

CONVICTION & CONDUCT

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

THE FAITH THAT WORKS

By
ISLIP COLLYER

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OTHER BOOKS TO READ

By ISLIP COLLYER

VOX DEI

THE GUIDING LIGHT

By JOHN CARTER

THE ORACLES OF GOD

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Contents

INTRODUCTION	PAGES
	7

PART I

The Philosophy of Faith

I	INTRODUCTORY	12
II	WORDS	18
III	ALTERNATIVES	24
IV	THE MIDNIGHT VISION	29
V	THE ETERNAL UNSEEN	36
VI	SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATIONS	40
VII	BREADTH OF BASIS	45
VIII	ATHEISM	51
IX	ATHEISTIC ARGUMENTS	57
X	SUMMARY	63

PART II

Prepare to Meet Thy God, O Israel

I	INTRODUCTORY	72
II	THE POWER OF BELIEF	76
III	THE FOUNDATION OF MORALITY	83
IV	DEGREES OF GUILT	90
V	FIRST PRINCIPLES IN ACTION	96
VI	"THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE"	104
VII	JESUS THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH	111
VIII	SELF-EXAMINATION	119
IX	MORE HEART-SEARCHING	134
X	PREPARATION BY TRIBULATION	144
XI	EXAMPLES OF PREPARATION BY SUFFERING	150
XII	CONTROL OF THOUGHT	159
XIII	PREPARATION BY ALL THINGS	166

Conviction and Conduct

The Faith that Works

INTRODUCTION

THE two works here reproduced were written more than thirty years ago and published in *The Christadelphian* magazine. The object was to present old truths in a new way and so perhaps prove helpful in the mortal struggle. Many readers found the messages provocative of thought, and it is hoped that in this reprint, readers of another generation will derive similar benefit.

The two ideas of a reasonable faith and the instructed preparation of character are found in all parts of Scripture. The Lord Jesus, in answer to the question what a man could do to perform the works of God, said that the first step was to believe on the one whom God had sent. Thenceforth disciples must bring forth the right fruit. "I am the true vine", Jesus said, "and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15).

The apostle Paul seemed to put the most emphasis on faith but really he was equally definite in a call for personal righteousness. "Patient continuance in well doing"; "working out salvation with fear and trembling"; bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit; sowing to the Spirit and reaping eternal life—these are some of his expressions. He put the matter in negative form too, declaring that men who conform to the works of the flesh will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

The apostle Peter is equally clear in his statement regarding the "exceeding great and precious promises" God has given, which make it possible for men to be partakers of the divine nature, and the vital need to add to our faith all the Christian virtues (2 Pet. 1). Everyone remembers that the apostle James bluntly declares that faith without works is dead.

The truth of the matter is that this is a perishing world, as the Lord Jesus so plainly taught. We are sinners unable to save a brother or to keep alive our own souls. God has offered justification to helpless sinners on the basis of faith and obedience. Once justified, we must bring forth the works of faith. God has provided us with garments; we must try to wear them worthily.

The message is in the Word, reposing in every home but often neglected. We may perform a little service by calling attention to that which is written and by reasoning on the basis of admitted facts. We try to give help wherever it is needed, and that is why many little books are offered to help in the study of the one great book. The following pages were designed for readers who were in large measure acquainted with the mass of evidence proving the authority of the Bible. If any readers are unaware of this evidence and are not prepared to accept the Bible as the Word of God we would refer them to other little books which might at least give them some idea of the subject and thus make the following pages more intelligible. In *Vox Dei* an attempt is made to show the cumulative force of this evidence and to put the main facts on "the shelves of memory", that they may be seen at any time in convincing combination. In *The Word of God*, another little book, other weighty evidence is adduced showing the completeness of the message. If a man can get the subject so fully in mind that a comprehensive survey of it can be taken at any time, he will never again be guilty of that scornful repudiation of faith which is a sure sign of the uninstructed. If such a man still feels that the Gospel message is too wonderful to be accepted, he will at least understand the belief of others.

Perhaps an illustration may be found to help in the understanding of this matter. Illustrations are always faulty, but the following is perhaps better than most, and it has the advantage of being easy to visualize in these days of ruined cities.

Suppose we contemplate a city which has been nearly destroyed and we raise the question whether there are any plans for rebuilding. A neighbour says, Yes, there are complete plans, and work will soon be started. He declares that he possesses copies of all the plans, and that in large measure he knows the contemplated order of restoration. We perhaps think that the claim is wildly improbable, and so we do not either believe it or take any notice of the plans he tries to show us. If, however, we give him sufficient attention to remember anything he says, and if presently work is begun in a surprising manner confirming his statements, it will not require many illustrations of correct forecast to convince us that our neighbour was really in possession of knowledge. Then we may desire to see the plans. A close examination of them may convince us that while many hands carried out the work, a master mind was behind it all, taking everything into consideration and making a perfectly harmonious and complete plan for the reconstruction of the city. Once having attained to understanding, the suggestion that the plans could be anything but genuine would seem utterly foolish. We should know then that the necessary preparations were in hand and every fresh development in the early stages of reconstruction would only give added confirmation to a truth already fully recognized. All readers who understand the cumulative force of the evidence will appreciate the significance of this illustration. They know what a strong basis we have for our faith in the Bible.

There are some students, however, who even with this knowledge find it difficult to feel a fulness of faith in the wonderful things revealed. There are many who cannot always maintain their faith at its zenith. Our feelings are subject to tides which cannot always be at the flood. For this

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

reason we offer our "Philosophy of Faith", in the hope that it may give help to thoughtful readers. We try to show that life is impossible without faith, that each denial implies an affirmation, and that the way of life is always with the positives. Put in its simplest form, the suggestion is that however difficult it may be to believe in the great unseen forces of creation it is still more difficult to deny their existence. The greatest danger lies in drifting negatives, or in the concentration of thought upon things near and evident while there is neglect of the unseen realities of the First Cause.

In the scriptural idea of preparation to meet God we present a call to righteousness which was sounded long ago by prophets and apostles. We try to give the call a new emphasis, showing the application of old lessons to modern life and seeking to maintain in all that is presented the leading idea of preparation to meet God.

In perusing these efforts of more than thirty years ago one particular comment seems to be invited by the recent course of history. We insisted that faith was always the appropriate basis for good works, that conviction was the foundation of conduct. We used the illustration of a building, and argued that on the moral plane, just as with material things, the removal of foundations would lead to the fall of the superstructure; the only difference being that with a building the fall would be immediate while on the moral plane it would be gradual. Surely this principle has been illustrated in the history of the last forty years. The atheistic teaching of Haeckel and others deprived many people of their foundations, and the utter bestiality exhibited at the present day is a natural consequence. There is no creature on earth more dreadful than an egoistical atheist.

If this reprint tends in any way to stimulate the thoughts of readers and give a little help in the difficulties of Christian life, the object in producing the book will have been achieved.

PART I

The Philosophy of Faith

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY

THERE can be no valid objection to the word philosophy, since its root meaning is love of wisdom. It has undoubtedly been greatly abused, and applied to systems of thought so far removed from its foundation meaning that one can perhaps understand the attitude of those who discard the word altogether, and think of it as permanently and necessarily associated with "vain deceit". There is, however, a philosophy of truth. We could ill spare the word from our language, and there is no more reason for expunging it on account of the way it has been misapplied than in the case of science, or of knowledge, of wisdom, or of love.

True science is knowledge reduced to a system, true philosophy is systematized wisdom. Philosophy is greater than science, just as wisdom is greater than knowledge; and as the true philosophy is more important, so a false philosophy is more dangerous. A scientist may confine himself to just one set of facts, like the naturalist described by Oliver Wendell Holmes, who devoted his life to the study of beetles, and was so excited by an entomological discovery that he could give no thought to anything else. Even in a larger sense, true science simply accumulates and classifies a knowledge of facts. It does not often point the way of duty, or show us how to be wise, and thus, by confining itself to the consideration of material facts, science always stands on a lower plane than a system of philosophy. It is of less importance when it is true, and it is less dangerous when it is false.

A scientist may make his name great by discovering some hitherto unnoticed fact in connection with the life cycle of an insect, and an inventor may win fame by constructing a new

engine of destruction, for all the nations to use against each other in war. In each of these cases there may be a real addition to the sum of human knowledge, and an actual achievement of human intellect, but there is no suggestion of wisdom. And on close investigation we might have to conclude that many whose praises have been sung through all the earth have failed to yield a fraction of service either to God or man. They have accumulated facts and reared harmful theories on them, they have discovered forces and worked mischief with them, so that sometimes even when they have been truly scientific they have done more harm than good.

We may thus observe a contrast between science and philosophy. Science may prosper within a limited area, whereas philosophy must be comprehensive. Science may do harm even when it is true ; philosophy can only be harmful when it is false. The mission of science is to find out what we may know ; the greatest achievement of philosophy is to determine what we should do. There is a close relationship between the two words, but it is a relationship of cause and effect rather than a partnership. The world's wisdom must necessarily be based on its knowledge, and thus partial ignorance or misconception of fact will breed false philosophy. The law of logical gravitation is slow in its operations. It sometimes takes as long for the superstructure to fall after the foundation has been removed as it did to construct the building ; but the process is a sure one nevertheless. Thus, many scientists may be at work in their various departments investigating and classifying, and in so far as their teaching is accepted by the world, the sum total of their conclusions will be woven into a system of true or false philosophy to bear fruit in another generation. Some time may elapse before the full fruition, but cause and effect may easily be traced. The settled conviction that God exists, as the supreme life-giver and lawgiver, leads to the conclusion, " Fear God and keep His commandments". The negation of all faith leads to the conclusion, " Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die".

The word philosophy is generally used in a sense far too restricted. When we hear of a man who takes a philosophic view of life, it generally means simply that he makes the best of his circumstances and accepts inevitable adversity without bootless lamentation. Perhaps such a man deserves the title of philosopher for being wise when so many are foolish, but we must have a much wider understanding of philosophy than this.

Even when the word is used in a less colloquial sense than that just noted, its meaning is still too much restricted. If in a biographical sketch we read that some well-known man devotes his leisure hours to the study of philosophy, it will generally be safe to assume that the philosophy is of one particular type, and we may quite confidently conclude that, whatever it is, it has nothing to do with faith. Probably the great majority of people who even use the word in a serious sense would scoff at the bare idea of connecting philosophy with faith. They think of a student of philosophy as being rather on the sceptical side ; a man of expansive mind, who has cast off simple faith with the putting away of childish things, while a man of faith is often despised as the ignorant representative of mental inertia, who has received a creed from his moral teachers and clings to it simply because he knows nothing of the great world of science and philosophy beyond its borders. To speak of the philosophy of faith, therefore, seems to such observers a glaring anomaly almost as great as if we chose for our subject the light of darkness, or the wisdom of foolishness. We may call to mind the fact that even such an apparent contradiction as this last suggestion might be chosen for a subject with some force of scriptural sanction. There is a way of wisdom which men account foolish, and the wisdom of the world is foolishness in the sight of God.

Perhaps this general tendency to suppose that faith is incompatible with philosophy arises from the fact that the two words have been abused in totally different ways. Having advanced a few ideas regarding the true meaning of

philosophy, it becomes necessary to give a similar attention to the word faith. It is said that a schoolboy once defined faith as "that quality which enables you to believe what you know is not true"; and the fact that the joke has been repeated with zest, seems to suggest that it has found a responsive echo in a good many hearts. We also have a lively recollection of an old atheist who attempted to give us a lesson in logic, and whose favourite maxim was: "What you believe, you don't know; and what you know, you don't believe". This man had a neat way of dealing with Christians. He would put the question, "Do you *know* that there is a God?" If his victim hesitated, or replied that he would not go so far as to say he possessed certain knowledge on the subject, then came the triumphant retort, "This man claims to be a Christian and to engage in worship, when he does not even know that there is a God!" If on the other hand the Christian proved of a more sturdy type, and claimed to know, the atheist felt equally triumphant in retorting, "Then there is no margin left for faith!"

These foolish criticisms would not be worth recalling to mind but for the fact that they very well express the general misconception regarding faith. It is true that the words *believe* and *know* have not the same meaning, but they must not be placed in antithesis. We suggested to our atheistic critic that his rule of logic placed him in a curious dilemma: "If a man tells you something that you *know* is true, you will not believe him". The fact is, of course, that belief can be of many different grades of strength until it finally merges into knowledge. In connection with all the affairs of life we might experience great difficulties in determining at what precise point we are justified in saying we know, but that is no reason for making the use of the word *know* impossible. And in those matters where the word faith is appropriate, surely it shines the brightest when belief has merged into knowledge. How can we manifest greater faith in a friend than when we are able to say, "I know he will be true"? The human mind, however, is under such severe limitations that we can at least

understand the attitude of those who hesitate to claim absolute knowledge of anything. The unpardonable mistake is to cite this universal difficulty as if it were only applicable in connection with one particular subject. It is not merely a theological dilemma ; it belongs to the whole realm of human thought. This fact can hardly be emphasized too strongly, for the subject of faith is continually being made the centre for a mere war of words. Unbelievers do not often state the case so boldly and foolishly as the old atheist whose lucubrations we have called to mind, but the same kind of argument is often used, the same obstinate determination to see difficulties in the way of Christianity which, as a matter of fact, are common to every subject. The world is full of faith. Business could not be conducted, society could not exist without it. It is of many degrees, varying from the slight balance of probabilities, which hardly deserves the name, to the conviction which amounts to knowledge.

If any man still persists that faith and knowledge are incompatible, or that there is practically nothing we can really know, do not argue with him. There is nothing less profitable or more contemptible than a war of definitions. Let it be granted, if he likes, that we cannot, in the nature of things, know for certain that there is a God, or that the Bible is true : he cannot know that any part of history is genuine, or that any countries exist that he has not visited. He does not know whether his wife is unfaithful, or his dearest friend a scamp. Indeed, the logical outcome of agnosticism is the position of the supreme egoist who doubts everything except the fact of his own existence. He knows that in some form he exists, but all the world beside may be a figment of his imagination, and all the events of his life a long dream.

Reasonable men, however, will not sanction such an extreme idea, and they come to recognize that it is sheer waste of time and of breath to quarrel about definitions. Men may frequently be proved wrong even when they are most positive ; it may be almost impossible to find evidence for any fact sufficient in absolute logic to justify the words, " I

know", but for all practical purposes we may often possess a faith which amounts to complete conviction. We may feel so positive that natural laws will remain unbroken, that we cheerfully stake our lives on the issue ; we may be so sure that the friend who has been faithful for years will remain true, that we leave our honour in his charge without a tremor ; and we may be so satisfied as to the consistent continuance of cause and effect, that we devote our lives to a labour which will be worthless if those laws should change, or our reading of them prove faulty.

What is all this but faith ? We entertain certain convictions on a basis of reason, and we guide, or attempt to guide, our lives accordingly. A famous poet voiced the popular sentiment when he described Christian faith as "believing when we cannot prove".

If this is intended to imply that Christian faith is in a special and peculiar sense unprovable, the line is false. If it only refers to proof in the absolute sense it can be applied to any subject. Nothing is proved while the work remains incomplete. An inventor at work constructing a flying machine may have absolute faith that he is working on the right lines, he may be able to demonstrate to his perfect satisfaction that his machine will fly, but the point will not be proved in the absolute sense until it does fly. A chemist may mix certain elements and feel perfect confidence as to the effect ; but in the absolute sense his experiment can only be proved by the result. And in the same way, the faith of a Christian that God will perform all that is promised in Holy Scripture can only be proved when the promises are fulfilled. If we are to insist on such a narrow use of the words *know* and *prove* we must be consistent in our application of them. Each investigator may feel, however, that, to him, the case is proved already, and it only needs realization to prove it to the world. In connection with all subjects that is what is meant by true faith—a belief in that which we cannot prove to the world ; on the basis of reasonable evidence, a conviction regarding truths which are not yet realized ; or, as the

apostle puts the matter, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen".

Our subject, then, should open a promising field. By philosophy we mean a systematical wisdom which takes a comprehensive survey of all available facts, and on the basis of what we know, attempts to determine what we should do. By faith we mean the reasonable hope and confidence reposed in God, who has Himself been faithful, and who in past history has given us assurance for the future. By combining the two words we imply the proposition that when wisdom has surveyed all that men know, or think they know, it brings us back to a simple faith in God and His promises. We are not merely to marshal Christian evidence, and show forth reasons for believing the Bible ; but, writing as to those who have some knowledge of the subject, we may make a general review of the position. Not simply as defenders or expounders of one particular proposition with all the onus of proof upon us, and prohibited from examining the difficulties of mere negation, but with full power to investigate anything, we may say : " Truth lies somewhere, where is it ? We have life and certain powers, how shall we best make use of them ? We want to demonstrate that a man of simple Christian faith may be a philosopher ; possibly even to show that a true philosopher must be a man of simple Christian faith."

CHAPTER II

WORDS

IT may seem a strange anomaly to begin with the consideration of the style and quality of the language in which our ideas should be expressed. Usually one would think this should be the last of our anxieties, especially in a work of this nature. The first and most important factor is to have

some ideas worth recording. Next we should take pains to arrange them, to give them proper sequence, and logical elaboration, while the mere question of verbiage should claim our attention last of all. If we invert this order at the present time it is simply because it is sometimes necessary to pull down before one can begin to build. There are many people whose attitude towards philosophical works resembles that of the old lady towards the special sermon she so greatly admired. Asked whether she understood it, she said she would not presume to do so. There is a tendency to condemn an author as shallow or superficial if his writings are perfectly clear. And conversely, a writer will sometimes gain a reputation for profundity simply because no one can quite make out what he means. It has been said that poets are men who utter great and wise thoughts which they themselves do not understand. There are also some poets, and prose writers too, who utter little and foolish thoughts which they do not understand. The disposition to judge a writer's depth by the difficulty of apprehending him is altogether vicious. The water near the Isle of Man where it is sometimes possible to see every detail of the sea bottom, is deeper than a mud puddle.

We have heard a book commended in all seriousness, because it produced a pleasant dreaminess, and left a vague impression of profundity. "It filled my mind with splendid thoughts, but I don't know what they were." This seems to be an age when vague thoughts are appreciated to an unusual degree, and language is often used to conceal rather than to reveal the ideas in an author's mind. We would not for a moment dispute the proposition that thought is possible without language, or at least without the language of words. We might go so far as to admit that the highest emotions, and even the highest thoughts, are beyond the expression of ordinary human speech. But when men speak they should not attempt the unutterable. Language may be made musical, picturesque and effective without losing any of its clarity, and any attempt at decoration which detracts from its clearness is false and detestable artifice.

There is a language of emotion which cannot express definite ideas, and which should not make the attempt. Music reaches its highest development when it is farthest removed from words. There is as much solid brain power evinced in any of Beethoven's symphonies as in any book that has ever been written ; but they do not express ideas which are capable of being translated into words, and the man who attempts to explain them to the multitude is a presumptuous blunderer. It is quite a consistent perversity that men who delight in vague books often ask for definite music. They read a lot of involved nonsense, and say, " There are some very profound thoughts in that". They hear a beautiful symphony or sonata, and ask, " What is it intended to represent ?" They can enjoy the book if it merely throws them into a condition of pleasant dreaminess ; they seem incapable of appreciating the music unless some wretched attempt is made to make it tell a story.

There are some philosophical works whose reputation would suffer a profound eclipse if every sentence should be analysed, and every idea paraphrased, in simple language. If a philosopher dares to use the words of the common people it means that he has somewhat to say. It is in this matter much as it is in the art of dress. That which is old and stale may be made attractive, and that which is false may be made to look true, if the dresser only has sufficient art. But in the use of words, as in the use of clothing, the simplest dress is always the best, and often the most beautiful. There are writers who exhibit an exaggerated horror of the commonplace, but who only escape from falling under this very condemnation by the cloudiness of their language. In Emerson's essay on " Compensation", the following passage occurs, and we may take it as a horrible example :

" Every act rewards itself, or, in other words, integrates itself in a twofold manner ; first, in the thing, or in real nature ; and secondly, in the circumstance, or in apparent nature. Men call the circumstance the retribution. The casual retribution is in the thing, and is seen by the soul. The

retribution in the circumstance is seen by the understanding ; it is inseparable from the thing ; but is often spread over a long time, and so does not become distinct until after many years. The specific stripes may follow late after the offence, but they follow because they accompany it."

Is this a profound thought, and if so, can one of the elect paraphrase it, and render the message in language which we uncultured mortals can understand ? This passage assumes an importance quite out of proportion to its merits, by virtue of the fact that it occurs in an essay which is quite typical of the modern revolt against simple Christian faith. We might find more modern expressions, but we could hardly find a better example of this tendency. Emerson states that his essay on this subject was partly inspired by his resentment against the traditional doctrine of judgment to come as it was expounded in a sermon. It is quite probable that the sermon was a travesty of Bible teaching, but even making full allowance for this, it is evident that Emerson had no more real faith in the Scriptures than he had in the " orthodox " preacher. And what is his answer to the doctrine of retribution and recompense in the age to come ? Simply the idea that there is a law of compensation operating now. " There is always some levelling circumstance that puts down the overbearing, the strong, the rich, the fortunate, substantially on the same ground with all others." We are invited to remember that cold invigorates, while on the other hand, the most noisome pests which afflict humanity flourish most in the sunniest climes. We are told that there are always checks to evil and some measure of alloy with every good.

The essay is interesting and sparkling, in spite of its obscure passages ; but if we seek for the final soul-satisfying message which shall replace the worn-out creed of Scripture, we seek in vain. Emerson was far too clever to carry his ideas to their logical conclusion. Even when his general contention was most clearly stated he was careful to qualify it. The levelling circumstance puts down the fortunate " substantially on the same ground with all others". What is meant by the

word substantially? We should certainly think that a very poor man who has to work hard, who suffers from some painful disease, who loses all his friends, and who finally is sent to penal servitude for a crime he never committed, is not at all on the same ground as any man who can properly be described as fortunate. The false philosopher might argue that the mental anxieties inseparable from the position of the fortunate man bring the two cases "substantially" on a level; but if he were invited to take his choice as to which part he would play in life, we cannot think that his philosophy would cause him even a moment's hesitation. We can remember reading a small pamphlet some years ago in which the doctrine of present compensations was pushed to its greatest extreme, and the author was foolish enough to use plain language. It was boldly affirmed that "we all receive by the force of circumstance exactly what we deserve. No more and no less".

Surely this is not what Emerson meant when he wrote the passage about "every act integrating itself in a twofold manner"! Yet one feels that unless the existing law of compensation can be pushed to such an extreme it is quite misleading to introduce it as a substitute for the idea of a final day of divine judgment.

The truth is that this essay is an example of the modern way of evading serious issues. A man might come forward with a bold avowal of unbelief, and deny that there was a judgment to come. He might deny that there are any final compensations for those who suffer for righteousness, and express his convictions in the words of Fitzgerald's rendering of Omar Khayyam—

"Alike for those who for today prepare,
And those that after a tomorrow stare,
A muezzin from the tower of darkness cries
'Fools, your reward is neither here nor there!'"

This would surely be an appropriate commentary on those who look for compensation to the existing laws of nature; and we should expect a man who rejects all ideas of

a future judgment to endorse this pessimistic conclusion. Not so, however. The modern philosophic writer scouts the old creed, but affects to find a satisfactory substitute in certain natural laws. He deals with these laws in vague language, pointing out principles which bear just sufficient analogy to the great subject in hand to give an impression of profundity, and carefully avoiding a plain statement of the issue. His effort seems more refined and to contain so much more literary flavour than a simple exposition of the old creed that people are easily to be persuaded that it contains far deeper thought. It is only when some less elusive writer attempts to explain the subject in clear language that the whole case falls to pieces, and it becomes evident that the philosopher only escaped from his ideas appearing commonplace by his language being confused.

We have, then, some reason for considering the words by which our ideas shall be conveyed before proceeding to develop our system. We hold that words should be the instruments of definite thought, while music stands pre-eminently as the language of emotion. If you seek the pleasure of an indefinite day dream, study the works of the great composers ; but if you seek a system of philosophy by which human life can be guided, insist that the language shall be clear, and the thoughts definite so far as the system pretends to go.

It has often been remarked that the value of a book lies more in what it suggests than in what it actually states. This is another way of saying that the author who most benefits his readers is the one who best teaches them to think for themselves. This development by the reader should be in clear thoughts on the basis of ideas clearly expressed ; not simply that the reader's mind should be exercised in a confused wonder as to what the author meant. Clearness of thought is one of the main distinctions between the highest type of mind and the lowest.

If then we have any ideas deserving expression or any system of life worthy of the word philosophy, let us convey

them in the simplest and clearest language. And if—as is almost inevitable—we are guilty of stating some platitudes, let them be naked platitudes, the value of which can be assessed in a moment, not so dressed up with confusing words that men dreamily conclude that they constitute a revelation.

CHAPTER III ALTERNATIVES

IT is a principle recognized in discussions that the onus of proof lies with the one who affirms. This rule is sometimes put to a very unfair use, the denier refusing to take up a definite position, or express a definite opinion. Perhaps the most extreme and foolish instance of this was the case of the Jew who challenged his Christian opponent to produce the original writings of the apostles, and declined to consider the analogous case of the Jewish Scriptures, on the ground that they were not the subjects of the discussion. There have been many instances of unfairness almost as glaring. The essence of discussion is to reason from the known to the unknown, or from what is admitted, to that which is in dispute. A disputant who refuses to admit anything or to state any of his beliefs, may easily gain a certain tactical advantage, but he does not in the least degree assist people to reach a rational conclusion. It is, indeed, just this disposition to evade the definite issue which renders most public discussions so peculiarly valueless.

Now when a man settles down to a thoughtful examination of life, such as our subject involves, he will not tolerate these contemptible evasions. He is not to consider any special proposition, and if he reduced his quest into a single question, it would be the old inquiry of Pilate, "What is truth?" If

we were to put the inferior but more definite question, "Is the Bible true?" the onus of proof would lie with those who affirm, while the deniers would be at liberty to raise every kind of objection without incurring the responsibility of suggesting any alternative to the ideas they condemn. When, however, we put the large question, "What is truth?" we all stand on a level, so far as fairness of discussion is concerned.

This brings us to a simple, yet most important principle, which lies at the foundation of our subject. The word faith is often applied in connection with other than religious matters. A learned professor and scientist once stated that part of the theory of evolution required an effort of philosophic faith, so that however much men may think that Christian faith is out of harmony with scientific research, the idea of faith apart from Christianity is not altogether foreign to their speculations. Using the word in this larger sense it appears that all men of intelligence must have faith in something. Their mental outlook cannot consist entirely of negations. Unless a man is prepared to affirm that he knows nothing, believes nothing, and harbours no opinions, unless he is prepared to condense all his positive belief into one solitary affirmation of his own ignorance, he must of necessity be in some sense a man of faith. Every rational man will claim to know certain facts, to believe in other facts where he cannot know, and to entertain opinions even where he would hardly claim to believe. When we take a survey of life therefore, and ask, What is truth? the question is not, Shall we have faith at all? but, In what shall our faith repose? Faith is always affirmative, and either faith or something akin to it, is found in every affirmation.

Thus we reach the aforementioned simple but important principle. In discussing an inferior question, a man may simply deny; but in considering the major question he is bound to affirm. Every negative implies a positive. If he denies that there is a God, he must affirm that the universe reached its present condition without a Creator. If he simply expresses doubt, then exactly in proportion as he doubts the

existence of God, he must be inclined to believe that the universe made itself. If he says the Bible is not inspired by God, then he must affirm that it was entirely the work of men. If he denies that there is a future life for man, or a divine purpose in the history of the earth, then he must affirm that all human endeavour will end in the blackness of death for ever. If a believer in evolution, impressed by the apparent cruelty of Nature, denies that there has been any superhuman power at work in her laboratory, he must be prepared to affirm that the million years of struggle and suffering in which he believes, have served no final object, and that the end of all sentient beings will be in the oblivion from which they came.

The advocate of any particular school of thought may evade these affirmations, but a man who wishes to take a philosophic view of life will welcome them. Truth lies somewhere, and he is searching for it. If therefore, he feels to doubt any proposition, instead of meeting it merely with elusive negatives, he is at once ready to look at the alternatives, and to consider the affirmative propositions his negatives imply.

Sometimes there is only one possible alternative and the issue is placed on the simplest possible level. Thus either God exists, or He does not. This has always been a simple issue, and the whole trend of human thought during the last few centuries has been to make it simpler. There is no need now to argue as to what is meant by God. Everyone recognizes that the subject is not touched by any conception of a race of beings superior to man but still dependent. The only possible conception of God is as the Uncreate, the one great Reality, the first Cause. In point of fact we are all bound to recognize the existence of a first cause or force, in the universe. There can be no quarrel between philosophers on this point. We say either there is a God, or there is not, and we only state the same truth in a slightly different way when we say either the first cause is an intelligent conscious force, or it is a blind force. Incontestably the truth lies with one of

these two propositions, and what is true now always has been true, and will remain so for all time. Sometimes there are more alternatives than one, and the negative may be taken to imply one of several affirmatives. Thus, the Bible is either entirely true, entirely false, or partly true and partly false. Everyone who denies two of these propositions must affirm the third. It is obvious that the last named of these three propositions admits of many sub-divisions, and many more detailed propositions come under this one heading. In view of the importance and prominence of the Bible, a man who is seeking truth will fairly face the responsibilities of affirmation, and at least determine for himself what is the most reasonable conclusion with regard to such an issue.

Sometimes there are only three possible propositions, none of which can be legitimately subdivided. Thus, the men who first proclaimed the resurrection of Christ were either true men declaring what they knew had occurred, false men telling lies, or mistaken men declaring what they thought was true. It is difficult to see how any one could desire any further qualification to these propositions. A man may hesitate to express an opinion, but if he feels that the evidence is insufficient, or that his investigations have not gone far enough to justify a definite conclusion on the positive side, he ought to be equally modest in his negations. It is possible for an honest man to be in this unfortunate position of uncertainty, unable either to affirm or deny, although we think such cases are rare. The more usual experience is to find men ready enough to deny, but anxious to escape the responsibility of affirmation ; refusing faith in God or the Bible, but very unready to place it anywhere else.

