THE FAITH OF A WAYFARER

A. PRINGLE

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BY

ARTHUR PRINGLE

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TO MY WIFE

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THE WAYFARER'S RIGHT TO SPEAK

"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and the wayfaring man shall not err therein."

Isa. xxxv. 8.

I

THE WAYFARER'S RIGHT TO SPEAK

So far as these pages are concerned, the Wayfarer stands for an ordinary man, who has not allowed life to dull his moral earnestness or his spiritual sensitiveness; a man who, without any technical knowledge of theology, knows the general trend of modern thought in science and religion. Above all, through the pressure of daily work and experience, he knows life. Such scant opportunity of serious reading as comes his way, he eagerly takes; but the dusty highway of bread-winning has to be his main preoccupation. Accordingly, his first and last demand of faith is that it give him strength and courage for the journey; that it be, in short, *a faith that works*. This, with due allowance for changed conditions, I imagine to be the Wayfarer of Isaiah's memorable allusion;

but, be that as it may, such will be the significance of the term throughout this book.

Now, the question at once arises, has such a man any right to speak on theology at all? Is it not a matter that busy people must leave to students and experts? If this be so, everything that follows is beside the mark, and it becomes meaningless to talk of the Wayfarer, as such, having any faith of his own. That this would indeed be the case from certain points of view need not be denied. According to the logic of the sacerdotalist position, for example, the layman has not even the right of private judgment in things religious, let alone the power of contributing anything valuable to theology. This is a cause of more or less embarrassment to the able men of this school who from time to time make resourceful attempts to commend religion to the modern mind. For, if this same modern mind has no theological rights, why appeal to it? On the other hand, how can the laity

have any such rights if the clergy are exclusively endowed teachers and the Church is a final authority?

There are, too, others who are so far from the sacerdotal position as to belong to the Free Churches, from whom, nevertheless, come suggestions that "amateurs" in theology, unequipped by special study, are not profitably to be listened to in this connection. Dr. Forsyth is, of course, the champion-in-chief of this view; witness the following typical passage:

"If a man takes leave to assault the great doctrines, or to raise the great questions as if they had occurred to him first, if he knows nothing of what has been done in them by experts, or where thinkers have left the question, he is out of place. No man is entitled to discuss theology in public who has not studied theology. It is like any other weighty subject. Still more is this requisite if he set to challenge and reform theology. He ought to be a trained theologian. He need not have been at

college, if he show sufficient evidence of real study. To read theology is not enough. Reading may be no more than the browsing of a mental epicure at will. The subject must be studied, and studied at fountain heads. No man should ask for a public hearing on a theological question unless he has mastered his New Testament at first hand, together with one or more of the great classics which are landmarks and points of new departure for theological thought." [1]

I venture to call this a dangerous and mistaken position to take up, because, as the sequel is meant to show, theology is not "like any other weighty subject," its central issues turning far more on human experience than on technical knowledge. A man may be innocent of Greek and quite unacquainted with the great classics, and yet, *because he is a man*, he may have the qualifications essential for framing a judgment on the doctrines of religion. But this is to anticipate; and we may now proceed to

[1] "Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind," p. 102.

another of the few quotations with which the reader of this book will be troubled. The present vogue of Theosophical thought makes it important to note how, according to Mrs. Besant's exposition, it denies all theological standing-ground to the Wayfarer:

"It has actually been made a matter of boast that Christianity has no secrets, that whatever it has to say it says to all, and whatever it has to teach it teaches to all. Its truths are supposed to be so simple that a wayfaring man, though a fool, may not err therein. (But) it is useless to give to all the same religious teaching; that which would help the intellectual would be entirely unintelligible to the stupid. If, on the other hand, the teaching be suitable to help the unintelligent, it is intolerably crude and jejune to the philosopher."[1]

This, indeed, is the "boast" that forms the underlying assumption of these chapters: that Christianity in its essence, in the part

[1] "Esoteric Christianity," pp. 2 and 3.

of it that matters most, is for the many and not only for the few, for men absorbed in the grim realities of life and not only for men of studious leisure. To say this is by no means to deny that in religion, as in all else, there must be grades of understanding and initiation. Jesus recognised some men as being, so to speak, spiritual intimates, and others as belonging to the great multitude. He knew that there were secrets and mysteries for which, as yet, not even the inner circle of His disciples were ready. To place fine truth at the mercy of coarse minds would parallel the casting of pearls before swine; and to invite the crowd to share the hidden festival of mysticism would be like the plucking of flowers that their fragrance might lose itself in the careless dust. But, taking this for granted, the welcome fact remains that, so far as it comes into working relation with life, Christ's teaching appeals not to any select coterie but to humanity at large. Indeed, it would appear that, the Master Himself being witness, the greater a

man's preoccupation with the honest care of daily life, the more, and not the less, can he understand the true significance of His teaching.

In short, so far from being a disqualification, practical touch with things as they are is the essential qualifying factor. Christ pushed this principle to an extent nothing less than amazing. For it must be remembered that the whole atmosphere and tradition of His time made religion a matter of professional interpretation, with little or no vital relevance to everyday realities. It would be hard to imagine anything less convincing to the ordinary mind than what, for want of a better term, we must call the orthodox teaching of His day. Why, then, did the common people hear Him gladly? Because He gave them the theological franchise; because He asserted their right to be the judges of what God is, and of what He ought to do. "*If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more your Father who is in heaven.* His

parables, accordingly, were fashioned of the stuff of homeliness and everyday humanity, making their appeal to fathers and shepherds and housewives and veritable "men in the street."

Of course we know all this by heart; but have we grasped its far-reaching significance? Do we realise that by these quiet, simple sentences, the "seat of authority" in religious thought is, as it were, shifted from the mind of the expert to the heart of humanity, and that Jesus is content to rest the case for the goodness of God on the common sense of the common people? Once grasp this principle, and theology becomes full of life and attraction, practically intelligible and inspiring to live by.

And when one looks at the present condition of things, with the ominous movement away from the Churches, can there be any doubt that along this line recovery is most wisely to be attempted? There is abundant evidence that, whether in the pulpit or out of it, what may be called technical and

academic theology makes scant appeal to the lay mind. There are, on the other hand, signs that people will find time to read or listen to theology that is real, human and unsophisticated; and on all sides the Churches are being exhorted to learn their lesson before it is too late. Thus, an Anglican writer who is among the ablest of the clergy's candid friends makes this pertinent observation:—"Laymen very ignorant of theology, *but less ignorant of some other things with which theology has to reckon*, should speak out in order that theologians may discover how to become intelligible to them. We ask only that the Church should speak to us in language that is our own."[1] Numerous other warnings in a similar strain might be quoted from thoughtful well-wishers of religion; but Mr. St. Loe Strachey's opportunities of a detached and comprehensive view make some words of his specially worth recalling:—

[1] W. Scott Palmer in "The Church and Modern Men," pp. viii. and 19.

"While laymen desire to handle such subjects, and are freely accorded the right to do so, there need be little fear of the old religious temper of the English people failing us. But woe betide the land should religion ever come to be considered a matter solely for the expert." [1]

There can be no doubt that these sentiments reflect what is passing in the minds of intelligent people in the Churches and beyond them. Speaking generally, the language of the pulpit is one thing, that of the pew another. Too often, what passes for theology is either meaningless or repellent to the ordinary man, who may be excused if he is indifferent to metaphysical speculations, and who is to be respected if he resents doctrines that depend on moral anachronisms.

It comes, then, to this. There is an inner, technical region of theological study where students equip themselves and stimulate each other; a province of indeed

[1] "The Amen of the Unlearned," pp. viii. and x.

"sacred learning," giving worthy scope for disciplined thought and speculative enterprise. This is work which every lover of truth must honour, and which, wherever possible, should be the background and resource of every pulpit. But the practical essence of what is learnt in this inner region should be capable of human and convincing presentation in the outer world of everyday experience. Preachers may *learn* in all manner of tongues; they must *speak* in the one tongue their hearers understand, and must, moreover, recognise that nothing is of essential consequence to the ordinary man that cannot be expressed in that tongue. Scholarship and training may confer enviable power to explore the byways and recesses of Life's wonderful journey; but, so far as the main highway is concerned, the Wayfarer need not miss the road or despair of a safe home-coming so long as he trusts to those fine instincts that did not cease to be in the heart of God when they entered into the heart of man.

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The chapters that follow are an attempt to expound the leading doctrines of Christianity in this spirit. I have taken God, Jesus, Sin, Atonement, and the Significance of the Individual as the cardinal issues on which our common faith depends; nor have I found that a broadly evangelical view of these has at all hampered my effort to present them in a way entirely human and actual. The book is small enough to excuse the hope that those who read any of it will read it all, the various sections being vitally dependent on each other for even approximate completeness of treatment. In any case, I shall trust that, in trying to make plain the path of the Wayfarer, I have not ceased to be reverent, nor caused him to forget the sun and moon, the flowers and hills, which are the tokens of mystery and beauty, and the promise of heaven.

II

THE WAYFARER'S VIEW OF GOD

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HAVING vindicated the Wayfarer's right to speak, we shall do well to encourage him freely to exercise that right on the fundamental problem of God; for theology has done itself great injury by its strained and artificial way of discussing the Supreme Being. If we are to have a working idea of God, if He is to be real to us and actually mean something in daily life, we must abandon speculative refinements, and, sheltered by the example of Christ, be natural even to the point of homeliness. The Wayfarer is a reverent man, and he knows that the Eternal is beyond human thought and speech; but he knows also, however vaguely, that the Eternal is in his own heart, woven into the very fibre of his being. This, then, is his

clue and starting-point. Making use of a word which nobody likes, but which nobody can dispense with, he owns himself an anthropomorphist; thereby pointedly suggesting that, unless we are to speak of God after the manner of men, we may as well cease to speak of Him at all, and thus leave the field to blank Agnosticism. Instinct tells him that he must think of God *in terms of his highest self* or not at all. He remembers, indeed, Mathew Arnold's portentous warning against any such attitude; how, according to that always interesting critic, God is "not a person as man conceives of person, nor moral as man conceives of moral, nor intelligent as man conceives of intelligent." This, of course, to any one who values his time or his sanity, is a final reason for giving up all attempt to think of God; for you will scarcely expect a practical man to go on "throwing out words at a vast object of consciousness" if this is to be his repayment. But the Wayfarer feels that there is another side to the case; and he is ready to

say, with Sir Oliver Lodge, "Let not any worthy human attribute be denied to the Deity." Theology has played into the hands of Agnosticism whenever it has not frankly conceded that personality, intelligence, love, righteousness — all the best qualities of humanity—are *essentially the same* in God. They may be *much more*, but they are not unthinkably different, so as to create a fatal gulf of misunderstanding or non-understanding between Him and ourselves.

