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THE ASSETS OF THE EVANGELIST.

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THE business of the evangelist is to display the inexhaustible riches of the Christian Treasury in the sight of the person he is seeking to win, and to invite him to taste and see how gracious the Lord is. The appeal consists more in the sight of the treasure itself than in any words which the evangelist may use. His function is very much that of the good commercial traveller. He must know first his wares, second his clientele, and third how to describe and display his wares so as to release their power to make the appropriate appeal to the particular idiosyncrasies of each separate customer or group of customers. The analogy may be homely, but it is not the less applicable for that.

The preacher must therefore be utterly persuaded that what he is offering is precisely what is needed by his hearers. His is the good news, the astounding, incredible, and glorious news, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto salvation. So far from being ashamed of it, he glories in it; and his sense of the wonder and the power of the treasure which is committed to his commendation fills him with a sense of humility, and confers on him an honour almost too great to be borne. He knows that the whole cosmic creation, the whole evolution of History, have been in travail to give birth precisely and exclusively to the Christian interpretation of life. He realises that he holds in his hands the one and the only talisman by which the gates of chaotic hell are closed, and the gates of the glorious Kingdom of Christ on earth are flung wide open. He is filled with the delighted realisation that the treasure he has in his earthen vessel is one which corresponds exactly with the needs of so vague an abstraction as a whole civilisation, and so concrete an entity as Mr. and Mrs. Brown and the baby, of 5 Acacia Villas. In comparison with his rivals he has every advantage.

The initial advantages with which the Christian begins his evangelistic campaign are many and various. He meets the incurable romanticism and hero worship of man with a great story superbly told, with a Hero worthy of all adoration, and eternally capable of attracting it. It is by tales of heroism that human imagination is most of all taken in thrall. If only they are greatly told, the tales of Charlemagne's paladins riding proudly to their death at Roncesvaux, of Leonidas and his Spartans combing their hair as they made ready for certain death at the pass of Thermopylæ, of the subaltern of a Lancashire regiment at Gallipoli who fumbled and dropped a live bomb in his own trench, and to save his men immediately flung himself upon it and was blown to pieces, are those which eternally hold the key to human imagination, and, through that, control human wills. The story of Jesus steadfastly setting His course to Jerusalem, resolutely entering the Garden of

Gethsemane to await arrest, is, quite apart from its theological significance, the power of God to catch the breath with awe, and to set the imagination blazing with the quivering flames of devotion.

The power of this, the grandest and purest dramatic tragedy which History affords to stimulate the will and quicken the heart, has in History an ample and an endless testimony. The mere reading of the Gospels, read as whole and complete books and not in separated portions, is itself a purge and a stimulus of terrific power. The breath of secularism turns the earth grey and petty ; and where it has succeeded in overturning the Christian religion, it is always forced to introduce again the category of heroism, and find fresh material on which to feed the human capacity for tragedy. No faith will ever capture human wills which does not provide food for the universal human faculty for wonder. Always there must be great stories and great heroes, and only as ideas are enshrined in drama and expressed in heroism can they capture the imagination and call for the loyalty of men and women.

In this the Christian evangelist starts with a tremendous advantage over his secularist rival. They both make a bid for the allegiance of human wills. The secularist points us to a grey, drab world. Everything which has emotional content for us, sacrifice, patriotism, family love, is coldly considered, and left with a huge question mark. Instead of a Hero God, coming to the earth and partaking of the changes and chances of our life along with His children, we are offered either a blank negation, or a vague something called a " First Cause " or a " Universal Element." The Christian evangelist has the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke. With them he can appeal to the faculty of wonder, and he knows that the story which he offers is one which never fails to kindle human imaginations. He has only to persuade people to listen.

The story of Charlemagne's paladins and the story of the Crucifixion of Jesus are alike capable of calling forth an imaginative response. But the quality of the response will be far different. Nobody has ever felt that the story of Charlemagne's paladins has any kind of moral compulsion for himself. The quality of the imagination called forth by the Gospel is precisely of such a nature that those who yield themselves to it know at once that it exercises a compulsion upon their wills as well as an enthrallment upon their capacity for wonder. The heroic content of the Gospel is of such a kind as to issue a compelling call to cosmic and moral adventure. That adventure is stern, exacting, and it is part of the stuff of which human nature is made that its moral aspirations only become actual achievements in so far as continuous and absolute surrender is demanded. The old story of Garibaldi and his thousand illustrates this well enough. It was not until he promised them weariness, hunger, forced marches, and death, that the people streamed out of Rome to follow him and set the Italian nation free. In the same way it is not until the compulsion laid upon us by a great story is felt to be one which demands everything, that ordinary men and women will yield to it the moral aspirations which animate them all.