This then becomes the first consideration for one who attempts to examine the philosophy of faith. What positive convictions or positive opinions can we entertain? Carlyle said that every man ought to have a theory of the universe by which to guide his life. The idea is not fantastic. Our actions are so completely dependent on our thoughts, that

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

if a man declares that he has no opinions regarding these fundamental truths it is tantamount to saying that he has no conception of any duty in life. If God did not exist, men could commit no sin, the earth would have to be regarded as a product of chance, and man as the highest intelligence could reasonably consider himself as superior to the forces which gave him birth. He would be the supreme lawgiver, and what he determined was right would be right from the highest standpoint. If men recognize the existence of God, but deny all special revelation, then all stand on a level, able to make or imagine their own God, endow Him with such qualities as please them, and frame laws to suit their convenience. If men not only believe in God but recognize that He has spoken, then it should be the most serious business of their lives to make quite sure as to the nature of the revelation and guide their lives absolutely by it. Truly every man should have a theory of the universe by which to live. He cannot guide his life by mere negations.

The first step in our philosophy then must be this definite recognition that every negative implies a positive. Whether we know, or believe, or only entertain a faint opinion, whether it is a case of creed, credence, or credulity, we must affirm just as strongly as we deny. The truth regarding these fundamental facts does not vary. However much human opinion may change or oscillate, truth remains the same. If sometimes a disciple falters, let him look at the positive alternatives, and re-echo Peter's question: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" If the traveller grows faint because the path through the wilderness is a hard one, and the lights ahead seem feeble, a merely negative attitude will serve no good purpose. It will merely make him half-hearted and miserable. Would he prefer to remain still in the desert? or turn back and retrace his steps? or forsake the path to the right hand or the left? If he gives an emphatic negative to all these questions what remains except to march forward? And why not march with a good swinging step, knowing that the lights will grow brighter as we draw nearer?

Our philosophy of faith is not merely to point a way for those who hesitate, but to quicken the step of those on the march.

CHAPTER IV

THE MIDNIGHT VISION

IT must be a matter of general experience that a full realization of even some of the simplest and most familiar of facts depends largely upon mood. We may not allow our changing temperament to affect our convictions, because we are on our guard against this weakness ; but we are all conscious that our beliefs come home to us far more forcibly on certain special occasions than is ever the case in the ordinary monotony of life.

The fact of our existence is a marvel, and we readily subscribe to the truth that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" ; but how often do we bring the marvel really home to our perceptions ? Under the ordinary circumstances of life, we are linked to days of childhood by an unbroken chain of prosaic recollections. Each day rests on the day before, and so it has been since the time when we first looked about us and "took notice" of various objects near, without having any capacity for coherent thought. In the ordinary experience of life, our philosophical reflections are so liable to be interrupted by considerations of bread and butter, that we rarely obtain a clear and complete view of some of the simplest truths. Occasionally, however, circumstance and mood may conspire to give us a momentary glimpse of that which is generally hidden. For a few minutes the mind sees truths it had previously only received on trust, just as the eye may sometimes see for an enormous distance if, when you are

on the top of a mountain, the cloud around you suddenly clears. A minute before you could only see a few yards, and the nearest peak was not visible. Now the cloud lifts, and you look over sixty miles of hill and valley, all clearly defined and bathed in sunshine. You knew, indeed, that such a scene was there, but your eyes had not perceived it ; and when the cloud settles down once more, you cannot see the landscape again, however much your eyes may be strained in the effort.

Such an experience as this in the sphere of mental or spiritual sight, has only been given to the writer two or three times in the course of half a life. On each occasion it has been late in the night when healthy men are generally asleep, or if they wake, are too drowsy for serious thought. Even those to whom no vision is vouchsafed, may advance the farthest in pure thought in the night "when deep sleep falleth on men".

Aroused by some unknown cause from a deep, dreamless sleep, and so thoroughly awakened that all the faculties are at their brightest. All is silent round, as if the whole world slumbers. One seems suddenly to have emerged from the land of forgetfulness into the fullest mental activity, with all the powers of manhood. The dreamless sleep has isolated the mind from the trivial events of the past day, and the general darkness and silence give it no suggestion of trivial duties to come. The man, with all the powers of a man, has suddenly sprung from a dead world ; his mind is so refreshed and vigorous, his sleep has been so sound, that it might have been the sleep of death, and this the resurrection morn. The first thought is an overwhelming sense of personality, and a realization of the marvel of his own existence such as never can be experienced in the ordinary course of a prosaic life. It is just as if the mist rolls away, and he looks for the first time at a marvellous expanse of territory which he had always believed to exist, but had never seen before. Then, as the thoughts turn to local details and he remembers where he is, what happened the day before and the principal duties impending on the morrow, the actual use of life

seems very paltry. He feels that such glorious powers of thought and movement should be better employed. And as he makes good resolutions for future endeavour, the mental picture gradually slips away from him, and he becomes the ordinary prosaic man again, linked to the past with the unbroken chain of trivialities, taking his existence and all his powers as a matter of course, and quite unable by any effort to get back to the mood caused by the momentary detachment from ephemeral things.

Yet, although under the ordinary circumstances of life we cannot experience this sensation, the lesson remains. We are able to reason from the acknowledged marvel of our own existence, even though the wonder is not brought home to us with the intensity of the midnight awakening. Nothing can be plainer than the fact that we are creatures. Our powers have developed gradually during the course of years, and they are unmistakably dependent on the correct working of our various organs. How clearly this is recognized in the special midnight experience ! The regular beat of the heart can be felt and heard. We are constantly breathing the air which surrounds us, with a consciousness that it is just the element we need. We realize that, marvellous as it seems, all our knowledge of life, all our hopes and ambitions, all our conception of right and wrong, all our thoughts, are contained within the fragile shell, now lying at rest. And that if air should be denied to us, if the heart should cease to beat, all our powers would fail. Beyond all question we are creatures. Who or what has created us ?

None of the theories which have been put forward by presumptuous men answer or come anywhere near answering this question. They may refer us back a stage, but the difficulty only takes another form.

The potentialities have always existed for whatever exists now. This is a truth so simple and obvious that it might with some measure of justice be condemned as a naked platitude, such as we suggested might be inevitable. Yet it is practically an affirmation of the existence of God, and there seems good

reason for emphasizing it now. Whatever difficulties a man may experience in believing and realizing the existence of an intelligent first cause, they are difficulties from which he cannot escape. Remembering our first postulate, our determination to repudiate mere negatives and insist on an examination of the implied positive, what alternative is there for the man who finds it hard to believe in a Creator? However far he may fancy that he has carried back the difficulty of creation, the difficulty is always there. And on closer examination one has to conclude that all the theories fail to explain the origin of anything. The theories which have regarded various forms of selection as the agencies of development do not advance us a single step towards an understanding of the original mystery. Even if the most extravagant claims of Darwin were conceded, creation would remain as great a wonder as ever. Selection must have something to select. There could be no beginning until there were living creatures in existence, no selection of profitable variations tending to improve eyesight until there was eyesight sufficiently good to be profitable. Selection does not produce anything. At the best it can only choose the best from that which has been produced. Evolution theorists have generally been conscious of the impossibility of explaining the origin of life on a material basis, and when the subject is closely investigated it become evident that each successive step presents exactly the same difficulty.

The more modern exponents of evolution have largely abandoned the theories of Darwin in favour of a larger belief in unexplained tendencies. This shows a more strict conformity to the meaning of evolution, which is an unfolding. There is evolution in the development of a bird from an egg, but that is simply an unfolding of potentialities, in accordance with a vital law we cannot pretend to understand. The egg is in every sense as wonderful as the bird. And if we could be persuaded that at one time the earth was a ball of fire, and the present system of life has been evolved purely by natural laws, then we could only conclude that the fiery earth and

the laws of nature were just as wonderful as the present ordered world, although, like the egg, they might present little variety of outline or substance.

The man who repudiates the belief in God should be able to express his conviction as to a first cause, or at all events suggest a possible theory as to what is cause and what is effect. Presumably he would admit that substance in some form or other has always existed ; but what are we to say regarding the various properties of matter as we know it ? Is the wonderful force we call gravitation to be considered as cause or an effect ? No one knows by what means substances attract each other with definite and regular force according to the density of the objects and the distance which separates them. That such a force exists is beyond all doubt, and there is no reason for objecting to the name scientists have given it. But, while we avoid the foolish error of cavilling at the word gravitation, do not let us make the opposite mistake of supposing that scientists have explained the natural force merely by giving it a scientific name. Is this force of attraction which can operate through millions of miles of space an inherent quality of matter, or is it an effect ? The same question may be asked of electricity, of life, and then through the various stages of development it can be pursued with reference to all the manifestations of life : thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting ; the power of the living creature involuntarily to turn food into its own living substance, the power of the blood to select and reform, to build up brain, heart and lungs, bones, sinews, and flesh, skin, teeth, and hair. The still more wonderful power—if such a comparison is possible—of taking substance back again in time of famine, and selecting it from parts where it can be spared, in order to sustain the vital organs. After a prolonged fast a man's form may seem to the last degree emaciated—his cheeks hollow, and his limbs thin ; yet the three vital organs, brain, heart, and lungs, remain unimpaired.

An exponent of an evolution theory once rather sneeringly remarked that Christians were continually trying to

find gaps in the doctrine of development that they might fill them up with God. The truth lies exactly the other way. The atheistic theorists say in effect, "Grant us a world of matter with certain forces and properties which make it fall into proper order. Grant us creatures with life, and able to reproduce their kind ; creatures with nerves sensitive to light in a world where there is light, with nerves sensitive to sound and surrounded by a medium which will convey sound. Grant also that these creatures are liable to produce chance variations covering in the aggregate the whole range of Nature's equipment ; and we can fill in the gaps without the aid of God." The answer is that there are no gaps to fill in.

Some years ago it was the dream of inventors to construct a perpetual motion machine. Much time and labour have been spent in the futile effort to find some system of applied mechanics which would give unending motion without waste of energy. Intelligent men, whose equals in this generation would not give a moment's thought to such schemes, devoted years to the effort to make a servant of gravitation. Men who recognized that the falling of a weight could only give as much energy as was required to lift it again, nevertheless imagined that by some application of leverage an advantage could be gained, and years of experiment were spent trying to fix weights on a wheel in such a manner that they would automatically assume positions to increase the leverage as they fell and reduce it as they rose. Others who could see the folly of these primitive experiments fell into precisely the same error, merely disguised by increased complexity. Many such inventors have planned and experimented with the water-wheel, which, driven by falling water, should yet pump the water back to its original place. They have failed to perceive that all such schemes are just as foolish as the simple weights on a wheel. Their futility is due to the same cause, and all their multiplication of levers and wheels is an attempt to cheat nature by a complication of cogs. With the development of electricity as a conveyer of power a new lease of life was given to the dying hopes of

those who desired to find perpetual motion. The newly-harnessed force seemed so mysterious, that there was some excuse for men thinking it might be exempt from the stern laws which limited the capacities of forces which were better known. In course of time, however, it was found that the same principles prevailed; and that, while an increase of complexity easily deluded man, Nature could never be cheated. The law has now been crystallized into a formula which is accepted by every man of science, and, probably, not denied by any man of sense, "Action and reaction are equal". The man who attempts to make a perpetual motion machine, whatever forces he proposes to use, and however complicated his apparatus, is simply hanging weights on a wheel. It is one law running through all nature, and whether we experiment with a simple wheel, or with water, or with electricity, the principle which checkmates us is the same. Action and reaction are equal.

But while we do not think that there is a word in this statement of the case that a mechanic would not accept, it is not the mechanical aspect of the matter that interests us. We would rather ask the question, When will men carry this principle to its logical conclusion? They have already advanced a long way from the recognition of the first simple fact that it requires as much energy to raise the weight as you gain by its fall. They know perfectly well that you can make no application of power from the fall of water without wasting the water, and that electricity is governed by the same law. They know that coal is simply bottled sunlight, and that you only gain power from it by burning it and dissipating its heat into space. If you dream of harnessing the tides to take the place of coal, they can prove to you that even the tides will cease in time. They can show that the earth, the whole solar system, and indeed all the bodies in the universe are subject to the same great law. "Suns shall perish, stars shall fade away." Heat is dissipated in space and lost to a world just as the heat escaping from a steam engine is lost to a man, and the inexorable conclusion is that a perpetual motion

machine is as impossible in the systems of suns and planets as in the man-made machines of earth.

Yet the power of perpetual motion exists. The universe has eternity behind it, and whatever can be effected by lapse of time has already been accomplished. If unlimited time could spend Nature's forces they would all have been spent eternity ago. The fact that there is motion now, proves that the power has always been. As we watch the movements of the heavenly bodies we see perpetual motion as an indubitable fact. That fact speaks of a power superior to Nature, a power outside the moving machine, and above the law that action and reaction are equal. It demonstrates the existence of a power able to determine by force of will when the machine should start, and how it should continue. One great fountain of energy, one first cause, one supreme reality.

If man should be left to his own devices for long enough, and if no great revolution should occur to sweep away the accumulation of human knowledge, there would come a time when the development of exact science would reach this great problem, and the existence of one great Creator would be demonstrated in the manner of a simple sum.

CHAPTER V

THE ETERNAL UNSEEN

THE things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4 : 18).

These words are true in a wider sense than is generally understood, or indeed, than is suggested by the context of the passage. The immediate connection of the statement has to do with the development of the "new man", "hidden man of the heart", or, as it is here expressed, "inner

man", which is begotten by the Word, and renewed day by day after the manner of a natural growth. The apostle Paul, afflicted in many ways, was writing to men and women who were companions in tribulation, and who thoroughly realized their mortality. They were all members of a perishing race, and if their aspirations and their whole mental development had been on fleshly lines, they would have been temporal altogether. Having responded to the call of the gospel, however, a new character was called to life in them. A character which could be developed by contemplation of the eternal truths connected with the gospel ; which could be purified by the hope of being made partakers of God's holiness ; and which might finally perfect a divinely begotten personality fit, in the mercy of God, to survive the destruction of unprofitable flesh. It is not difficult to see in this connection, that the only eternal things are the unseen. The character of the man is not a visible object, and the purifying hope of the gospel can only be seen by the eye of faith. We readily recognize that this unseen part is the essential feature. If a thorough " man of the world, whose portion is in this life", could be clothed upon with immortality, he would be thereby destroyed just as surely as if his carcase were burned to ashes. It is truly not a legitimate speculation except just to emphasize a truth which is not always clearly perceived. It has been remarked by other writers that had God created deathless and sinless beings direct from the clay they would have been devoid of character, and the same consideration explains the impossibility of men being saved against their will. How could it be possible for a man to be at one moment a thorough servant of sin, knowing and caring nothing for the commands and promises of God, and the next moment a partaker of the divine nature ? The transition involves such a change of character that if it could be sudden it would be destruction.

When the accepted saints are made the subjects of the great change, and are clothed upon with immortality, they will all be distinctive personalities. In the day of weakness

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

they have made themselves acquainted with the divine point of view. They have struggled against temptation with much suffering and consciousness of failure. They have all experienced the same kind of struggle as the apostle Paul describes in the seventh chapter of his letter to the Romans. The evil of sin-stricken nature has always been present with them even when they were most impressed and attracted by the picture of divine perfection presented to them by their great Example. But they have understood the purpose of God, they have responded to the gospel call, they have endeavoured to bring themselves into line with divine requirements, and through the mercy of God they are accepted. The great change will be to them the end of the painful struggle. It will make permanent the characters they have tried so hard to form, and introduce them to the society and the position for which they have laboured to prepare themselves. In this sense it is easy to see how completely the unseen things are eternal and the visible things temporal. The hand of God, in working out His purpose, is unseen, yet the purpose is sure and the work enduring. The efforts of men and all the objects of human desire are aggressively visible, yet they are all most evidently destined to perish.

On closer examination it is perceived that the words under consideration need not be restricted to the subject of their context. In the fullest sense and with the widest application, they hold true. There is nothing enduring in all that we see. There are objects which seem so permanent that we can note no change from day to day, but we can prove that changes are continually taking place. Not only living creatures and plants, but rocks and metals reveal their mutability. Rocks crumble into dust, metals corrode, the hardest of substances wear away or change their form, and all the advance of human knowledge tends to prove that such a law applies to all things visible.

At one time men no doubt regarded substances as differing from each other in essence as much as they differed in form. The idea that a gas which burns with a blue flame

combines with the vitalizing element of the air we breathe to form water, would have seemed absurd. No one would have believed that another main constituent of air could be turned into solid food for the nourishing of our bodies. Indeed, a hundred commonplace facts will come to mind, all of them so far removed from apparent truth that they have only been accepted after very thorough proof. The tendency of chemical research has been to show that substances which at one time were considered elementary, are really compounds ; while, on the other hand, new substances have come to light which have compelled a revision of accepted theories, and suggested to more than one mind the probability that there is only one original substance, and that invisible to mortal eyes.

Recent discoveries regarding radium have compelled a revision of theories, and have tended to expand the human mind. The narrowest of all mental outlooks is that which regards all obvious facts as commonplace and everything else impossible. A broader mind sees elements of miracle even in the every-day event, while it hesitates to draw any hard line as to where miracle must end. In a world where everything is so wonderful, surely all things are possible. Speaking of radium, Sir William Ramsay recently remarked on the fact that its emanations were really a transformation of its own substance. He raised the question, How long would radium last if it were always changing into gas ? " My answer," said Sir William, " is for ever. It looks like a paradox, but it is not. The amount given off is always proportional to the amount of radium there. We can tell, however, how long it will take radium to half change into the emanation, and the time we have just measured in our laboratory is 1,750 years."

Sir William went on to say that radium was the most concentrated form of energy known, and that the emanations in turn were subject to transformation, making a series of changes through a cycle of substances, each of which had been named by science.

Some people might view these revelations with scepticism, and question the ability of scientists to prove their

assertions ; but there is no need to labour the point. The facts are sufficiently certain for the present argument. It is beyond all question true, that forces have been discovered during the last few years which further refute the old materialism, and which illustrate the truth that the eternal things are those which are unseen.

CHAPTER VI SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATIONS

RELIGION and science have so often seemed at variance that some people have come to regard the antagonism as natural and inevitable. The votaries of materialistic science have sometimes contrived to place religion in an unfavourable light by treating the whole history of this conflict as if it were the record of a single protracted battle, the combatants always standing in the same relative positions although with continually changing battle ground. Such men say in effect :

“ We are the modern representatives of the pioneers of progress in all ages, you men of faith are the lineal descendants of persecuting papists. Each new truth you resist as long as possible, then when at last it has to be admitted, you grudgingly give it a place in your temple and concentrate all your energies to repel the next discovery. Religious men are continually dragging back, scientific men are continually pressing forward.”

Such a criticism as this has just sufficient of truth in it to make it dangerous. It is, however, in almost every way grossly unfair and misleading. It is unfair to treat a vast number of controversies in different ages as if they were parts of one long battle ; it is utterly unfair to assume that if a

Christian in these days denies that a monad could be turned into a man merely by "natural selection" he would in a former age have denied that the earth is round. The error in this line of reasoning is indeed fundamental. It arises from an effort to use the word Science in its strict sense, and at the same time countenance the lowest possible application to the word Religion. Science in its strictest sense is knowledge reduced to system ; Religion in its strictest sense is that which draws a man nearer to God. It may be stated with perfect truth that any theory which turns out not to be systematized knowledge was not true science, but we must not forget that it is equally true that any theory of worship which does not bring men nearer to God is not true religion. The popular tendency is to restrict the word science to that which is believed to be true, while the word religion is used in connection with any effort in the direction of worship. As the theories of clever men come to be discarded they cease to be regarded as science ; but the grossest forms of worship are still spoken of as religion. When we know sufficient to enable us to give both words their proper value we shall doubtless find that there never has been any antagonism between genuine religion and genuine science.

We raise the question, then, What is scientific explanation ? We have to point out a truth, so simple that it is continually missed. Science never can do more than observe and arrange existing facts. It never can explain the essence of anything or make any object in the universe appear less wonderful. It explains a fact simply by reference to other facts, and thus by classifying and arranging what it observes, a good work may be accomplished, and the mind of man may become more orderly and logical. If, however, the men who take the lead in scientific work endeavour to build theories on the basis of the facts they have observed, they depart from the strict path of science, and there is more danger of their going astray.

As an illustration of a scientific explanation and to exhibit both its value and its limitation, we might take the

case of electricity. An ignorant man, seeing the damage wrought by lightning, and hearing the menacing sound of thunder, might quite naturally think that he beheld the sword and heard the voice of an angry God. Science strips the lightning of its terrors by bringing the facts near to us. It shows us that electricity is an all-pervading force present in all objects, and seeking an equilibrium just as water finds its own level. The manifestation of destructive power is when something has momentarily disturbed the natural balance and the electricity violently bursts through all obstacles to get to rest again. The scientist can show us a miniature representation of the thunder storm in his laboratory. He can demonstrate that the balance of electricity can be disturbed by friction, just as may happen on a far larger scale with the wind-driven clouds in the heavens. Then when some object is brought near to the cylinder of his machine we see the flash, hear the sound, perchance feel the shock, and realize that the scientist has proved his point and given the true explanation of the thunder storm.

Yet, after all, what has he explained? We do not in any way detract from the value of his work when we point out that he has simply collated facts, and in the strictest sense of the word he has explained nothing. He has merely removed the superstition connected with an occasional manifestation of Nature's wonders by showing that such wonders are always with us. It would be an unfortunate result of his work if, in addition to removing the craven fear, he deprived us of all feeling of intelligent reverence.

However far man's knowledge regarding Nature and his mastery of its forces may extend, he must still admit a complete inability to explain anything in its essence. The scientific explanation is simply an attempt to show the relationship, or that there is a relationship between various facts that have been observed. Sometimes the explanation opens up a field far more wonderful, and far more helpful to faith than the first impressions of ignorance. Had it not been for Sir Isaac Newton we might have taken the fall of the

apple as a matter of course, and seen nothing wonderful in it. His genius opened up a vast field for investigation, in which fact is explained by reference to still more wonderful fact, and our view of the universe is enormously enlarged.

So far we have simply pointed out a truth which must command general assent. We now come to a more doubtful and difficult question. If scientific men are unable to explain the essence or the cause of anything, have they any right to insist that belief in the handiwork of God must be thrust into the background and only admitted when they have unmistakably reached the end of their tether? It cannot be denied that such a course is taken, or that, in very many instances, the scientific theory is accepted simply because it is assumed as a first postulate that we must not believe in an ever-present and active Creator. "Parsimony is the law of logic", says the scientist; "we must never suppose a greater cause than the facts require." If a suggestion is made that anything is directly the work of God it is at once met with the condemnation that it is not scientific.

"Here we have trees", says this class of reasoner, "from whence have they come? Science shows that they have grown strictly in accordance with natural laws. We find coal in the earth, and a simple-minded man might think that it was placed there by the Creator for the benefit of the human race. Science shows that it has been produced by perfectly natural means, the submerging of forests and the action of floods. A slow process has produced all these things, and we conclude that all nature, all plants, and animals, including man, have been the subject of evolution. We see these subtle changes at work; we see Nature's laws in operation, and it is not scientific to suppose that the 'reign of law' is ever broken or to attribute anything around us to the creative power of a divine Being."

In this manner the inquiry is narrowed down, and those who accept the premises have only limited space in which to quarrel over the conclusion.

Yet, although modern scientists generally repudiate the

idea of looking to God for a direct explanation of anything, they almost invariably find it necessary to acknowledge belief in Him as the first cause. No other postulate seems possible as a starting point. The existence of one supreme Creator is the great central fact where all other wonders converge and have their explanation. We may explain the thunder and lightning by reference to the wonderful force we call electricity. We may explain the fall of the apple by reference to the law of gravitation ; and the only result is that our minds are open to the recognition of facts far more marvelous in their completeness than in their local manifestation, and in their turn calling for explanation.

You do not explain the existence of rock by telling us it is coagulated sand any more than you explain sand by saying it is pulverized rock. It may be true that coal is simply pressed and hardened fern, but the fern requires at least as much explaining as the coal. The scientist thus only thrusts the mystery further back, and when finally called upon to account for the laws which have worked all these wonders he cries, like the magicians of old, " Ah, here is the finger of God ". Unfortunately, there is some danger of the old error being repeated. People may grow so accustomed to the scientific explanation that the belated recognition of God falls on dull ears. Their hearts are hardened.

We may state a proposition which needs emphasis in these days, and which may well be impressed on the memory. If it is scientific to admit the existence of God, or even to concede the possibility that He exists, then it is certainly most unscientific to ignore Him. If the idea of God is accepted as the final cause, then He constitutes the one great inexplicable fact which furnished the only explanation of all other wonders. We certainly cannot apply the phrase " systematized knowledge " to a school of thought which, as a general rule, ignores the greatest fact in its whole category, and the only final explanation of anything. There is not the slightest reason for affirming as some have done, that miracles are impossible, or that belief in special divine intervention is

unscientific. Rather is it scientific to suppose that an intelligent Creator would never have set in motion forces capable of producing such a world as this, without any better purpose than has been served by its present material development. If a scientist believes that at one time God established laws capable of governing and preserving a planetary system such as this ; that at another time He introduced life upon the earth, and rendered it capable of development, surely it is sheer folly to say, "This is the end of His work. It is unscientific to admit the possibility of further interference".

If we insist on the application of the perfectly logical principle laid down in a previous chapter, and ask a critic to turn from mere negatives and state the affirmative propositions which his negatives imply, we can slay much of the foolish opposition of unbelief. Does he think that the earth was once a mass of fire ? Does he think that it cooled and evolved the present world of life all by chance ? If not, how much does he admit may have been accomplished by an intelligent application of creative power ? And if he admits that God has ever intervened, on what principle can he deny that God will ever stretch forth His hand again ? To admit the existence of God, and then ignore Him, to affirm that God has ordered the laws of nature, and has thus, either directly or indirectly, turned a mass of blazing matter into a world of intelligent life, and then deny that He can ever interfere again, is neither scientific, nor philosophical, nor logical. It is not even common sense.

CHAPTER VII

BREADTH OF BASIS

IT is a mistake to suppose that the strength of a man's faith is always proportionate to the vehemence of his expressions. An excessive strength of assertion may be indicative merely of bigotry, and that has nothing to do with faith. The bigot is one who regards everything so persistently

from his own point of view that he suspects all who dissent from his opinion of dishonesty. A broader minded man may hold his convictions quite as firmly and on a far more solid basis, and at the same time be able to sympathize with those who differ from him.

We may sometimes find two men in the same community answering to these descriptions. The first states his convictions in moderate language ; he is prepared to admit that there are difficulties in his path and that there is some force in the objections raised by opponents. In short, he is a man of strong convictions, but he is not a bigot. The second expresses his opinions far more emphatically, refuses to admit the presence of difficulties, can hardly credit an unbeliever with honesty, and perhaps in private conversation whispers a fear that his colleague is sadly lacking in robustness. If we judged by externals we might admit that this seemed a legitimate criticism coming from such a quarter ; that by comparison with the critic's whole-hearted confidence the other appeared weak. A few years pass by. We visit the same community again, and find that there has been a great change. The man who seemed feeble is still at his post ; but the robust critic has deserted to the ranks of the enemy, his over-expressed conviction all gone, and his energies perverted to destroy the faith which once he preached.

In such a case as this we may feel astonished at such inconsistency. Yet, after all, there is nothing which need excite the mildest surprise. Strictly speaking, there has been no inconsistency. The deserter was a narrow-minded supporter before, and now he is a narrow-minded opponent. He never saw the whole even of his own side of the picture, while he was utterly oblivious of the other side. When circumstances first forced him to widen his outlook, he saw more of the other side than of his own, and his narrow faith was shattered by the shock. There is still hope for him if he can crush out all natural vanity and begin to learn in a more thorough manner.

An illustration may help to explain the matter. We may imagine the two men as defenders in a besieged fort. Both are confident of the strength of their position ; but they greatly differ in their reasons for this feeling of security. The first has minutely examined the defences and is also thoroughly acquainted with all the resources of the enemy. He knows that there are powerful weapons arrayed against the fort, and he recognizes the possibility that there may come a time when the enemy will appear to be on the verge of triumph. Yet after a careful investigation he is satisfied as to the ultimate strength of the defences, and with quiet unboastful confidence he states his faith. The second man believes in the fort with the blind, ignorant confidence of the partisan, denies that the enemy has a single weapon worthy of the name, or that he will ever trouble to approach anywhere near. In a time of peace we might think this man the more robust defender of the two, and admit the justice of his reproaches. But the final test is in the day of action. When the enemy comes in force, when the full strength of hostile weapons is at last realized, when foes reach the very gates and it looks as if the outer defences have already fallen, then is the time for the foundation of men's confidence to be tested. The first man never falters, for he sees nothing more than he expected. He is just as confident as ever that the tide of battle will turn back again, leaving the fort unharmed. The boastful man, on the other hand, has no such foundation for his faith. For the first time he feels the force of those weapons he has derided, he sees the enemy accomplishing that which he has loudly declared to be impossible, and in the sudden shock his confidence dies and he turns traitor. The illustration does not need special application. All men of wide experience will recognize that such things have often been in connection with religious matters, and surely there is justification for a close examination of defences while we remain unassailed by any doubts.

If any feel that such an investigation is unnecessary, let them reflect upon the actual experience of the last half-

century. How many cases can you call to mind of men and women who embraced the hope of Israel, entered the Sin-covering Name, remained faithful and even enthusiastic for a time, and then drifted right away? They can be numbered by the hundred. Why did they go? What was the underlying cause of their weakness? It is not reasonable and it is not Christian charity to assume that they were dishonest and simply left the service of God in order to enjoy the pleasures of sin. There can be no doubt that for some cause their faith failed. Can we be certain that there are not similar causes operating now? And if we admit the danger, is it possible to heal up the breaches before they grow too wide?

Raise the question for a moment: What was the ostensible cause of departure in those unfortunate cases which have come under our notice?