So, then, to come to particulars, the Wayfarer has his own common-sense way of approaching what may be called the speculative side of this problem. He is philosopher enough to know that effect is never greater than cause; and that if God produces man, He must have man in Him, whatever else He may have besides. God must possess before He can bestow; and our homely virtues as well as our mighty aspirations had never been ours unless they had first been His. Holding this sure ground, the Wayfarer is not to be put off with "a

something not ourselves," "the great Unknowable," and other familiar substitutes for a personal God. "No man hath seen God at any time"; and yet every man who sees his own best self sees God. This, therefore, is the material out of which the Wayfarer fashions his conception of God—the highest that is in himself. God is infinitely more, but He is still *that;* and, though he cannot complete the structure, why should not the Wayfarer go on building until his material is exhausted and the clouds of mystery are reached? Even so, as perhaps the sequel will indicate, he has a house strong enough and warm enough to live in. For, when he comes to reflect on the underlying facts of human relationship, he finds that they, too, have this mingling of the knowable and the unknowable. When you get to the root of it, what do even the greatest intimates really know of each other? What can any of us understand of the mysteries and sanctities of another's existence? Indeed, one of the supreme charms

of human love is the constant presence of the unknowable; so much so, that when mystery vanishes it carries with it the inner magic of love. Directly we feel that friendship has revealed all its secrets, directly then does the wonder of friendship evaporate. And if this be so between man and man, much more is it between man and God; so that a true Agnosticism should be the feeder of faith, rather than its destroyer.

Still keeping for a little longer to this more speculative side of the great subject, the Wayfarer has other suggestions to make that may be worth heeding. He feels, for example, that modern psychology is providing him with at least the beginning of an answer to a question which ordinary people often put to themselves, viz., How can there be any Being who is always present everywhere and is conscious of all that happens? To put it even more plainly, how can God know us and be in touch with us all at the same time? The question is not so unanswerable as it once seemed; for, in the physical

world, wireless telegraphy has given us a suggestive clue; and, in the spiritual world, the assured wonders of telepathy forbid anyone to say that sight and nearness are necessary to the communion of one person with another. The whole trend of psychology now is to emphasise the mystery and complexity of human personality; and, with whatever vagueness and crudity, it helps the plain man to understand how communion with God may be the supreme reality of his life. Incidentally, at this point, the Wayfarer shows that he has a doctrine of the Holy Spirit which at least possesses the advantage of being intelligible and practical. Speak to him of "three persons in one God," with the puzzling reservation that "person" does not mean "person" as ordinary people understand it, and he will reply that, however important such subtleties may be to professed theologians, they have no interest for him. But, just as a man, by the outpouring of himself, creates an atmosphere and a circle of influence, so God "pours

out His spirit on all flesh" for guidance and inspiration. This is not to deny the mystery of the Godhead; it is only to contend that, whatever the speculative bearings of the subject, it has a practical aspect which we do well to emphasise.

Leaving these inner mysteries, we now come more into the open, and ask: How does the Wayfarer imagine God as related to the physical world? For one thing, he quite fails to see how questions as to evolution and the age of the world can in any way affect the substance of the Christian faith. Whether the world was created in six days, or whether it has slowly evolved in millions of years, is a point carrying no vital significance. The essential fact is not *how* God made the world, but that, in the deepest creative sense, "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." *In the beginning God.* That granted, the question of ways and means, and times and seasons, can settle itself. But there is this further practical consideration: If it be proved that

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God's method of working is through the slow process of evolution, if He really knows the meaning of deferred hopes and far-off results, so much the better for us; for thereby does He enter into one of the elemental, tragic experiences of humanity. Better far, for everyday helpfulness, the evolution that makes God a worker than the creation that makes Him a magician. Other aspects of the problem will face us as we proceed; but let it be insisted that, so far, evolution is the friend, and not the enemy.

When we come to God's relationship to man, there is a strangely neglected distinction on which the Wayfarer would lay the utmost stress. It is right to say that, by whatever method, God created the world; it is misleading, because less than the truth, to say that God created man. Creatorhood is one thing; fatherhood is something altogether deeper and more intimate. Creation is the making and fashioning of something *with my hands*; fatherhood is the begetting of someone *with my self*. The one is outer;

the other is more inward than inwardness itself. There is, of course, a real sense in which God is in everything He has made; but still the distinction holds. The ancient writer strains language to express this when, with fine suggestiveness, he pictures God as "breathing into man the breath of life." How better could it be said that God put Himself into man? Unless this distinction be recognised, the fatherhood of God becomes less intimately significant than human fatherhood—becomes, to all intents and purposes, merely a name. Yet, if one is to judge by discussions ancient and modern, this obvious point has been often ignored or blurred by what may be called expert theology. At one time it is gravely asked, Is God the father of all men, or only of some? At another, Is God immanent in all men? God dwells more fully, or at least is expressed more fully, in some men than in others; just as, in a human family, one son is more like the father than another. But that there is something of God in us all is a fact beyond dispute—unless,

indeed, we are prepared to reduce Christ's central doctrine to unintelligibility. Here, at all events, there must be no restriction or reserve or refining away. When we say "Our Father," we must mean it; and when we hear St. Paul's great challenge, "*Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?*" our response, however awe-stricken, must be "Yes," from the very depth of our hearts.

Following on this, there is another point on which the Wayfarer must insist the more strongly because it, also, has suffered calamitous neglect, viz., *the responsibility of God.* Every wholesome theology ought to have at its centre a bold, unequivocal insistence on the unspeakable responsibility of the Power that has called into being such a universe as that in which we live. No right-minded man or woman can bring one child into the world without a solemn sense of responsibility; and "how much more" must be God's responsibility for the countless millions He has brought into the world! Let it be repeated

that the neglect of this plain truth has been calamitous. This neglect has, for example, enabled such ghastly doctrines as Calvinism (as popularly understood) and eternal punishment (in the traditional material sense) to be matters of grave debate, with text and counter-text—matters, indeed, of heresy-hunting and excommunication; whereas, one flash of the light of the Divine responsibility must reveal them as libellously impossible. There are some things it is an insult to God even to discuss; and such doctrines as these are cases in point. Man's claim upon God is companion to God's claim upon man; and moral wholesomeness goes if you separate one from the other. Theology, hymnology, preaching, and prayer are full of what humanity owes to God; they say far too little of what God owes to humanity. That, in the future if not in the present, every man will have his "chance," scope and opportunity to be his best; that no man will be eternally condemned for mere errors of belief, or judged without regard to individual difficulties and

handicaps — these are propositions that ought to go without saying in connection with God. Yet each in turn has had the weight of orthodox and expert theology against it, plain men thus being reduced to despair. This being so, one need not be surprised if in many serious minds there is a reluctant echo to Omar Khayyam's bitter outburst :

> Oh, Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
> Beset the road I was to wander in,
> Thou wilt not with predestination round
> Enmesh me, and impute my fall to sin ?
>
> Oh, Thou, who Man of baser earth didst make
> And who with Eden didst devise the snake;
> For all the sin wherewith the face of man
> Is blacken'd, Man's forgiveness give—and take !

It is easy to call this blasphemy; it is wiser to recognise the theological folly that has given it excuse. There is, indeed, no disguising the unpalatable fact that, according to such doctrines as have been named, God stands in sore need of man's forgiveness. Life is thrust upon us without our choosing ; and at best it means a hard struggle; at worst, a desperate tragedy. Under the

circumstances, Atheism would be less disconcerting than belief in a capricious irresponsible Deity. If any reader suggests that it is waste of time to insist on so obvious a point, he betrays his ignorance of recent and even, in some directions, present theology. The truth of the responsibility of the Divine fatherhood has had to fight first for existence, then for prominence; and, even now, what ought to be Christianity's glad, cardinal boast is more often a timid, half-articulate detail. But, happily, it is an idea that appeals inevitably to the theologically unsophisticated mind; and, with due gratitude to the preachers and scholars who, not without cost, have fought for this truth, it is the Wayfarer's healthy instinct and commonsense that have done most to win the battle. While learned exegetes were dissecting doubtful passages and accounting for apparently conclusive texts, the Wayfarer had already made up his mind; his unanswerable position being that, *pace* all conceivable chapter and verse, the Father revealed by Christ

is a good God, more sensitively responsible than the best of us can imagine Him to be.

Thus, finally, we come face to face with the most practically insistent aspect of the great riddle. What, on this side of the grave, we shall never understand is how to square the responsibility of God with such evil and misery as the world holds and always has held. But, if we cannot solve the problem, we can at least—speaking for the Wayfarer—suggest something by way of alleviation. For we have here one of the finest and surest traits of true humanity to guide us. Love's first demand is to *share*, when it cannot take away, the suffering of its object. The wound of the child penetrates, with added keenness and depth, to the parent; and the agony of sympathetic looking-on is often more than the pain of enduring. When we can do nothing else, our comfort is to penetrate as far as may be into the "fellowship" of our loved one's sufferings. The unimaginable thing is that we should be spectators who do not *feel*

wha. is going on. And if this is so with ourselves, again "how much more" must it be with God! When we come to speak of Atonement, we shall see with special vividness what harm has been done by conceiving God as spectator, rather than sharer, of the world's sufferings and sacrifices; but, meantime, we, fortunately, need be in no doubt as to what is the real Christian doctrine. It is, indeed, here more than anywhere that we must insist on the Divine immanence. For the one credible justification of pain is that God does not *send* it. He *brings it and stays with it* until it is transformed or destroyed. "*If I make my bed in Hell Thou art with me.*" The popular dreadful phrase which speaks of God "sending a man to Hell" has no answering reality. When, in our different turns and degrees, we all "go" to the several "hells" our sins have created, *even there* God is with us until the fire has done its purifying work. In every furnace of pain there is always "one like unto a son of man." Even before our Lord came, this

wonderful truth of the suffering God dawned upon men. Already they began to feel that "in all their afflictions He was afflicted"; and one of the miracles of Hebrew praise is the blessing of God because "day by day He bears our burdens."

God, then, is *our fellow-sufferer;* and does it not make some difference if we believe this? The tortures of disease, the worries of business, the temptations of youth, the weariness of the last few steps—God not only *sees* all this, He *feels* it. To state it quite humanly—as the Wayfarer must—God takes His full share of the travail which He asks men to endure, because by it alone can His far-reaching purpose be accomplished. As Sir Oliver Lodge has put it: "The most perfect of all the sons of men, the likest God this planet ever saw, He to whom many look for their idea of what God is, surely He taught us that suffering and sacrifice and wistful yearning for something not yet attainable were not to be regarded as human attributes alone."

