of this martyrdom ? ' the facts must be put into the moulds of the altar, and without these forms of the altar we should be utterly at a loss in making any use of the Christian facts which would set us in a condition of practical reconciliation with God. Christ is good, beautiful, wonderful. His disinterested love is a picture by itself. His forgiving patience melts into my feeling. His passion rends my heart. But what is He for ? And how shall He be made to me the salvation that I want ? One word—He is my sacrifice—opens all to me, and beholding Him with all my sin upon Him, I count Him my offering. I come unto God by Him and enter into the Holiest by His blood." In these words of Bushnell Christian experience speaks, and it speaks with authority and not as the scribes, and from its testimony there is no valid appeal.

HERBERT T. ANDREWS.

JESUS' FORGIVENESS OF THE SINFUL.

IN the following pages we are meant to contemplate Jesus face to face with sinners, who need and also somehow receive pardon at His hands ; to reflect on His teaching about forgiveness, whether conveyed audibly in words or silently by act or gesture.

It must never be forgotten that, in a true sense, Jesus continued a religious work inaugurated by the Baptist. The forerunner is pictured as " baptizing in the desert and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins " (Mark i. 4). We encounter here the conviction that all men are sinners, that no one can go into the Kingdom whose sins are not forgiven, and that repentance is the requisite path to forgiveness. It is in this atmosphere of belief that Jesus began His public work. He does not

appear ever to have doubted that such belief is essentially true.

There were however other contemporary opinions which He definitely repudiated as misleading. Thus He rejected the habit into which good people had fallen of construing their relations with God in terms of law. There were 613 precepts, none of which must be infringed. The correctest view of God is that He is man's Judge. His righteousness is that of the magistrate. Grace was not denied, but its place was secondary and therefore highly uncertain. The worshipper must accordingly bestir himself to win God's favour, and make his own position secure by doing extra works he might have left undone. Looking ahead, he saw at the end of all things a Divine assize where the Jew should receive all that his deeds were value for in the heavenly record. There is nothing ignoble in all this, which by no means exhausts the Pharisaic creed. But to Jesus it was profoundly unsatisfying. And one reason why it is well to fix this Jewish background in our view is that thereby we realize the fact more vividly that Jesus' wonderful message of forgiveness was not uttered casually but with strong and deliberate intention, in antagonism to a rival doctrine which He desired to expel from human faith. He sought to make it redeemingly clear to the sinful that Law was not His own last word to them, or His Father's.

In Jesus' company, men became aware by degrees that He was reading their nature to the depths, probing motives, discerning wishes, catching unspoken prayers; not, however, with the cruel penetration of steely intelligence but by a new intensity of love. He was indeed altogether open-eyed about low and base things in their lives. His judgment could be of a dreadful severity. His holiness burned in white flame near which evil could not live.

In spite of this uncompromising rightness—or rather, on account of it—men were able to place the utmost confidence in His affection ; and in case after case they seem to have flung themselves upon His strength for protection from themselves and against the power of habit. Along with this went the insight that He was worthy of trust. He was such that sinners could depend on Him. They saw Him live in the tempting, defiling world—facing allurement, enduring hardship, ignoring flattery. Plainly there was a struggle ; to keep His integrity was a real conflict. More than once they caught His agonised voice as He prayed concerning His difficulties, and at such times they could do little more than stand far off, guessing at the pain. Eventually they reached the irreversible conclusion that His soul had never once been touched by evil. They said to each other that this Man was not, like them, a sinner. He had never felt an evil conscience or had to speak the bitter words of self-accusation due from all the rest.

Thus our Lord produced in His associates the profound sense that morally they were failures. No doubt they came to perceive that God and Jesus were indistinguishable in character, but this, it appeared, could only make things worse. If what they felt in Jesus shamed them, must not the meaning be that they were all too unworthy for the Holy One to bear them in His presence ? Yet just here is the amazing fact. Precisely when their shame grew intolerable, His treatment of them removed their sad despair. He would not send them away, or say that He could make nothing of them. Instead, He somehow let them know that He and they were friends for life. His attitude was at once so stern and so understanding, so holy and so merciful, that in Him God seemed to be standing by their side, and their eyes opened to the truth that what

through Jesus' love they were receiving was the forgiveness of God Himself. They did not as yet know that Jesus' attitude to the sinful would one day cost His life, but they quite well understood that He was doing for them the greatest of all services. To speak the word of pardon, to blot out the past and open up the future, to give peace to conscience, to impart hope to broken men and launch them in the career of loving their neighbour as themselves —nothing else could be so great. And this is what He *was* doing, because in reality He was leading them into fellowship with God.