Sometimes the explanation offered has been the old excuse, "I cannot live the truth". But is this the real difficulty? No ordinary man ever has lived the truth to perfection, but while he retains full faith in God's promises, surely no ordinary man will voluntarily sever his connection with those promises simply because he is disappointed with his own past record. If we probe the matter a little further we generally find the deserter inclined to raise difficulties which indicate only too plainly that doubts have arisen in his mind, and that his faithless action arises from the simple and obvious cause that faith has left his heart.

Now here we come to a close application of our system. We never meet or hear of one who, having been well instructed in the matter concerning the hope of Israel, turns aside as the result of closer investigation. Those who leave the household either drift away gradually or else they are drawn aside by outside influences. No doubt this assertion would be challenged by some. We know of men who would claim that their desertion of the hope was due to extended study, which carried their knowledge beyond the limited sphere of believers. They hint quite plainly that their minds

are of a superior order, and that their scepticism has a thoroughly rational basis.

In some instances it is doubtless perfectly true that such men have made extended studies and that their desertion is largely due to a knowledge of facts which are concealed from the majority of faithful believers. But this admission does not in the least degree invalidate our previous assertion that those who leave the household never desert it through making a closer investigation of its foundations. In those special cases just mentioned, attention has been concentrated, not on our foundation, but on outside forces altogether. To revert to the illustration of the fort, it is easy to understand that men who tire of life in the camp, and wandering away from home devote nearly their whole energy towards examining the resources of the enemy, may end by throwing in their lot with him. They are further influenced to this surrender if they feel that former colleagues have manifested a blind and ignorant confidence in the fort's defences. This, incidentally, furnishes a complete explanation of a phenomenon which has often excited the wonder of superficial observers. "How is it", they ask, "that some who have been brought up from childhood in the strictest possible manner, should go quite astray in later life?" It is a simple law of nature. If you force a system of thought on a child and yet fail to fetter his intellect completely there will be an inevitable reaction which may easily carry him astray. If he learns the pros of the case by statute labour, and yet is left free to seek out the cons for himself in later life, which side would you expect him to learn most thoroughly, that which is forced upon him or that which he seeks for himself? We never learn a lesson thoroughly under fear of the cane.

Even when a man has learned the rudiments of his faith with something approaching thoroughness, there is always a danger that he may be unduly influenced by arguments which have the force of novelty. The old saying, that familiarity breeds contempt, is capable of a very wide application. It seems to be part of a great law extending from the physical

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

to the mental. A drug may lose its potency through too frequent application, and arguments seem to be subject to the same rule. We may perhaps see in this the explanation of the revolt against conventionality which leads some clever men into such inordinate use of paradox.

These, however, are minor considerations. They may act as contributory causes when men lose faith ; but they do not present the greatest difficulty, and to recognize their presence is to be armed against them. I am convinced that the most persistent difficulty we have to deal with is the disposition to avoid the positive side and drift away from truth on a tide of half-hearted negatives. And this is the danger against which our philosophy of faith will protect us.

When a believer turns away from the truth because he has been studying another system of thought, it does not necessarily imply that he has become a convert to the new theory. He might find it quite impossible ever to feel convinced of such a thesis. The plausible arguments he has been considering do not convert him to the writer's point of view, but they seem in some way to weaken and thrust to the back of his mind the convictions which he has previously held. The negative side is always easier to maintain than the positive side. It may be difficult to believe that some time in the remote past, God worked on this earth and produced various forms of living creatures from the lifeless clay ; but surely it is still more difficult to believe that these creatures came by chance, or that they always have been here. There is no choice outside of these three possible theories. It may be difficult to believe that God has a definite purpose with our race and that there will be a time of recompense when His judgment will be given ; yet surely it is still more difficult to believe that there is no purpose in human life beyond the immediate ambitions of sinful men, that death ends all, that sacrifice and virtue have no final meaning, and that all creation has struggled and suffered only to pass away finally into the oblivion from which it came.

The man who is moved from his moorings through his extended reading, does not often find another anchorage. The contemplation of another haven has simply tempted him to drift out into the stream, and his position is always the point to which he happens to have drifted.

I have a strong conviction that a measure of true philosophy might have saved many such. If only they had raised Peter's question in time, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" they might have decided to remain, making their moorings more secure. In plain language, they might have made a choice which would indeed seem pitifully weak to a man of strong faith, but which could at least have started them on a firm foundation.

CHAPTER VIII

ATHEISM

A CERTAIN man, who was endowed with a liberal share of this world's goods, when caught in a particularly candid mood, once expressed his conviction that all men who think deeply on the subject of religion either become Christadelphians or atheists. It was a confession that there is no logical halting ground between "believing all things that Moses and the prophets did say should come", and the extreme of not believing anything.

In this instance, such a recognition of the clean-cut line did not bring the thinker on to our side. But, of course, there is always one serious consideration in favour of atheism. It requires a strong conviction to make a Christadelphian of a rich man; but if he has no convictions, he may become an atheist automatically. An atheist is a man "without God in the world". We cannot improve on that translation. He does

not necessarily proclaim that there is no God, he simply says, "I do not know of one"; probably with an unexpressed inclination in the direction of absolute negation.

There are many people who, even when their faith is weak, are quite confident that they never could reach this position of absolute atheism. To such it may come as a shock when we proclaim our full endorsement of the opinion expressed by the wealthy man. Yet, in attempting to give effect to our system, that every negation should be examined in the light of all that it implies; in attempting to make an application of Peter's question—"Lord, to whom shall we go?"—the present writer must confess an absolute endorsement of the opinion quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Then some will say, "But, of course, you do not mean actual atheism as the only possible alternative, you mean some form of agnosticism". I have to answer, I do mean absolute atheism as the next most logical position, if once we abandon the truth as we have learned it. Friends are shocked, and say, "But surely, that is unthinkable. You never could come to such a position". I answer, I sincerely hope not. It does indeed seem unthinkable, impossible, yet just such a position remains as the logical end of the rejection of simple faith.

In order to render the meaning of this statement quite clear, it may be well to have recourse again to illustration. Suppose, then, that three men visit a certain island, and, in exploring its surface, see some evidence of work having been performed there, suggestive of human effort. The first explorer is convinced that men have been there before them, and here are the remains of their activity. The second, profoundly impressed with the idea that there are evils in the island which would never have been tolerated by human inhabitants, proclaims that men have never visited the spot before. The third is inclined to agree with the estimate of the first. In course of time they examine more than the surface of the ground, and succeed in laying bare some extensive works of intelligent design. To the first explorer

this affords conclusive evidence that the island has been inhabited, and goes far to suggest the object of the people's labour. "Here", he says, "are works which are unmistakably of human origin, and we can in large measure perceive the object that authors had in view." "No", says the second explorer, "I am so convinced on other grounds, that men have never been here, that I refuse to believe that these works are of human origin." The third says, "I fully believe that men have been here, but I am inclined to think that these works, however suggestive of design they may be, are purely the outcome of chance, and men had nothing to do with their production".

It will readily be admitted that in this illustration, the third position is illogical to the point of absurdity. The man who denies the adequate cause must perforce find some other explanation of the wonderful effect ; and however much we despise his explanation, we must admit his consistency. But the man who admits the presence of an adequate cause, and then—out of mere caprice, apparently—refuses to recognize any connection between the cause and the effect, cannot surely command our respect.

Is this illustration a fair one ? Agnostics of all varieties—and there are very many in these days—will protest that it is not fair at all. But writing for those who know the Bible and understand the Hope of Israel, the question may be put with confidence. Is it not a fact that in the fundamental laws of the Universe, in the wonders of the earth on which we live, and in the existence of the human race, we have an accumulation of marvellous facts which require a great Cause to explain them ? If it is admitted in any case that God exists, would it not be capricious to the point of absurdity to say that He had nothing to do with the production of these wonders ? Is it not also a fact that there is evidence of the truth of the Bible, so strong in its entirety that it would be equally foolish for one who had ever once grasped it, to say, "God has had no hand in this, yet still I believe in God" ?

Doubtless, the difficulties experienced by many arise from the fact that they never have had a comprehensive grasp of the evidence. The force of the argument is cumulative, and if a man is unable to see more than one small section at a time he cannot realize the strength of the whole. In other simpler matters this principle is recognized. Even when you write a letter to a friend it is in measure illustrated. There may be thousands of men in the country bearing the same name, there may be thousands of men in the same town, there may be hundreds of Market Streets or High Streets in the country, each with many inhabitants. Yet when name, street, and town are put in combination, the letter goes unerringly to its destination. If the postal authorities were incapable of considering more than one item at a time they could not act. Whether they looked at name, street, or town, the address would be hopelessly inadequate.

The most extraordinary illustration, however, of this incapacity to take a comprehensive view is furnished in connection with the subject under consideration. An attempt has been made by some sceptics of influence and standing to answer a small section of Christian evidence, and in the effort to account for this minor part they have given an amazing exhibition of failure to understand the whole case. I refer to the suggestion that Jesus did not die as the result of crucifixion, but only swooned ; and that his recovery, on purely natural lines, gave the impression that he had risen from the dead, thus laying the foundation for that enthusiastic propaganda which turned the course of human history.

This sceptical suggestion, which is probably familiar to all readers, is to be welcomed, in that it brings us to close grips, and enables people to see the force of the argument better than when the enemy refuses to take up a position of any kind. It is at least an honest attempt to find a rationalistic explanation of one phase of the great miracle. The author or authors of the theory evidently recognized that in strict process of logic the fishermen of Galilee can be put into the witness box almost as if they were still living, and if we

refuse to credit their evidence that Jesus rose, it is only fair to determine whether they were lying in their testimony, or whether they were merely mistaken. No reasonable man would suggest that, in their testimony as to a fact so resented by those in authority, the disciples of Christ could wilfully tell falsehoods, so it only remains for the unbeliever to find some explanation of their strange mistake. Hence this curious suggestion that Jesus only swooned, and that his recovery imparted to his disciples the burning conviction that a miracle had been wrought on his behalf.

The suggestion is not very satisfying, even in the very limited sphere to which it can be made to apply. It would be very strange for a man to recover from such an ordeal after the Romans were satisfied that he was dead; very strange for him to escape from the tomb and appear before his disciples with enough vitality to convince them that God had raised him. And if we can concede the possibility of this happening, there would still be his mortal nature—with expectation of life shortened by his terrible ordeal—a drag on the very vitals of the new religion, and finally, when he died, a direct negation of its fundamental hope.

We might understand a man strongly prejudiced against all ideas of miracles accepting such a strained theory if the testimony of the fishermen of Galilee had been the only difficulty for him to deal with. But when we remember that this is only a small part of the case, and that after the ingenious sceptic has elaborated his single coincidence, he has to fit it in with a number of other converging lines of evidence which are not even touched by his theory, we can only marvel at the incurable tendency of so many people to see only an isolated fragment at a time.

The swoon theory makes no attempt to account for the conversion of the apostle Paul. In the epistle to the Galatians, and the first letter to the Corinthians, we have explicit claims that the writer is the apostle Paul, and that the well known story of his conversion is true. "Last of all Christ was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." "Ye have heard of

my conversation . . . how that I persecuted the church of Christ." "Now in the things that I write unto you" (the things concerning his miraculous conversion, and the fact that Christ was revealed to him), "behold, before God, I lie not."

We come into such close touch with the writer here that there is no middle position for us to take. Either he is an impostor telling lies, or he is the apostle Paul telling the truth, so far as he knows it. An acquaintance with the epistles is sufficient to rule the first suggestion out of court, as even the enemy will admit; and if it has to be conceded that this extraordinary writer had his convictions revolutionized so completely by the alleged fact that Jesus appeared to him, surely it is reasonable to ask the candid sceptic to suggest a possible explanation. The swoon theory does not attempt to meet the case here. If a seeker for truth accepts the swoon theory to account for the faith of the immediate disciples of Christ, some other coincidence must be invented to account for the conversion of Paul. An entirely new set of facts must be found to account for the many prophecies in the Jewish scriptures which bear upon the rejection and the resurrection of the Anointed; and finally he will need to stretch coincidence in a new field altogether if he attempts to explain away the argument for Christ's resurrection which may be drawn from the book of Revelation. The swoon theory is merely a clumsy attempt to deal with the least part of the whole case. The honest seeker might believe that one extraordinary coincidence came by chance to favour the uprise of Christianity; but can he believe that a dozen such chances chanced to converge? You might take the most intricate machine ever made by man, and if you looked at it in small enough sections at a time, you might conclude that each part might have been formed by chance. It is only when you consider the machine as a whole that the fact of design becomes quite certain. In the same way scepticism towards Christianity flourishes on the partial, sectional view. It is rooted out when we realize the cumulative force of evidence,

and with comprehensive view note the spot where all coincidences coincide.

But if men believe in the existence of God, why all this straining to prove that He has never shown His hand? Why seek out wild theories to resist the idea that God ever foretold the future to man, or ever raised a human being from the dead, if all along you recognize the existence of a God to whom such work would be easy?

If a man does not believe in God at all I can understand his resisting the thought that super-human intelligence has ever operated on human affairs. But if he admits the great Cause, it seems evidence of wicked perversity or deplorable blindness to refuse to recognize the obvious effect. The illustration of the explorer seems quite fair.

Those who have had patience to read so far will at least begin to see the idea which this fragmentary, wayside writing is striving to express. In another chapter there will be opportunity to carry the thoughts a stage further and show that the real difficulties men experience in the exercise of simple faith are atheistic difficulties, and that the crowd of doubters and drifters scattered in all parts away from the true anchorage of hope, have simply made an illogical compromise between the impossibility of their becoming atheists and their unwillingness to accept God as He really is.

CHAPTER IX

ATHEISTIC ARGUMENTS

PERHAPS it will be well to begin the present chapter by quoting the last words from the previous one :—

“There will be opportunity to carry the thoughts a stage further, and show that the real difficulties men experience in the exercise of faith are atheistic difficulties, and

that the crowd of doubters and drifters scattered in all parts away from the true anchorage of hope, have simply made an illogical compromise between the impossibility of their becoming atheists, and their unwillingness to accept God as He really is."

Everyone who has been at all observant of human controversies will recognize that men often make use of elaborate arguments which played no part in establishing conclusions. In public discussion, whether verbal or written, many points are introduced which may help to give the appearance of victory, but which to men of discernment carry no real weight. There is good reason for placing in this category the majority of the attempts to convict the Bible of inconsistency. Some charges of contradiction have been so obviously strained that they are clearly the effect of unbelief and not the cause. The attempt to prove inconsistency between the accounts in the four gospels as to the number of women who visited the sepulchre is a notorious instance. If I say that a certain man visited my house to-day, I do not contradict the statement of another that two men came, or of a third witness who declares that there were several visitors. It is quite evident that if anyone finds an accusation of inconsistency on such a case as this, it is merely an exhibition of unreasonable prejudice.

We need not be surprised that alleged contradictions should occupy a prominent place in the stock-in-trade of a professional sceptic. In the nature of things it is inevitable that even when there is a perfect answer to such accusations, the attack can be stated in fewer words than the answer. And a large number of alleged contradictions recklessly flung into a controversy regarding the authority of scripture, is sure to have some effect in giving that appearance of victory so ardently coveted by the lover of shallow polemics.

No well-informed student of scripture will deny that there are some real difficulties of this character, some of which we cannot fully explain ; but, was the contemplation of these apparent discrepancies ever the real cause of faith being

shattered? Surely the evidence is all the other way. Extended study finds the solution of so many problems, that the way is opened for a recognition of unknown factors which will bring apparent discord into harmony. In the false book the harmony is superficial, and the discord fundamental. In the Bible the apparent inconsistencies sometimes glare at us from the very surface, and then disappear as the result of extended study. Nature herself is full of apparent contradictions. Sometimes men readily find the explanation, sometimes with all their research they fail to discover the underlying cause of irregularity in her procedure. Yet they never doubt that such a cause is there.

When we remember the number of books included in the Bible, the period of time covered by its production and the processes through which it has come down to us, it is only common-sense and ordinary fairness to recognize the possibility that in some instances there are harmonizing facts of which we have no record. Many unbelievers have used apparent contradictions to justify their unbelief, many Christians have pondered over these things and asked for more light, but I cannot believe that these minor difficulties were ever the real cause of an opponent's scepticism, or of a brother's fall from grace.

There are other arguments, however, which continue to exercise a baneful influence on almost all people. They are the objections which are given the prominent place in all serious attacks on the Bible, and which have been the real difficulties in the way of simple faith in many cases where faith has faltered. They may be summarized in a single idea which has often found expression, thus: "Surely the God of love would never do or sanction such a deed as that". If the subject is fully examined, I believe there will be a general confession that this sentence is a concentration of the real essence of scepticism, and that the laboured attempts to convict the Bible of inconsistency in detail are the effect rather than the cause of unbelief.

Herein lies the explanation of the sentence with which we link the last chapter to the present one. Whenever these difficulties regarding the acts attributed to God in the Bible are thrown into the form of argument, it can easily be demonstrated that they are atheistic. In other words, either they prove too much or nothing at all.

If we wish to find an illustration of this principle in working, it will be as well to take it from the reasoning of ordinary people, and the lessons of current events. During the last month a controversy arose in one of the daily papers regarding the claims of the Bible and the right of human revision. After several correspondents had expressed their opinion, an opponent of simple faith wrote the following letter :

“ Mr. Metford points out that it is impertinent and awful to ‘ eliminate pages, chapters, even ’ of the Bible on any account.

“ There is, however, no doubt that at the present time the chief method of imparting the truth which it is claimed God has revealed in the Bible, consists in teaching selected passages from it (usually called Bible history) to unreasoning children, on whose minds they remain permanently impressed.

“ It is from this history children draw their first inferences of the life of man, of good and evil, and of God Himself. They learn how that, more than 6,000 years ago, God created the earth ; how He created animals, fishes, plants, and finally man. How Adam and Eve then partook of a certain fruit, and were consequently expelled from Paradise, and how they and their seed were cursed. Then, how God drowned Adam’s descendants (except Noah and his family, and certain animals who were with him in the ark). Then from the plagues and the murder of the first-born Egyptians, to the wholesale destruction of men, the execution of the priests by Elijah, and the tearing and eating of boys by two bears for laughing at Elisha, the whole history is a series

of miraculous occurrences and horrible cruelties committed by the Hebrew leaders.

“Surely elimination on account of ‘fashion’ would produce more satisfactory notions of the earth, the sky, of man and of God, than this selection of Bible history.”

Now it is quite evident that when a man has only a limited space to express his views on a very large subject, he is apt to state the heart of his position and not the unimportant details. Probably the writer of the foregoing letter imagined he had delivered a trenchant attack on the Bible without raising any difficulties in the way of his own position. In any case, there can be no doubt that he indicated clearly enough the line of argument which has carried the greatest weight with the vast majority of those who have ever felt the influence of sceptical thought.

A few days after the appearance of this letter, the papers contained an account of a terrible tragedy in Russia, a wedding party being chased by wolves and over fifty people being killed and devoured. For the purpose of the present argument it does not matter whether that account was entirely true or whether it was exaggerated. Such things have happened all through the history of mortality.

Here, then, is the point of this illustration drawn from current thought and current history. Some blasphemous sons of the prophets in the days when God’s power was made known on earth, mocked at the idea of Elijah being caught up by God, and told Elisha to “go up” also. Two bears out of the woods then became the instruments of a terrible retribution. The implication is that this was a providentially manipulated judgment. Our sceptical letter-writer, convinced that providence would never do any such thing, quotes the incident as a proof that the Bible is not true. Would he regard such a tragedy as that of the wedding party being devoured by wolves, as a proof that God does not exist?

Now it may be that many sceptics would immediately be up in arms against this line of reasoning. They would urge

that from their point of view the adventure with the wolves was simply a chance tragedy, that it was in no sense providential, and cannot be regarded as a retribution. In other words, the sufferers are not to be regarded as offenders against God. They were the victims not of divine wrath, but of an unfortunate chance, which brought unmerited disaster upon them. Probably this tragedy, and thousands of others like it, were simply the outcome of chance ; but does that lessen the difficulty ? In what facts can we find the cause of such horrifying carnage ? Simply in the facts that there are beasts of prey on earth, that sometimes, when weather conditions are severe, these monsters become especially active, and that sometimes human beings become the victims. Who made the wolves ? Who established the conditions ? The sceptical deist moves a step farther back. He says God did not make these creatures, but that they are the products of a natural evolution. Follow his argument back to the beginning, and ask how the many laws on which life depends had their origin ? How the heavens were first spread forth, and the worlds first given their appointed orbit ? How was the ordinance of day and night established, and the earth set at its appointed distance from the life-giving sun ? Who gave it this coating of air, and who first started life upon its surface ? Does the unbeliever think that all things, including the reasoning mind of man, have sprung of themselves from what was once a mass of fire ? Here generally the fleshly reasoner hastens to assure us that he holds no such idea. He admits the existence of a Creator. Darwin suggested that at a very remote period God started life upon this earth, and then left it to evolve in accordance with natural laws. But if that were so, can any man believe that God did not know what the results would be ? An ignorant savage may believe in an imperfect, limited God ; but surely the only possible philosophical conception of a creator is as the one supreme reality in the universe, all-powerful and all-knowing. In plain process of logic, the typical unbeliever must either be driven into absolute atheism, or else take back his choicest

arguments against the Bible. To our limited perceptions it may seem terrible that God should curse man for his sins, and that so many tragedies should be enacted during this period of selection and probation ; but surely it would be vastly more terrible if God had started life on earth, and then without a care for any of His creatures and without any final object in view, had left the earth to a million years of purposeless suffering.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY

THIS is an age of summaries. Writers often find that they have not time to elaborate their thought as they would like, and they may console themselves for necessary abbreviations by the reflection that modern readers lack the patience to read.

We will summarize the Philosophy of Faith so far as it has been unfolded, and attempt to point the practical lesson that it carries.

First with regard to the kind of language in which our convictions should be expressed. It has been noted that style of verbiage often lies much nearer the foundation of what is called philosophy than many people have supposed. That sometimes utterances which have been regarded as profoundly wise owe their entire reputation to the cloudiness of the language, and when reduced to solid meanings it is seen that the only elements of truth they contain are the shallowest of platitudes.

We raised a protest against the perversion of the arts, in the tendency to cultivate cloudiness of language, concurring with the effort to make music definite. Music should

be simply a language of emotions, words should be the vehicles of clear and definite thought.

We laid down as a fundamental proposition that Truth does not consist in negatives, and the sceptic who simply denies, is making a wholly indefensible effort to shirk his duty. Every negative has its corresponding positive, and a man who denies a proposition, cannot escape from the moral responsibility of saying what he would put in its place. If his knowledge is not sufficient for him to affirm, neither is it sufficient for him to deny. Every shade of negative has its equivalent on the positive side. This is so, even when we might be inclined to think that an exception had been discovered. Suppose some new and extraordinary phenomenon is brought to our notice, and a wildly improbable or absurd explanation of it is suggested. We may be quite unable to offer a more reasonable solution, and yet have no hesitation in rejecting the explanation given. At first sight then it would seem that here is a case where denial is justifiable, although we are not in a position to affirm. Closer investigation, however, will show that our rule still holds good. Our repudiation of the absurd explanation is based upon a latent conviction that some more adequate cause can be found, and when we begin to argue the case, if we are capable of stating any ground for our denial, we shall equally be able to suggest a more reasonable alternative.

Perhaps no better illustration of this could be found than in the change which has taken place in the attitude of men towards phenomena which by a former generation were attributed to evil spirits. Men are inclined now to repudiate such explanations of a new wonder, simply because their knowledge of Nature's resources has been so greatly enlarged. If it should be suggested that some new and inexplicable disaster was the work of evil spirits, men would now say, "No, far more likely to be a perfectly intelligible outcome of Nature's laws under circumstances not hitherto observed". Thus, with an increased capacity for affirmation has come an increased capacity for denial.

If a man is engaged in a discussion regarding first causes, and his only desire is to gain an apparent victory, he will do well to avoid the positive side as much as possible. If, however, he is simply discussing the matter in his own mind with a genuine desire to find the truth, he will remember the rule that his affirmations must be as strong as his denials.

It may seem that the description of creation in Genesis is not convincing. Can he condense any possible theory of the case into the same compass and make it sound better? It may seem that the idea of God intervening and producing man from the clay by a definite creative act is unscientific, but, with the popular understanding of that word, is it possible to account for existing things without being unscientific? Popular theories are not quite honest here. When the suggestion is put forth, "Let us deal only with the world as we know it, and with forces which are familiar", a strong claim is established in public favour. It seems so much more scientific to deal with such facts than to believe in a special creative work remote from our experience. But the near and familiar facts do not yield an explanation. They only provide men with a vast field of thought in which despite its familiar aspect one can easily get lost. As we pointed out in an earlier chapter, if all the most extravagant claims of Darwin were admitted, the difficulty of creation would only have been pushed a little further back. The evolution theory needs a very large postulate. In effect evolutionists say, "Let it be granted that matter and the various forces of Nature existed. Let it be granted that there was a world capable of sustaining life, and that life had appeared upon it. Let it be granted further that these living creatures were capable of reproducing their kind and were gifted with an almost infinite capacity for putting forth profitable variations, and then we can explain the evolution of mankind without looking to God". On similar lines we might say "Give us a fertile egg, and we will produce a chicken from it without further help from nature". But there is not much cause for boasting in this, for all we do is to keep the egg warm, and even this

simple task would have been performed far better by the hen.

If the man who objects to the Bible will accept the full responsibility of his negative attitude he will soon perceive that with our limited understanding difficulties are inevitable, but as we experience in all phases of life, those which are near and clear look most formidable. Human theories which attempt to explain the secret of the Universe only cover the difficulties with a flood of confused thought.

The truth of the matter is that life itself is beyond our understanding, and the original production of it on earth must have been equally marvellous. But men are accustomed to life as it is, and the forces of nature as they are, and with shallow reasoning they conclude that their search for a final cause must be bounded by the fragment of nature they have been able to observe. Then after all the assumptions, the strained arguments, and the cloudy language, they find if they look closely enough into the matter, that they have explained nothing at all.

Whether our faith and rule of life is a burning conviction amounting to a passion, or a cold product of logic which can only be converted into a living influence by hard labour, or a feeble opinion drawn from what seems to us the balance of probabilities—in any case let it be such as can take shape in clear thought and be expressed in clear language. The weak faith needs definite and vigorous thought to give it strength ; the cold conviction needs such exercise to give it warmth ; and even where faith amounts to a passion there must be clear thinking if it is to be durable. This fact was pointed and illustrated in the chapter on " Breadth of Basis". Passions are apt to exhaust themselves if they have no more solid basis than emotion. Sometimes, indeed, the men who despise the philosophy of faith are those who stand most in need of it.

Let us summarize conclusions, then, with a determination, above all things, to think clearly, to affirm as strongly as we deny, and to make our building solid as far as it goes.

We are absolutely satisfied that God exists and that the only possible conception of God is as the Uncreated Unity, the one great fact in existence. We realize that all the efforts of rationalism have not diminished the wonders of creation by a hair's breadth. They have only tended to make God seem far off, instead of near at hand, and have offered encouragement to men to shirk the real issue. Whatever trials faith may have to endure, we never can reach such a position as to affirm that all things, including our own power to reason, came by chance from a world of dead matter which chanced to exist.

Turning to the Bible we find that man's principal objection to it is that it is so far removed from what he would like. But we are living in a world which rudely repudiates man's ideals ; a world in which wolves may become the guests at a wedding breakfast ; a world in which brutality rules and man asserts his ascendancy with sword and rifle, not by moral force ; a world in which appalling tragedies occur every day, and chance spares not sex, nor age, nor beauty. Hardly anyone flies for refuge from their problems to the position of absolute atheism, and those who do present only a cowardly negative. Put the positive question, "Do you affirm that all things, including ourselves, have come by a series of chances?" and they falter and retrace their steps. "We can only suppose", the scientist says, "that God is so immeasurably great that He cannot be judged by human standards, and the death of a man is no more than the death of a worm." Why not express the thought in better language, ready framed for us?

"His ways are higher than our ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth." "All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity." And, to the petulance of baffled human reason, put the question, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding."

What folly to attack the Bible because it presents a view of God in harmony with nature !

I look round on the world of men with all its sin and suffering, and it seems to me, that apart from all revelation, some rudiments of truth would appear. The existence of an intelligence superior to ours can be assumed just as certainly as when we watch the meandering of a stream we know that it is supplied with water from a higher level than the glade through which it flows.

The sun shines through the pall of Yorkshire smoke today, and I can imagine myself carried away from city grime, back to one of those favourite Welsh solitudes, with scarcely a human being in sight. From an elevated position I look over an expanse of hill and valley, carpeted with grass and flowers, warmed by the sunshine and glowing with brilliant colours, and it seems to me unthinkable that such a world as this has come into being for no better purpose than to be the battle-ground of selfish flesh.

In this solitude, almost as well as in the midnight vision, one can realize the elementary truths of life, the marvels of brain and muscle, the familiar miracle of our being. And then, with the clear view of beautiful country added to the vision, could any reasonable man fail to raise the question, "For whom was this land of promise designed?" With such blend of evil and of good in the world, might not a man be led to the conclusion that God is angry, but that He is prepared to forgive? With some knowledge of history, might he not remember a thousand explanations of the wrath, while right before his eyes would be a thousand promises of mercy?

But if I were to see such promises in the face of nature, they would all stop short of giving satisfaction, for they offer no breath of personal hope. If I waited on the hills until night, with the blotting out of near objects and the opening up of distant worlds, there would only come a crushing sense of human littleness, and no hope of individual salvation. I might speculate on the possibility that in course of time a select race would be evolved, to enter upon this fair

inheritance with the blessings of peace and a fuller life. Only through revelation can I learn that the work of selection began long ago, that already thousands have been numbered in the Book of Life, and that it is possible for my name to be written there.

Scripture is in complete harmony with Nature, both in its frowns and its promises. It interprets the world to us, fills in the details, and gives us the message of personal hope. Its claims to be divine are more direct and understandable than those of Nature, and with the subject in heart and head, not merely with the book in our hands, it is possible to see a vision indeed. A line of evidence which would require a hundred thousand words to express, is before me in a single thought. It can be examined as a whole, and its full cumulative value be appreciated, as in our illustration of the addressed envelope.