Nevertheless, the last word in this connection must not be of God as sharer or sufferer; else we should forget the power that is only withheld and the strength that but waits its opportunity. A God who could only fight and sympathise would be no inspiring "captain of our salvation." God stands for the eventual victory of good, the banishing of sorrow and sighing; and His suffering, as well as the suffering of humanity, means not the impotence of God, but the patient fashioning of a blessedness that, in retrospect, shall make clear that *everything has been worth while*.

III

THE WAYFARER'S VIEW OF JESUS

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WHAT, after all, do we know about Jesus? This is a question the Wayfarer cannot help asking himself; for he has heard of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, of Schmiedel and other enterprising members of the critical left wing, and he is to be excused if he feels some anxiety as to what is the exact present position in so momentous a matter. We have, indeed, to reckon with a vague, general impression that, criticism having had full play, the reliable nucleus of the Gospel records is reduced to little or nothing. So much is this the case, that with certain people it is even considered justifiable to raise the question whether, after all, Jesus really existed. Now, those who have followed this book so far will understand that it cannot turn aside

from its main purpose to reinforce the professed defenders of Christianity who have so successfully taken the field. No one who is interested enough to take a little trouble need find any difficulty in lighting upon books that treat the whole subject with candour and strength, proving conclusively that, in relation to *the essential and unique features of the Gospels*, criticism is as a sea washing the rock without destroying it. While, at the outset, I must ask my "wayfaring" readers to accept this statement provisionally, they ought to find cogent reasons for it as this chapter unfolds.

The first thing, then, that the Wayfarer does is to *begin at the beginning*—which in this connection is what nine out of ten people fail to do. For this the regular versions of the New Testament are largely to blame, seeing that they do not present the various books in proper chronological order. The reader who would come into direct touch with the facts and the order in which they happened should study his New Testament

through such an edition, for example, as is published in the "Everyman series. By this means he will discover that, long before any of the Gospels were written (the earliest, *Mark*, is dated 65—75 A.D.), something important was happening, a something not to be evaded in any fair treatment of the New Testament books, which were evidently written under the inspiring conviction that Jesus was *actually then alive*. He is not so much a past fact as a living, present reality; and the whole atmosphere is pervaded by the afterglow of the resurrection. As much as most of us, these men of the first Christian years knew the meaning of trial and sorrow; but their spirit was so indomitable that even so great a phrase as "more than conquerors" conveys no jar of exaggeration. Something had happened, and was now happening, that changed cowards into heroes, and brought an eager gleam to eyes that a little while ago had been dulled by despair. What was this "something"? Imagination? Delusion? The making the wish father to the thought?

The reader knows the familiar alternatives, and in the proper place he may find them exhaustively discussed. My point at the moment is simply to urge that, faced with this plain initial phenomenon in the New Testament, the Wayfarer must feel it to be a factor with which he ought to reckon in making up his mind as to what he knows of Christ. At the very lowest it is evidence not to be ignored by a candid mind; and on this line, rather than through any minute sifting of the Gospel accounts, will the truth of the resurrection come home to ordinary readers. Apart from the character of Christ Himself, the resurrection of His followers from their living death must remain the master-argument for His own resurrection from the death of the tomb. Otherwise we have the strange spectacle of one of the supreme controlling forces of history coming from nowhere, yet resolutely refusing to be discredited or explained away. At all events, if the New Testament literature is to be justly and scientifically viewed, it must be

approached through this avenue of resurrection-light ; and, when the Wayfarer's view of Christ is complete, His supremacy over death may impress us not so much as an argumentative possibility as an inevitable corollary.

Meanwhile, what of the picture of Christ as we have it in the Gospels themselves? It must be conceded that, so far as mere quantity is concerned, the records are slight indeed. Eliminate repetition, condense the four books into a consecutive whole, and you have a surprisingly small volume. But, even so, it would ill become a present-day reader, knowing too well the tedious prolixity of much modern biography, to suggest that knowledge of a character has any necessary connection with the number of incidents recorded. The piling-up of detail, the careful chronicling of trivialities, which are the bane of so many "lives," tend to hide what they are supposed to reveal. No ; while we would all know more of Christ's earthly life, let us not needlessly worry ourselves by

anything so ridiculous as an argument from bulk. And, in truth, the Gospels tell us far more than a superficial reader would imagine; but their method is implicit rather than explicit. That is to say, instead of telling us many things, they tell us *a few things which imply numberless others*. A tool or a bone may give the scientist the clue to an epoch; and the Gospels are full of "clues," which, if followed up, put one in possession of at least a working knowledge of Christ. Thus, people often speak with regret as though we knew practically nothing of His boyhood and youth; but would it not be truer to say that we know practically everything? "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man." This single sentence calls up a picture of healthy mental and bodily development, and of a manly, unaffected goodness, that gave gladness to God without being irritatingly "superior" to man. The picture could be filled in, but what conceivable detail could add to it? Then, again, as

the Gospels contain no explicit declaration that Jesus ever smiled or laughed, there are people who gravely complain that He showed no appreciation of the more genial side of life. As though when anyone talks of games in the market-place, adds to the happiness of a wedding-feast, and loves to have children round Him, chapter and verse were needed to demonstrate that He could smile and laugh! These instances, to which any reader of the Gospels can add on his own account, are enough to suggest that, even from the standpoint of quantity, our knowledge of Christ is far ampler than is generally assumed.

But, after all, the point of vital importance is the *quality* of that knowledge; and here we come to close quarters with those grave issues round which controversy is perpetually raging, and concerning which every serious person must do his best to make up his mind. Let us take those issues as they would occur to the Wayfarer reading the story of Jesus in an ordinary straightforward

way. Now, as soon, so to speak, as he has found his bearings and grasped the general significance of the story, he begins to look for something which, to his surprise, is nowhere to be found. He understands that here is someone who, in the nature of the case, makes bitter and powerful enemies as He goes on His way ; whose path is blocked at every turn by men *whose interest it is* to discover weakness and expose it. But the blemish that is looked for is never found, and the challenge, " Which of you convinceth Me of sin ? " is left unanswered. It is, further, to be remembered that some of the most critical years of Jesus were lived under conditions giving small chance for the hiding of moral failure. There is no reason to suppose that tongues were less ready for scandal in those days than in these, or that the amenities of village life were less searching and intimate then than now. Yet, even with this advantage to their hand, the enemies of Jesus were unable to point to lapses or indiscretions. (Some may regard this as a small and

incidental point, but to me it seems of signal importance.)

But there is something yet more significant to come. From any point of view, Jesus was one of the best of men; and the Wayfarer's acquaintance with human nature tells him that it is almost always the best people who are most sensitively conscious of their imperfection. All human beings need penitence; but, generally speaking, those who need it most feel it least, and *vice versâ*. The better we really are, the further we feel ourselves from the best; and the higher we ascend, the more distant does the sky seem to be. The Psalms and the best devotional literature, excluding morbid examples, bear this elemental trait written on their surface, or, it would be truer to say, stamped into their heart. By analogy, therefore, Jesus should be weighted with the consciousness of sin, His prayers should be laden with penitence; and, whenever He talks of forgiveness, His first thought should be His own need of it. But this is precisely what never

happens. When He speaks to God it is as a Son who, though He may have something to learn, has nothing to regret. He goes to God for strength and fellowship, never for pardon. Similarly when He speaks to men, it is as one who has power to forgive, but who Himself needs no forgiveness; and, willing sharer of all that belongs to humanity, He yet admits no comradeship in the fact or sense of sin. This is the unmistakable impression yielded by a plain reading of the Gospels; and let it be reiterated that the impression is unshaken by any findings of legitimate criticism.

Now, very much hinges on this question of the sinlessness of Jesus; especially from the Wayfarer's point of view, for he is a practical man, in search of a faith that works; in search, too, of some sure sign that the fight for goodness is not a prolonged futility, that freedom from sin is not a will-o'-the-wisp to be followed but never to be overtaken. If Jesus were really sinless, He provides what the Wayfarer is looking for—an actual token that in the struggle with sin humanity

need not be finally worsted. Once at least, and *under fair conditions*, the perfect victory has been gained; and, for our inspiration, we may well hope that what has been done once may be done again.

Here we come to a point of the utmost moment, round which, indeed, everything turns. *Did Jesus fight His battle under fair conditions?* In such a connection there can be no irreverence in speech that is plain only because it would get at the truth; and what we want to know is whether His struggle with temptation was sham or real. If Jesus was so abnormally filled with the Divine strength, so specially shielded by the Divine grace, that sinlessness came to Him naturally and automatically, the question ceases to have any practical interest. In that case, He would stand in one category, we in another; and in the midst of our temptations it would be of no use to turn for help to one who was not and could not be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in all points tempted like as we are."

In this connection it is worth while to recall how Mr. H. G. Wells has given expression to what, with less vehemence and exaggeration, a large number of people probably feel :

"The Christian Christ in none of His three characteristic phases, neither as the magic babe (from whom I am cut off by the wanton and indecent purity of the Immaculate Conception), nor as the white-robed, spotless miracle-worker, nor as the fierce unreal torment of the cross, comes close to my soul. I do not understand the agony in the garden ; to me it is like a scene from a play in an unknown tongue. The last cry of despair is the one human touch, discordant with all the rest of the story. One cry of despair does not suffice. The Christian's Christ is too fine for me, not incarnate enough, not flesh enough, not earth enough."[1]

This passage is of the carelessly impetuous order ; but, even so, one is puzzled to understand how it could have been written by anyone who has read the Gospels with

[1] "First and Last Things," p. 87.

ordinary discernment. The "fasting" that preceded the temptation, whatever interpretation is put upon it, at least suggests prolonged and tense preparation for a conflict that was to strain all resources. The "groaning in spirit" and weeping in face of distress and sorrow would seem to indicate a Christ not without "heart"; hints of bodily weariness and of "virtue going out" are surely human touches enough! Fortunate, or unfortunate, must he be who is such a stranger to human agony that Gethsemane is "like a scene from a play in an unknown tongue." The Gospels may hint more than they tell, but they suggest plainly enough that Jesus fought a real battle and gained a real victory. Accordingly, His sinlessness is a matter not of academic interest, but of practical concern; so that, when He bids us be "perfect," He implies that, however beset with difficulties, the road is before us even as it was before Him. And that, after all, is what it was important for us to know.

