the other hand, that even those who believed in a variety of Gods always had

a dim and awful sense of one supreme Fate behind and above them all, wielding the destinies alike of Gods and men. And this sense of some unity ultimately behind all inferior powers must have been suggested to men's minds by the manifest harmony or indeed unity of the works of creation. This revelation has been,—not weakened, if you consider it aright, and will bear to have the significance of the name of the Most High enlarged—this revelation has not been weakened but materially strengthened by the discoveries of science in modern days. There, perhaps, has rarely been a grander moment in the history of the world than that in which Sir Isaac Newton saw, in the falling of stones to the ground, the one power that wields the planets in their course, and the stars in the remote distances of space. At once a unity was conceived that probably, almost certainly, grasps all things, however unimaginably remote, nay infinitely distant from ourselves. But this grand revelation has only been brightened and enlarged by other discoveries of a more recent character. We have been taught latterly, for instance, that all forms of force are resolvable one into another. There is a shrewd suspicion that substances, commonly considered as elementary, may by a more powerful analysis hereafter be resolved into a very few others, if not found to be all diverse forms of one. In truth it cannot be denied that the researches of scientific philosophers, so far as they have gone, all proceed on converging lines. They may be, as yet, far remote one from the other, and we find it quite impossible to conceive in any articulate manner what the ultimate unity of things may be. Nevertheless, these discoveries all point in converging directions upon one sublime unity that embraces all things.

Here, then, we have the outward facts of the world forming our creed, And so does the experience of mankind by a more imperceptible process, beget in us habits of reverence, a feeling of dependence, keen aspirations towards a higher life. It is impossible for you to trace subtle consciousness of this kind to any precise or individual origin. Such feelings have gradually grown up in the race, they have been generated by communion between the race and the mysterious divine world without us. Never let us for a moment be supposed to undervalue feelings of this kind, or to doubt the immortal realities to which they answer. To me those feelings are in themselves proof demonstrative that there must be a religion

for mankind. Let us always cherish them as amongst the most precious results of the traditions of past days.

Farther, there have arisen every now and then, individual souls specially gifted with spiritual insight, in whose thoughts and feelings the religious creed of the race, and still farther, the religious sentiments of the race, have crystalized into forms of beauty and power, that have attracted the sympathy, and kindled afresh the feelings of all the world. Such men were Moses and Samuel; such men, in perhaps an inferior, or some may think in at least an equal sense, were Pythagoras and Buddha; above all, such a being was Jesus of Nazareth, who chiefly concerns us, coming nearer to our hearts than any, and embodying in himself the brightest of all the inspirations of our individual lives. The real revelation in Jesus was not—if you will simply read his own words—the communication of any unverifiable secret concerning the eternal world, or the mysterious nature of the Most High. Rarely did he speak of such things at all. The real revelation that Jesus gave, consisted in the clearing up of certain facts of the moral and religigious consciousness, which, when cleared up, can always bear witness for themselves. He stamped upon the hearts of men, as it had never been felt before, the Fatherhood of God above, whose children all men alike are, of every colour of every race. He inspired men with a sense of brotherhood one to another, and gave them to feel how reasonable it is that on two great commands—love to God and love to man—should hang the whole harmony of life. He taught that the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven consists in establishing the rule of God in the heart of man. He brought out with an intensity that it had scarcely possessed before, the abiding curse that is inflicted on humanity by sin. He gave us to feel, likewise, the healing power of love. And above all, not in words only, but in deeds, and, perhaps, still more in suffering, he taught the transparent divine paradox that the loss of self is the gain of God; that the true throne of moral victory is the cross of endurance.

We have no time to sum up as we might have desired; but here, I think is revelation enough to fill the heart with gratitude, and the soul with admiring reverence. It is a revelation that can always prove itself. Terms may be changed—some of you may not be able to accept in

precisely the meaning that I give to the words, certain phrases that have passed my lips now, but the thing signified, the feelings of the heart, you all realize as most precious, yea, and as most divine. Such a revelation as this can be shaken by no discoveries of science, but is rather strengthened by every increase of knowledge. Such a revelation as this does not of itself divide men into sects and parties, but rather gathers all into the unity of one sacred brotherhood.

Finally, let me say that, whatever conclusions may be drawn—and freedom of thought, and freedom of language, I should be the very last to deny to any—these lectures have not been conceived in any spirit of hostility, to spiritual religion. Rather they have been forced from me by the deep conviction I have that only in the direction indicated, can spiritual religion at length survive. The present day knows but little of education. Most men as yet, make little attempt to harmonize their knowledge, to balance one perception or one opinion against another. Thousands, millions, there are, content to use one kind of logic in dealing with business matters, and another, and a wholly inferior, worthless logic, in dealing with the most sacred matters. But these incongruities cannot possibly last. Little by little education is spreading, little by little the very youngest are being taught to reflect; more and more is the embargo removed from freedom of honest enquiry; and if not in your days, then in the days of your children, or at any rate, in the days of your grandchildren, a time will come, when if men cannot separate spiritual religion from belief in a miraculous revelation, spiritual religion must die the death of all the superstitions of by-gone days. And this would be, to my mind, the most frightful calamity that could possibly overtake the race. It could not endure, or humanity would wholly perish from off the face of the earth. All our finest feelings would die away; all the highest delights of existence would be gone; and universal suicide would be preferable to the sort of existence that would be left. Such an event I believe to be altogether impossible But terrible trials might be caused; agonising perplexities of mind; and a long period of blank materialistic atheism, from which men would only slowly emerge after the bitterest suffering. It is against such a fate that we ought, if we

have any care for posterity, to do our best to guard ; and it is with such a view—if I may humbly say so—with some lowly idea of doing a little towards an achievement of this kind, that the present lectures have been delivered here. The reality, the permanence of religion, I believe to be guaranteed by the manifestation of the eternal God in the Universe around us, by the constant experience of mankind, by the religious susceptibilities of the race. Religion itself is eternal as the heaven; but the sectarian opinions, on which too many dote, are fleeting as the clouds that half obscure and half adorn the face of the sky.

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