The Jews, Christ, the Jews and Christ together ; direct testimony of honest men, testimony of prophecy, and history : Babylon and Tyre, Rome and Egypt ; the corrupt Church ; the heedless nations ; the awakening of Israel, and the clash of arms—these things are before me with all their combined force, and a thousand recollections of incidental Bible harmonies, intertwining with them : and as I look over a part of this fair earth I say, “ Here is the world interpreted to me, and a perfect harmony of ideas presented ”.

If I could believe that uninspired men chanced to produce the Bible, then I could believe that blind force chanced to produce the world. If I could refuse to believe in the Bible because it represents that God has sometimes used beasts of prey, or no less savage races of men, as the instruments of His vengeance, then I should also feel bound to believe that God could never allow such evils to prevail at all—and thus deny His very existence. There is no logical halting place between the position of the Christadelphian and that of the absolute atheist : no halting place for me between simple faith and utter folly.

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

It is not through the exercise of reason's powers that faith becomes weak or that those who have run well begin to stumble. It is through the cramping cares of life, or the search for pleasure, or perhaps even the narrowness of friends. And when believers grow weary, their drift from faith is nearly always with mere half-hearted negatives. The habit of self-examination with a continued insistence on the simple positives might have saved them.

Life itself is an affirmation.

When hearts do not beat, and lungs do not breathe, their day is over. And when we cease to have a positive belief by which to guide our lives, we might as well not live at all.

PART II

Prepare to Meet Thy God, O Israel

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY

THERE is sometimes a close analogy between the life of a man and the life of the community. It has frequently been observed by historians that a nation passes through periods of youth, maturity, and old age, and sometimes a nation follows the pattern of the individual from old age to decrepitude and death. A similar parallel can be traced between the spiritual development of a son of God and the experience of the ecclesias. Sometimes a believer passes from the first enthusiasm of youth into a middle age of indifference, and then with more rapid retrogression to a final death of faith ; and, beyond all doubt, there have been times when the truth has come to light, and flourished for a while in a Christian community, only to follow the same pathetic course.

If, on the other hand, we look on the more pleasing spectacle of a community holding fast to the faith and growing in grace, we can find the pattern of its proper development in the life of a faithful man. A faithful brother changes somewhat with advancing years. At first, full of enthusiasm for new found truth, strong in himself and anxious to convince others, he finds a certain zest and pleasure in the strain of controversy. He passes on into middle age, and his character is gradually moulded to a fuller and more finished shape. His enthusiasm is undiminished, but it burns with a steadier flame. He is more discreet, more subdued, more sympathetic, and he is drawn to recognize the immense significance of the many exhortations to "hold fast". Old age comes upon him, and there is still another change. The truth has a stronger hold on him than ever, because it appeals direct not only to the intellect but to the heart. He engages in controversy only

from a sense of duty, and with none of the zest of former years. He would like, if possible, to have a little quiet time for preparation, for he feels that he only just begins dimly to realize the greatness of God and the holiness of our calling.

I am impressed with the feeling that there is an analogy here between the life of a faithful man and the experience of the community in this latter-day manifestation of the truth. It seems to me that we have passed through two periods and entered upon a third, and these periods are associated in my mind with three scriptural exhortations.

The first speaks in an incisive, severe tone which must arouse those who hear, whether it induces repentance or resentment, and it bids us turn from vain idols to serve the living God and to wait for His Son from heaven. The second is equally stern and uncompromising, and it bids those who have repented to hold fast the form of sound words. The third in a gentler tone addresses those who have held fast, and says, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel".

It would be foolish to raise the question which is most important of these three ideas. There can be no graded degrees of value when all are absolutely essential. We might as well speculate on whether a man could best dispense with brain, heart or lungs. These three exhortations can be expressed in single words—Repent, Endure, Prepare; and they are all equally important because they are all vital. Apart from the first the later processes are impossible; apart from the later developments the original repentance is useless.

Of what use would it be for a man to repent and turn to the worship of God if he could not hold fast to the truth he had accepted? Of what use to hold fast merely if he did not allow the truth to have its proper effect in preparing him for the future? It may be suggested that repentance, in its fullest sense, implies a completed life of faithful service, and that preparation implies a previous repentance, and that we therefore need not insist on the three words as if they marked three distinct stages in the working out of our salvation. There is

reason for this division, however, and it is amply justified by the experiences of life. There have been some who have repented with all sincerity, but have not endured; and there are others who have endured, but have not prepared. The Lord Jesus indicated these classes in his parable of the sower. There are some who receive the word with all gladness, but having no root in themselves, wither away after the type of the grain sown in stony places; and there are others who endure and grow up to maturity, but, choked by the cares of this world, bring forth no fruit to perfection. There is reason, then, for insisting on the three necessary processes expressed by these words—Repent, Endure, Prepare.

But, although these ideas are of equal importance inasmuch as they are all essential, there are times when one may seem to require more attention than the others, just as there are times in the life of a man when more seems to depend on one of the vital organs than on the other two. When there was no community of believers in existence the pioneers of the truth's revival in the latter days might well concentrate their whole attention on the work of calling men to repentance. When a community was formed, but assailed by various new suggestions and disturbing theories, when men arose who would make a whole symphony out of a single crotchet, or on the destructive side would pull down an entire building in order that their names might be inscribed on the foundation stones, there was reason for faithful brethren to concentrate their energies on the word Endure, and constantly enforce the exhortation to hold fast.

But now, are there not grounds for giving more attention to the word Prepare? A considerable number of men and women serve the true God, and wait for His Son from heaven. We do not know when the day of the Lord will be, but all signs indicate that it is drawing near; and with events transpiring which incontestably fulfil some Bible predictions concerning the latter days, we can discern an especial significance in the words addressed to the Hebrews: "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works,

not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is ; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."

These words seem especially applicable to the present day, and they put the emphasis on the last stage in the working out of our salvation. This idea does not suggest that there should be a slackening of labours in other directions. Until we are called away to meet the Lord we must continue to advertise the invitation God has issued. Nor do we imply that there has been any failure of good exhortations in the past, for some of the most inspiring words were written when there were very few to pay heed to them. But now that we see the day approaching we seem to be required in a special sense to exhort each other. Not only must we be united in the work of instructing others, not only firm in the determination to hold fast to sound words, but above all we must be whole-hearted in the higher work of "strengthening the things which remain", exhorting one another, provoking to love and good works, and doing all in our power to realize the idea expressed in the words : "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

By more careful reading of the Word, by examining ourselves, by giving more heed to faithful exhortations, by allowing the first principles of the oracles of God to be carried to their legitimate conclusion—in all these ways we may prepare ourselves for the great position to which God has called us.

Experts in physical culture tell us that the success of any effort to develop the body depends largely upon the concentration of the mind. Not only must we engage in certain exercises, but we must perform them with a conscious direction towards a certain end, and a whole-hearted determination that they shall accomplish the results for which they are designed. If this is so in matters pertaining to the body, how much more will the rule apply in the development of the mind? All the work of the truth provides mental and moral exercise, even the most elementary labour of pro-

claiming first principles. We may go further than this, and say that such exercise is provided by all the experiences of life down to the most trivial trials of home, office, or factory. But unless the mind is properly directed, the lessons pass unheeded. The trials of everyday life may simply irritate instead of engendering patience, the work of the truth may be perfunctory, and some of the grandest and most profound of Bible teaching may be accepted merely as a matter of cold, logical demonstration, instead of it being the warm and glowing foundation of a living faith.

If we see the Day of Christ approaching, and feel the necessity of exhorting each other more than ever, if we feel that in these latter days the most important work of all is to clear away the thorns of worldly care which are preventing the production of perfect fruit, and so increase the yield in the day of harvest, we need not attempt to seek out anything new. The teaching required is ready to hand, and all that is needed is a new emphasis.

CHAPTER II

THE POWER OF BELIEF

THE actions of a man may be very inferior to his beliefs, but they will never be superior. Righteous conduct is simply right doctrine in practice. The theory of right is the foundation, and the practice of it is the superstructure ; and while it is possible to have a useless, bare foundation without the building, it is not possible to have the building without the foundation. A man may do good without being religious ; he may have no definite end, and no conscious recognition of God ; but he must have some idea of good and

evil as a foundation for his actions. Thus, while the Creator is not acknowledged, there is still some appreciation of law which came from Him.

We frequently hear men say that they do not attach much importance to doctrine ; they concentrate attention on the living of a good life. Such a sentiment only emanates from a very shallow brain. It is as if a child should enter a garden, and seeing the gardener planting bulbs, should say, " I do not care for those ugly bulbs, I like the beautiful flowers". The living of a good life without a foundation of good doctrine is impossible, just as it is impossible to grow flowers without roots. In every case of intelligent action the thought must precede the deed, and thus sound doctrine is the foundation of sound morality.

When we draw attention to this obvious fact our shallow friends sometimes say, " But the doctrines we condemn are those controversial questions of belief which do not affect our actions. We say, Concentrate attention on those great principles of morality which are recognized by all men".

In plain language this means " Conform to the age in which you live " ; and it puts a check on all progress. What great principles are recognized by all men ? There are men living now who think that the greatest virtue is animal courage, and the greatest achievement to fight and slay. Our ancestors practised a " morality " of this kind, and if a higher standard is recognized in this country now it is because of doctrine introduced to us from outside. In some parts of the world there are men living who have a lower standard even than this appreciation of mere animal pugnacity. According to the recent testimony of a well-known journal there are tribes in Northern India where thieving is inculcated as a primary virtue, while a treacherous style of fighting is regarded as a recreation. If such people are ever induced to give up their murderous and predatory practices it will be because they are in certain measure made to understand doctrine. When our shallow friends are thus closely followed they sometimes explain that there are some

foundation principles the observance of which will show the most excellent results in the social life of man : sobriety, honesty, chastity, gentleness, or, in one word, love. There are other doctrines which whether true or false, have no obvious bearing on the welfare of humanity. Be convinced that other men are your fellow-creatures, and have equal rights with you, and your attitude towards them will be affected. Be convinced that all men are mortal, and the Platonic doctrine a fiction, and what difference will it make to your life ? Obey the command of Christ to do unto others as ye would that they should do to you, and you will bless mankind and make the world better for your presence. Obey the command to be baptized, and whom will you benefit ?

Such questions put the issue very tersely, and admit of a terse reply. Every important doctrine can be placed under one of two headings : as affecting our attitude towards God, or towards man. It is only reasonable that this should be the case, since the foundation of all morality is of the same two-fold character. The Lord Jesus said that all the Law and the Prophets depended upon the two fundamental precepts of the law of love : " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart", " Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". All sound doctrine is simply elaboration of these principles, and, consequently, every important precept can be placed under one of these two headings. Shallow critics sometimes point to some excellent moral precepts of pagan teachers, and suggest that the fact of sound doctrine emanating from such a source militates against the truth of Christianity. It is a very narrow method of reasoning. Jesus never claimed to invent or discover truth. He claimed to be the embodiment of eternal truth. He came neither to invent nor to destroy, but to fulfil. According to the Bible, it is clear that the ancestors of all men living were taught of God, and we cannot doubt that the law of love was the foundation of the earliest instruction given. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that some of this teaching has survived ; the wonder is, rather, that any man should have completely forgotten it.

If we look at the matter more closely we shall readily understand why the first precept of the law of love should be forgotten sooner than the second. The evil results attending a violation of the second law are immediately apparent. It is hardly possible for society to hold together at all without at least some faint recognition of neighbourly love. By love and co-operation how much may be produced? By hatred and competition how much can be destroyed? Any pagan philosopher might see this truth, and when it comes to us with the force of an authoritative command any man of intelligence will endorse its excellence. Individual selfishness often violates the law, and society falls far short of the ideal; nevertheless the beauty of the ideal is admitted, and reformers urge men to follow it.

It is far different with the first and greater law of love. The evil consequences of neglect are not so immediately apparent, and men may forget in a single generation. This great law, to love God with all the heart, was repeatedly impressed upon the Israelites and as often forgotten. We need not be surprised to find that Gentiles have been equally remiss. Any general rule of human conduct which will be beneficial to others will be equally good for us. Even a far-seeing selfishness might bid men put a check on their natural greed. The selfish desire to safeguard their own persons and property might induce them to inculcate principles of justice and respect for the rights of others. But the more abstract question of love for God does not come home to us in the same practical way.

Our religious instincts may be satisfied by a form of worship of our own devising. Human sentiment is easily suited, and unless men bring reason to bear upon the issue, they will be content to give no practical manifestation of love for God except in so far as it is expressed by their attitude towards each other. Some openly contend that this is all that is needed, but surely no one claiming to be a Christian can take such a narrow view of human responsibilities. Two precepts of the law of love were given; Jesus quotes two; and if

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

one should be esteemed greater than the other, surely the place of honour must be given to the first. A little consideration will show that this is infallibly true. The first command, to love the Lord with all the heart, includes all other commands. No sin can be named which does not violate this fundamental law. It is not only broken by sinful acts, it is transgressed even by the thought of evil, for if vain or evil thoughts find places in our minds the love of God is in that measure banished. The apostle John uses very uncompromising language on this point. He declares that a man who professes love for God while hating his brother man, is a liar. But while it is not possible for men to love God and hate their neighbours, it is quite possible for them to love their neighbours and hate God. To love God with all the heart is the first command, and all other laws are simply elaborations and explanations of this. To love our neighbour is an important part, but it is not the whole. Men seeing that love for humanity is one way of expressing love for God, have deceived themselves as to the state of their feelings. With a childish narrowness of view they have judged everything by its apparent value to humanity, and perceiving that love for God requires good fellowship among themselves, have supposed that their love and obedience is sufficiently expressed if they observe those items of divine law from the observance of which they themselves will benefit. Hence they give heed to those doctrines and commands which affect our attitude towards each other, and neglect those which only affect our attitude towards God.

It is almost disconcerting to find professors of Christianity openly advocating such an attitude. A few weeks ago, chance threw me into contact with a clergyman, and in the course of conversation, I suggested that one of the greatest faults of the present age was that men presumed to pick and choose between divine laws, only heeding those commands which were obviously beneficial to humanity. He replied that those were the important laws, and that an agnostic or atheistic socialist, who loved his fellows, was a better man

than a professor of Christianity who did not. I agreed that an honest man was always better than a hypocrite, but pointed out that to be Christian meant to love and obey Christ in all things, and not simply to obey him when his commands accorded with the obvious interests of humanity. I cited baptism as a case in point, where men had presumed to change the ordinances of God to suit their tastes and convenience. Surely such matters of simple obedience were pre-eminently the tests of our Christianity. The clergyman made no attempt to defend the attitude of Christendom towards baptism, but he expressed himself as very much surprised that I should speak of such minor points as constituting a pre-eminent test. Surely I did not mean that.

I replied that I could not regard them as minor points, and I certainly meant to use the word pre-eminent. The illustrations he had cited proved the point. Our love for mankind did not prove our love for God, since similar love was manifested by an atheistic blasphemer ; and if men only observed those divine commands which accorded with human judgment, and repudiated those which were of no obvious benefit to society, it proved that their good fellowship had a merely human foundation, and did not manifest love for God. He then suggested that in the matter of baptism, obedience would seem to have more of a selfish element in it than in the case of service rendered to our neighbours ; for we should help our neighbours for their sake, while we should be baptized to secure salvation for ourselves. I replied that even taking the matter at his estimate, we are still helping our neighbours by doing right ourselves, and on a higher plane of action. The good things of this world go by competition, and the success of one man deposes another ; but in spiritual things it is different. We help others by helping ourselves, and there is no destructive competition. I should prefer, however, to look at the matter from a higher standpoint, and to regard baptism as a simple expression of loving obedience. A Christian should unhesitatingly place God first and obey

His laws because they are His laws, and not simply because they are convenient and helpful to human society.

It was an interesting point, and might have kept us up all night if we had pursued it. But what a mere scratching of the surface! What a tremendous issue for two mortals to discuss in an evening's chat! And what a huge mass of material was pressing in the background! This question touches the foundation cause of God's controversy with mankind from the transgression of Eden to the end of mortality: God must come first with all those who approach Him. There must be no interference of human convenience, no offering of strange fire before the Lord. Men speak in these days of their advanced views, and think they are drawing nearer to Christ because they have learned from him some simple lessons in political economy. They ignore those of his commands which offer no obvious profit for the life that now is. A reputed minister of religion will thus compromise with a blaspheming Socialist, and say, "We agree on the most important points, since we should both like to see the hungry fed". They only disagree on the question of whether it is right to worship God or curse Him! What kind of worship is it which can regard such a difference as immaterial? God is just, and men who concentrate their attention on the service of humanity by no means lose their reward. The affairs of temporal life engross their attention, and the affairs of temporal life will be their portion.

If we desire to help each other on a higher plane than this and prepare to meet our God, we must not pick and choose from among the commands and doctrines of the Bible. In order to escape the contagion of infidelity it may be necessary to give most attention to that which is most despised, and bring reason to bear most closely on those doctrines which are most unpopular. Closer examination will make it increasingly evident that all the first principles of the truth perform a part in the ordering of our lives, and in the great work of preparation. The reason that some of these doctrines have been regarded as unimportant and far

removed from moral precept is simply because they affect our attitude towards God and not towards man. And in all generations the first great law has been the first to be forgotten.

CHAPTER III

THE FOUNDATION OF MORALITY

THE influence of human philosophy must be numbered among the thorns which sometimes choke the Word and prevent our final preparation for the kingdom of God. It is always difficult to resist fashions, whether in clothes or theology, and when we think we are quite unmoved by the stream, it often only means that we are lagging a little way behind.

The error mentioned in our last chapter—the tendency to ignore any of God's commands which offer no obvious benefit to humanity, is indeed nothing new. It is as old as the human race. This generation is, however, giving it a new emphasis, and there is perhaps some danger that we may be unconsciously influenced to go at least part of the way with polite and cultured serpents.

Surely there was never an age when commands which do not appeal to human reason were rejected so openly as at the present. Ministers of religion congratulate themselves on the "triumph of common sense over the bondage of form and custom". They rejoice to see that attention is being concentrated on the service of humanity, and that the mind of man is shaking itself free from the shackles of laws and statutes. The gulf between the church and unbelief is being bridged so rapidly, that perhaps, before long, confession of faith in the Bible will be the surest sign of heresy, while the question of

right and wrong will be determined solely by the fashion of the age.

With loose ideas expressed so freely, it becomes necessary to examine foundations, and to make sure that thorns are torn up by the roots.

If a man denies the existence of God, he cannot logically contend that it is possible for human beings to sin. If he admits the Creator into his philosophy, but not divine revelation, he is in a very similar difficulty. There are very few men, however, who dare to accept this logical conclusion, and most deniers of God will argue for a code of morals. Many who admit the existence of the Creator, and simply repudiate revelation, seem to be unaware that their position is attended with difficulty. They cling to a portion of the law God has given to man, and fail to perceive that they have stripped it of all authority.

Sir Oliver Lodge, who expresses these modern ideas as well as any man, has delivered an opinion on the matter of free will and sin. He pointed out that reasoning power and intellect upheld volition and capacity to choose between one course and another. In exactly such proportion as men were free to do good, they necessarily were also free to reject it, and when they knew what was right, and deliberately chose that which was evil, they committed sin.

All this is very true, and, we may add, very elementary. But for those who repudiate revelation the question arises—What is right? What is the standard of good and evil? Any reply to these questions would probably simply be a re-echo of the second great law of love. It is right to act with due regard for the well-being of our neighbours, and arising out of this law, on the negative side, it is wrong to kill, or to steal, or to bear false witness.

But, we may ask, is it always wrong to kill and steal? Or are men at liberty to determine for themselves whether killing is sinful or virtuous? Is it wrong to kill a neighbour in our own country, but right to build huge engines of destruction to

slay neighbours across the Channel? Does the law of love end with men of our own nation, or with men of our own colour, or with the human race as a whole, or does it extend to all living creatures? When is it wrong to steal and kill, and how do we know that it is wrong at all?

Perhaps this last question would raise a storm of protest in some quarters. It is so obvious that robbery and murder are wrong, that we ought not to raise such a question. The point of the question lies in the fact that there are so many other obvious truths completely ignored, and it is only by penetrating to the hidden foundations that we can ascertain how much of the original plan of the building has been abandoned. I would like to force this issue on the minds of all who are capable of exercising their reason. When a modern thinker accepts the doctrine of evolution and repudiates revelation, how can he give us an authoritative moral code?

He believes that the human race has come into existence by a long process of evolution, in which natural selection has played the principal part. More creatures have been born than could survive; this has led to a struggle for existence, and survival of those most suited to their environment. Sometimes the strong have killed the weak in actual conflict, sometimes the determining factor has been a scarcity of food, sometimes the struggle has been to find a mate. In all cases, those best equipped by nature have triumphed over the unfit. The strong have taken more of the good things of life than they needed and the weak have been deprived of the very means of life. In other words, according to this theory, the human race has been produced by a law of killing and stealing, and development to a higher standard still depends upon the continuation of these principles.

Darwin, more consistent than many of his followers, openly maintained that it would be a mistake for charity and human pity to interfere too much with the law of struggle which sends the weakest to the wall. Other scientists have raised the same point as a serious objection to Socialism, and

the authority of these critics was sufficient to provoke a reply from one of the latest dreamers of Utopia. Mr. H. G. Wells, in his book, *New Worlds for Old* (published 1908), devotes several pages to this objection. Mr. Wells apparently accepts the evolution theory as a demonstrated fact, and in answering this particular criticism he speaks of it as "the difficulty of the mind that realizes clearly the nature of the biological process". Yet his reply is tantamount to a denial of the first principles of Darwinism.

He points out that natural selection can only preserve those most capable of surviving, and not the fittest from any moral or æsthetic point of view. He then quotes statistics to show that the finest children are produced in periods of low infant mortality ; and when the struggle for life is sufficiently severe to kill the weak, it will also tend to weaken the strong. It is a most interesting admission to those who have given any attention to the teachings of Darwin and his followers, but it certainly shows a lack of harmony between their scientific conceptions and the first principles of morality.

The matter can be pressed rather more closely than this. If a man says that God has given us no revelation of His will, and that nature is the only guide we have, he surely should be punctilious in his observance of those few matters in which nature gives us an obvious rule of life. Man has discovered some vices which are palpably unnatural. Those vices must be repudiated if a rejector of God is to have a moral code at all. If those vices are avoided and men live natural lives, they will be healthy and they will increase in number.

Individual childlessness may simply indicate individual misfortune ; but national childlessness is a sure sign of national degeneration. There is probably not a doctor, or philosopher, or statesman in all the world who would deny this proposition. The rate of increase will vary according to the conditions of life ; but when human beings are most healthy and leading the most natural lives, then they will multiply the quickest.

This question of increasing population presents a problem in connection with both the past and future. It has been proved that all that can be ascertained regarding the probable rate of human increase, favours the Bible representation of the case. Many people are somewhat startled when their attention is first drawn to the evidence of figures. At first sight one would think that it would be difficult to account for the present population of the world at anything like the usual rate of increase. In the controversies of some years ago it was shown that if the human race had doubled itself but once in one hundred years, and this rate of progress had been sustained from the days of Noah until now, the eight people who came out of the ark would now be represented by a family many times greater than the present population of the world.

When there was abundance of food, and conditions of life were healthy, the increase of population would be much more rapid than this ; at other times checks would intervene and thus reduce the average. After making an ample allowance for warfare, pestilence, and all causes of destruction, however, the present population of the world is quite consistent with the Bible record, and, on the face of it at least, glaringly out of harmony with the views of Gentile philosophers.

What is the answer of those who claim that our ancestors were on the earth hundreds of thousands of years ago ? They reply at once that the struggle for existence was very much keener than we suppose, and whenever a country became so thickly peopled as to make food scarce, a devastating war would follow, and the weaker tribes would be driven from their lands or exterminated. In other words, according to this view of the case, men have been on the earth so long, that apart from special checks the population at the present time would have been a million times greater than it is, and life could not have been supported. This disaster, however, has been prevented by a long course of killing and stealing, growing more severe when competition was keener. It seems

rather strange for people who hold this view to claim that they derive a humanitarian moral code from the teaching of nature !

The case, however, presents even greater difficulties than this. The man who denies that God has ever interfered with human affairs in the past, repudiates the idea that the future of the earth will be subject to divine control. If, then, men live healthy, natural lives, and the population of the earth is doubled, say every two centuries, what prospect does the future offer ? In another three thousand years there would be about fifty billion people in the world, and if we extended the calculation to such periods as are contemplated by scientists the figures produced would be utterly appalling.

But even this fails to express the whole difficulty. All scientists seem to agree that the earth cannot be expected to sustain life for ever. Some think that the power of the sun will eventually fail, and after restricting the area of possible life more and more to the equator, will at last cut it off altogether. A recently expressed idea—probably based on observations of Mars—is that the water supply of the earth will fail before the sun loses its power, and living creatures will perish from thirst. In the one case there would be a last frantic struggle for warm lands ; in the other case, for well-watered lands.

In what part of nature do the advocates of such theories find the commands : Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, or thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ? Amidst all the confusion of tongues in the world there is nothing more grotesquely illogical than the attitude of the atheistic evolutionist who poses as a humanitarian, and teaches the universal brotherhood of man. If men and beasts come from a common ancestry how can it be proved wrong to make slaves of negroes, but right to make slaves of horses ? If the law of nature is the law of battle how can it be proved wrong to kill and steal ? If human life and human propagation are to go on for ever, how can humanitarian principles be

sustained? Nations grow too large for their homelands and they seize some of the fairest spots of earth for further development. The aborigines resent the intrusion and are slain or subdued. Great nations grow, and encroach upon each other's borders, their interests clash and their animosities are aroused. They perhaps avoid the horrors of war as long as they can, not because they think it is wrong to take the sword, but because they know it is painful. The strain grows greater until at last one side perceives a favourable opportunity, offering almost a certainty of success. Then the blow is struck and with a frenzy of patriotic enthusiasm, they kill and steal.

The heart of the Socialist is often better than his head. There is something within man which rebels against this conclusion, but it cannot be resisted. If God had never given a revelation of His will to man there would be no standard of right and wrong, except the standard of human fashion; and if the atheistic conception of the past and future of the earth were correct, even the most elementary principles of human righteousness would be at last impracticable. Nature would be the lawgiver, and nature would say, "Thou shalt kill and steal, or thou shalt quickly perish from off the land".

Perhaps there are some earnest people in these days who would feel shocked at this exposition. One might say, "I have frowned on the poor man who steals pheasants from a landowner's preserves, and I have shouted with enthusiasm when the army of my country went forth to seize the land of an enemy. Is it, after all, a matter of fashion? Is there no real standard of right and wrong?"

Yes, there is a standard; so simple and complete that the only marvel is that it can be so neglected. All things everywhere belong to God, and sin is, as the Bible defines it, "the transgression of the law". When God says, "Thou shalt not kill", it is wrong to kill; if He says, "Slay, and spare not", it is wrong to save alive. If God tells His servants to seize property which is in the possession of others, it is not

stealing, though the world might so call it. It is simply a redistribution of His own property. The commands of Christ would not be practicable if applied to an everlasting world of multiplying mortals ; but they are practicable for his friends who for a "little while" must endure a soul-refining probation.

To "fear God and keep his commandments", is "the whole duty of man", and in that idea we have the foundation of all morality and all good. It is so simple that it seems almost an insult to human intelligence to labour the point, yet it has been so much neglected that even advocates of Christianity have followed secularists in trying to find another foundation for a more limited moral code, and the only other basis they can find is human fashion. If we desired to prepare to meet our fellow man, human fashion would be the best guide, but if we desire to prepare for that far higher society which will only admit those who are made partakers of the divine nature, our foundation must be the law of God.

Our repudiation of mere human standards will lead to some conclusions far removed from human philosophy, startling to those who do not understand, and perhaps not quite realized by many who have learned the first principles of the oracles of God. And perhaps a clear statement of these conclusions may be interesting even to those who have for long realized them, and who have helped the present writer to a perception of the truth.

CHAPTER IV DEGREES OF GUILT

IT is usual to judge the heinousness of a sin solely with reference to its effect on humanity.

Even those who have grasped the principle that sin is the transgression of God's law, almost always fall into the

error of supposing that the worst sin must be the one which most harms our neighbours ; and from this assumption it is not a very long step to an attitude of toleration or indifference towards all sins which do not appear harmful to anyone.

This might be reasonable in the case of nations God has not known. When such nations have been so wicked as to evoke a special act of divine retribution, their cup of iniquity has been filled with sins which were not only dishonouring to the Creator, but also obviously harmful and degrading to human society. In such cases, perhaps the ordinary human method of assessment is not far wrong.

When people claim to be servants of God, however, they must employ a higher standard. It is true that some sins are more serious than others, but the comparison must not be made by reference simply to the well-being of humanity. There are some transgressions for which God has in a special sense expressed His abhorrence, and which may therefore be regarded as exceptionally offensive. Apart from this, the depth of a man's guilt is determined, not by reference to the degree of harm he does to other men, but by the degree of deliberateness with which the law is violated. In other words, sins of presumption are always worse than "sins of infirmity".

All reasonable people will see the truth of this proposition when it is expounded, although they often lose sight of it. It is perhaps seen most clearly on a lower plane of action. It is recognized by almost everyone that children should obey their parents, and that when this rule is not observed domestic life assumes a very ugly shape. All reflective minds will perceive that when punishment for disobedience is administered, it should be meted out in relation solely to the disobedience and not be affected by the chance effects of transgression.

Nothing could be more demoralizing than for children to be taught that disobedience did not signify so long as no evident harm was done. Yet how often we see parents taking a course which will inevitably give this impression. A child is perhaps meddling with some ornaments which should not

be touched. The mother commands him to leave them alone, and come away. The mandate has to be repeated several times, perhaps with threats, and it may be that in the end obedience is only secured by some kind of bribe. The child is not punished, though richly deserving. But now, on the other hand, suppose that, without any deliberate disobedience of this nature, the child, turning to come away at the first command, chances to break one of the most precious of the ornaments. The parent becomes a perfect fury, and the erring child is punished with the utmost severity.