It is in this connection that we can most

usefully consider how the problem of the Virgin Birth presents itself to the Wayfarer. Into such questions of metaphysics or biology as may be involved, he is not qualified, nor need he be anxious, to enter; neither will he be so foolish as to deny dogmatically its abstract possibility. His own reading of the New Testament, however, suffices to convince him that, whatever else may be said, belief in the Virgin Birth is not to be made a cardinal article of Christian faith. The silence of the earliest Gospel (*Mark*), of the Epistles, of Christ Himself, is to the Wayfarer not necessarily an argument for denial, but an indication that the matter is not of essential importance. It should be remembered that it is not left to so-called "advanced" theologians to recognise this; and it is enough to recall Dr. Forsyth's significant admission that the Virgin Birth is "irrelevant to the incarnation."[1] After all, to a man who wants a practical and working faith, *the fact of Christ* is what

[1] "Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind," p. 276.

matters. That secured, the method of His coming into the world is of secondary importance. At least, on so fine and delicate an issue, let there be no grating dogmatism or irritating confidence on either hand. There are questions on which the intellect breaks, as it were, by the inevitable clumsiness of its touch; questions on which heart and soul and instinct should have the last word. And there will always be those to whom the grace and sinlessness and whole supreme wonder of Christ are best and most reverently accounted for by His having been, in the literal physical sense, "born of a pure virgin." On the other hand, there will always be those to whom such a belief is an embarrassment rather than a help. What then? Need any of us waste the fragrance and beauty of this finest flower in the garden of humanity while we discuss the mystery of how it came to be?

But while, in each one of us, the heart thus "has its reasons," there is one more consideration that appeals very

powerfully to the Wayfarer. It is often suggested that to question the Virgin Birth is to question the sinlessness of Jesus; that His unique character can only be secured by His coming into the world in a unique way. Now this is assuredly the most dangerous and self-defeating of arguments; for, if it means anything, it implies that this sinlessness of Jesus, of which so much is made, was from the beginning miraculously assured and safeguarded. But here is the fatal mistake. You can rear and preserve *innocence* in this way, but never goodness. Artificial protection means no danger because no battle. Life in the open carries risk, but it also carries the possibility of achievement and victory. And what the Wayfarer cannot help remarking is that he and all mankind have come into the world more or less handicapped by heredity. No miraculous interposition enables ordinary men to start new and fresh without hampering links with the past. But it is precisely we ordinary men that Christ came to help; and it is to

us, with our hereditary disadvantages, that His sinlessness is held up as a pattern. If, therefore, He entered this life as we had to enter it; if in all points, hereditary and otherwise, He shared our difficulties, how much greater the significance of His conquest over sin! If we are in search of a faith that *counts*, what more inspiring than a Christ who entered life by our door, fought its battle with our weapons, achieved His victory under our drawbacks? Who shall say that such a view does not enhance, rather than diminish, all that makes Him to be the Saviour of man? Therefore, without any dogmatic foreclosing of so great a question, this is the Wayfarer's practical view; and it lends no excuse to the hurtful narrowness that makes the Virgin Birth and the Divinity of Jesus stand or fall together.

We ought now to be in a position to make clear, *in the ordinary man's language*, what is meant by the Divinity of Jesus; and the reader must still keep in mind that, so far as this book is concerned, we have nothing

to do with what may be called the metaphysical aspect of the question. Believing, as he does, that Christ was divine in a sense that applies to no one else, the Wayfarer recognises that philosophers and theologians may find it intellectually necessary to indulge in speculations as to the eternal relationship of the Father and the Son. He holds, however, that this phase of the subject need not affect his working faith. No serious man would talk of such a matter as though it were all reducible to easily-understood speech. Mystery there is, and will remain, when all is said. Meanwhile, the best thing the Wayfarer can do is to go with an open mind to his New Testament, and form his ideas of the Divinity of Jesus by what he finds there. Let us recall some of the metaphors under which the fact is presented. Jesus is *the* Son of God; and "to as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God." In the great human family, He is "the first-born." Among all the eminent, He

has "the pre-eminence." The "fullness of the Godhead bodily" was in Him; and of that fullness those who live in His spirit are to receive. We are to work until we attain "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." He is perfect; we are *to be perfect*.

I cite these texts and ideas because I regard them as the plain man's best *data* for understanding what is meant when we speak of Christ as divine: and such illustrations have the advantage of being easy to fit in with our habits of thought and life. See how they look with the slightest of paraphrase. Jesus was *filled* with God; we have a *little* of God in us, but are gradually to become more filled with Him. He is the "first-born"; we are brothers and sisters in the same family, looking to Him for our example, and hoping one day to be like Him. He was in touch with God *all the time*; we are consciously in touch with God only at intervals, in our higher and better moments. All this must sound

almost disconcerting in its homeliness to those accustomed to hearing the case presented in language more theologically impressive; but, homely or not, it is the New Testament manner, and, above all, it means something that everyday people can take hold of and relate to everyday thinking and living.

Nevertheless, simple as it sounds, it holds a stupendous fact. Because God is the Father of all men, every man is divine. "The light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" may be dimmed and feeble, yet it is still there. But in one Man the light never pales, the will never swerves, loyalty is never divided. He feels so divine, and appears to others so divine, as to say without challenge, "I and the Father are one." If, in face of these facts, anyone still feels impelled to complain that this way of stating the case dishonours our Lord, or makes His divinity "only a question of degree," there would seem nothing more to be said. But no Wayfarer is likely to make such a complaint. When

he reflects on what it means to make even a few inches of headway on the road to goodness, to strangle one sin, to win but a momentary oneness with God, he will not join in any cheaply calamitous abuse of that word "only." Rather will he remember what a tremendous task is set him in the great words of Milton:—"He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, *he is the true Wayfaring Christian*." And this, in turn, will make the Wayfarer feel that Christ gives him that for which, at heart, every true man is longing: some One divine enough to be *an ideal*, yet human enough to be *a working possibility*.

> Was Christ a man like us? *Ah! let us try*
> *If we then, too, can be such men as He!*

IV

THE WAYFARER'S VIEW OF SIN

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THE Wayfarer cannot help noticing that there is a marked diversity in the way in which preachers talk about sin. According to some, our age is suffering from a waning of "the sense of sin"; according to others, our grit and manliness are in danger from a morbid tendency to self-depreciation. Now, it will clear the ground and give us an excellent starting-point for this part of our journey if we at once say that both these judgments are justified, because each hits a side of the truth. For, on the one hand, no one with any knowledge of modern life and thought can fail to detect an ominous decline of moral sensitiveness in certain vital and delicate directions. Why this is so, is much too big a question to be discussed at the moment; but, meanwhile, it

may be enough to point out that there are some things not to be had without running serious risk. Among these things are a "problem" drama "controlled" by a censorship that too often ceases to be nominal only to become ridiculous; novels that find their unfettered opportunity in the most intimate sanctities as well as in the more surface emotions; and, not least, an ever growing determination to sound the possibilities of life unhampered by convention. All this, for better or worse, is now part of our moral stock-in-trade; and there is, inevitably, a heavy duty to pay. For, when the last word has been said, it will still remain true that, if people discuss certain things, still more if they permit themselves to be amused by them, they must be on their guard against a coarsening of their moral fibre. This is putting the case moderately; but it will serve to suggest what is probably the most formidable set of influences at present playing on "the sense of sin."

Here, then, is some stiffening and admoni-

tory work for the preacher to do—work that the honest Wayfarer will be the first to thank him for doing. But there is something else that should not be left undone ; and here we come to what those men have in mind who protest against undue self-depreciation and the " over-emphasis " of sin. For, keeping the average congregation in view, it is fair to say that they come to church needing and deserving encouragement quite as much as rebuke. Sinners they are, and they will welcome any preacher who helps them to feel a natural and wholesome penitence ; but most of them are fighting a hard battle, and many are winning veritable triumphs of courage and self-conquest. It is this element of the heroic in daily life, the way in which obscure people face pain and worry hour by hour—it is this that preachers seem so often to ignore. But it would greatly help the Wayfarer—nor need it endanger his proper " sense of sin "—were the pulpit to give more frequent sign that it knows something of the fine fight that so many people

are making. The Church appears to find it congenial to follow her Master's example in lamenting the unbelief of men; why does she so seldom manifest Christ's glad surprise at their faith? Indeed, it is a wonder how some people can believe at all. With everything against them, literally pressed on every side, they still trust; and it would do us all good did the pulpit sometimes give way to Christ's frank amazement at these miracles of belief.

So much by way of guarding against extremes, and putting things in some approach to right proportion. And now comes the question, What is the real significance of sin in the scheme of the Wayfarer's faith? Setting aside scholastic refinements and ecclesiastical aggravations, and just looking at life as we know it, what actually *is* sin? To begin with, it is *a reality*. The facile talk about its being a priestly invention, or a superstition with which humanity is needlessly worrying itself, is beside the mark. Liddon effectively probed this fallacy when he said:—"If sin were not a fact independent of Christianity,

if it were not an integral feature of human life, Christianity would long ago have perished. In the spiritual world, too, there is such a thing as supply and demand; and if a religion presupposes wants which do not exist, and brings remedies for diseases of which nobody is conscious, it has already signed its death-warrant."[1] And, indeed, the plain man hardly needs to go beyond the evidence of conscience, the witness of that persistent sense of responsibility which survives all plausible efforts to persuade him that he cannot help his thoughts or deeds. Self-respect and self-reproach, following the conscious exercise of choice, are an elementary experience of our nature; and, somehow, there they are, still waiting to be reckoned with, in spite of the most triumphant demonstration that they cannot logically exist. In this vital matter the Wayfarer stands to the facts of his own consciousness; and, in the long run, the most fully-equipped philosopher can scarcely do anything more sensible.

[1] "Some Elements of Religion," pp. 129—30.

At the same time, much is to be gained by a frank facing of the usual arguments against man's freedom and responsibility; and the pity of it is that one of the most potent of these arguments has been provided by theology itself. For it cannot be denied that the traditional doctrine of the Fall, with its alleged involving of the whole race in total depravity and guilt, is but another way of saying that neither as to what we are nor what we may be can we in the least degree help ourselves. There is to-day a widespread and needed call for renewed insistence on the grace of God; but, if this be accompanied by renewed insistence on the powerlessness of man, we must not be surprised if the laity in increasing numbers become infected with the determinist virus.

But, in the light of modern thought and of our own practical experience, how does the question shape itself? What can we say —is there anything to be said—as to how sin came into the world? Here the Wayfarer

has an embarrassing task; for, listening to the theologians, he understands that man has *fallen*; whereas the scientists assure him that, through evolution, man has *risen*. Which of these statements is he to accept? Both, assuredly. For what has happened in the moral history of the race happens too in the moral history of each individual; and we have but to consider our own experience to realise that we have both risen and fallen. We, also, to begin with, are placed in Eden. Then, in that first stage of being, shame is unknown; "right," "wrong," "praise," "blame," have no meaning; innocence knows not its right hand from its left; all is inevitable and beautiful and welcome. But, quickly enough, dawns the day of choice, the era of conscious responsibility. Two ways open to us—one, somehow, the more pleasant; the other, somehow, the more right. It must be one or the other; and to accept pleasure rather than duty, *when the two are incompatible*, is to make the lower choice, and to that extent to *fall*. Here is

no word-playing or hair-splitting. Man may not have been, in the old sense, "created in innocency"; but, evolving on the way to manhood, he must, in the nature of things, have had his innocent period; and it is perfectly fair to call the first sin, as each subsequent sin, a fall. In short, we have the key of the matter as soon as we regard the story of Eden as a pictorial representation of what all of us pass through. No theories of evolution at all affect the case; for, wherever or whenever man first came into being, he must have begun somewhere and at some time; and, for our first ancestors as for ourselves, innocence was the room on which the door of life first opened.