Here again the Christian evangelist has the secret of power in the treasure which he offers, and his secularist rival has nothing to bring. For instead of demanding an endlessly sacrificial way of life, the secularist is eager to explain to those who listen to him that the way of life which he offers is one that makes precisely no demands at all, unless and until it seems good to his hearers themselves to make them. In his scheme of ethics self-sacrifice is indeed immoral, being equated with self-murder. Self-expression becomes the only final good, and the thing demanded is the thing which causes no one much trouble to give. In no sense does he call for anything which can be described as adventurous moral life. The Christian, on the other hand, has that which eternally appeals to men's moral aspirations. He begins by setting the imagination on fire with the greatest story in the world. In that story is contained the demand for heroic living on the grand scale, the demand not merely for a part of life, but for everything that there is about a man, heart, and hand, and brain, to embark upon the most dangerous and the most glorious sea in the world, the sea of living in the twentieth century a life of moral perfection and absolute sacrifice.

It is therefore not to the heart alone, but also to the mind that the Christian evangelist must make his appeal. Having set the imagination on fire by telling the story of the historic Christ, having issued the call to man's incurable moral romanticism, which that story eternally contains, he must then show how a rationale of what is implied in all this fits together in every joint. Here he has to offer a body of thought which, given the assumption upon which the Gospel itself is based, namely that God exists and God loves, is a perfectly logical pattern in every part. Nor is there any possibility of undermining it. It stands every test. It can be examined from the exalted point of view of the cosmic order, and it stands the test there. The historian can subject it to scrutiny from the point of view of his doctrine of progress, and it there passes the test which decisively disqualifies the whole Marxian interpretation of life. The full range of Christian theology, revelation, redemption, inspiration, life in the Church, and immortality beyond the grave, is the most perfectly logical structure which is known to the world of thought.

If it is objected that it rests upon the initial assumption of the existence of the love of God, and that a measure of faith is required before the mind can set out on the journey which Christian theology proposes for it, the Christian evangelist has his answers ready. They are, first, that Science itself is built upon precisely such a faith. Each branch of the physical sciences, Astronomy, Psychology, Physics, and the rest, is an attempt to explore and classify some particular area of the whole field of the present mysteries of Nature. When the astronomer and the psychologist, the chemist and the biologist, have completed their work, then it will be found that the separate pieces fit together like a jigsaw puzzle, and produce the perfect portrait of Nature. But that is an assumption, an act of faith, and Science cannot move one step without it. His second

answer is that he possesses what the secularist can never possess, a story which makes faith reasonable and possible. It may be an assumption to believe that God exists and that He is love, but an assumption which has behind it the acceptance of a Figure of the moral stature and heroic grandeur of Christ, is an assumption which is well worth making, and which on any showing calls forth the kind of life by which alone the world can be saved from ruin.

The treasury of the Christian evangelist is, moreover, one which has been amply tested. Two thousand years of history testify to the continuous effectiveness of the life which yields itself to the glamour of the Gospel, embarks upon the life of moral adventure which the Gospel suggests, and checks and purges that life by constant recourse to the whole scheme of Christian theology. Over and over again it has been proved that society is healthy in proportion as Christ effectively rules it, and that men and women achieve the purpose of their lives in so far as they make His moral values and His demand for uttermost sacrifice their own. On the other hand, his secularist rival can only point in history to a progressive series of disasters which have followed every attempt to make his interpretation of life victorious. He has behind him a long history of disastrous failure. Over and over again the attempt has been made to build the City of Man without reference to God, and as often as men have painfully erected it, they have found that they were living after all in the City of Destruction. All the great civilisations of the past in which God was not consciously enthroned, have had their little day, achieved greatness in it, but have stood on the brink of a great pit and come crashing down into it.

Both the Christian and the secularist point us to a victory. The secularist victory has from time to time been achieved, and we know what kind it is. It is the victory of Lenin, of Hitler, of Mussolini, in the present, and in the past the victory of Cæsar Augustus, of Frederick the Great, and of Robespierre. This victory offers to the vanquished only blood and tears. But the Christian offers to those whom he is seeking to vanquish a defeat which is itself superb and glorious victory and triumph, in which there are no vanquished to weep and no tears to be shed.

Thus it is that the evangelistic call is the display of a treasure which the evangelist holds. But he must learn to make the best use of it. Not only must he know the treasure itself, he must also study his customers. Broadly speaking, the Christian treasure has to be displayed in such a way as to make appeal to three great human faculties, the faculty of thinking, of purposing, of feeling—the mind, the whole moral adventure, and the heart. Only as he succeeds in taking each one of these three faculties in thrall will he succeed in claiming the world for the allegiance of Christ.