Doubtless we have all seen such exhibitions of incompetence and lack of self-control on the part of ignorant and undisciplined people, and doubtless we can all agree that it is most deplorable. The child should not be punished for an accident, but should be taught that prompt obedience is the first virtue, and deliberate disobedience is a deadly sin, whether ornaments are broken or not.

This illustration is worthy of attentive consideration, for it is probable that for every ten people who can perceive the true bearings of this law in the matter of obedience to human parents, only one can see it in reference to the laws of God. There is such a deeply ingrained tendency to judge all things from the point of view of humanity—to lay the whole emphasis on the second of the two fundamental laws of love—that it required a great effort to break away from the tradition.

Yet the attitude of such people is only a shade less narrow-minded than that of the undisciplined mother they condemn. She takes no notice of the mere act of disobedience because the evil result is not immediately apparent. The broken ornament, on the other hand, was of value, and will cost money to replace.

Many modern theologians reason in a similar narrow groove. The neglect of the Bible, the rejection of such an ordinance as baptism, produces no immediate and evident harm to humanity ; but to kill or steal does. Wherefore they condone the offences analogous to the deliberate disobedience

of the child, and only condemn those analogous to the breaking of an ornament.

A little deeper reasoning would in each case lead to the conclusion that the act of disobedience is the sin, and not the accidental results which may accrue ; and although in some cases disobedience may not be productive of immediate and obvious harm to humanity, a terrible retribution comes at last. In the one case we have the hateful spectacle of an unruly, selfish, worthless family ; in the other case, a godless, worthless race. Sin is the transgression of God's law ; and the more deliberate the disobedience, the more serious the sin.

The full apprehension of this fact will explain much in the Bible that has been a cause of stumbling. The Israelites complained that the way of the Lord was not equal, and many modern critics have re-echoed the charge. Thus they have pointed out that David, who committed a sin of the blackest character, was not only forgiven, but was permitted to retain the kingdom, and is even held up as an example. In earlier times Achan, and all confederates with him, were stoned for an offence which did harm to no one ; while still earlier a man was stoned, at the express command of the Lord, simply because he went out gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.

The man who reasons according to the flesh sees inequality in this. He points out that David, in spite of his great possessions and his privileges, became a robber, an adulterer, and almost a murderer, yet he is held up as an example. Achan's offence was to save some treasure which should have been destroyed and he did no harm to any man : yet he was not given a chance of repentance. As for the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day, the modern critic is shocked at the idea of such an act being punished with death. What possible harm could it do to gather a few sticks ? No man would be any the worse for it, society was not menaced, no one was wronged. Why this strange disparity, this severity towards a trifling error and leniency towards an atrocious crime ?

Such questions indicate that the critics are imbued with something of the perversity that caused the offences in question. In effect they say, "We are human beings. The world was made for human beings. Where is the harm in doing anything which is no detriment to our fellows? What is the good of doing anything which is of no benefit to anyone?"

One who has grasped the elementary principles already enunciated will immediately see the answer to the apparent paradox. They will make no attempt to justify David, whose sin was as black as the Bible describes it, but they will recognize that his sin was distinctly one arising from the weakness of the flesh, and not from a deliberate intention to flout the law of God. It was otherwise with the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day. A strict command to hallow the Sabbath, and do no manner of servile work on that day, had just been given. There was no temptation to break the law in this manner. The offender could not possibly plead that he was assailed by a great temptation to gather sticks, and in a moment of weakness succumbed. The same may be said, with very little qualification, regarding the sin of Achan. There may have been some temptation to save a goodly garment, or to appropriate for himself some of the silver and gold; but it was such temptation as would not be felt at all by a man who had the fear of God before his eyes; and in view of the fact that a special command had been given regarding this particular occasion, the transgression was tantamount to a deliberate despising of the law. The distinction is between sins which arise from the weakness of the flesh and sins which arise from the perversity of the spirit. When the spirit is willing, and the heart is inclined to God, much of the weakness of the flesh may be forgiven; but when the spirit is perverse, and the heart rebels against God, how can it be possible for the great breach to be healed?

The enunciation of this principle should provide much material for serious thought, and induce men to ask themselves whether they are paying heed to all divine laws simply because of their duty to the Creator or whether they pick and

choose according to the dictates of human fashion. Unfortunately reflections on these elementary principles often take another form. A man will sometimes say to himself—indeed we have heard it openly suggested—that as David was forgiven his sin, and it is evident that God makes much allowance for human weakness, surely we in these days shall be excused for doing such and such things.

These fleshly reasoners fail to perceive that by the very fact of their indulging such reflections they move the transgression of fleshly weakness into the category of deliberate despising of God's law. If David, previous to his transgression, had deliberately reasoned the matter out and concluded that since God had shown mercy in other cases, it might be worth while to undertake the risk of sinning, we should never have heard of him as an example of rectitude. In all probability he would have been treated with the severity shown to other despisers and wilful transgressors of the law.

When a sin has been committed, and the transgressor, with a repentant humility, pleads for pardon, it is doubtless comforting to know that other servants of God have sinned and have been forgiven ; but all our efforts must be to shape our lives in accordance with the commands and examples held up for our guidance, and to avoid the stumbling stones over which others have fallen. If a man reverses this process and is encouraged to do evil by the contemplation of great offences which have been forgiven, he becomes a perverse despiser of that which is good, and can no longer plead the weakness of the flesh. Let him set his face like a flint to do the will of God ; let him strive to keep his body under and bring it into subjection, and after all his effort he will stand in very much need of forgiveness.

There is, however, no need to labour this point here. We desire not to find how little we *need* do to prepare ourselves, but how much we *can* do. We see clearly enough that the first great law of love has been greatly neglected by humanity, and that, as a consequence, an artificial severance has been

made between first principles of doctrine and first principles of morality. We see clearly that the foundation of all morality is the law of God, and that, from the point of view of the atheist, it cannot even be proved wrong to kill and steal. We see that a deliberate violation of the law of God excludes from divine favour, even though it may be on what seems a trivial issue from the standpoint of self-centred man.

A clear perception of these elementary truths is not without value in the work of preparation. It is true with regard to all first principles, that a very thorough grounding is of great advantage when the time comes to leave the foundation and push on to perfection.

CHAPTER V

FIRST PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

WHEN the apostle speaks of leaving first principles of the doctrine of Christ, and pushing on to perfection, he does not imply that when we have secured a mental grasp of these elements they require no further thought. His complaint was against those who were continually discussing, and questioning their foundations, and who, at a time when they ought to have been teachers, had need that one should teach them again what were the first principles of the Oracles of God.

He desired that they should be grounded and settled on such points, in order that they might gain a knowledge of the deeper and more subtle matters he was prepared to expound to them. Pushing on to perfection also implies a practical application of doctrine in the working out of character, and the ordering of our daily life. It is possible for a man to spend so much mental energy in discussing and re-discussing the

simple elements of truth, that he never puts what he has learned into practical effect, and probably this is why some people have drawn a fictitious distinction between matters of morality and what have been called "mere questions of doctrine." As we have previously stated, sound doctrine is the foundation of sound morality, and right action is simply right doctrine in practice. The time has now come to consider this idea in greater detail.

When we say that all men are of one blood, and that they have certain rights which must be considered, we propound a doctrine. All professing Christians will acknowledge the truth of this, and, except when human selfishness interferes with duty, they endeavour to carry the principle into effect. There is no need to argue the case so far as our attitude towards man is concerned, for everyone can see how much depends on the doctrines which lie at the foundation. What is needed is a careful examination of the first principles, which are generally dismissed as "mere matters of doctrine," and which are supposed not to affect our walk in life. There is need for a clearing away of clouds in connection with this matter.

To begin the exposition, we may confidently affirm that the worship of God is a part of morality. It seems almost absurd to propound such a truism ; but we are living in an age when it has become necessary. Even some religious people have come perilously near regarding the question whether God exists or not as "a mere matter of doctrine."

Try to imagine a State in which regard was paid to the rights of humanity, and the law of neighbourly love observed, but in which there was no worship of God. "A Godless Socialism," indeed, in which all the members were unfettered by tradition and unchecked by public opinion. Who could say that such a community had held to morality and only discarded "mere questions of doctrine" ? As a matter of fact, the relation, in connection with which the words moral and immoral are used most frequently, obviously turns not on a question of animal rights, but on a question of divine law ;

and many Socialists are even now openly repudiating the law, despite the present fetters of tradition and public opinion.

Presuming then, that worship is admitted to constitute an important element of morality, where is the line to be drawn by one who deprecates doctrine? Would anyone suggest that while it is a fundamental principle of morality that we should worship, it is immaterial whether we worship the true God or not? Probably no one would venture to draw such a distinction, and so we see on this point how inseparable is doctrine from morality. Knowledge of the true God is the foundation, and acceptable worship the superstructure. Reverence for a false conception of God is doubtless better than no reverence at all, but simply on the principle that a little light is better than total darkness. A complete knowledge of the truth is the root from which may grow a complete morality.

We may next consider the nature of man. When the elements of this subject have been argued and the evidence of man's mortality has been pressed home to some of our friends, they have often said, Well, after all, I cannot see that it makes much difference. It is a mere matter of doctrine, and does not affect the way in which we order our lives. If we do that which is right we shall be none the worse for having thought we were immortal, even should your views prove correct.

We could hardly imagine a more deplorable error than this. It is another instance of throwing the whole emphasis on the second law of love, and ignoring the greater command to love and fear God. A false conception of man's relationship towards his fellow-man affects the law of human love and duty, and the evil effects are immediately apparent. A false conception of our nature affects our love and fear of God, and society may remain indifferent to the results. The pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul probably affects man's attitude towards his fellows very little indeed, but its effect on his attitude towards God is utterly disastrous.

He cannot approach the throne of grace in the right spirit. He cannot "humble himself beneath the mighty hand

of God". He cannot "seek for immortality". He cannot "discern the Lord's body", and he cannot place himself in the right attitude to receive the "free gift of eternal life". This false doctrine affects every fibre of his life, and consciously or unconsciously, dominates his whole being. While a mortal man cherishes the conviction that he is immortal, that his personality must necessarily enter into all eternal calculations, that he is already a "partaker of the divine nature", although he perhaps knows nothing and cares nothing about the great and precious promises God has given, it is impossible for him to approach the throne of grace in a right spirit. He fails even when judged by the simplest of standards. He may "do justly", and "love mercy", but he cannot "walk humbly with his God". He might, indeed, give an appearance of humility to his fellow-man, but there could not possibly be a genuine humility before God. The very thought involved when this doctrine is believed offers a standing insult to heaven, and forbids acceptable worship.

It is impossible to emphasize this argument by the use of an effective illustration. An illustration can only fulfil its purpose when it slightly exaggerates, or when it presents a similar relationship of ideas on another plane of action, and thus exhibits incongruities which in the issue under consideration had been unperceived. When men reach the profoundest depths of ignorant presumption in their approaches to the Most High, it is impossible to find a parallel, and any attempt at illustration would be feeble. It is possible, however, to see some of the effects of this doctrine; and perhaps no better example can be cited than that of a famous English poet, who held the doctrine of man's natural immortality with such ardour that he spoke of the matter in this way: "If I have not an immortal soul, then there is no God, but a mocking fiend has made us. I would shake my fist in his Almighty face, and tell him that I cursed him!"

"What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Walk humbly indeed! Here is a result of Platonic food!

A poet, who was supposed to be a great instructor of the people, and who probably turned out more shallow sentimentality than any other man of his generation, loses his temper when his immortality is called in question; and, instead of humbling himself beneath the mighty hand of God, indulges in this wild and foolish blasphemy. He was ready to "curse God and die" before the adversary had even menaced his possessions.

This, however, is merely the negative side of the issue. It is easy to see that a false and flattering doctrine regarding our nature has an enormous effect upon our walk before God. It is easy to see that the Platonic doctrine has so inflated human pride, that a man can never make any substantial advance until this extension of the serpent's lie has been abandoned. But the question may be raised, "How does an appreciation of the truth regarding our nature help us to prepare for the great day of judgment?"

There is some danger that we may lose sight of the importance of first principles in the work of preparation. We learn that man is mortal as one of our first lessons, when we begin to study the Bible. It is one of the principal issues in all our early arguments. The nature of man is regarded as a nice, simple subject for a young speaker, and more advanced exponents of the truth are often disposed to fight shy of it. If the mortality of man is mentioned in an exhortation, or if it is emphasized in a week-night meeting convened for the brethren and sisters, it is generally considered that the time might be spent more profitably than in the exposition of such elementary matters.

This feeling may be justifiable, yet there is a distinct element of danger in it. There is a danger that having once learned the first principles of truth, one should lose sight of their bearing on the development of character. There is a great difference between discussing what are the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and building on those first principles. Those who fail to realize this are in danger of failing to

derive any benefit from the truths they have accepted, and their doctrines will be as dead as faith without works.

Here is a young man, perhaps, who has thoroughly mastered the bearings of the controversy as to the nature of man. He has passages of Scripture dealing with the subject at his finger ends. He knows the best that can be said for the Platonic theory and—if the whole truth should be exposed—he rather enjoys the effort of pulling that theory to pieces. At the time we meet him, we will suppose that he has just encountered an opponent, and has been even more successful than usual in the discussion. While the subject is fresh in his memory, we will take up the subject and deal with it in rather a different way.

You have just concluded a dispute with a disciple of Plato who thought that he was also a follower of Christ. You have completely refuted his arguments, placed evidence before him which he could not pretend to answer, and he has retired, feeling very uncomfortable. You are smiling with a certain feeling of satisfaction at your success. We are quite agreed that man is a creature of the dust, under sentence of death because of sin ; so leaving the elementary argument of the case let us look at the moral bearings of this truth.

Do you quite realize all that is involved in the fact which you have just demonstrated ? It is very much easier to prove that other men are mortal than it is to realize that you are mortal yourself. You have an animal body with two legs and two arms. You are made of soft flesh on a framework of bone, and although your body comprises many wonderful organs, they would all soon decay apart from the animating principle of life. All that you know, or think you know, of history or philosophy is locked up in your skull, and if that were suddenly destroyed it would cut a thought in two and send you back to the dreamless sleep from whence you came. You may lay your finger on your pulse, and as you count the throbs think that the existence of the universe, so far as it has any meaning for you, depends upon that regular pulsation, and if in days of darkness the heart had grown tired and ceased

its work, all would have been over at once, and for ever.

You may think of millions of human beings who have lived in the past, each with personality as distinct as your own, and realizing the fact of man's mortality, you may read a lesson from a skull, far more effective than the ordinary homily of Gentile philosophy. You may calculate the possibilities with generations yet unborn, and feel staggered at the figures which multiply so readily, and the pictures they conjure up of mountains of human flesh.

Even this does not set the limit, for in rebuking the Pharisees and showing how futile it is to place confidence in the flesh, and the dignities of pedigree, John the Baptist said: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father; for I say unto you, that God is able from these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham".

And why should any man stumble at this saying? The thought in the abstract is not more wonderful than the manner in which nations are raised from mother earth. Think of some fruitful land, where man has never been, and consider the changes wrought by time, remembering the while that time is only relative, and the whole history of man is not a fraction of eternity. A few hardy settlers go to the uninhabited country. A few ticks of the clock, and the land is overcrowded. The introduction of human life has turned thousands of tons of clay into mortal human flesh, like unto you! It is like the almost magical production of maggots in a favourable environment.

Now, while thinking of yourself in this light, and fully realizing the truth regarding your own nature, recall to mind some passages of Scripture. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

It is an intellectual pleasure to contemplate the harmony, the order and the logic which appear everywhere in the Bible when the eyes are open to the truth regarding ourselves. "Not perish, but have everlasting life." We belong to a perishing race, and, apart from this divine interference,

would pass away like the beasts of the field, whose foundation, like ours, is in the clay. But do not stop at this intellectual pleasure. Regard the first words as well, and you will see that just as the neglected part of this passage is given a new meaning by the truth, so the oft-quoted part is given a new emphasis. What rights are possessed by the common elements of clay around us? The breath of God, either directly or indirectly, acts upon them, and a vast army of men and women rise to life and vigour, to work and play, love and hate, rejoice and sorrow. They are made from the earth, which is the Lord's, animated by the breath of God, and eating the fruits He has made. You are one of the crowd, and what rights have you more than the elements from which you spring, or of what value are you more than the myriads who might be?

With such thoughts as these quote the passage regarding the love of God, and the truth will reveal as much new meaning in its appeal to the heart as to the head. Christ loved us and gave himself for us. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He has given us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of His own nature. Such an offer as this to creatures of the dust, who in the exercise of the volition He has given them, have all transgressed His law! Truly the goodness of God is great towards those that fear Him. The old platitudes of Christendom may be re-quoted, and they are platitudes no longer, but are filled with a meaning unsuspected by Gentile philosophers.

The follower of Plato, honoured, flattered, loaded with wealth and every delight of the sons of men, talked of shaking his fist in the face of the Almighty if his desires were unfulfilled.

The humble servant of God, who recognized that if he had died in infancy he would have been as though he had not been, stripped of all his possessions and stricken with disease, said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him".

Argue your case with all the force you can bring to bear upon it, but be humble even in that. Derive full satisfaction

from the perfect harmony established between various parts of the word by the simple truth, and the light it throws on the constitution of nature, but do not allow the lesson to end there. Attempt to realize the truth and it will reveal a view of the goodness and condescension of God such as was never imagined in the philosophy of Plato, and will play a part in humbling the mind ; as great a power for good as the false theory has been a power for evil. The truth here has its active side, affecting us every day in our attitude towards God, and allowing almost unlimited scope for building on the simple foundation. We may re-state the truth to ourselves with every appeal we read to walk worthy of our calling, and perhaps at last through the mercy of God be sufficiently humbled to be the subjects of a greater miracle than the transformation of clay into mortal flesh.

CHAPTER VI

“ THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE ”

WE may expect the Gospel to play an important part in the work of preparation, since the apostle declares that it is “the power of God unto salvation to every-one that believeth”. There are two senses in which the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation”, and although we may feel somewhat reluctant to use the words legal and moral, since they have been subject to so much abuse, it would nevertheless be difficult to find better expressions. In this connection, however, the legal aspect has to do with a law of grace. There are times when a man is technically guilty although morally innocent, but the New Covenant establishes a gracious law which gives forgiveness and sanctification to those who are morally guilty.

When a speaker or writer, with a knowledge of Bible teaching, gives an exposition of “ the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation ”, he generally deals with this legal aspect of gospel power, and practically confines his attention to that half of the subject. He points out that all men have sinned, and stand related to death as the wage of sin. He explains that salvation involves change of body, a clothing with immortality, a partaking of the divine nature and inheritance of the Kingdom of God. Men are morally unfitted for such honour, and the principle of justification by faith and imputation of righteousness is an act of divine mercy and condescension which we may without paradox describe as a law of grace.

The intelligent expositor of scripture proceeds to show that since God has been so merciful, it is increasingly important that men should accept the conditions offered, and make no effort to tempt Him further. Since He has proposed to accept our faith as righteousness, we must take care that our faith is genuine, and that it comprehends the promises God has actually made as the “ substance of things hoped for ”. These things are comprised in the good news, or Gospel, to be heartily accepted and obeyed. The New Covenant is more redolent of mercy than the Old, and for that very reason it is more serious to reject or neglect it. “ How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ? ” or despise Him who speaks from heaven ? The expositor of the truth has no difficulty in showing that although the New Covenant is full of grace and mercy, it involves somewhat of legal procedure. It is absolutely necessary to have faith in the promises God has made, not in the imaginations of man’s heart ; and, having accepted the “ one faith ”, we must pass through the ordained legal procedure in submitting to the “ one baptism ”, in order that we may enter the Covenant and stand within the circle of the sin-covering Name. In this manner the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation in giving justification to sinners who could never justify themselves, and

bringing under the constitution of righteousness men whose natural righteousness was like a clothing of filthy rags.

This is the first half of the subject, the elementary part of a first principle. By faith in the Gospel and the obedience of baptism, a sinner is turned into a saint—at least, in a nominal sense ; and the power of the Gospel has been manifested in its legal aspect.

There is, however, still much to be accomplished. Having received a talent, we must use it ; having been presented with garments we must keep them clean ; having been brought within the constitution of righteousness, we must “ work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” The question was asked in ancient times, “ Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way ? ” And the immediate answer is, “ By taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

The quotation from the epistle to the Ephesians chosen for the heading of this chapter falls into perfect harmony with this idea. In putting on the whole armour of God, we must have our “ feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.” Our shoes are in use every step of the way. We are not always using the sword of the Spirit to the throwing down of fleshly strongholds ; but we are always walking, whether in war or peace, whether surrounded by the wicked and assailed by fiery darts, or in the assembly of the saints and hearing words of cheer. “ Our walk in life ” covers all this experience.

It is, of course, unsafe to apply a scriptural metaphor in greater detail than the writer intended ; but surely there is a real significance in the figure of speech here chosen. “ The preparation of the gospel ” is a part of the word of God ; but it is the part which requires the most constant use, and therefore the apostle puts it in a separate category, and in his figure of a man thoroughly armed and equipped, he places this preparation of the gospel on the feet, to be used every step of the way. In plain language, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, first, by offering sanctification to sinners who will believe and obey it; and afterwards by

exercising a steady moral pressure all through life, to keep saints in the narrow path of saintship, to help them in the working out of their salvation, and finally prepare them to meet their God.

The apostle Peter, writing to those who had believed in God, and had been born again, tells them to “ desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby ”. Everyone who is acquainted with the context of this passage will admit that the reference is to the gospel, or good news of the kingdom, so that here we have an illustration of the gospel as a power to promote growth in those who had already been the subject of its first work of sanctification. The Lord Jesus told his disciples to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and the apostle Paul constantly puts the kingdom forward in his exhortations. We are required to remember that we are “ called unto God’s kingdom and glory ”, that “ in due time we shall reap if we faint not ” ; and in many indirect ways we are called upon to have regard to the reward God has promised. Paul shows that even at the end of his life this idea was still to the front in his mind, and he looked forward to the crown of righteousness to be given him “ at that day ” of the appearing and kingdom of Christ.

We have a higher example still in this matter, for we are told that the Lord Jesus “ for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. ” He looked forward to the consummation of God’s purpose, and saw glory instead of shame, joy instead of sorrow, a righteous world in place of a wicked one, and instead of the crowd of mocking enemies he saw a vast assembly of adoring brethren, every one of them saved by his sacrifice. The thought of the coming kingdom was the power of God to help the Lord Jesus through the hour of trial, and so will it be with all his brethren. “ Fear not, little flock ”, he said, “ it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ”

The consideration of such testimonies is sufficient to justify the division we have made of this subject into a legal

and moral aspect. If we investigate the matter rather more closely we shall find the distinction even more clearly marked. If we had been given no information as to the nature of the reward God has offered, the good news of salvation might still have been the power of God in a legal sense.

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews a general principle is enunciated that "those who come to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." Had God chosen to give us no more precise information than is contained in this simple proposition, it might have been made a test of faith, and baptism into such a faith might have been constituted a test of obedience. But such meagre information could not possibly exercise a moral influence in any way comparable to that which the complete picture wields. There would be such little scope for thought, such little material for conversation. Brethren might "speak often one to another", but they would not be able to converse regarding the purpose of God. It would seem impious to speculate on a subject where no information had been vouchsafed, and thus in their efforts to serve God they would be deprived of the tremendous moral help of a definite hope on which to converse and ruminate.

The subject will appear in a still stronger light if we compare the position of one who, with intelligent faith, waits for the Kingdom of God, with the case of a Gentile who knows not the gospel.

We once heard of a young man who expressed his opinion regarding Christian hopes with more candour than reverence. He had been given to understand that the future experience of the saints would be to sit in heaven playing on harps of gold. "Why", he exclaimed, "I should get tired of that in a day!" From the point of view of some people this might seem a most irreverent and shocking criticism to make. Others will admit that it contains a strong element of reason. In all seriousness, and with no unkind contempt for the misguided, we may ask those who hope to go to heaven at death, what are their expectations? What work or occupation do

they anticipate finding there? What information does the Bible give to suggest a picture to the mind? To raise a more practical issue, do such people in point of fact, converse with each other about the joys of heaven, or reflect upon their hopes with a longing to realize them? Is it not rather a fact that the hope of heaven is relegated to a back place, to administer consolation when the present life is almost exhausted, but not to interfere with the social activities of this mortal world?

How different is the Hope of Israel. Instead of a vague consolation for the hour of death it presents us with a tangible idea which has its foundations in the history of the past, its signs in the events of the present, and in its consummation it will transform this earth on which we dwell. Not only so, but in almost all ages, believers have expected an early realization of their hopes, and have apparently been purposely kept from knowing how long a time was to elapse before the day of blessing. The hope has thus been intimately connected with every-day life; brethren have felt that at any time their ordinary associations might come to an end, and the whole course of human history be changed.

Gentile expectations of a life beyond the grave are entirely detached from ordinary human interest, and there is nothing in the course of every-day life to bring the purpose of God before the mind. The hope of Israel, on the other hand, is so intimately connected with our present experience, that it is continually impressed upon us. It gives a new meaning to history, and throws a new light on politics. Even the development of science renders some assistance as giving a faint forecast of powers of the world to come. If we see wrong and injustice here, we know all will be rectified when Jesus comes again, and perfect justice will prevail in the very place which suffers the evil now. If we see warfare, and warlike preparation, we know that just as truly as the first advent brought an increase of strife and division, so will his second appearance bring the promised “peace on earth”. If we look over a landscape of perfect beauty, only spoiled perhaps

in some part where "man marks the earth with ruin", the Kingdom of God comes before the mind at once without an effort. Here, where we stand, men will participate in the promised blessing ; and perhaps our lot might fall here, and we should come with the power of immortality to enforce the principles we try to exemplify now. And with this thought we perhaps experience something like a shock, and a number of pointed questions are put to self. It brings the matter so close home to us.

We are not left to our own imaginations. Whole books of Scripture, which are practically meaningless to Gentiles, give abundant information regarding the hope of Israel. We can read, converse, reflect upon it, and then in all the experiences of life, in our studies, our friendships, our travels, our work, and our recreation, the kingdom of God is continually presented to the mind.

The gospel of the kingdom was the foundation of the one faith which first gave us justification, and if we will allow it free scope it will exercise a steady moral pressure upon our minds, and finally effect what could never be accomplished by human will power or any number of "good resolutions". It has already been the power of God to bring us within the sin-covering Name ; it may be His power still to keep us faithful and fit for His purpose.

The great examples already cited show us how important is the moral help of first principles. Even in the case of the Lord himself, it was the hope that sustained ; and the apostle John, speaking of the fact that in the day of Christ's coming his brethren will be like him, says, "He that hath this hope purifieth himself even as he is pure."

If we are to be prepared for our Lord at his coming, we must certainly allow the hope of the kingdom to exercise our minds in all our walk through life. Our feet must be "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."

CHAPTER VII

JESUS THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH

AMONG the first principles of truth which can be translated into action in our daily lives, the sacrifice of Christ stands pre-eminent. It is, in fact, part of the preparation of the gospel of peace, with which our feet must be shod. "He is our peace", says the apostle, "who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

Again, in writing to the Romans, the same apostle says, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

For the moment we are more concerned with the moral effect of this doctrine in the preparation of those who already understand and believe, than with what may be called the legal aspect of its first principles. Yet here again it is simply a matter of translating knowledge into action, or perhaps, more still, into growth. A thorough grasp of first principles is the necessary basis for all true development. A false conception of the atonement has most obviously evil results. It is not simply that it is the will of God for those who approach Him to understand the meaning of Christ's sacrifice. We can see that an appreciation of the truth has an effect in the moulding of character, and that knowledge rightly applied will promote growth.

The harmful effect of false doctrine is equally obvious. If a man thinks of Christ's death as substitutional, and imagines that the whole of his debt to God has been paid, he cannot approach the throne of grace in an acceptable manner. This idea of substitution and a debt discharged in full is of one piece with the doctrine of immortal souls. It leads to the

monstrous caricatures of religion to be seen in connection with death bed repentances, and sudden conversions.

Thus, the lords spiritual will agree with the civil authorities that a certain man is unfit to live on earth, and yet will think that the combined ministrations of parson and hangman will send him off to heaven. The cross is sometimes held up before people, and in answer to the question, "What shall we do?" a preacher will reply, "Do nothing, Jesus has done it all". Such ideas can never humble men under the mighty hand of God, and in the end it often happens that a man so instructed will use his reason rather more and lose his faith in the doctrine of the atonement altogether.

In a lesser degree the minor controversies which have arisen in connection with this matter have done a measure of harm. Some attempts have been made to explain the sacrifice of Christ as if it had arisen out of the complications and technicalities of imperfect human law. God's law has been treated as if independent of His will, and the whole subject has been obscured.

Another evil has been the tendency of some speculative thinkers to raise the question, What would have occurred if the purpose of God had been in some respect different? There has been much disputing over such futile issues, in which it is perfectly safe to say that there has been at least an equality of ignorance, since we can none of us know what the will of God would have been if in any respect His purpose had been different from that which has been revealed.

It is, indeed, surprising that men who have had ample opportunity to study the Scriptures, whose eyes have been open to the elementary principles, and who have had access to excellent expositions, should raise these questions. It has frequently been asked, "Would Jesus have had to die as a sacrifice for his own cleansing if he had been the only one to be saved?" And there have been some who have actually regarded this as a serious question, and have thought it right to insist on a definite answer. The great sacrifice will never be

much moral help to men in preparing them for the kingdom of God, if they spend their time in such fruitless contentions.