This, then, is man's *fall;* but it is also, and equally, his *rise.* The coming of the moral prerogative, of the power of choice—even when it is wrongly exercised—puts man on a higher plane than innocence. Directly he begins to know what temptation is, to feel the strain of higher and lower impulses, he enters into a new kingdom, *whatever the*

result; just as the soldier lying dead on the field of battle is of more significance than the safe sleeper in the tent. This gives practical meaning to Schiller's much-quoted saying that "the Fall was a giant-stride in the history of the race." So man's "fall" and "rise" are two aspects of the same thing; and the *essence* of what religion declares has no quarrel with the *essence* of what science teaches.

Now, still keeping the discussion as plain and untechnical as possible, the next question we have to face is, What effect has this original "Fall" had on ourselves? And here, for our own sakes, we must make short work of certain phrases that have too long been a source of perplexity to many people. We must, for example, get rid of the idea that one man, or any number of men, can be "under condemnation" or "guilty" because another man has sinned. And in this connection the Wayfarer should make it clear that, whatever subtle significance it may still have for theologians, the phrase "original

sin" is one for which he has no use. Similarly, "total depravity" can, without hesitation, be cast overboard, for the more than sufficient double reason that it stands condemned by every normally healthy conscience, and that, in the ghastly event of its being true, it would be fatal to any intelligible idea of human responsibility. But this is by no means to suggest that the "Fall" has no influence at all on those who come after. On the contrary, nothing can be plainer than that we come into the world tainted with the results of what our ancestors have done; and this, not because of a "curse" arbitrarily passed upon the race by a Deity angered at the first transgression, but because of the natural working of those laws of heredity on which our age lays such stress. All of us are handicapped by heredity—some considerably more, some considerably less; and so great is the complication of conditions and motives, that only God can know enough to apportion praise or blame. What is to one man

unmitigated disgrace may be to another almost pardonable—such is the diversity of inherited character and environment. At all events, it ought to be obvious that an inherited tendency to evil is, in itself, no more sin than an inherited tendency to goodness is, in itself, virtue. Not what we inherit, but our own attitude, desire and effort, constitutes our accountability.

While we are talking of heredity, let us be careful to remember—what so many seem to forget—that it is two-sided. Influences pure, lovely and of good report come down the stream of ages with even fuller strength and persistence than things malignant and degrading; so that, in all but the most unfortunate, the provocations to be our best outnumber and outweigh the incitements that are less worthy. It is often natural enough to bemoan our lot and to regard life's handicap as an indictment of God; and, indeed, it is a hard struggle for the best and happiest. Nevertheless, it is unfair to God and discouraging to ourselves not to

recognise the chances and inducements of the better kind that fall to most of us. The battle, after all, is not so uneven as we are prone to think; and, theological technicalities apart, there is more grace than evil in this strange mixture of a world. In the end, therefore, Goethe's pregnant dictum can stand as the sum of the case: "Heredity fixes our trial, but not our fate." The race is set before us. Some have a long start, others have laborious ground to overtake. But *we all have our chance of reaching the goal;* and we can sympathise with Mr. Blatchford when, notwithstanding his dissertations on determinism and "the bottom dog," he says, however illogically:—"I believe that I am what heredity and environment make me; but *I know that I can make myself better or worse if I try*."

The ground thus cleared, we must now ask ourselves wherein consists the dreadfulness of sin: What harm does it do? Whom does it injure? If we are to preserve any soundness in our view of the world, we must

conclude that God does not make capricious commands and prohibitions, hemming us in with "shall," and "shall not," for which there is no natural and essential reason. If we are to aspire after some things and to deny ourselves other things, it is not because God would gratuitously diminish the already small enough total of human happiness. No; sin *is* sin because it means injury to God, to ourselves, and to our fellow-men. In a very deep sense, its "wages," its inevitable consequences, are death. So we say, and so we often hear; but how and why? What, for instance, do we mean when we declare that sin inflicts injury on God? Well, the answer must depend on how you conceive God. If He is the arbitrary despot who has so often figured in popular theology, it would be natural to think that such a Being would be angered and roused to ferocious retort were His whim crossed or His decree resisted. He would want to be obeyed for the sake of being obeyed; He would stand ever on His

rather perplexing dignity. No wonder when, such being their conception of God, people feel it difficult to frame an intelligible notion of how sin, or anything else, can hurt Him!

But with the Christian idea of God—the God who carries responsibility, sacrifice and love as part of His daily burden—the case is different. We moderns—we preachers or hearers who try to stand for enlightenment in religious thought—should surely be the last to deny that sin does grievous injury to God. We who say so much—though not too much—about what God owes to man should not hold back when it is a question of what man owes to God. A father owes it to his children to do all he can for them; and, indeed, when that father is God, He must "freely give them all things." But the more, and the more finely, one gives, the greater the pain when the gift is rejected or abused. If God has put Himself into our lives, if we are not trifling with words when we speak of His immanence, our sin *must*

hurt Him. How far need we look to find a mother's heart broken or a father's life shattered by the sin of those to whom they have freely given themselves and "all things"?

Then, is God to be the one father in the universe who is unhurt and unwronged when His children make shipwreck of their lives? To many of us much of the traditional and current talk in this connection is either unintelligible or repellent; but that is no reason for speaking as though our goodness or badness, our wisdom or folly, can make no difference to Him. The Wayfarer, at least, stands for an inspiringly human conception of God; and let him hold to this, and say frankly that, just as our goodness makes the divine heart glad, so our sin must mean, even for the great Father, the gathering of clouds and the undermining of joy.

Taking this view, there is for us no point in the question whether sin injures God *or* man. It injures Him *because* it injures us; it strikes at Him *through* us. There is

significance beyond our fathoming in the ancient word, "*He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul.*" Sin, looked at in the light of experience, is a missing of the mark, a falling short of the might-have-been. Most people know what this means, even though they may seldom talk about it. There is in every normal person a deep instinct to live his fullest life, to develop all his latent possibilities, to be what he has it in him to be; and the longer we live, the more we understand what Christ meant when He said, "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." Now, may we not, roughly but sufficiently, put the matter in this way?—There are certain attitudes of life, certain ways of thinking and acting, that, *whatever they seem at the moment to do*, in reality sap at the roots of our noblest possibilities, and, more or less speedily, rob our lives of their best development and crown. A man owes it to himself and to God to be his best, to make the most of his life; and anything that he does to make this impossible is sin. What

things come under this heading in individual cases must rest largely with ourselves to decide; but no serious person is likely to quarrel with the statement that whenever we wilfully do what morally maims us and hinders our highest possibilities, we commit sin.

This would seem to be the proper place to register a warning against an insidious thought, already hinted at, that is finding utterance in much of the writing of our time. Our duty, we have just said, is to fulfil ourselves; our sin is to hinder that fulfilment. "That," say our modern monitors, "is precisely what we would have you see. Your conventional codes of morality, your man-made laws as to what is right or wrong—what, in short, you call your Christianity—all this spells timidity and weakness and narrowness. Live with full blood and zest, show spirit and enterprise, plunge boldly into the sea of life, and refuse to be content with the tedious safety of the shore." We make a mistake if we imagine that it is only

so-called "emancipated" thinkers, or people seeking excuse for moral slackness, who talk in this way. On the contrary, the same influence in various forms makes itself felt by numberless people of finely-disciplined thought and life.

The bald fact is that for so many of us life is a circumscribed, monotonous affair; one day much like another, with only a day here and there big or eventful. Students of social factors and moods have accustomed us to realise that monotony, rather than mere wantonness, lies at the root of much moral catastrophe. Wage-earning, buying and selling, keeping irritable people in humour —the humdrum routine soon gets drab and weary; and, meanwhile, there are the rich longings and possibilities *that every heart ought to feel*, rising and protesting within us. Why not, then, strike out, even at some risk? Why not hasten the "fulfilment" that otherwise may never come? The best answer to this lies, I think, in that combination of "narrowness" and "abundant

life" which is characteristic of Christianity. Our present unsatisfactory social conditions are, of course, responsible for much stunting and impoverishing of life; but even with the coming of Utopia there must be disciplines and renunciations that, on the surface, look like a needless forgoing of what life has to offer. "*Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life*"; and, in the sense of a reasonable acceptance of life's inevitable limitations, narrowness is a virtue not because of what it is in itself, but because of the illimitable breadth to which it at last leads. Nothing that novelist or dramatist or our own observation of life can show us is able to shake the conviction that departure from the main lines of Christian practice means, sooner or later, catastrophe and bitterness. For the moment, the month, or the year, there may be "fulfilment," a sense of triumph over vexatious restriction; but the end is still narrowness—only, the narrowness that itself is death, instead of the narrowness that is the avenue to life.

Emerson was scarcely to be charged with lack of enterprise in thinking or living, and yet it was he who wrote these significant lines :

> How much, preventing God ! how much I owe
> To the defences Thou hast round me set :
> Example, custom, fear, occasion slow,—
> These scorned bondmen were my parapet.
>
> I dare not peep over this parapet
> To gauge with glance the roaring gulf below,
> The depths of sin to which I had descended,
> Had not these me against myself defended.

To some readers all this will seem needless digression ; but those who know what modern conditions of life mean, and where the moral pinch really is, will understand that for very many of us this is the most important aspect of the problem of sin. At present we have to be content to live with, so to speak, many of our best possibilities in reserve—at this stage of the battle there is no use for them. The Christian plan of campaign is to keep all the forces of our being ready and untainted, to wait patiently until there is a worthy challenge to advance. Doing this, we may seem to lose a few

preliminary skirmishes; but it is the only way in which we can ultimately win the whole battle. "*Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it.*" The more we know of life, the more we realise the depth and actuality of these words; and this it is that makes the selfish "saving" of one's life to be at once a sin and a mistake.