These problems would probably never be raised if there was an adequate recognition of the difference between the ways of God and the ways of man. Human legislation grows gradually, contains so many faults, and has such unexpected results, that "the law" seems to be a separate entity, a powerful instrument, which must be respected even when it is unreasonable. It may indeed be moulded and gradually changed, but while it remains "the law" it must be carried into effect, even if it has results totally at variance with the designs of those who framed it. Men sometimes resort to hasty expedients in legislation, that they may avoid some unforeseen consequence of the statutes they or their fathers have formulated, and occasionally we may behold the spectacle of a law having consequences which are deplored by almost everyone. Men say, "This is the law and it must be carried out; but in this connection it is thoroughly unjust, and should be amended at once."

It is very different with the law of God. There are no discrepancies in His statutes, no unforeseen results, and there is no need for expedients. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." When God made laws, He made them with a full knowledge of all their effects right to the end of time, and thus the law of God is simply an expression of the will of God. It is true that sometimes we can gain a glimpse at God's point of view, and see the reason for His laws, but we are on safe lines only so long as we are guided by the Word.

It was the will of God that sins should only be forgiven on the basis of a perfect sacrifice. Under spirit guidance we can see the reason for this law. It was because man had become unfit to approach the Father. God gave a law which condemned all, that He might show His mercy to those who had faith in Him, and "that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God". Forgiveness is thus offered on a basis which humbles the creature and exalts

the Creator. The sinfulness of man is emphasized, while the righteousness and holiness of God is declared "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

But when the apostles deal with this matter they speak of the purpose of God as it is, not as it might have been. Thus in speaking of the fact that God subjected His Son to a painful life and a painful death, the apostle says, "It became him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." And the Lord Jesus, in the hour of trial, submitting to the Father's will, told his disciples that he might pray even then, and have legions of angels at his command, but "How, then", he asked "should the Scriptures be fulfilled?" There is not the slightest scriptural warrant for propounding the question what the will of God would have been had Jesus been the only one to be saved.

Perhaps those who have sometimes put the question would admit that it is not strictly legitimate, but excuse themselves on the ground that they only raise the issue to test whether there is a proper understanding of the position of the Lord Jesus. The question, however, is worse than useless for such a purpose, for like all such questions it tends only to place those who understand the least, and those who understand most, in the same category. Ask a child, "What is electricity?" and he will admit that he does not know. Propound the same question to the most learned scientist of the day, and he also will confess ignorance. But ask a school-boy who has attended a couple of lectures on the subject, and he will probably tell you at once.

Guided by the word of God it is easy to prove that Christ offered for his own cleansing as well as for his people. It is easy to demonstrate that in the revealed purpose of God, the holiest place was not to be entered except with a perfect sacrifice. We can clearly see that the offering of his body on the cross was the culminating act of our Saviour's obedience, for which he is "highly exalted". It was the will of God that the captain of our salvation should be made perfect through

suffering. And it is the will of God that many should be saved through faith in his blood, and all that is involved in that expression.

Beyond this we cannot go. It is most unscriptural and most improper—to use no harsher term—to speculate on what the will of God would have been towards His Son, if it had been totally different toward all others. In this matter we are not arguing. We are simply mentioning facts which only need to be stated for their force to be felt.

When the apostles speak of the sacrifice of Christ they make no effort to develop a technical argument such as would appeal to a lawyer, and if only we can clear the mind of false impressions, and get back to apostolic definitions, the difficulties vanish. We could not desire a clearer exposition of the atonement than is given in the third chapter of Romans ; and, like many dissertations of the apostle Paul, exhortation arises in a perfectly natural manner out of the exposition. The chapter is very well known, but, unfortunately, it is possible for the best known chapters to make the least impression.

If a seeker after truth should read this chapter for the first time when his intellect was fully mature, it might give a clearer view by that one perusal, than the many readings of one who first became acquainted with the language used when the mind was incapable, or indifferent. It is wonderful how dead the brain can be to the meaning of words which have been familiar to the memory from the time of its earliest recollections, and sometimes nothing is needed in the way of exposition except to call a halt at every verse, or possibly present the idea in slightly different language that the brain may be stimulated by the change.

The apostle quotes from the Old Testament to show that the history of humanity is a history of evil, and no man has been perfect before God. He declares that no man shall be justified by the law, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. That is to say, that the law, with its clearly defined commands, made it evident to all reflective minds that they fell far short

of perfection. "But now", says the apostle, "the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." The purpose of God to justify men by faith was witnessed by nearly all parts of the Old Testament, from the time when coats of skins were made to cover the nakedness of the first transgressors, and our mother Eve was given the promise of a sin-destroying seed.

It was witnessed by the call of Abraham and his trial of faith, especially by the words, "Abraham believed God, and he counted it to him for righteousness." It was witnessed by the Psalms in the blessing pronounced on the man whose transgression is covered, in the promise that the man who has clean hands and a pure heart shall receive the blessing from on high and "righteousness from the God of his salvation"; and in the promise of a deliverer, the "son of God's handmaid"—the man God made strong for Himself. It is witnessed by all the promises of a Messiah who should put an end to sin, and make reconciliation; who should please God, live a perfect life, make his soul an offering for sin, and become the father of the future age, since the travail of his soul should bring forth a numerous seed of glorified sons. It is witnessed by the severe law which condemned all who came under it, and convinced them all of sin. In fact, the whole of the Old Testament is a complete enigma apart from the explanation brought by the New.

But with Jesus as the keystone the whole building is "fitly framed together", like the spiritual house it is instrumental in forming. The gift of righteousness from God is, indeed, witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; "even the righteousness of God which is by faith unto all who believe, for there is no difference"—that is, that all men, both Jews and Gentiles, are alike under condemnation.

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." All men being sinners, they are dependent on the grace and mercy of God, and the gift of righteousness to those of pure heart. And it has pleased the

Father to make this gift only through the Lord Jesus, "whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God."

Some have regarded the word propitiation as conveying the idea of substitution. There is no justification for such an interpretation. Propitiation may be taken to mean the turning away of wrath, and that is indeed accomplished by the sacrifice of Christ; but the teaching of this passage is utterly contrary to the unscriptural, unjust and unreasonable idea of a substitute. There is no question of a debt discharged, no question of a "death incurred by Adam and inflicted on Christ", that the technical demands of a law may be satisfied. The sins are forgiven "through the forbearance of God", and the basis on which God offers remission is the declaration of His righteousness in the life and death of His Son.

Righteousness primarily means right conduct according to law. The supreme lawgiver is God; therefore righteousness is to act in harmony with the law of God. In the case of man it involves a bending of the human will into harmony with the divine. Thus the perfect righteousness of the man Christ Jesus is expressed in the words he used, "Not my will but thine, be done". But the righteousness of God must necessarily mean something different from this. The will of the Father is the supreme law, and if righteousness simply means conformity to law, a declaration of His righteousness would simply mean a declaration of His consistency. Perhaps rightly understood, this idea covers the whole subject. God has declared that He will not give His glory to another; and that He will be sanctified in those who approach unto Him. The righteousness of God thus involves more than we usually associate with the word. God set forth Jesus to be a declaration of His holiness, His supremacy, His consistency, and on this basis He offers forgiveness and the exercise of forbearance towards humble and believing transgressors. The apostle repeats the idea: "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of those who

believe in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded."

All apostolic references to the atonement are in harmony with this clear exposition. We read that Jesus died to put away sin. How could sin be put away more effectually than by conquering all its impulses in life, and then submitting to the crucifixion of the flesh? We read that he died to condemn sin in the flesh. How could sin be condemned more effectually than by thus being put away? And how could the righteousness, the holiness and the supremacy of God be declared more emphatically than by the complete triumph over sin on the part of His Son, and the complete repudiation of the flesh involved in his perfect life and the final crucifixion of his body?

If, without any attempt to improve on the exposition of the apostle, we take a comprehensive glance at the whole subject of redemption, we obtain a glimpse of God's point of view, which is in itself a perfect exhortation.

We see man in a sinful and hopeless condition, unfit to approach his Maker. We see a law given, which condemned all who came under it, and made it evident that they were sinners. At the same time, there were many evidences that God intended to exalt some of the sinful sons of men to the power of an endless life, and even the angels desired to look into these things. God made selection of a virgin of the house of Israel, and by the power of His Spirit, produced from her substance a man, made in all points like unto his brethren, subject to all fleshly weakness, and differing from them in nothing except his mental and moral strength. He was the "man God made strong for himself". Begotten by the power of the Spirit of God, his character, as it unfolded, reflected the character of the Father. He "set his face like a flint", to "choose the good and refuse the evil". He was "obedient in all things, even unto the death of the cross", and because he loved righteousness and hated iniquity, God has anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows. By every act of his life he condemned sin in the flesh, and declared the righteousness of God, and finally, by the free offering of his

body on the cross, as the culminating act of obedience, he made a suitable basis for the exercise of God's forbearance. Here is the weak body of sin subdued and controlled in life by the strong will of the Son of God, and finally slain on the cross, and thus completely put away. The flesh repudiated, man humbled, boasting excluded, and the holiness, majesty, and supremacy of God declared. This is our mercy-seat.

We are not told that our debt is paid and there is nothing more to do. We are urged to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, to follow Christ, to obtain spirit-help from the Word of God, and play our part to make it possible that God can be just and yet our justifier.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God."

CHAPTER VIII

SELF-EXAMINATION

ONE of the most important, and certainly one of the most difficult of all the phases into which this subject of preparation can be divided, has now been reached. So much depends upon self-examination, because it is the process by which all other lessons can be made effective. A man may have a very thorough grasp of the truth, so far as its elementary principles are concerned, he may retain a lively recollection of apostolic exhortations, he may even be able to speak "a word in season" for the building up of others, and yet, through lack of the ability or the inclination to examine himself, he may quite fail to make any practical

application of his knowledge in the moulding of his own life.

There are many exhortations in the writings of the apostles to examine ourselves, and there are still more passages from which the necessity of such a process may be inferred. "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith." "Prove your own selves." "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." In such words as these, the apostle Paul teaches the necessity for an analysis of self. "The thoughts of man are evil continually." "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, murders, thefts, covetousness." "In my flesh dwells no good thing." In such passages as these, the same idea is implied in a less direct way.

This work is necessarily an individual matter, and herein lies the difficulty. A man is his own accuser, his own defender, and his own judge. With the most complete facilities for knowing the full measure of his guilt, he unites a most unjudicial bias in favour of the accused. He perhaps possesses all the knowledge necessary to draw up an unanswerable indictment; but his talent is mainly employed to find extenuating circumstances. He has all the skill of a defending counsel to raise a false issue, but lacks the impartiality of a judge to expose the pretence.

It would be late in human history for a writer to devote much space to the task of proving that men can deceive themselves. The fact is generally recognized and has many times been the subject of comment. The idea was very well expressed by a celebrated English historian when, in speaking of the hatred engendered and the cruelties practised in the contentions between Catholics and Protestants, he remarked that men had often mistaken their own vindictive feelings for motions of pious zeal. Yet although modern writers have frequently referred to this human weakness, they have very seldom ventured to use language anything like so strong as that in which the Bible has stated the matter. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"

The deceitfulness of the heart makes it difficult for man to know himself, hence the need for great care in the work of self-examination.

The question is asked, "Who can know the heart?" and an immediate answer is given, "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." The contemplation of this passage will give added significance to the words of the apostle, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." God will make no mistake in judgment. He will not be deceived by the heart's evasiveness, even if we are deceived ourselves. But if we can force ourselves to be impartial, if we can guard against the deceptiveness of our nature, strip ourselves bare of pretence, and administer to ourselves the correction needed, we may escape the judgment and condemnation of God.

The question, Who can know the heart of man? implies that an effective introspection is always difficult. It is an individual task in which, however, we may either help or hinder each other. We may either look facts honestly in the face and help our neighbours to be equally honest, or we may cover them up with a cloud of subtle and misleading language and assist the heart in its deceitfulness. Men walk in a vain show. They think that all is well when all looks well, and are even disposed to blame the man who strips off some of the veneer and reveals the blemishes that lie beneath.

Honesty is the first quality necessary when we come to examine ourselves, and perhaps the first step is to take an honest look at humanity as a whole.

What is a man? We must not choose the best of men, and, judging even them more as they appear than as they really are, think of them as fair specimens of the human race. Neither must we choose the worst of men, and think of them as representing the measure of our fellows. But, taking a more comprehensive view, we may see what are the weaknesses characteristic of all humanity; and after an honest

survey of man as a whole we may be able to direct an honest look into our own hearts.

Man is an animal, with animal tastes and impulses. He yearns for happiness, and in his untutored state expects to find it by having his own way and gratifying his own desires. He is extremely conceited, and loves the praise of his fellows. With an animal sensuality he unites a vigorous imagination which renders his animalism far more dangerous than it is in the beasts of the field. He seeks out "many inventions" far from the uprightness of his original standard. And when in a high condition of civilization, well instructed in all the primary laws of morality, and with a certain pattern of righteousness, set by society as a whole, man presents a spectacle of extraordinary incongruity. He constantly relapses into habits which are disgusting even to himself.

This is not a phenomenon confined entirely to those who are consciously striving after an ideal. Truly, it is felt most by the earnest Christian, who, like the apostle Paul, finds a law of sin in his members warring against the law of his spiritually regenerate mind, and seeking to bring it again into captivity to the flesh; but it is also felt in some measure by any man of sound mentality, even though he makes no profession of religion. He is conscious of the degradation of other men, and he is also aware that there are certain forces, certain allurements which tend to drag him down to the same low level. In contemplating the wrecks of humanity he may almost feel like Addison, "afraid to remain alive, for dread of what he might become".

Surely this constant temptation to do that which is repulsive to our higher self bears eloquent testimony to the fact that man has fallen. Indeed, it was pointed out some years ago, when the modern theory of evolution was first elaborated, that, although at first sight the theory of evolution seems like a direct negation of the Bible record, the scientists were compelled to believe in a fall of man in large measure corresponding to the old faith—that when reason took the place of instinct, man made deliberate choice of evil, and

hence the infanticide of certain savage nations and the many other unnatural vices that have cursed the world.

This union of high ideal with low practice causes hypocrisy. Men pretend to be better than they are. A celebrated author of the nineteenth century—himself an unsparing exposé of human vanities—once deplored his own timidity, and declared that Fielding was the last English writer “who ever dared to depict a man”. This is doubtless a drastic criticism ; but it may contain at least an element of truth, and it is important that truth should be recognized. When a medical examination is made to determine the physical fitness of a patient, some of the clothes must be removed, and the doctor must see the man as he really is. The same rule holds good with the more tightly-fitting clothes of the mind. When we begin the work of self-examination, we have to study the nude. Sometimes the clothing of the mind fits so perfectly that we are quite unconscious of it, and serious defects, all the time growing worse, remain undiscovered.

An instructive incident was reported recently, and even some of the newspapers were constrained to moralize. An old man and his wife were admitted into a workhouse, and on examination it was found that, in spite of their apparent destitution, they possessed several hundred pounds in cash. No sooner was this curious discovery reported in the papers than some relatives came forward, most anxious to know how “the dear old people” were.

The case was too glaring to admit of a charitable construction being put on this sudden interest in the neglected old couple awakened in the breasts of relatives. It furnishes an instructive study in the nude ; and at least one of the newspapers was tempted to make use of it to raise the question whether even those who smile cynically at such hypocritical covetousness are entirely free from all taint themselves ; whether the noblest of all human impulses is not often alloyed by a mixture of the most ignominious. Men may feel certain that they are inspired by pure motives of love, and yet if they

can penetrate through the heart's deceitfulness they may find at least some slight element of a sordid character. The unblushing greed we observe in an extreme case may thus assist an analysis of self, and teach us to distinguish the true metal from the alloy.

There are other matters in which the heart is more successful in its deceitfulness, and very few people indeed ever look at the naked truth. We frequently hear of some controversy being raised as to whether a certain public performance for the amusement of the people should be condemned on the ground that it appeals to the lust of the flesh and of the eye. Such a dispute always gives occasion for a vast amount of hypocrisy, some of it only subconscious, and some of it, perhaps, hardly conscious at all. There are always some writers to defend the exhibition, and to express the utmost astonishment at anyone seeing anything in the least degree objectionable in it. The old man of the flesh can so easily quote "To the pure all things are pure", and on such an issue can sometimes shame his opponents into silence, and make them fear to criticize, lest they should appear to have impure and nasty minds. Then, perhaps, some writer, anxious to maintain a reputation for strictness of morals, yet fearful of appearing to reveal a possible weakness in himself, makes a ghastly attempt to compromise. He says that the particular performance under discussion is so beautiful that its artistic merit renders it free from all suspicion of grossness, but it is just possible that there might be imitators, who, lacking the ability of the original, would present the features of possible objectionableness, ungraced by the skill and beauty of their model. And thus by permitting such a performance to begin, the way might be opened for many abuses.

In this manner an exceptionally pious newspaper recently attempted to find a compromise between the attitude of another paper and the attitude of a Watch Committee, towards a modern "dancing woman". It furnishes a remarkable instance of the deceitfulness of the heart. Anyone with a

fair knowledge of human nature ought to know, that if such a performance can possibly appeal to the lusts of the flesh at all, the more beautiful and artistic it is made the more dangerous it will be. The blundering old man of the flesh with his deceitful heart, thinks there can be no objection to any exhibition which he finds wholly pleasing. If there is not sufficient grossness to be repellent, he thinks there is no grossness at all. The facts rule all the other way. The most shameless of exhibitions would be innocuous if we could be certain that everyone who attended would be thoroughly disgusted. But it is not pleasant to be disgusted, and if everyone found an exhibition distasteful, no one would attend.

Would it not be a great deal more honest to brave the taunt that we are nasty minded, and admit that it is a good description of our native ugliness? That we are conscious of a carnal mind to be displaced, and of a body to be kept under? The man who is never conscious of any element of nasty mindedness is either much to be envied or much to be pitied. Either he is exceptionally free from fleshly difficulties, or else he has never made any struggle against them.

Certain it is that there is much hypocrisy or else self-deception in the attempts made to justify doubtful exhibitions. It is a well-known fact that unsavoury subjects always prove irresistibly attractive to a great public. Let a book be pronounced obscene, and unless it is suppressed by law, it is sure of a large circulation. Let a dancing woman be condemned by the Watch Committee of a great city, and it is the best advertisement she can have. If we desire to see still further commentary on human weakness and wickedness, we can see it in the heartrending spectacle of crowds of fallen women—tens of thousands (it has been said as many as seventy thousand) in London alone. All people see these horrible evils. What they often fail to see, is the fact that they themselves are of the same nature as the fallen; that perhaps they owe their superior position more to circumstance than to their own strength, and that when they revolt at the practices

of others, it may not mean that they are any purer in the sight of God, but simply that their taste is rather more dainty and refined.

Close observers of mankind always feel rather suspicious of those who make a profession of superhuman purity. When frail human nature pretends to have grown more refined than God originally made it, we generally find that the profession is a mere cloak to cover an exceptional depravity. Those who have been most successful in subduing the flesh have always been most honest in describing it.

This is one of the great objections frequently raised against the Bible. In many parts it is not at all pleasant reading, and the reason is that it is too honest. Perhaps there has never been a more complete confession, or a more damning self-exposure, than that of a famous American blasphemer, who, a few years ago, railed against the objectionable stories contained in the Bible. "It does not enliven the subject with a single touch of wit or humour", he complained, "it never rises above the level of dreary, stupid vice."

This testimony is true, but what are we to think of a man who could object to such a truth? Vice is dreary and stupid, and certainly does not afford a fitting subject for wit or humour. Human nature takes to evil readily enough without the "pen of a ready writer" being employed to dress sin in an attractive garb. Sin is hideously ugly in the sight of God, and when He speaks of sin in His word, a kind of language is employed to make it ugly to us. It is not desirable that we should dwell unnecessarily upon unpleasant subjects, but it is desirable that when we deal with them at all, we should be honest.

There are times when human beings meet in social intercourse, and it is well to be decently and respectably clothed. There are other times when we retire into privacy and put off our clothes for washing. And this presents a certain analogy to the matter of language and moral teaching. Most parts of the Bible are suitable for the social gathering, but there are some portions evidently designed more for the moral bath-

room. There are people who, in connection with this matter, resemble the man who performs his ablutions without removing his clothes, and who on special occasions would put on a pair of gloves instead of cleansing his hands. The Bible teaches us the truth regarding our nature, shows us how to wash ourselves, how to obtain clean garments, and how to keep them from being defiled.

We can spare no part of it. The grand characters and the desperate sinners, the wonderful conversions and the deplorable falls, the lofty exhortations and the outspoken condemnations, are all needed in this work of washing and clothing. The harmful book is the one which makes nakedness look desirable, and gives to filthy rags the appearance of cloth of gold. The Bible holds up a true mirror to human nature, and the natural man rebels, and says how ugly it is.

The question may well arise whether it is not possible to find something more definite and personal to help in the work of self-examination than this mere recital of general principles. We may be taught to see man as he is by nature, we may be induced to look facts honestly in the face, and to beware of mistaking the refinements of sin for real purity ; but is it not possible to obtain some more personal help than this ?

The apostle Paul gives rather a personal turn to one of his exhortations, when writing of the wilderness experience of Israel. He reminds the brethren of the transgressions of many, and warns them against lust, idolatry, fornication, tempting Christ, and murmuring, and he gives the warning a personal turn by saying, " Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

There is good reason for this solemn exhortation. If a superficial thinker of the twentieth century reads these examples without receiving any assistance he may entirely fail to benefit from the perusal. He says to himself, " These men, in spite of all their privileges, in spite of the marvellous manifestations of divine power witnessed by them, sinned in

almost every possible way, and showed themselves utterly lacking in faith. I am much better than that."

But did the apostle Paul contemplate the possibility that those for whom he wrote would ever worship a golden calf, or indeed in any respect furnish an exact replica of early Israelitish sins? We shall never draw any lessons or warnings from these ancient examples unless we can look a little deeper than this.

We have sometimes been censured for introducing new and dangerous speculations, when we had thought our only offence was that we had unnecessarily laboured a truism. There is a truism in connection with this matter. It is undoubtedly recognized by the vast majority of the brethren and sisters, and properly taken into consideration in all their efforts at self-examination. But as there are some who have not recognized it, we must devote some attention to it now.

We may state this truism in borrowed words: "All men are in large measure the creatures of their age". That is to say, they are influenced by the general trend of human thought, and they invariably feel the various winds of doctrine even when they refuse to be blown about by them. If men of different generations are brought into line by the truth, it is certain that the difficulties they experience will vary according to the peculiarities of their environment.

If we were to read the history of the Exodus without paying any regard to this principle, the faithlessness of Israel would be inexplicable. An unbeliever will pronounce the narrative palpably false, and affirm his conviction that if the children of Israel had witnessed half the wonders recorded they never could have been so faithless. A believer will accept the history as it stands, but with such a superficial reading cannot take any real warning from the awful examples of failure. He is inclined to say, "These people were granted the supreme privilege of beholding the visible hand of God, and yet although so much was given to them they could not believe." The effect of his reading is to make him self-satisfied, and he thinks that with far less privilege than was

vouchsafed to ancient Israel he is able to manifest far more faith.

Before we can understand the extraordinary perversity of Israel in refusing to believe that God was sure to fulfil all His promises, it is necessary to recognize the simple truth that their environment had been totally different from ours. Their's was an age of superstition and idolatry, ours is an age of science and scepticism. The influences may be equally dangerous, but it is obvious that they press in different directions. In the age of superstition and idolatry men found it easy to recognize that a superhuman being spoke to them, but hard to believe that His power was supreme. In the present day, men find it easy to believe that God is almighty, but hard to realize that He has ever spoken. The only possible philosophical conception of God is as the great Original, the Creator of all things ; and this idea has been so thoroughly accepted in these days that we need no lesson to enforce it.

If we think of one of the angels giving a message to an Israelite at the period of the Exodus, and then imagine the same message and the same manifestation of power to a brother of our own day, it is easy to see that the difficulties in the way of faith would press somewhat differently in the two cases. The Israelite would never doubt that an angel had spoken to him ; but if he was a man of feeble faith he might doubt the faithfulness of the messenger. He had been brought up among people who believed in many gods of limited power—gods of the hills and gods of the plain ; gods who were unable to carry out their designs, or who forgot what they had promised. True, he had repeatedly been told that these idols were all vanity, and that the God of Israel was supreme ; but the influence of his environment might press heavily upon him in the day of weakness and cause him to doubt. “Dangers surround me”, he might say, “and there seems no prospect of deliverance. Has the angel forgotten his promise, or does he really hate me, and mean me to perish ?” Such a man would simply be the feeble creature of his age,

his "evil heart of unbelief" moulded by the thoughts of the period in which he lived.

A modern brother would not fall into the error, even though he might be equally weak in faith. He would never doubt that the promise of an angel would be fulfilled, but when difficulties arose to try his faith, he might doubt whether the promise had ever been given. "Perhaps I was dreaming", he would think, "or the subject of some extraordinary hallucination." And if he took his case to a modern doctor, doubtless a scientific explanation could be given, and a scientific name found for the condition of nerves which led to the supposed vision.

Perhaps the point can be forced home still more by an illustration taken from history. The Israelites were taught that their God was supreme, and they were given abundant evidence of His power. They witnessed all the plagues of Egypt, and the severance between the land of Goshen and the land of their enemies. They were led out of Egypt by a pillar of fire, and yet they lost faith when confronted by the waters of the Red Sea. The sea was divided and stood up in walls for them to pass through, and then it returned and overwhelmed their enemies. They were fed with food from heaven, they saw water miraculously gush forth from a rock to sustain them in life, they heard the terrible voice from Sinai, and witnessed a greater manifestation of power than their eyes could endure.

And yet, after all this, when they reached the borders of the promised land they lost faith because the cities had high walls and the inhabitants were big men. It seems utterly incredible, until we learn to make allowance for the influence of environment. Observe the form of their unbelief. They never doubted that God had been with them. Even the language of their murmurings admits this fact: "Wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should be for a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?"

We cannot imagine a brother using language like this now. There have been many instances of those who at one time ran well, losing all their faith, but we never hear of one who freely admits that God has promised and yet doubts whether He will perform. The modern unbeliever throws doubt on the whole subject of revelation, and seeks to find plausible explanations of every incident in history which in any way indicates the overruling power of God. In truth, the doubters are always the feeble creatures of their age, their evil heart of unbelief at one time moulded by the prevailing idolatry and at another time by the prevailing agnosticism. If a man, in these days, retains a robust and living faith in spite of all the oppositions of "science, falsely so called", it is probable that had he been with the Israelites at the time of the Exodus he would have been found on the side of Joshua and Caleb.

But if in these days, after enjoying every opportunity, he refuses to believe the testimony of history and of prophecy, it is probable that had he come from the darkness and slavery of Egypt he would have doubted the voice from Sinai. Men are generally keenly alive to their difficulties, while accepting all their privileges as a matter of course, and in judging the actions of others they see all the advantages and none of the limitations. In some respects the children of Israel enjoyed privileges greater than ours, but in other respects we have the advantage. We must learn something of historical perspective before we can take full warning from their experience. And we call attention to their limitations not in any sense to excuse them, but to explain a perversity and faithlessness which, apart from these considerations, would present a complete and hopeless enigma.

It is true that the explanation brings us closer to ancient Israel, and renders their weakness more intelligible. Instead of appearing like monstrous types of incomprehensible infidelity, they begin to assume a humiliating resemblance to men and women of the present day. Herein lies the value of our learning to view history in its true perspective. It is not

simply an interesting study to examine the nature and cause of Israelitish unfaithfulness. It is not a mere mental exercise to find the true explanation of the strange perversity which resulted in the rejection of a whole generation of the chosen people. The apprehension of this principle is absolutely necessary before we can learn the true lesson offered to us here, and we might almost say it is necessary before we can examine ourselves effectively.

Exhortation does not merely consist in saying, Let us choose the good and refuse the evil. The mind adjusts itself to conditions just as the eye adjusts itself to almost any degree of light, and the force of contrast is needed to teach us to distinguish how dark or how evil it has been. If we imagine ourselves projected back to the time of the exodus from Egypt, with all the advantages of twentieth century education, and the privileges given to ancient Israel superadded, the warnings of the apostle will fall on dull ears indeed. But if we recognize all the facts of the case, they give us a searching power of self-examination.

How far do we conform to the age in which we live, and how far are we drawn thereby from the path of perfect faithfulness? There is a lesson in the fact that the principal stumbling blocks which obstructed the path of the Israelites have been dissipated by time; and we may ask the question how far are we influenced by the worldly fashions which vanish so quickly? Do we ever give God cause to address us as He addressed the Israelites, slightly altering the wording of the question to suit the modern difficulty, "How long will it be ere ye believe that I have spoken?" Or if we do believe, do we always remember, always realize that God is omniscient, that Christ will return, that we shall stand before him? And is it a belief "from the heart unto righteousness", or do we sometimes tempt Him, sometimes murmur, sometimes lust after evil things?

The apostle mentions matters which would provide materials for whole chapters by themselves, but, for the moment, we will only take one item to illustrate the possi-

bilities of thorough self-examination on the basis of a true view of history. We enjoy a modern set of advantages, and we experience modern difficulties. We have fully grasped the principle that God is almighty. No other conception of Him is possible to a modern thinker, and this point, therefore, causes us no difficulty. We have been given evidence that He has spoken, sufficient to satisfy every test we can apply to it. We have been brought out of darkness, and are being led through a wilderness. We have been forewarned that we should experience some adversity to humble us, and teach us in our turn that "man does not live by bread alone"; but we have the assurance that if we love God and serve Him faithfully, all things will work together for good, and He will never forsake us, nor permit the trial to pass beyond our strength.

If then, we murmur or complain, are we any better than the grumblers in Israel? There is room for rigorous self-examination here, for sometimes murmuring voices are heard with less excuse than the Israelites might plead. If it is urged that the complaint is not against God but against circumstances, the question may well arise whether this is not another feeble surrender to the influence of our age, whether, in fact, it is not our special trial of faith to recognize the hand of God in circumstance, knowing, as we do, what ancient Israel found so hard to learn, that if God be for us none can be against us?