And now there is the further consideration that what injures God and ourselves injures also our fellow-men; a fact so obvious, and bulking so largely in the thought of our time, as to stand in need of but little demonstration. Yet, perhaps, we do not even now realise it to the full. Do we, for example, quite understand how completely beside the mark it is for a man to say that his life is "his own," and that he is at liberty to "do what he likes" with it? Facts are crowding on us to-day in reminder of the solidarity of humanity. Our very thoughts create an atmosphere that others must breathe; our smallest words and actions swiftly carry an

influence beyond our knowledge and control. We can, in short, be or do or say nothing without someone else being the better or the worse. Hence every man who lives selfishly and not for his fellows, who wilfully fails to make the best of himself, is robbing the world and delaying the victory of God. A man owes a duty to the world in which he lives, to those other men with whom his life is inextricably woven, and if he put his own pleasure and advancement before this sacred claim he is guilty of sin. It is possible for a cynic to point out that he owes nothing to a posterity that can do nothing for him—but it ought not to be possible for a decent man to repudiate his debt to those who came before him or who now surround him. Warrantably enough Henry Drummond said, years ago:—"Prisons, mad-houses, hospitals—these are just so much roofing which society has put on to hide the stain of sin." Every man who sins, whether pettily or on the big scale, makes the common darkness greater and the common battle harder. To be upright in

business and thoughtful in the home; to be pure and self-controlled; to refuse all happiness whose price is the misery of others — here is the Christian Wayfarer's programme; and of these plain virtues sin is the enemy and the opposite.

Taking this view, we know why sin *is* sin, why it hurts God, ourselves and our fellow-men; why, therefore, our supreme call is to fight it to the death. And in contemplating our own ordeal — those inward struggles known to no one but ourselves—it will help us if we keep alert to the impressive challenge of Liddon:—"Two things a genuine Christian never does. He never makes light of any known sin, and he never admits it to be invincible."

V

THE WAYFARER'S VIEW OF ATONEMENT

V

THE WAYFARER'S VIEW OF ATONEMENT

THERE is, without doubt, a prevailing impression that, while it may be difficult to talk of theology generally in an easily intelligible way, it is almost impossible where the Atonement is concerned. It is regarded as outside the category of human experience, bearing no practical relation to life as we know it, and, therefore, as incapable of presentation in modern "everyday" language. This is, to all intents and purposes, what the theological doctors have said in the past; and the bulk of people have taken them at their word, allowing the subject to remain, more or less inanimate, in the hands of the experts. And, be it noted, the pulpit has very widely yielded to the same mood, only at rare intervals troubling its hearers with

expositions of a subject supposed to be so aloof from their understanding.

In such a matter each of us must, of course, speak for himself; but, as against this prevalent idea, it seems to me that on the Atonement, of all subjects, the Wayfarer ought, along his own lines, to be able to find a view at once clear and helpful. There should, indeed, be no doctrine of which the rank and file are so sure, or which links itself more firmly to the realities of life. Rightly conceived, Atonement, divine and human, is so all-pervasive, so part and parcel of the nature of things, that, so far from being incredible, belief in it should be inevitable. Naturally, if this is to come home to us, we must insist upon our right to speak of the subject in our own language, and under the figures and influence of our own time. This by no means implies that we undervalue the phraseology and images by which the Atonement was made real in other days. So long, for example, as people had certain ideas of the character of God and of the Fall, so long was

it natural to think of Atonement as a ransom by which people were rescued from the hands of Satan, or as a means of the shedding of "rich blood" that "soothed an angry Father's face." Every man must climb to truth by his own ladder; and these older methods of statement still meet the needs of a certain order of mind for which, in the meantime, it is these or nothing.

The mistake, and the calamity, is that what, curiously, are called "sound" views of the Atonement are generally meant to involve a plentiful, though not always intelligent, use of such terms as "blood," "propitiation," and "rescue." Indeed, it is the simple fact that to discard these words and ways is still in many pulpits to incur the condemnation of "not believing in the Atonement." But we shall never get to the root of the matter until we realise that it is not a question of *phrases* but of *realities*. Words, figures of speech, come and go; the question remains, is there or is there not an essential element in human experience

answering and surviving all temporary and provisional efforts to give it expression? That, after all, is the point to be sure of; and the one way to be sure of it is for each age to give frank utterance to what *it* sees and feels. As we have found with God, with Christ, and with Sin, so shall we find here, that, when all is said, there must be an abiding region of mystery beyond the horizon of human thought. To realise this is to be sure beforehand that our eagerness to see what can be seen and to say what can be said will always be tempered with reverence. Nevertheless, before this mystery-region is reached as regards the Atonement, we shall find that there is much to be suggested of a decidedly practical and "wayfaring" order.

Now it must be obvious that our view of Atonement will depend on our general scheme of belief, and particularly on our conception of God. Accordingly, to save needless repetition, it will be presumed that the reader will come to this chapter predisposed to give it sympathetic study by what has

gone before. And it will be in harmony with this if we divide the word so that to our eyes as well as our ears it proclaims its root-significance: AT-ONE-MENT. The fact we start from is that, for various reasons, there is not the oneness between man and God which for each must ever be the ideal. Between the Father and His children there ought to be oneness of character and spirit; whereas, too patently, there is separation and misunderstanding.

To realise how this is, we need not have in our minds ideas of "curse" and "ruin," and an arbitrarily estranged Deity; but, just as clouds of sin and mistake come between earthly parents and their children, so sin and other things not sinful—such as human sorrow and perplexity—come between ourselves and God. Now, can anything be clearer than that to break down this separation, to clear away this darkness of misunderstanding, must be, not the momentary act, but the persistent, unceasing life-work of God? Directly you limit Atonement to one act or

period, you lay the foundation of the fatal error which prevents the ordinary doctrine making any appeal to the mass of men. If God is the Father we have pictured Him to be, then every age and every place must be full of atoning influences. From the Christian point of view, the one convincing philosophy of history is that *God is always working to reconcile the world unto Himself.* In this, as in all other matters, thought broadens out as time advances; but we still have some distance to travel before the Atonement gains its rightful supremacy in religious thought. And it will become more supreme as it grows more catholic. It must no longer be a "transaction," strangely interpreted in terms of mediæval or sacerdotal subtleties. It must be, on the contrary, a world-wide fact, interpreting itself in the light of the highest human experience.

So far as I know, this aspect of the case has never been put with greater force or clearness than by Dr. John Hunter in his contribution to the Atonement-symposium

published a few years ago.[1] It would be to the general advantage were so striking an essay to be widely distributed in pamphlet form; but, meanwhile, the following passage contains the heart of the matter:—

"The Divine mission of Jesus is not so much an isolated interpolation in human history as the reflection and revelation of the universal and eternal labour, passion and sacrifice of God. Without Jesus the world was for thousands of years, but not without the merciful, gracious and redeeming God. 'His goings forth have been of old and from everlasting.' The whole economy of things is so ordered as to bring men at every point into contact with God. This is the final meaning and end of all the forces that enter into human life. By all the natural processes and experiences of life, by the discipline of hardship and toil, joy and sorrow, by the retribution that warns us back to right, and the moral purpose that is in all events,

[1] "The Atonement Modern Religious Thought," pp. 317—18.

God from the beginning has been reducing and destroying the separation between Himself and His children."

If human fatherhood at its best be in any way a reliable suggestion of what God is, there can be no difficulty about such a view as this; indeed, any more limited view becomes impossible. But from the Christian stand-point there remains the vital question as to the place of Jesus in this universal process of reconciliation; and there seems to me nothing better than to say, with Dr. Hunter, that the Atonement is "specialised" in Jesus. That is to say, amid all the atoning forces of the world He is *the* atoning force. Because we are surrounded by Divine love we are surrounded by Divine atonement; but "in Him we have *the* Atonement." We may, then, regard the life and death of Christ as *the supreme expression of that atoning love which has always been at work in the world;* and this, of itself, is something that we can link to the rest of our thinking and to the needs of life.

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But there is a further aspect of Atonement on which it is important to lay stress, and we find this in the fact that Christ is *the supreme example of vicarious sacrifice*. When the average man thinks about the Atonement at all he, with sufficient excuse, associates it with ideas of the guilty being saved by penalties inflicted on an innocent victim, or of the righteousness of one being "imputed" to another; and such ideas do not strike him very clearly or healthily. But beginning again, as it were, and looking at the case without prejudice, we find that, as a matter of indisputable fact, vicarious sacrifice runs through life; so that if a man reject Atonement on the ground that no one can save others by suffering for them, he is rejecting not a single doctrine but the whole scheme of life as we know it. When he sees heredity transmitting blessing or curse; when he sees the solidarity of humanity so intimate and subtle as to give awe-striking evidence that "no man liveth unto himself" —how is a man to deny the fact of vicarious

sacrifice? It is woven into the fibre of humanity and therefore, surely, into the fibre of God. For, as Dr. John Watson once asked, "If it be counted a noble thing in a lowly member of the human race to obey the law of sacrifice, is this high achievement to be denied to God Himself?" In harmony with the whole tenour of this book, it must be insisted that the Atonement is not a sacrifice which God "plans" and on which He "gazes," but a sacrifice which He *makes;* and, making this sacrifice Himself, He calls on us all to *do our share*.

If we are to make anything at all of this strange world, if any gleam of light is to penetrate its darkness and tragedy, we must find it in the belief that things can only come right through all suffering for each and each for all. We must all "fill up on our part that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ." The forgiven man learns to forgive, the reconciled man becomes a reconciler; and so the Divine circle spreads and the work of atonement goes on. Writing

on Nathaniel Hawthorne's work, Mr. Henry James has remarked that, according to his great compatriot, "Life is an experience in which we expiate the sins of others in the intervals of expiating our own." The quiet by-ways of love and friendship, the main road of human struggle and achievement—all are marked with the cross and on them all has sacrificial blood been shed. Before disease is conquered, many more doctors and patients must suffer and die; before truth is won, there must continue to be a call on those who are ready to sacrifice material ambition; before a fair life is possible for all, many more workers must be victims of "the system," and many more employers must succumb to worry and pressure. In short, if ever the darkness of sin and misery is ever finally to be dispelled, we must all kindle our little gift to the great illumining. And as this circle of vicarious sacrifice gradually widens, who shall say where it ends? For example, is this from Richard Jefferies (quoted by Dr. James Moffatt in a

similar connection) mere quaintness of fancy, or is it not rather an almost uncanny lifting of the veil on unsuspected tragedy?

"In this cottage opposite the violet bank they had small-pox once, the only case I recollect in the hamlet—the old men used to say everybody had it when they were young; this was the only case in my time, and they recovered quickly without loss, nor did the disease spread. That terrible disease, however, seemed to quite spoil the violet bank opposite, and I never picked one there afterwards. There is something in disease so destructive, as it were, to flowers."