We might even imagine a resurrected Israelite presenting a view of our case so totally different from the usual habits of modern thought that it would come with something like a shock to us, and yet the extreme picture containing a sufficient element of truth to arouse some profitable reflections. "You have many advantages", he might say; "in your education you begin almost where we left off. You have instilled into the mind from infancy, lessons we had to learn by bitter experience. You have the word of God ever ready to your hand and can consult it when you like. Instead of faith depending on your memory of events which were soon

over, you have the great miracles of history and the Bible always before you, and you can renew the impressions as often as you will. Instead of coming from slavery, you were brought up in freedom. Instead of wandering through a homeless wilderness, you have houses of your own. You are protected by the powers that be, instead of being attacked by them. And yet with all these advantages, protected, well fed, well clothed, well housed, you often murmur at the most trifling difficulties."

We are far from suggesting that such an indictment would be perfectly just ; but it might conceivably appear in this light to a man coming from other times with other manners ; and, presented in this way, it may help to broaden our minds. And the effort to enter into and understand the point of view of others may help us to look at our own case with a measure of that detachment which is absolutely necessary before we can understand our errors, or even begin the work of self-examination.

There is much more to be said, but unless these foundation principles are remembered it would be almost vain to pursue the subject any further.

CHAPTER IX

MORE HEART-SEARCHING

WHEN a man has learned something of what we have called historical perspective, he is able to draw lessons from even the most ancient portions of Biblical history ; and he is also able to put many searching questions to himself as to his motives and the ruling principles of his life. " Is my course of action, in any particular instance, guided by pure regard for the law of God, or simply the

conventions of man? Am I taking pains to bring every 'hought into subjection to God, or do I countenance ideas which, under more primitive conditions of life, would be translated into sinful acts? "

Such questions as these will at once occur to a reflective mind, in working out the details of this subject. The Bible gives us a very clear lead in this matter, and states the principle involved with a directness of language and an absence of qualification that would probably have been severely censured had it originally emanated from the brain of a modern writer: "Whosoever hateth his brother, is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

The principle here involved is precisely the same as that laid down by Jesus in connection with another matter. The harbouring of evil thoughts may sometimes be regarded as heart guiltiness, although the evil desires have not been translated into action. There is no need for earnest men to be unduly distressed by this principle, when, in contemplating their own weakness, they are conscious that evil thoughts have sometimes sprung from their hearts. With both good and evil intentions, the will can only be "taken for the deed", when there is a real and deliberate determination. We shall not have praise of God simply for good thoughts which we have instantly dismissed, neither shall we be condemned for evil thoughts which we have instantly repudiated. But a solid intention to perform a good work is counted for well doing, even though circumstances should prevent the consummation; and, on the other hand, a deliberate harbouring of evil thoughts is counted for sin, even though lack of opportunity prevents the sinful act.

Thus, as an illustration of the first statement, we may remember the words of the Lord to king David when telling him that he was not destined to realize his dream of building a house for God. "Whereas it was in thine heart to build a house unto my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart" (1 Kings 8 : 18). This was not a fleeting idea which

had crossed the mind of David without any solidity of purpose behind it ; it was a definite and absorbing object in his life, born of his zeal for God, and not with any idea of self-aggrandizement. And, although he was not permitted to carry the intention into effect, it was said to him : " Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart".

Conversely, it may be said to a sinner who is saved from an evil act by lack of opportunity, " Thou didst evil in that it was in thine heart". Now, is it not a fact that the changing circumstances of human life may sometimes put a check on evil stronger than the moral force of divine law? If Cain and Abel were living in modern days, would the anger of the rejected brother end so tragically, or would he keep the hatred in his heart ?

The words of the apostle John simply give a re-emphasis to an old Testament principle, that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks into the heart. Man sees the circumstance, God sees both circumstance and intention. Man sees the act, God sees both act and motive. It is a startling thought, but there is no escape from the conclusion that it is possible for a highly respectable, apparently pious man in these days to cherish such bitter feelings against his brother, that if he were living under more primitive conditions he would strike and slay.

It is not at all uncommon for a man to feel such resentment against one who has wronged him, that he clenches his fists and feels that he would like to strike. What withholds him from delivering the blow ? Is it the fear of God or the fear of man ? Is it a sincere regard for the law of Christ or is it the influence of a purely Gentile training in manners ? Is it a desire to be respectable, to avoid any action which would be out of harmony with the rules of a shallow gentility ? One thing is certain ; if it is a pure regard for the law of Christ which holds him from injuring, the same motive power will quickly eradicate all feeling of bitterness. For the law of Christ goes further than our national code. It not only forbids us to strike our enemies, it commands us to love them.

Not only must we abstain from evil action, we must cast out the evil thought.

Perhaps there are some who would pronounce this impossible, and say that while we can control our actions we cannot control our thoughts ; that we can withhold ourselves from doing anything to injure an enemy, but we cannot help hating him.

Control of thought is a subject worthy of a separate chapter, but we may here remark that complete lack of control simply means insanity, and the contention that " we cannot help our thoughts and feelings " is of one piece with the doctrine of determinism, which repudiates responsibility for everything. It has been repeatedly proved that a sincere regard for the law of Christ, a recollection of the love he showed, and a realization of the great debt we desire God to forgive, will not only hold men back from malignant and revengeful acts, but will humble their hearts and kill every bitter thought.

Indeed, it is a fact that some find it much easier to cast out such feelings of resentment against those who have wronged them than they do to control their acts in other directions. That is largely a matter of individual temperament. But whether the task is easy or difficult, the most complete justification for the principle laid down is to be found in the fact that the old man of the flesh has repeatedly been conquered in this matter.

I suggest the idea that a most effective self-examination can be carried out by a comparison of our circumstances with more primitive times, and asking ourselves the question what course should we take if we were under none of those powerful restrictions erected by the conventions of man.

There is room for consideration of this idea in connection with other matters than the apostle's definition of a murderer. We might refer back to a previous chapter, and put some searching questions in connection with some of the subjects previously mentioned.

First with regard to the matter of doubtful or demoralizing exhibitions which appeal to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. There are undoubtedly, men—we will not say brethren, although brethren are still men—who, while revolting at the bare thought of going in the sight of all the world to attend such an exhibition, would readily embrace the opportunity to witness it all in secret, when they felt quite certain that no one would know. What is this but the fear of man instead of the fear of God? Public opinion undoubtedly exercises a salutary influence on the great majority of men, but the dread of our neighbour's censure, however useful it may be in the ordering of human life, is certainly not anything to merit the praise of God.

There have been instances of men who have maintained a conventional morality while under the restrictions of public opinion, but have completely broken loose when they have gone to live in some undeveloped country, with the power to indulge their evil desires, and no settled law or settled society to impose the restraints of legal punishment or public censure. Under such conditions men readily develop a contempt for divine laws, and even what may be considered human rights. Murder, pillage, and every kind of outrage become common, while men accustomed to violence soon lose all repugnance at the sight of blood.

And yet, after all, there has perhaps been no great change in the hearts of the men themselves. The Cains among them, instead of hating their enemies in secret, and trying to ruin them in business, lie in wait behind a rock with loaded rifle. They are murderers at heart in any case, and abhorrent in the sight of God, whether they live in the superficial decorum of the city or the freedom and savagery of the undeveloped land.

A man may ask himself the question, Would my regard for the law of God keep me in the right way if all human help were removed? Or should I find my strength unequal to the task, and prove that my fear of man is greater than my fear of God? If by some strange chance I became the unquestioned

leader of a simple people in some remote part of the world, a people with no knowledge of right and wrong, and looking to me for guidance, should I be full of zeal for God, and instruct them in the right way, or should I take advantage of them, and make them all the ministers of my pleasures ?

One thing is certain. A man who would retain his zeal for God, even if subjected to such tests, will always be on the side of righteousness in the ecclesia. A man who would not do any manner of violence to his neighbours if they were living far away from all human restraints, and accustomed to scenes of bloodshed, will never "beat a fellow-servant" in the ordinary experience of ecclesial life. And a man who would be proof against the allurements of the flesh with every opportunity, and no dread of public censure to deter him, will not indulge even the thought of evil now.

These helps to self-examination are, perhaps, all in the nature of tests of our motives. Yet the matter of motive is worthy of separate treatment. It is possible for even the noblest work to be spoiled by an improper motive at the foundation. We have no right to judge the motives of others, but it is a duty to judge our own. We must not be superficial in such a work, and we must remember that sometimes several motives might lie at the root of human actions. There may be an alloy of base metal with the pure gold.

Thus, in the work of the ecclesias, it is inconceivable that the motives of any worker should be wholly evil. He is called to the work by a desire to serve God, and apart from such a desire, he would not wish to have any part or lot in the matter. A superficial thinker may examine himself and quickly decide that his motives are beyond reproach. He looks into his heart, and finding that there is a sincere desire to be on the Lord's side, he assumes that all is well. If he examined more closely he might find that there were certain secondary motives which, if unchecked, might in course of time assume the first place in his affections. The possibility of such an evil is attested by centuries of dismal history in both ancient and modern times. Many kings and great men

of old began their course well, yet afterwards were lifted up with pride and fell into condemnation. That which had at one time been only a secondary motive, in course of time took the primary position and turned away the heart from God.

The apostle Paul speaks of this evil in his day. There were some who with envy and strife preached Christ of contention, not sincerely ; and while the apostle was prepared to rejoice that Christ was preached whether in truth or in pretence, he nevertheless taught that evil motives would destroy the preacher, even though he had been instrumental in instructing others. Thus, in writing to Timothy regarding the office of a bishop, Paul commands that a novice should not be put into such a position, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

If such a danger could exist in apostolic times, we must not expect to be free from it now. It behoves every worker to make a careful examination of his motives, to delve deep into his heart, and not be content with finding some good there. It may be accepted as a matter of course that he desires to serve God, or he would surely take no part in the work, either active or passive. But are there any other motives which will render his labour unacceptable to God ?

The counterfeit is always most dangerous when it contains the largest proportion of the true metal. There have been spurious coins in circulation so ill-made that no man of ordinary acumen would be deceived. In recent times we are informed, a number of counterfeit half-sovereigns have been made so perfectly that even banks have been deceived. But these coins, which deceive even expert eyes, are more than half pure gold, and it is just the presence of so much of the true metal that prevents the base metal from being detected. Thus a man may be a most earnest preacher, may cherish a sincere desire to serve God, and on the first effort at self-examination may think all his motives are pure gold ; yet perhaps there may also be a love of approbation or desire to have the pre-eminence which, if unchecked, will quite spoil his life's work.

We may here revert to the case of David to enforce this idea still further. We remarked that David's desire to build a house for God, was inspired by a pure zeal for divine things and not with any idea of self-aggrandizement. There are two proofs of this assertion. The first lies in the fact that God approved him and commended his intention. The second arises out of the plain facts of history. It is obvious that the construction of a magnificent temple for the worship of God would seem one of the grandest of all possible achievements for a king of Israel. It would be a lasting memorial of his greatness, a centre of pilgrimage from all parts of the kingdom, and with each successive generation men would point out to their children the beautiful house of prayer, and speak of the great king who conceived the idea and carried it into effect.

We can easily imagine what a day of pure delight it would have been to David could he have carried out his intention, and having completed the work, assembled all Israel to the dedication. His intention was frustrated. His ambition had been a worthy one, but it was not to be gratified, because he had been a man of war. What was David's attitude in the face of this disappointment? He humbly thanked God for the mercies promised, and started with zeal on such work as was permitted. He was not to have the honour of building the house, but he could perform the humble work of preparing material. He seems to have devoted himself to this idea, and "in his trouble" made great preparation for the work he was not permitted to consummate.

Might it be possible, without any undue straining of the case, to make a translation of this incident into modern times, and put ourselves to the test? Suppose that a brother conceives the idea of writing a book on a grand scale in support of the truth's warfare. It will need much research, much patient labour, much sacrifice of ease; but it is a grand work, and he is ready to devote his life to it. The idea is suggested to the brethren, and a meeting takes place to decide

whether they will find the means to carry it into effect. The brethren, in their collective wisdom, decide that such a book is necessary, but they choose another brother to write it. What will be the attitude of the one who first conceived the idea? Will he be filled with bitter indignation, and become an active opponent of the work? Or will he maintain a passive attitude, and merely make spiteful remarks? Or will he crush down all evil feelings, and retire into himself hurt and silent? Or will he prove a man after the David type, accept the decision, with perhaps a pang of regret, but with no diminution of his enthusiasm, and with a whole-hearted determination to make the work a success, apply himself to the hack labour of accumulating material to help the chosen author?

In this way we obtain a glimpse at God's point of view in pronouncing David a man after His own heart. There are many who would not have transgressed in the manner David did, but who, if baulked in a laudable ambition to build a temple, would have washed their hands of the whole affair.

Perhaps there are some who will think that our modern illustration hardly presents a fair parallel, since it might be much easier to accept a disappointment with becoming meekness when it comes from God than when it comes from man. If, however, we go to the root of the matter, there is no real difference. The work of the ecclesias now is in the service of God. It should be performed "with singleness of eye to the glory of God". There are many matters in connection with which our only course is to accept the decision of the majority, and we all recognize that this is the only possible workable rule. But when the decision of the majority runs contrary to our ideas of what should prevail, there are various ways in which we can accept it. We can make the best of it or the worst of it, while between those two extremes are many grades. We may think an unwise course has been taken, but when the decision has been made we should try to make it a success. We may think the wrong brother has been chosen

for a special work ; but since he has been chosen, let us do all in our power to strengthen his hands.

Perhaps there are some other critics who will not dispute the fairness of the lesson drawn from the life of David, but will think the instruction is hardly needed. If there are none in these days who would assume an improper attitude in the face of disappointment ; if none of our brethren ever decline work they might perform, because they are not permitted to take the part they would have chosen—so much the better. The more we can be like David in this particular the closer shall we approximate to the standard set us. But a little self-examination in this matter will not harm anyone. It is sometimes well for a healthy man to ascertain how incipient disease may be detected and checked.

There is one other matter which may well be mentioned under this heading. We sometimes hear of harsh judgment being passed on one who has been overtaken in a fault, and from whom the brethren have felt it necessary to withdraw. There are times when this painful course becomes a duty. For the honour of the Lord, for the benefit of the ecclesias, for the sake of interested friends, and even for the sake of the offender himself, it is necessary to withdraw from one who is guilty of disorderly walk.

But when this duty has been performed, it is not right to pass comments on the action of the offender, and assume that his association with the brethren has been hypocritical. Rather let us judge ourselves and ask whether we have always been consistent, or whether in some sense—as suggested by the apostle Paul in the seventh chapter of his letter to the Romans—we do not all lead double lives. When one who has for many years been a labourer in the service of the truth makes complete shipwreck, let it not minister occasion for uncharitable comments ; but rather for a most thorough heart-searching, to see whether there are not some inconsistencies in us, which might grow almost imperceptibly from year to year, till our very profession of faith would seem like hypocrisy. In this connection it is well to remember that on

a certain historic occasion, the only one whose life was perfectly consistent was the One to recognize that a discovered sinner might yet fear God. The One who never offended was most charitable towards the weak offender.

CHAPTER X

PREPARATION BY TRIBULATION

AN English writer of great reputation once remarked that prosperity was the blessing of the Old Testament, and adversity the blessing of the New. Having stated this broad distinction, he tried to qualify it by pointing out that even in the Old Testament there is some recognition of the blessings that accrue from divinely-administered chastening. The statement needed even more pruning than this ; for, although at first sight it may seem to express a truth, it becomes evident, on closer consideration, that there is no real difference in this matter between the two dispensations. Under both covenants prosperity is exhibited as the final blessing, and under both covenants adversity is commended as a means to an end.

“ Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now I observe thy word.” This passage, from the book of Psalms, is the enunciation of a general principle, which is exemplified in all parts of the Bible—in the lives of the fathers, who dwelt as strangers and sojourners in the land of promise ; in the history of Israel ; in the repeated declensions during times of prosperity, and purification through adversity ; and it is only more fully manifested in the lives and writings of the New Testament saints. “ We must through much tribulation, enter the kingdom.” Exaltation is only to be after we

have "suffered a while". This is only a re-emphasis of the principle laid down in the Psalm, and it is instructive to note that some of the most complete expositions contained in the New Testament give extensive quotations from the Old.

The beautiful Scripture "which speaketh unto us as unto children," comes from the Book of Proverbs : " My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his reproof. For whom the Lord loveth he reproveth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth " (R.V.). In truth, the only difference between the old covenant and the new in this respect is, that in former times the Land of Promise was inherited under the law of Moses, whereas now it lies desolate. In former times obedient servants received some typical blessings in the chosen country, whereas now all Israel, both natural and spiritual, are scattered among the heathen. The underlying principles remain unaltered. The final blessing is complete unity with God, and an abundant inheritance of all desirable things. Adversity and suffering play their part in the preparation for the meeting with God.

It would surely be a mistake, however, to assume that misfortune and disaster befall the servants of God more than other men. When the apostle declared that the way to the kingdom was through much tribulation, he did not imply that the way to everlasting chains of darkness was through much happiness and ease. The Bible verdict is quite the other way, and a survey of this troubled world confirms the truth of it. The most genuine joy is to be found among the servants of God, and the most complete misery and discontent is to be found among the most thorough servants of sin.

It is a great mistake for brethren to be anxious to represent that they suffer much for their profession. It seems almost like an insult to God for one to say, " If it had not been for the truth, I might have been well off instead of being poor, and hardly securing the bare necessities of life". These " might have beens " are very uncertain. Were it not for the truth, he might have been in the workhouse or in prison. Trouble is the common lot of humanity, only in the case of

the righteous it is divinely controlled, and covered by the gracious assurance that we shall not be tempted beyond what we are able to bear.

The question may then be asked, Wherein is the force of the apostle's words regarding the chastening God administers to those He loves? If as much, or more, trouble might have been heaped upon them by the accidents of time and chance had they never known the way of life, where is the significance of tribulation or of the apostle's words?

One answer has already been indicated. The sufferings of a saint are divinely regulated, while the sufferings of sinners have been accurately described by a much-afflicted poet as "the bludgeonings of chance". There is, however, another answer to the question. There is one kind of tribulation experienced at all times by those who try to serve God, and from which the thorough-going servants of sin are quite exempt. It is described most vividly in the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans. It is the struggle against our own fleshly weakness, which may become so severe as to lead one to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" All those who are described as having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, will have passed through severe tribulation of this kind. There is no escape from it, and, generally speaking, the more spiritually-minded a man is, the greater will be the struggle, the more severe the trial.

Other troubles—sickness, bereavement, poverty, weariness, and all the other evils that afflict humanity, are a common heritage of saint and sinner. The principal difference between the two cases is that the troubles of saints are divinely controlled, while sinners are far more the sport of chance. Those glorious ministering spirits sent forth to the heirs of salvation encamp around those who fear God and deliver them, whereas when the angels have a special mission to aliens, it is generally because the long suffering of God has come to an end, and human society must be subjected to a drastic purging. Time and chance happen to all, but some-

times chance is controlled for good or evil. Other men beside Joseph have been wrongfully imprisoned, other men beside Job have lost their possessions and been stricken with illness, other kings beside David have been driven from their thrones by rebel sons ; but in the vast majority of these cases the afflicted men have been the sport of chance, and where they have been the subjects of providential control the object may have been to punish rather than to purify.

In the special instances mentioned the apparent evil was only the chastening hand of God on beloved, although not faultless, sons. And this thought brings us back to the most difficult and most interesting phase of the subject. It is comparatively easy to see that chance advantage or chance adversity may befall an alien world. It is easy to accept the truth that every servant of God must pass through some tribulation arising out of the conflict with self, but there remain these other evils to be explained. God-fearing men are sometimes plunged into dire misfortune. Prayer seems of no avail, the very effort to do good sometimes appears to enhance the evil, and if the angels of God surround such an one, it appears as if they have a charge to torture rather than to deliver him. Yet we are told that we must not regard this as evidence of God's displeasure, but that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth".

Why this suffering? Why should it be necessary for those who are trying to serve God faithfully to pass through such tribulation? The analogy suggested in the passage just quoted is of some assistance, but it fails to give complete satisfaction. The feeling may arise, and we have heard it put into actual words, that there is no comparison between the gentle punishment and reproof a parent will administer, and the awful suffering to which some of the sons of God have been subjected. Perhaps the most important work one could possibly perform in writing a treatise on the philosophy of suffering, would be to give a clearer view of the relationship between punishment and reward, and a better understanding

of what is meant by the fatherhood of God. When men feel rebellious against the trials which overtake them, and are unable to reconcile the evil we experience with the mercy of God, it is simply because they see everything in a wrong perspective. They are wearing short-sight glasses which enable them to see their fellows and all near objects, but which quite fail to give a more distant view.

We may at once point out that if there is no comparison between the punishment a father will administer to his son, and the affliction which has sometimes come on the sons of God, neither is there any comparison between the two objects in view. Indeed, if we examine the matter closely, we are bound to recognize that there is a far greater disparity between the objects than between the reproofs. The fact is, man looks at the matter from the narrow standpoint of merely human life. The human father directs his efforts to train the child in such a way as to be fitted to take a proper place in the world of his day and generation. If there is some regard paid to the idea of a better life beyond, there is always the feeling that the same foundation of training will suffice, with nothing added except instruction in the ways of God and exhortation to seek after Him. The human father is rather like an older child in the nursery. He still shares the nursery's fortunes, and his horizon is practically bounded by its walls. He may be well able to teach the younger ones to behave according to nursery etiquette, and to qualify for nursery games, but he knows little of the great world outside, and when some evil or disappointment comes, he is as ready to cry as the youngest child.

There can be no comparison between a temporal and an eternal object, since the finite can never be compared with the infinite. It is a fact, however, that in all temporal objects men pay great regard to the time required for the endeavour and the durability of the finished work. Who would not be willing to endure a single second of suffering in order to secure some substantial advantage for the rest of life? Yet even a second is a proportion of our allotted span. The

fraction can easily be expressed in figures, and not such an appalling array of figures either. Sixty seconds to the minute, sixty minutes to the hour, twenty-four hours to the day, three-hundred-and-sixty-five days to the year, and then seventy years for a human life. But the whole history of mankind does not constitute a fraction of eternity. The realization of this fact helps us to see something of God's point of view, and we can understand why that which seems like the most awful suffering to us can be described as a "light affliction which endureth but for a moment". The apprehension of this single fact is enough to reprove those who feel inclined to complain that the chastening hand of God is more severe than that of the human father. There is, indeed, a disparity, but it does not lie in the direction the grumblers think.

We must delve deeper than this, however, if we desire to understand God's point of view with anything approaching to completeness. As men and women we naturally attach too much importance to the individual life. This feeling does not possess us so much when we look back on the tragedies of remote history. No one grieves over the destroyed Sodomites, or feels that those personalities ought to be restored, to be given another opportunity to repent. When men have been dead so long we are apt to think of them as if they had never really been, and we do not feel that there is anything more terrible in their "perpetual sleep" than the prevented births of the children they would have borne had their lives been spared.

From God's point of view there is no limit to the possible production of human personalities, and those who sin and perish are of no more account than those who have never been. Therefore, since God calls us from the dust, and gives us all things we possess, what possible analogy can we suggest which will be a real illustration of the position? We are the products of an alien world, only living through God's long-suffering, and if, by adoption, we become children, and are subjected to chastisement, it is only through God withholding

for a while some of His good gifts. A fair consideration of the elementary truths we have learned will bring us to the attitude of Job. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be his name." The chastening is grievous, we are made sorrowful by it ; but our apprehension of the truth should make us "sorry after a godly manner". The trouble with the grumblers is that they accept all blessings as a matter of course, and comparing the best they can imagine of life with the limitations of their experience, think that they have in some way been wronged. Whatever happens, they have no ground for complaint, unless it was wronging them to give them a personality at all.

But still, when all this is admitted, the question remains, Why should the servants of God, who humbly recognize His supremacy and His goodness, have to suffer in their time of preparation ? We are told that He will not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men, so there must be some reason for the chastening rod to fall. Perhaps the consideration of a few special cases may serve, in part, at least to show us what that reason is.

CHAPTER XI

EXAMPLES OF PREPARATION BY SUFFERING

WE could hardly do better than begin by a review of the experience of Israel in the wilderness, that period of history so fruitful of instruction. This was a national preparation, yet it was also individual, as there were many among those who finally entered the land, who were old enough to discern between good and evil at the time of the Exodus, although they had not reached man's estate. They passed through the whole experience which taught the nation discipline, and witnessed in their own lives the effect of divinely regulated trial.

The case is particularly interesting from the fact that the Israelites were in bondage in the land of Egypt, and the Exodus came to them as a great deliverance and an offer of freedom. We read that they were under the command of hard task-masters, that they were made to serve with rigour, and that "their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage". Yet when they were brought out of Egypt, it did not seem to need much trial or danger to create in their minds a desire to revert to the old conditions of slavery. On more than one occasion they called to memory the good things of Egypt, and appeared to conclude—as some have done in latter times—that Egyptian bondage was preferable to the freedom of Truth.

They looked back with longing eyes on the flesh pots of Egypt when they first saw the wilderness before them, and no apparent means of sustenance (Exod. 26 : 2). The mixed multitude fell lusting, and many of the children of Israel were rebellious when there was nothing but manna to eat (Num. 11 : 6). They proposed to make a captain of their own, and return to Egypt rather than encounter the giants of Palestine (Num. 14 : 2). And they openly affirmed their preference for Egyptian life, and their loathing of the "light bread", with which God had sustained them (Num. 21 : 5).

Readers who accept the argument used in a former chapter regarding historical perspective, will have no difficulty in recognizing the fact that, from the purely human point of view, the deliverance from Egypt was intensely disappointing ; and with little more penetration the possible application of the lesson to our own days will be equally obvious. God's point of view was totally different from that of His people ; and before they could be established in the land of promise, before they could be accepted as a nation, they needed drastic purging, they required much instruction, and their whole point of view had to be changed.

From the standpoint of the slaves in the land of Egypt, the distinctive evil of their experience was that they were made to work hard, and their task-masters were severe. From

God's standpoint, the evil was that they were in a thoroughly bad religious atmosphere, and that there was no opportunity for spiritual growth. When they were delivered, they longed for material blessings, and complete exemption from the bitter experience of toil and weariness. God looked for an improvement of mind and a growth of the spiritual man.

They apparently thought that God should have exercised His power to give them all desirable luxuries, to feed them with food such as they appreciated, and to save them from evil, or even the fear of evil. The object of their Creator is expressed in the words of Moses, as recorded in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy : " He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God doth man live."

Thus, the deliverance from Egypt really involved what might, from the human point of view, have been considered merely a change of troubles. Instead of a grinding and stunting servitude, with plenty to eat and drink, but with no opportunity to develop the higher powers, they were brought into the life of divine truth with a privilege of access to God such as has never been vouchsafed to any other nation; but, at the same time, they were suffered to hunger, sustained by a kind of food which was not intended to please the flesh, and subjected to experiences designed to humble and prove them.

The good effect of this severe discipline is seen in the account given in the last chapter of the book of Joshua. The people protested that they would serve the Lord, and we are told in a sentence which covers a period of some years that they had respect unto their vow : " Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that over-lived Joshua, and who had known all the works of the Lord that he had done for Israel."

This presents a great contrast to the picture of the Exodus, or to the time when in their first disappointment at

the limitations of their deliverance, the people desired to turn again to bondage. They had been brought through the wilderness, many rebels had been purged out from among them, they had suffered many trials ; and at last, chastened and humbled, they were brought into the land of promise as a righteous nation, serving the Lord. Having learned that the word of God is more precious than material blessings they were fitted, for a time at least, to receive and enjoy such blessings ; and this experience stands out as one of the great illustrations of preparation to meet God, as an example for all generations following.

It is not difficult to see some ways in which the lesson may be applied in our own day. Men sometimes cry unto God by reason of their hard bondage in these times, and in such modern instances the hardship they deplore is often more in the strain and worry of exacting labour, than the lack of opportunity for spiritual exercises. Sometimes God interferes and calls such men to freedom, and as in the case of the Israelites they sometimes find the deliverance very disappointing. We have heard those who are afflicted raise the question, "What possible object can this trouble serve ? It does not and cannot make me any better. It rather makes me worse". With the example of the Israelites in mind we may recognize the possibility of this being true. The affliction in the wilderness did not improve every individual although it served the nation. It was a purging process as well as a means for individual discipline, and certain words of the Lord Jesus suggest that trouble performs a similar work now.

He speaks of some who, like the seed on stony ground, have only feeble roots, and who, when trouble arises, are quickly offended. In the presence of affliction it is well to remember the impressive words we have quoted from Moses, for Jesus quoted those words in the hour of temptation : "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". "He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna",

Moses said, and thus indicated that the special food God provided for His people was intended to chasten. It sustained them in life ; there was no cause to complain, but it fell short of what they desired. It was not equal to the portion they would have chosen for themselves.

If, then, we feel in these days that our experience is rough and humiliating, it simply presents an analogy to that portion of Israel's history which is, in a special sense, offered to us as an example and a warning ; and if we feel that the adversity we have to endure cannot in any way benefit us, it suggests a terrible alternative, that instead of being numbered among the faithful to be purified, we are joining the ranks of the rebels to be purged out.

The fact is, we can, in large measure, determine for ourselves what shall be the effect of our experience. We may resolve, under all circumstances, to draw closer unto God ; that, even under the stress of greatest affliction, we will still trust in Him, and in times of prosperity we will remember the lessons of adversity. With so many examples before us in the Scriptures we ought never to feel rebellious, or for a moment suffer the thought that we are unjustly treated. Those who respond to the call of the gospel in these days are like Israel of old journeying through the wilderness. There are some times of pure joy, and there is always the comfort of having access to the mind of God ; but there are also many trials and afflictions, purposely designed, to purge the whole body, and to purify individuals. There are not many who are required to endure for more than forty years.

Sometimes, however, a man may feel unduly depressed by the fact that circumstances hinder his best efforts, and the trend of events would almost seem to indicate that his work for the truth was unacceptable. He may feel that his sphere of action is so deplorably limited, while if he were more favourably situated he would do so much. It is not that he pines to be rich, for he recognizes that riches are proverbially deceitful ; and the one who talks of the good he would do if possessed of money is generally allured, whether he admits

the fact or not, by the thought of the power and pleasure wealth confers more than by the good it might accomplish.