So, it would seem, even a flower cannot live its "own" life, but must bloom or fade according to things beyond its control, thus paying its share of the tragic universal debt. A companion quotation from Stevenson, disconcertingly vivid, lifts the veil on a phase of the animal world that, perhaps, most of us would be only too glad to forget:

"Are they like us, I wonder, in the timid

hope of some reward, some sugar with the drug? Do they, too, stand aghast at unrewarded virtues, at the sufferings of those whom, in our partiality, we take to be just, and the prosperity of such as, in our blindness, we call wicked? It may be, and yet God knows what they look for. Even while they look the foot of man treads them by thousands in the dust, the yelping hounds burst upon their trail, the bullet speeds, the knives are heating in the den of the vivisectionist; or the dew falls, and the generation of a day is blotted out. For these are creatures, compared with whom our weakness is strength, our ignorance wisdom, our brief span eternity. God forbid it should be man that wearies in well-doing, that despairs of unrewarded effort, or utters the language of complaint. Let it be enough for faith that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy: surely not all in vain."

It is well for us to have these reminders of how the truth of vicarious sacrifice has

driven itself home to men of insight whose thoughts run outside the ordinary religious boundaries; and it is more than well that we understand what significant light this throws on our own lives. It really means that we are bound up in that scheme of redemptive suffering of which Christ is the supreme example. The great utterance of Paul about "filling up that which is lacking" has profound human experience behind it, for it came, surely, from his attempt to explain his own sufferings. First, being a Jew, he would say, "I suffer because I have sinned, and therefore I am but enduring what I deserve." Afterwards, taking a wider view, he would say, "There is no conscious sin in me to account for suffering so great and persistent"—and hence his "thorn in the flesh" became a hateful mystery, reflecting on the fairness of God. At length, however, the truth dawned; he was to "fill up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ"; his affliction was neither a visitation of Providence nor a

punishment of sin, but actually a part of the great sacrifice by which God and man are at last to be made one! And thus, from perplexity and disgust at his afflictions, Paul came to rejoice in them for the sake of what they did for others, and because they made him, however unworthy, a comrade of the Master.

Now, this problem of suffering is essentially the same for us as it was for Paul; nor shall we find a solution unless we look for it along the same lines. For, even if you say that all suffering is *ultimately* due to sin, it is impossible to deny that the worst suffering often falls on those who have least to do with the sin. In short, while of a great deal of suffering we can affirm that it is the direct penalty of sin, or that it is designed to "serve a good purpose," there is very much that cannot be included in either of these categories. Often disease, business calamity, worry in one of its deadly forms, bring suffering that, so far as we can tell, is not only undeserved but is likely to do more

harm than good. And is it not time to say frankly that, for the Wayfarer, the ordinary consolatory talk about "providential dispensation," "the will of God," and "all sent for some good purpose" is, *in such cases*, beside the mark, its palpable inappropriateness wounding rather than comforting? Better silence than that. Better still a bold taking hold of the inspiring explanation that came to Paul. All men who suffer for the sins of others, all who have to endure affliction that is not needed for the purifying of their own characters, are entitled to the help and joy of knowing that they are, with Christ, saviours of the world. He is, and must remain, *the* Saviour; but who shall suggest that He is dishonoured or that so sacred a word is used unworthily when it is made to throw light on the problem of vicarious suffering, otherwise ghastly and inexplicable? There is, indeed, the essence of Christianity as well as of the highest humanity in Whittier's familiar rendering of this idea:

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Wherever through the ages rise
The altars of self-sacrifice,
Where love its arms has opened wide,
Or man for man has calmly died,
I see the same white wings outspread
That hovered o'er the Master's head.

Believing this, we shall at least be spared the last madness of bearing or—what is worse—beholding suffering that does nothing but blunt and embitter, that leads to nothing better than itself. When all is said, the pain and calamity must remain, to be borne and to be seen; but, somehow, everything is hallowed and made possible when, reverently as Paul himself, we feel that we are entering into "the fellowship of His sufferings."

Let it be admitted that, in a matter so delicate and intimate as this, a man may express what to himself is inspiring truth, and yet fail to waken response in any but a few other souls. Nevertheless, we best make for truth and for the common good by the plain utterance of what has proved helpful to ourselves. Yet, sooner or later, under the strain of the mystery of vicarious

suffering, language must falter; and only the wings of silence can carry us to the realm of that "something more" which in human love is always the hidden secret, and in the Divine love must ever be that which "passeth knowledge."

We not only may, but must, "rationalise" our view of Atonement until it *mean something* in our thought and *stand for something* in our life; nor can we wisely neglect any suggestion that may bring it into more vital contact with the facts of everyday experience. But, when we have done all this, the last thought as well as the last word will remain with the penitent heart that begins to realise that its sin is answered by the forgiving love of God Himself. It is then that we understand that Christ and His cross, all that He has done and all that He still does, must ever stand not only supreme but alone. At such moments, to use Dr. Dale's words, men "discover for themselves that in dying, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, Christ has met the deepest wants of their

spiritual life, as well as revealed the infinite wealth and tenderness of the Divine love."

It was not a theologian, but a modern novelist (Mr. A. E. W. Mason), who, with true instinct, made a typical woman of the world say to her lover, "*Don't forgive so easily when we both know that there is something real to be forgiven.*" It is a truth not to be demonstrated by argument, but realised by anyone who has fronted life seriously, that true forgiveness always means Calvary, that at its heart there is always a cross. And this, not because it is grudging or reluctant, but because it is sacred; and sacred things are never easy or cheap. To be forgiven, deeply and solemnly, by one's fellow-man is, if any moral sensitiveness be left, to be marked for life—not with the brand of despair, but with the stamp of prayerful hope and incentive. To be forgiven by God is to see a new light in the sky, new ships of promise on the horizon; it is, in the matchless definition of Robertson, to have the heart to try again.

VI

THE WAYFARER'S VIEW OF HIMSELF

VI

THE WAYFARER'S VIEW OF HIMSELF

In certain respects, this last of our series of studies is the most important of all; for, when one comes to reflect upon it, the view we take of ourselves is bound more or less to dominate the view we take of everything else. Indeed, a great deal of the nebulousness and misgiving now apparent in religious thought is due to our failure to insist on *the significance of the individual*, with which, be it remembered, Christianity stands or falls. Once let us become uncertain on this point, and one of the most distinctive parts of Christ's teaching is undermined; for it is scarcely possible to deny that the inestimable worth of each individual in the sight of God is with Him a cardinal doctrine. And what He did, as well as what He said, was pre-eminently dedicated to the individual.

Much of His time was given to single persons or small groups of people; much of His finest speech was concerned with how much it matters whether *one man* goes right or wrong. That the repentance of "one sinner" means "joy in heaven" is not merely poetry; it is the solid, ultimate basis of true Christian doctrine. For, at last, our faith means nothing less than this, that there is something in humanity which makes each of us worth dying for.

It is a way of popular hymnology and much conventional prayer to express amazement that He who made us can see in us anything lovable or worth troubling about —"worthless worms" as we are! But we did not learn this self-depreciation from our Lord, who everywhere takes it for granted that the saving of men is worth even the sacrifice of God. And, as if to show what the Divine sensitiveness means, He made it manifest that the thronging and pressing of the crowd can never dull Him to the touch of the *someone* who seeks the virtue of His help.

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Christ, then, stands for the significance of the individual; and, could we take Him at His word, we might lift up our heads and live our lives with zest and spirit; for a real belief in ourselves will bring with it a real belief in God and in all else worth believing in. If, on the other hand, *we mean nothing*, not only the teaching of Christ, but all inspiring faith, shrivels into futility. That is why this particular part of our wayfaring journey is of such importance; why, before our brief companionship closes, we must do our best to persuade each other to *believe in ourselves*.

But how to do this? for, indeed, it is being made very difficult to-day. It would, in fact, be hardly too much to say that the whole trend of thought, just now, goes to show how utterly insignificant and negligible we all are, taking us one by one. The very language of the social reformer suggests this; running, as it so often does, on *man* and *the race* rather than on *men* and *individuals*. "Man" is worth the effort to

uplift; but—men? *They* must come and go, rise and fall, according to their luck or ability; the race is the thing that matters, that alone pays for persistent trouble. Then, too, without going into philosophical questions, it is useless to deny that much of the prevalent talk about Monism and Pantheism makes it difficult for ideas as to the importance, or even the existence, of the individual to survive. Speaking from the Wayfarer's point of view, it is to be regretted that progressive religious thought should so frequently be burdened with philosophical tendencies which the plain man finds it difficult to follow, and which in any case (if a colloquialism may be pardoned) leave him with nebulous notions as to *where he comes in* in this All-God scheme of things. On those of us who delight to speak of the Divine Immanence devolves, surely, a corresponding responsibility to make it clear that God can dwell in men without swamping or absorbing their separate existence and personality.

However, only a reader here and there would care to follow up this by-track any further; so let us come back to the main road, and consider one or two things that no thoughtful person can help feeling the force of. Take, for instance, the part played by the great idea of *evolution* in leading men to look upon themselves as insignificant items in the wonderful universe. According to the old belief in creation — so the argument runs—man was created directly by God, Who "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"; and thus his glory was immediate and his Divine descent first-hand. Whereas, according to the evolutionary doctrine, man appears at the end of a long process, during which ages of animal-descent have intervened between him and God. There, presumably, is the essence of the matter as it appeals to the people for whom I am writing.

Just because it seems to impress so many people, I state the argument; but I confess to not being able to feel its force. Is a rose

less beautiful or fragrant for being the result of a tedious process of growth instead of, so to speak, the product of immediate Divine magic? If not, why trouble ourselves with the paradox that, supposing we took millions of years in the making, we are therefore of less account than if our creation were instantaneous? If there is any argument at all to be urged in this connection, it should rather be: the more time spent, the more valuable the result; but, granted that man is "fearfully and wonderfully made," and that God is his maker, it is a gratuitous clouding of the sky to suggest that his value can be affected by the length or nature of the process by which he was made.

As for the alleged degradation or depreciation of man through his animal descent, it does not occur to us, at this time of day, to be ashamed of being linked with the "whole creation," which, too, is of God, and which has been our stepping-stone to human consciousness and prerogative. On this point Huxley's words may well stand as the

expression of the true Christian position:—"Thoughtful men, once escaped from the blinding influences of traditional prejudice, will find in the lowly stock whence man has sprung the best evidence of the splendour of his capacities, and will discern in the long process through the Past a reasonable ground of faith in his attainment of a nobler future."

There is, however, another phase of modern thought that is of far more weight in its bearing on our view of ourselves—I mean our ever-growing conception of *the immensity of the universe.* Even in Old Testament times, when the world was regarded as circumscribed—with, as it were, the earth for floor and the sky for roof—the Psalmist began to wonder whether man could count greatly with God when there was so much else to occupy the Divine mind:

> When I consider Thy heavens, the work
> of Thy fingers,
> The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained;
> What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?
> And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?