“ I do not even desire to be wealthy”, such an one may say, “ I only desire that life’s burden should be eased just a little. I feel that I could write and speak in the service of the truth with some effect if my mind were not so jaded. But with a life of wearying toil sapping a man’s strength, how can he ever do his best ? If a man comes home at night worn out in mind and body, and then, perhaps, has to minister to an ailing wife, and take charge of a peevish child, how can he possibly prepare any effective work in the truth’s warfare ? How is it that some who are called upon to serve, are so fettered and afflicted in their labours ? ”

One who reasons in this way has failed to recognize one of the most elementary of the principles which govern the plan of salvation. We may address some home truths to such a complainer, truths which are not perceived in some quarters, and which may be given a new emphasis even to those who know them.

There is only one work in which God has any actual need of your assistance, and that is the work of your own salvation. If, then, God regards you with favour, from His point of view, your most important task in life is to make your own calling and election sure. Any other work you may perform might just as well be done by others ; all that is required of you is, that within the limits of your opportunities, you shall do your best : not the very best of which you might be capable with the most favourable conditions, but the best that is possible under the circumstances. The disadvantages under which you labour are included in the assessment of the talent given you.

Has it ever occurred to you that your chafing at the fetters which hinder your work savours of egotism ? Do you suppose that God had any need even of Moses in the deliverance of Israel ? As a matter of fact, when Moses, in the enthusiasm and strength of youth, “ supposed that his brethren would have understood that God by his hand should deliver

them", he was not permitted to perform the work. He had to flee ; he lived as an exile for many years, and perhaps he sometimes felt that his powers were being wasted in the land of Midian. He probably endured many trials in those days, and then, when he was humble, shrinking from the idea of being a leader, and desiring a life of quietness, he was called forth to the greatest trial of all. But God could have performed the work by other hands, and had Moses refused to obey, God would have suffered no loss, except the loss of Moses.

Wherefore, O complaining brother, what does it matter if your powers all seem to be wasted, through the prosaic duties of life being too exacting ? The labourers in the harvest may be few, but God will have all He needs, and perhaps these very trials of yours, this apparent waste of your energies, may be a necessary part of your training, and God may think of you more as part of the harvest, to be ripened and prepared, than as a labourer for others. But it is demanded of you that you shall do your best, and, so far as possible, triumph over obstacles. When you are tired after a day's work, therefore, do not jade your mind still further by worrying over your limitations. Minister to the ailing wife as she needs, soothe the crying child, and then do your best under difficulties to write or prepare the work you have to do. It is not that God stands in need of your help, it is simply that with a full knowledge of all the circumstances, He demands the best you can perform. And it is just possible, after all, that a few ragged sentences or feebly expressed ideas, prepared under such trying conditions, will strike home with a greater force of truth than the most polished emanations from the private study, and in their artless simplicity be even more effective than that highest form of art which conceals art.

If we seek illustrations of individuals who have been prepared through suffering, we might take the case of David as a special example. He was called to a position of exceptional honour and responsibility in mortal life, and he had to pass through a period of much affliction and trial by way of

training. The beginning of his reign shows how well this tribulation prepared him, and his later transgression furnishes a remarkable illustration of the dangers of prosperity. David was sent to the hard school of adversity for a second time to prepare him for the higher position to which he was called.

Other characters might be mentioned whose lives illustrate the same principle, and whose example has often been cited ; but it would only be to repeat the lesson already given. Men of strong faith, who make a proper use of the very varied Scriptures God has given us, will not be purged out from the commonwealth of Israel by tribulation. Though they may not understand why certain troubles come, they will determine to be rightly exercised by them, in order that, like Job, they may come out of the furnace of affliction like silver refined. It may seem that their abilities are fettered, but they remember that God knows all the circumstances, and He will be just. They will continue the work of building even though the enemy presses so hard that they only have one hand wherewith to labour ; their troubles will become their tutors, and disappointment—to borrow a fine idea from Henry Kirke White—will be like a gentle nurse to wean them from the world.

I think that the Hindus, with their doctrine of Nirvana, simply exhibit a perversion of a truth taught long ago to our common ancestors. This idea of an ultimate absorption into the divine—that all things come from God, and all things turn to God again, is unquestionably scriptural. Yet what a vast difference there is between the false and the true in this matter. The heathen conception appears to be that personal existence is a curse ; that all the suffering endured serves no purpose except to help us back towards the condition from which we started ; and personalities are purified only to be destroyed.

The Bible teaches that we are subjected to trial in order that we may be fitted for our individuality to be perpetuated. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, will be in

the Kingdom. Men and women of whom the world was not worthy will be made perfect as real and distinct individuals, who have passed through such experiences that it is possible for them to be made partakers of the nature of God and yet remain distinct and separate characters. The affliction of the righteous thus accomplishes a real work. It is not a mere stepping-stone back to the original condition. It is the way to a new creation, it is the pain of spiritual childbirth.

Where can we find such clean cut and distinct personalities as those who have suffered for righteousness, and trod the narrow path which leads to life? men who have striven against temptation, who, conscious of their weakness, have clung to the hand of the One who is strong; sometimes stumbling, sometimes receiving instruction through bitter suffering and sorrow, but pressing towards the mark of their high calling? "With strong crying and tears" they have made their supplication to God, with earnest prayer they have besought His forgiveness and His help. Even in the darkest hour of trial they have remembered their early lessons, and while pleading that the cup of bitterness might pass, have said, "Thy will be done". However dark the way they have not faltered; however bitter and incomprehensible the pain they have maintained their trust, and prayed that sorrow should have its right effect and bring them nearer to God.

In this development is witnessed the strange yet beautiful paradox that the more they grow like God, the stronger is their personality. They have risen from the formless animalism of the natural man, and through the travail of temptation and trial have approached the angelic standard of intense individuality, yet perfect harmony with God.

CHAPTER XII

CONTROL OF THOUGHT

EVERY deliberate act is the outcome of deliberate thought, and it therefore follows that control of thought must lie at the foundation of all reform, and must be the mainspring of every virtue right up to that bridling of the tongue which is placed by an apostle as the supreme test of a man.

We shall never find a better description of the process which leads to destruction than that contained in the first chapter of the Epistle of James : " Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

It is safe to affirm that there has only been one out of all the human race who has exercised a perfect control over thought ; only one to whom that passage from the Psalms is perfectly applicable—" I hate vain thoughts ; but thy law do I love." It is characteristic of humanity to love vain thoughts, and the step from vain to sinful is only a very small one, if, indeed, there is a step at all. But, although we are all sinners, we are required to follow the perfect example of our Lord and Master as closely as we can, and so must endeavour to resemble him in this. In other words, we must learn to control our thoughts.

This at once raises an issue mentioned in a previous chapter. There are some people who deny the possibility of such control. They claim that thoughts come uninvited, seeming to flash into the brain from nowhere and defying all effort to exclude them. Consequently it is urged that control of actions is hard enough, and control of thought impossible. We need not be surprised at this objection, since there are many writers in these days who take a similar stand regarding the whole subject of human action. Indeed, humanity has always been disposed to repudiate responsibility for evil

behaviour, at one time seeking to lay the blame on the Creator, at another on a god of evil, or devil, and now in these more scientific days, on the many causes described by the word Circumstance. It is urged that man is the helpless subject of environment, that in so far as a babe possesses character or the material from which character may develop, it is the outcome of ancestral environment, and that from the cradle to the full development of manhood it is the sport of Circumstance. In short, that whether men are noble or bestial, cultured or degraded, they are the natural product of the soil in which they have grown.

There is a considerable element of truth in this contention, and therein lies its danger. The highly respected judge may have no greater intrinsic virtue than the vicious offender he condemns, and if their whole conditions of life could have been exchanged, their positions in the final scene might be inverted. No wise man will dispute that environment accounts in very large measure for the failure or success, the righteousness or unrighteousness, of man. But when this principle is carried as far as some writers have taken it, it becomes not only untrue but absurd, not only absurd but self-destructive.

Thus, if men are the helpless creatures of circumstance, and can exercise no real power of choice, what is the use of arguing with them, and what possible object can be served by propounding a system of philosophy? If the denier of free-will replies that he is not a fatalist, and that he acknowledges the possibility of argument being a factor in determining a man's course of action, surely then, his whole system stands self-condemned. For the very doctrine of determinism will be one of the determining factors, and who could commend it then? Teach men that they are poor creatures of circumstance and cannot in justice be punished or blamed, however much they sin, and what manner of men will they become? It is quite possible for a defence of "bottom dogs" to be a prime factor in the production of the breed. Let it once be admitted that men may hear the voice of wisdom and be

influenced thereby, and all we ask is then conceded. Preachers of righteousness are justified, and sin's apologists stand condemned.

Approaching more directly to the subject in hand, we may dismiss all philosophical speculations and consult our own experience. There is surely a real difference between sanity and insanity, and the difference can best be expressed by saying that a sane man is responsible for his actions. His thoughts are definite, he sees certain real issues before him, and he is conscious of making deliberate choice. Not only so, but he must also be conscious of a higher part of the mind capable of controlling in large measure the unclassified thoughts which flit through the brain with such rapidity and in such profusion. You are perhaps walking along a crowded street, and a multitude of crude thoughts come into the mind, some of them excited by objects you see and sounds you hear, some coming with no apparent cause, but probably arising in many cases from latent impressions you do not properly remember, or from associations of ideas too mechanical for the higher part of the brain to follow. It may be quite true that you cannot prevent these flitting thoughts from passing through your mind. The eyes see whatever is before them, the ears hear whatever sounds are in the air, and the mechanical association of ideas is unavoidable. So it is that many vain thoughts are thrust upon us as we walk along the street of a city, and we cannot be held responsible for them.

But are you not conscious of a higher part of the brain capable at any moment of seizing on any one of those stray thoughts, and retaining it in the mind for definite consideration? And is it not beyond all question a fact that in this you exercise some power of choice and control? You may pass a picture shop and see therein a picture of Christ and a picture of a sinner. You cannot prevent this presentation of opposite ideas, but you can exercise a choice as to which subject shall be encouraged and which shall be dismissed. And this is only an illustration of many such choices which are

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

continually presented to the mind. A man is not a passive instrument to listen to the best arguments of both sin and righteousness, and by a kind of automatic process yield to the guidance of one or the other. There is the possibility of listening to the voice of wisdom saying, "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge", and by making such a choice to secure great results in the end, despite human weakness and sin's deceitfulness.

This responsibility rests with the higher part of the mind, and we are all conscious of the power to choose from among the fleeting impressions conveyed to the brain by the senses. The habits of the lower part of the brain are undoubtedly determined by circumstances and training, and the greatest of all determining factors is the attitude of the higher, reasoning part of man. Habit has been defined as second nature ; and few people will deny the truth of what this saying implies. Habits become like natural impulses. When in great strength they seem irresistible, and even when the higher reasoning part of the brain condemns them, they have their own way.

Like all reforms, the re-ordering of the brain is a lengthy process. It requires a weeding out of the unfit elements, a stricter discipline, and some time for exercise to get all the parts in efficient working order, and to train the habits in the right direction. The issue comes before us very plainly here.

Teach men that they are not responsible for their thoughts and actions, that there is no such thing as free will, that environment is everything, and that they cannot with justice be praised for well-doing, or blamed for their sins—and they will relax all effort, give free rein to habits, and sink very much into the automatic machines they believe themselves to be.

Teach them that they are responsible, that they can "refuse the evil and choose the good", and can even exercise a control over their thoughts, and they will rise to the occasion. There will be a conscious choice, a conscious struggle against evil tendencies and evil environment, and a

consequent development of personality. It is out of such a struggle that the sons of God are born.

There have been some attempts on the part of scientific men to classify the several parts of the brain, and to present a comprehensible picture of its powers and processes. Without attempting to be scientific, we may in some measure follow the lead of a scientist in suggesting an illustration of the matter which will emphasize the importance of discipline and the cultivation of good habits. The brain is rather like the controlling staff of a great business, the higher reasoning part being represented by the head of the firm, and the lower parts by various subordinates. The servants sometimes act under the direct instruction and supervision of the master, but very often they have to act for themselves, only indirectly controlled by him. Even then, however, he is largely responsible for their behaviour. If he is the soul of honesty and integrity it may, indeed, be a long time before they reach the same high level, but they will come nearer to it with each struggle. If, on the other hand, he is unscrupulous and deceitful, the staff will follow his lead, and probably end by deceiving the master himself.

It will be the same with the staff whose duty it is to gather and report information, and who correspond to the receptive faculties of the brain. If the master promptly consigns useless or harmful reports to the waste paper basket, and reprimands those who have produced them, the number of such reports will greatly diminish, and the amount of valuable information obtained will proportionately increase. If, on the contrary, he manifests great interest in the most frivolous items, such matters will predominate, and the eyes of the staff grow keener for them. It is so with the powers of the mind. The ruling part is responsible for the training of many servants, and on their training will the efficiency of their work depend.

We may often see the most effective condemnation of a false theory in the attitude assumed by men of business. On

no subject are men so practical as where finance is concerned, and it is possible sometimes to learn a lesson from these mundane affairs which is applicable to higher things. There may be some successful business men, who, as a matter of theory, embrace the doctrine of determinism, and deny the freedom of the human will, but it is quite certain that they will never attempt to make a practical application of the principle. They recognize clearly enough that there is a constant necessity for choice and conscious effort. They perceive that one of the great essentials of success is in the cultivation of businesslike habits, and they are generally ready to claim that some credit is due to them for the energy they have displayed and the control they have maintained over the natural inclination to shirk all unpleasant work.

One of the best business exhortations I ever read was on the subject of habits. It was not merely a condemnation of bad habits on the lines of ordinary moral maxims. It pointed out that habits of many kinds may be developed ; and the subconscious powers of the brain furnish us with a whole army of servants, which may be so well trained as to become most efficient helps, or so mismanaged as to become our masters. Cultivate good habits, and the higher part of the brain is left free to perform the work which it alone can accomplish. The right thing is done at the right time as a matter of routine, regular duties are performed with the same instinctive certainty that calls us to the breakfast table in the morning, and the higher part of the mind is able to devote itself more thoroughly to the realm of pure thought. Such a well-ordered brain is like a business with a good organizer at the head. The chief does not run here, there, and everywhere in a random and disjointed effort to see all the work done. He knows how to delegate labour, and to maintain an efficient staff of workers. He knows how to establish an effective routine which leaves him free to direct the whole machine, and think out further possibilities of improvement. In short, he has, by conscious choice and effort, produced and cultivated an army of useful habits,

first in his own brain, and then in the whole organization of his business.

If the desire for temporal success can evoke such effort, how much more should the ambition to be fit for the kingdom of God. The same rules apply regarding the control of thought, and the same lessons must be learned over the matter of habits. We must remember the positive side as well as the negative, and as well as avoiding those habits that are evil, cultivate the good—the habit of reading, the habit of well ordered thought, and the habit of prayer. Control of thought lies at the basis of it all, and the persistence of these habits will, in their turn, enormously strengthen that control.

A business magazine published an account of a most successful salesman who maintained his efficiency by putting himself through a kind of catechism every morning, to impress upon his mind the excellence of his proposition and his determination to be successful. Perhaps his example might, with advantage, be followed on a higher plane of thought. Men may exhort themselves sometimes more effectively than they can be exhorted. Our ideals go far beyond our attainments, and an author may sometimes feel that his own writings are his severest critics, and his own exhortations pre-eminently suited to his own case. Thus it is possible for men to examine and reprove themselves, and, without any knowledge of scientific propositions, practice what has sometimes been called self-hypnotism. There is a very real wisdom in the institution of special evening and morning prayer, for it is at those times that the mind is most plastic, and habits of thought most easily formed. Let a man deliver his evening prayer from the heart, and then, dismissing worldly thoughts, woo sleep by thinking about the kingdom of God, and his mind will be in the right condition for the silent night's work of renovation. It is by the encouragement of such ennobling thoughts that the positive habits are formed and evil habits are excluded. In this way also our power of controlling thought may be increased, and instead of being guided by the imaginations of an evil heart, the faculty of imagination may

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

become subservient and fill a most useful part in giving us a broader outlook, enlarging our sympathies through a better understanding of other standpoints besides our own, and in enabling us to realize and bring home to our minds the truths we have learned.

CHAPTER XIII

PREPARATION BY ALL THINGS

THIS heading for the last chapter of the series suggests the idea of a recapitulation. In connection with almost any other subject it would indeed be so, for after an author had dealt in detail with various methods of preparation, the final heading, "Preparation by all things", could only mean a repetition, or general summary of what had already been advanced.

In this matter, however, there is room for such a chapter without any need for repetition. The preparation of Israel is unique in this, that all things work together for good to those who love God ; all the work, all the activity of life can be an offering to the Creator and a preparation of the creature. It is not only in the labour directly inspired by a love for divine things, that a service can be rendered ; but often in work which seems to have no connection with the purpose of God there is equal opportunity for faithful endeavour, and the manifestation of love. The apostle shows us that there is scope for rendering service to God even in working for a bad master. The evils should be endured patiently as part of a necessary training, and the work performed heartily as unto the Lord and not unto man.

The meeting on the first day of the week has sometimes been regarded as an antidote to work-a-day experience, as if

all worldly associations were evil, and a special effort was needed every week to counteract their influence. May we not rather make it a time of self-examination to insure that we are rightly exercised by adverse experience, and to so face the forces of evil that they are all converted into helps? In matters of physical development, exercise will always strengthen the muscles so long as it is not severe enough to overstrain them. And even if they are sometimes tested too severely, and prove unequal to the task imposed upon them, it is far better to suffer some mishaps in the rough-and-tumble of life, than for the powers to be atrophied through lack of use. A child is not strengthened by its falls, and may possibly be greatly harmed by them, yet the muscles grow strong through exercise, which is attended by inevitable risk; and it is better to have a few falls than to remain feeble and useless.

The Lord Jesus did not pray that his disciples should be taken out of the world, but that they might be shielded from harm, and remain faithful to their trust, though living in a faithless age. When men or women attempt to isolate themselves from the world in order to cultivate a special spirituality, they are not acting in harmony with the Master's teaching, and they do not develop a genuine piety. Their virtues are only of a negative kind, and perhaps not far removed from positive vice. A blind man cannot be said to have overcome the lust of the eye, neither can a dumb man be praised because he speaks no evil. But a man in full possession of all his faculties may live in the world, yet not be of it, and by his positive efforts attest his faith in such a way as to find forgiveness for his failings. In that great picture of the judgment seat presented to us by the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteous are commended for their positive virtues, and the wicked are condemned for their sins of omission.

We are shown what is required by many shining examples; men who manifested their faith by their works, and who took their place in the world of action. They could rejoice or sorrow, they could abound or be abased, they could hold the reins of temporal power or be driven to igno-

miny and death—and in all their experience find some exercise to prepare them for the life which is to come. We are exhorted to work, not as men-pleasers, but as in the sight of God, doing all things heartily as unto Him. This is a most helpful thought, supplying us as it does with an eternal object, even in the ordinary experiences of every day, and drawing us close to God even while we are engaged in temporal pursuits. We require something more than the will to improve. Mind, like muscle, requires exercise as well as food. Sometimes people have been oppressed with the feeling that there is so small a part of their life which brings them into contact with divine things, and they plead for more opportunity to serve God. They are like the shipwrecked men, whose experience has furnished such an excellent illustration for preachers. A party of unfortunate mariners, drifting helplessly on a rudely constructed raft, half mad with thirst, and with no land in sight, frantically signalled to a distant ship for water. A curt answer, in three words, fluttered at the masthead of the vessel, "Dip and drink". Wondering at the strange advice, they tasted the the water and found it fresh. The raft had drifted by the coast of South America, and they were near the mouth of the mighty Amazon, whose waters flow over the surface of the sea for many miles before they are finally mingled with the salt. These poor voyagers, piteously pleading for drink, were all the while surrounded by enough fresh water to assuage the thirst of all the world. So it is with those who ask for opportunity to serve God. It is there all around them, and no work is asked of them beyond what they can perform.

We might perhaps even establish a closer analogy than heretofore between the development of muscle and of mind. Athletes tell us that the gentler exercises give the muscles strength, and finally equip them for the great achievements which merely display and test their powers. Perhaps it is the same in large measure with the growth of the mind. The great work is more in the nature of a test than an exercise. Our growth will find its motive power in the smaller events of

life, the more prosaic but more frequent experiences of everyday effort, success and disappointment. Only those who do all things heartily as unto the Lord will gain strength to triumph in the day of great trial, and only such will be chosen for any special work. The Lord Jesus himself laboured for many years in a very humble sphere before he engaged in the final struggle. He proved his love for God and man in the ordinary experiences of life before he manifested it in perfection in his great sacrifice. In him we have the perfect example.

It is possible to obtain a very clear view of what is required from the sons of God by taking the converse of a description of wicked men. It was testified of some that "God was not in all their thoughts". Again, we perceive that the condemnation is for a sin of omission, or at least the matter is put in this negative form. Righteous men have fallen, and sometimes it may be possible to point to a single instance of more glaring sin on the part of a servant of God than can be found in the records of many children of evil. When, however, men merit this sweeping scriptural description that God is not in all their thoughts, it avails them nothing that their offences have been mild in character, or that records have been kind to them. There are cases where notorious sinners can be prepared for the kingdom of God more easily than some of good reputation. Repentant publicans and harlots go before hypocritical Pharisees.

For the moment, however, we are more concerned with the converse of this description than with the indictment itself. It gives us an ideal suited to our present theme. If we would be numbered among the righteous, God should be in all our thoughts, and then we shall find preparation in all things.

There is nothing in this idea to impose a strain upon the mind, nothing in the least degree related to that habit of thought which sometimes leads to religious mania and insanity. It is pre-eminently characteristic of perfect sanity for intelligent creatures to recognize the Creator in all things, and to give Him a place in all their thoughts. In times of

suffering and sorrow, where is it possible to obtain any real consolation except from our Maker? When hard work and great effort are required, where is it possible to obtain such help and inspiration as He can give? And in a time of rejoicing, surely it is only fitting and natural to recognize His goodness, since it is "in Him we live and move and have our being".

Religious mania arises from a concentration of the mind on only one phase of religion, and generally on the least important phase. Sometimes, indeed, it is the outcome of an intoxication which cannot be called religion at all. People doubtless find pleasure in the excitement and infatuation of revival meetings, but it is the pleasure of intoxication, and, shocking as the criticism may seem, it might fairly be described as sensual. It has no affinity with the "pure religion and undefiled", which manifests its faith by its works in the ordinary duties of life. The ideal was presented in the Old Testament, "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Opportunity can be found every day, even under the most prosaic conditions and in connection with matters which would never bring God to the minds of worldly men. We are constantly confronted by alternatives which put us to the test. It is often easy to appear just and merciful in the sight of men, and yet snatch an advantage for self which is not legitimate. A few days ago an observer expressed the opinion that nearly all men were dishonest at heart, and were only anxious not to be discovered. The man who is determined to do justly in the sight of God will certainly find many possible tests of his profession every day he lives, often in little matters which seem insignificant in themselves, but which are invaluable as exercises. They are like the very easy movements with pound weight dumb-bells which strengthen the muscles of the athlete, and no wise man will despise them.

The most impressive words, however, come last in this simple creed, "Walk humbly with thy God". This passage falls into perfect harmony with the idea of preparation by all

things. If a man walks humbly with his God in all his progress through life, he is at all times under divine guidance and influence. Whether in sorrow or joy, at work or play, his experiences can thus help to prepare him for the more complete manifestation which is to come.

Those who stand with their sins forgiven, and privileged to call God their Father, experience none of that craven fear which is cast out by love. Their fear is a dread of grieving the Father, of causing a breach, of being separated from their Maker. They are not like awkward schoolboys in the presence of a stern and unsympathetic master, afraid to do anything but study, and secretly longing for the pedagogue to go away that they might breathe freely again. They are like children in the presence of a good father, with a wholesome fear inspired by love, taking their troubles to Him, and loving to have Him near; equally ready to work or play in His sight; and drawing closer in sympathy with Him, either in their labour or their sport. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that men can never recommend themselves to God by humanly-devised exercises in asceticism. If we neglect His commands, it will be no excuse that we have kept some irksome rules of our own. If we eat forbidden fruit, it is useless to plead in extenuation that we have denied ourselves fruit that is not forbidden. And if—as is generally the case—the establishment of unwritten laws of repression simply results in harsh judgment and condemnation of others, such legislative labours are very much worse than useless. All experience tends to show that when men try to impose more stringent conditions than God has laid down, they are robbing the foundations of the building to give it a worthless piece of decoration.

If in doubt as to the legitimacy of any work or any pleasure, test the matter by this question—Can you ask the Father's blessing, or can you give Him thanks? And we have to beware how we condemn another for that in which he gives God thanks. By so widening the basis of our communion we find opportunity for preparation in all the activities of life,

and none has ground for complaining that prosaic duties absorb all the time and prevent the use of his talents. You may dig or sweep the roads, and make it a work for God, and you may preach and make it a work for the devil. A critic may raise the question, "How can digging a few square yards of earth be of any value to God?" We answer, "How can the most eloquent preaching be of any value to Him?" In the words of one of old, "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he at thy hand?"

The fact is we can only give God our hearts. We can exercise our volition just in so far as He has made us free, and endeavour to serve Him by responding to that invitation which is given to whosoever *will*. All faithful work performed as in His sight is simply an index of this gift of our hearts. No human achievement can be so great as to be of any benefit to Him, yet no faithful work can be so insignificant as to be overlooked. Wherefore let us remember our task in life is here, ready to our hands every day, and we can find preparation in all things.

By way of conclusion, and to emphasize this thought in a form which will perhaps linger in the memory longer than any prose argument, we will select a few verses from a poem composed about three years ago, wherein reason reproves a discontented man, and tries to instil the lesson of humility.

Were the ambitions of thine early youth
Of what might seem the noblest type of all?
A burning zeal for spreading Christian truth,
A ready recognition of "a call"?

And now, has Circumstance so bowed thy head
Beneath the harsh corrections of her rod?
Thy strength so spent in struggling for bread,
That thou has almost lost thy faith in God?

No napkin round thy gift didst thou entwine,
No bushel o'er the light which thou didst bear;
Yet both are hidden through no fault of thine,
Beneath a crushing load of toil and care.

PREPARATION BY ALL THINGS

Yet thou remainest uninstructed still,
And so thou speakest with presumptuous haste :
How can it be a wise Creator's will
That all my powers thus should run to waste ?

The answer is, Thou art being taught a truth
So hard to learn, so easy to forget ;
In Heaven's sight, thou still art but a youth,
A pupil merely, not a teacher yet.

How can the Lord have any need of thee,
Since all things in the Universe He owns ?
What matter if thy powers wasted be
Since He could raise up servants from the stones ?

If any special work for thee is found
Think not that the Creator needs thy care ;
Look at the mass of mother earth around,
Think what potentialities are there.

Men would have lived, the sun still give his light,
If thou had'st never come upon the scene ;
What more art thou in the Creator's sight
Than countless myriads who might have been ?

If thou art something more, 'tis by His grace ;
Thou hast been taught by His afflicting rod ;
And having sinned and suffered, hide thy face,
Humbled beneath the mighty hand of God.

The days of toil which seemed so ill to thee,
The bitter pain and seeming fruitless strife,
Have given what at last may prove to be
Thy only title to eternal life :

And in the consummation thou wilt find
The hard and wearing struggles of thy part
Detracted from the brilliance of thy mind,
But gave instead a broken, contrite heart.

And thou wilt see the meaning of it then,
And even come to bless the chastening rod
Which, taking that which gives the praise of men,
Gave that which takes thee to the praise of God.

CONVICTION AND CONDUCT

There is alone one field of labour where
Thy great Creator hath real need of thee,
And even that one honour thou must share
With all who have been or can ever be.

Not in the work to which the mind aspires,
Nor in the field where men have mostly striven :
The work in which assistance He requires
Is ruling the volition He has given.

In thy heart's preparation thou shalt find
Thy one monopoly of work; Here are
A myriad entities of human kind
Each with one character to mould or mar.

If thou art eloquent, drive pride away ;
Remember, God with energy divine,
Could raise from common elements of clay
A million tongues more eloquent than thine.

If thou hast strength, 'tis He who made thee strong ;
And what if thou shalt give with pious vow
Thy strength to Him to whom all things belong,
Some other clay would do as well as thou.

But in the ruling of thine own free will
(For in large measure He has made thee free)
No other man can that position fill,
And God Himself requires help from thee.

He needeth not thy houses, gold, or land,
Since all thou ownest He must first impart ;
And gift of subtle brain, or cunning hand,
Serve simply as an index of the heart.

Give God thy heart, 'tis all that He doth ask,
And thine obedience to that one command
Will still involve accepting any task
Within the power of thy brain or hand.

So be thy burden such as thou canst lift,
And give to God as He has filled thy store ;
The widow with her humble farthing gift
Did what she could, and thou canst do no more.

PREPARATION BY ALL THINGS

And when thou hast completely conquered pride,
Content a humble labourer to be ;
Perchance the doors will be thrown open wide,
And God will find a special work for thee.

Wilt thou accept the post of honour then ?
Too often those who sought to be the head,
And wished to figure in the sight of men,
Shrink from the task when vanity is dead.

Flinch not now at the call of Providence,
Allow not that reproach to rest on thee ;
Nor shun nor seek the post of prominence,
But ever ready, never anxious be :

Content to labour in a humble sphere,
Performing work for God no man can see ;
Yet ready in the forefront to appear,
And take the place where fools will envy thee.

So tread in faithfulness the narrow way,
Pursue not pleasure lest thy strength be shaken ;
Pursuit of pleasure oft leads men astray,
Yet very rarely is she overtaken.

But if to thy Creator thou art true,
Rest then assured He never will forsake thee ;
Thy path of duty shall thy soul pursue,
And happiness unsought will overtake thee.

If every work and deed thou wilt perform
As unto God, then thou wilt never stray,
But pass through life unharmed by mortal storm ;
And, strengthened by the battles of the way,
Be finally prepared for that Great Day.