Even in those distant days the question suggested itself; and the bigger the universe, the more insistent grows the question. Goethe echoed it as he gazed from the Brocken, and ordinary people like ourselves feel its force when we come into contact with "the great immensities," whether of noise or of silence, when we hear talk of countless worlds and mysteriously-endless space.

It is all so dazzling and baffling; daring us, as it were, to pray, to hope, or to do any of the things that give life quality and splendour.

This, then, is the question; and, if our faith is to live, we must find an answer. Nor need this be over difficult so long as we do not spend strength in the wrong direction. We must not, for example, be too anxious to prove that we are actually at the centre of the universe. Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace has made a spirited attempt in this direction; but, after all, does it signify much *where* we are? Suppose that the material worst has happened, and that we are, all the time, walking, striving, sleeping on a corner of the

universe. The "corner," meanwhile, is enough to hold us and is still *in* the universe; and we do not think of God as nearer to this place than that, or as receding from us as the world grows larger. If we believe that He is spirit, we need not distract our faith by talking of Him as though He were flesh and blood, unable to be *here* because, at the moment, he is *there*.

As for the material glories of the universe, what significance could these have unless there were intelligent beings like ourselves to give them that significance? Force, beauty, grandeur—what are these things, or any other things, apart from human consciousness and recognition? It is, in short, not a question of quantity, but of quality; not of how much there is of us, or what is our place in the universe, but of *what essentially we are*. To take in the best sense a homely illustration. Who cannot imagine what it is to be in a great house filled with rare treasures and material distractions; and yet in the sickness of a child all else is

forgotten, and this small speck of humanity is the one object of solicitude, the one thing that counts. And can it be otherwise between ourselves and God? Presuming God to be the Father we have pictured Him, is there anything more credible than that, in spite of all the material wonders of the universe, the need and love of His children should appeal to Him first and last and always?

Here, again, therefore, there is no call for us to lose hold of our belief in human dignity and worth. The argument from the immensity of the universe is merely an argument from bulk, which loses its force directly we gauge what it actually amounts to. It compares things belonging to different kingdoms; as if unconscious splendour, even in the heavens, could be of more moment than conscious striving and aspiring, even though these last be amidst the dulness and weakness of earth. And so the Psalmist's answer to his own question can be ours also:

> Thou hast made him but a little lower than God,
> And crownest him with glory and honour.

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But, supposing that we have survived the challenge to our dignity offered by evolution and the vastness of the universe, there is a further and yet more potent challenge to meet, arising from the sheer number of human beings past, present, and to come. Seeing there are so many of us, can we all matter? Must there not be a great deal of overlapping and general superfluousness? Wherever we turn, there is something to remind us of how readily we could be dispensed with; for the depression that is begun when we think of the overwhelming numbers of humanity is completed when we contemplate the congestion and competition incidental to our tragically-clumsy industrial conditions.

Are there, then, too many of us? Must some of us—perhaps most—be idle spectators of the great drama, because there is no part for us? This is a question which goes home; and possibly, in our day, it is more responsible for the undermining of faith than all other difficulties put together. For

persuade a man that *he* does not matter, and quickly for him nothing else will matter. Convince him, on the other hand, that he counts, that there is a clear call for *him*, and all else will healthily find its place. On the surface, no doubt, as we appear to ourselves and the casual onlooker, there would not seem to be much reason why many of us should be here. What we are, thousands of others seem in all essentials to be; what we do, thousands of others can, to all intents and purposes, do with equal efficiency.

Go deeper, however, and there is a different story to tell; for the more closely we study our own ordinary selves, the more convincingly shall we see that the mere number of people in the world no more affects our individual significance than does the size of the universe in which we live. In his little book on Human Immortality (which every Wayfarer should read, not once but many times) Professor William James puts in a stimulating word for the despised units of humanity.

"Take for instance," he says, "all the Chinamen God Himself, you think, can have no use for them. An immortality of every separate specimen must be to Him and to the universe as indigestible a load to carry as it is to you. But is not such an attitude due to the veriest lack and dearth of your imagination? You take these swarms of alien kinsmen as they are *for you:* an eternal picture painted on your retina, representing a crowd oppressive by its vastness and confusion. As they are for you, so you think they positively and absolutely are. *I* feel no call for them, you say; therefore, there *is* no call for them. But all the while, beyond this externality which is your way of realising them, they realise themselves with the acutest internality, with the most violent thrills of life. 'Tis you who are dead, stone-dead, and blind, and senseless, in your way of looking on. You open your eyes upon a scene of which you miss the whole significance. Each of these grotesque or even repulsive aliens is

animated by an inner joy of living as hot or hotter than that which you feel beating in your private breast. The sun rises and beauty beams to light his path. To miss the inner joy of him, as Stevenson says, is to miss the whole of him."[1]

Everyone, by the way, who would think as highly of himself as he ought to think should keep Stevenson in a place easily reached; for he compels all who catch his spirit to be "passionately and intensely interested" in themselves—makes them feel that under the thin crust of convention and outer seeming they conceal poetry and passion, comedy and tragedy, wonders and mysteries. He would have you realise that it is good to be alive, because there is no one like you, and no one like anyone else. We are, in short, unique. In humanity, as in nature, there are no duplicates. Leaves that, at a few yards, appear to be endless repetitions of each other are, when closely looked at, subtly distinctive; and it is in

[1] "Human Immortality," pp. 73—7.

this minute way we must learn to look at ourselves. Commonplace and dull we may be; nevertheless Truth will not be built until we have laid our brick on the wall; and we who, as we think, have "nothing worth contributing," are robbing the world until we say what is in us. "The Smithate of Truth must always differ from the Brownate of Truth"; and Smith and Brown ought to take heart since Oliver Wendell Holmes has thus offered them so strong an incentive.

We all want to feel, and we all have a right to feel, that *we come in somewhere*, and that the world cannot do without us. Of course, industrially and ordinarily, no one of us is indispensable; and the swiftness with which the greatest are "done without" and forgotten is one of the ironies on which cynics feed. Get, however, to the deeper significance of a man, and you will understand that *he is himself and has his own value*. Let him leave *his* task undone, *his* word unsaid, and undone and unsaid they will for

ever remain. This is the proud thought that inspires a famous passage in George Eliot's "Stradivarius"

Naldo:

What, were God at fault for violins, thou absent?

Stradivarius:

Yes! God were at fault for violins.
If my hand slacked, I should rob God, since
He alone is fullest good,
Leaving a blank instead of violins.
He could not make Antonio Stradivari's violins
Without Antonio.

Inevitably, with things as they are, we have moments and moods when the trivial and humdrum aspect of life takes firm hold; the more reason, then, for making the utmost of this other truer and more inspiring aspect. Indeed, when we once grasp the power that lies in our hands, we are more likely to be afraid of our significance than paralysed by our insignificance. Said Lord Kelvin, "I lay this little piece of chalk upon a granite mountain, and it strains the whole earth"; and the pregnant truth is as applicable to the human world as to the physical. We lay our "little pieces" of speech or silence

action or inaction, on the human mountain; and who is to say where the "strain" of influence ends? A word, and the whole current of another life is changed; a look or hand-grip, and another heart is filled with despair or hope; a selfish indulgence, and trouble is laid up for generations unborn.

In face of it all, how can we think that we are of no account? Indeed, front the issues of life squarely and intimately, and the point is no longer that we do not "count" enough, but that we "count" so much.

If, therefore, we fold our hands, will God be robbed of His victory? No; but He will have to work harder and longer to gain it. If we sulk in the tent or fight on the wrong side, will misery and sin go on for ever? Again, no; but we shall prolong the term of humanity's trouble by a few more months or years. Pardonably enough, Mr. Frederic Harrison and other Positivists contend that one of the attractions of their religion is that their God—"Humanity"—needs their help, gives them something urgent and vital to do. Why

have we Christians allowed ourselves to forget that this is one of the attractions also of our religion? In the future we shall have to lay much more stress on this point than has been done in the past; for only here shall we find an answer to certain questions that are increasingly puzzling thoughtful people.

What is meant, for example, by God's providential action—where can we trace it? What is meant by answers to prayer—where do we find them? What is meant by God's presence in the world, His care of the poor and the troubled? Where is He all the time; where are the signs of His coming? If at so late a stage one may throw out suggestions on this great medley of problems, we shall find more and more an important clue in the fact that God very often employs men—*ourselves*—as intermediaries. That is, unless we, for Him, answer the prayer of the needy, unless we, for Him, stand by the wronged, their cry will, in many cases, remain unrevenged. God is the Commander,

but He must act largely through the rank and file; and this world-struggle is a veritable Inkerman—a soldiers' battle, with all that this means. This is not meant to deny or preclude other and more direct ways in which God may work and answer prayer; it is only to lay stress on one of the main ways in which He does, as a matter of fact, so work and answer.

Finally, there is one supreme task that, whatever our theological prepossessions, confronts us all at the present juncture. We may have our own ideas, advanced or conservative, on New Testament criticism; but in any case we must by some means make a bridge between the Jesus of Galilee and the Christ who is to be a living force to-day. Talk to serious people intimately, and you will probably find that in the majority of cases their difficulty is the far-awayness of the New Testament Jesus. There He was *then* and *there*, with His words of healing, His gracious teaching, His supreme sacrifice; but *here* and *now*, with the tragedies and

perplexities of this actual moment, how does He come and what does He do?

The *full* answer lies with God, with endless varieties of individual experience, with things a man may feel, but which would scarcely be valid and helpful if set down in cold print. But *an* answer, and a great one, is in the fact that the Christ-principle, of which Jesus was the supreme example, finds practical expression in everyone who tries to live for the common good. Whatever happens in other ways, through whatever other channels the Divine succour reaches men, it comes also through *us;* and in that fine sense it may be said that we are real, though lesser, Christs. If in the old days, according to Paul, the rock of which the people drank was "Christ," why not, in the same reverent spirit, say that "Christ" stands for every influence or deed or word that brings men nearer to God?

Thus, from paralysing ideas of the nothingness of man, we stretch to inspiring ideas of his significance; from thinking that he is of no account, we rise to the

thought that neither God nor his fellows can do without him. In many important respects this will ease the difficulties of faith; and it will arm us against the slackness, the fatal feeling that "nothing matters," which is the worst enemy of those who are aiming at the highest. When once we realise the wonder and the possibilities of our own being, God and immortality become not so much credible as inevitable, and life gathers a proud, invincible incentive. And, as the Wayfarer goes on his journey, certain great words, hitherto vaguely familiar, wed fresh music and become a veritable song of the road:

"*Now are we children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be*

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