I.

It is however time to examine one or two characteristic incidents in which Jesus' mind about forgiveness is made clear, as well as the principles (to use too cold and doctrinaire a word) on which He dealt with the sinful who had sought Him out or had been guided to Him. Let us first consider an episode which casts an extraordinarily suggestive light on Christ's view of spiritual facts—the healing of the paralytic (Mark ii. 3–12). His question to the onlookers, as given in Dr. Moffatt's rendering, is this: "Which is the easier thing, to tell the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to tell him, 'Rise, lift your pallet, and go away'?" This was probably meant not so much to rebuke the murmurers as to make them think. They disbelieved in Christ's power to pardon sin by a word, and when they heard Him say to the invalid, "Your sins are forgiven," they called it blasphemy, on the ground that no one *can* forgive except God. They were right, of course; God alone is the author of forgiveness, and no declaration of pardon which mediately or immediately does not come from God has any value. In any ordinary case this would have been final. But now it missed the

mark, for all that Jesus did or said was revelation. His tears are God's mercy, His wrath God's anger. And just so, to the sin-tormented soul before Him, His absolution is God's pardon.

Hence our Lord replied to the objection by showing His power in another way. To forgive sin or cure disease by a word is for common men impossible; in their case it is as simple and as vain to speak of the first as of the second. But when the sick man rose and carried out his bed, it was an ocular demonstration how far from vain it was for Jesus to speak words of healing, and, as He proceeds to show, the physical has its counterpart in the spiritual. If His word can quicken helpless limbs, His word also can cleanse the guilty conscience. Salvation—that comprehensive miracle—for Him consisted in admission to a Divine family in which men were the children of a Father who both forgave all their iniquities and healed all their diseases. Now the scribes would very likely have kept quiet had Christ simply healed the man, but they could not bear Him to act on the higher plane, and they resented fiercely His touching the soul. But what Jesus presents to them is an instance in which the two halves of life are indivisibly one. Body and soul are but abstractions; together, in the inseparable unity of experience, they form the human life which God has made and will redeem. Thus to the question, whether asked in the first century or the twentieth: Which is easier, to forgive or heal? we must still give Jesus' answer, that both are impossible for men but wholly possible for God.

Thus one truth shining out of this wonderful interview is that for the mind of Jesus pardon is supernatural. He and the sick man knew that something had happened which nothing but the illimitable power of the Eternal could account for. We cannot forgive ourselves. No

comrade, with the best will in the world, can do it for us. If we avert our eyes from God, the order of things is dead against the thought of forgiveness, for there is not a hint of it in Nature, or at least the half-decipherable hints which Nature may contain are illegible by any mind not already enlightened by the experience of being pardoned. It has been truly said that to the first question of personal religion: What must I do to be saved? Nature, in its regular and majestic sequence, makes no reply. Sun, moon and stars cannot answer it, nor can earth and sea.

Moreover, from Jesus' treatment of the paralytic we learn that in forgiveness the initiative is with God. Jesus spoke first; before the man had time to ask for it, He placed the boon in the needy hand, with anticipating love. Very possibly healing and pardon had an altogether different importance for Jesus' mind and the other's. To the patient health was the one thing needful, and Jesus counted mainly if not exclusively as the great Worker of cures; to the Healer, God and pardon were the greatest things in the world. In His judgment the bad conscience ranks as the sorest of all troubles, and deliverance wrought by pardon is the divinest gift in His power. He therefore gave it first. Become right with God, He says implicitly, and trust Me for the rest; or, as He expressed it otherwise, Seek first the Kingdom and its righteousness, and all other things shall be added.

The scene also contains suggestive indications of Jesus' view of His own part in the mediation of forgiveness. And this we might expect, for on the surface of it the episode is peculiar in this respect, that our Lord's right to pronounce pardon on the sinful had been openly challenged, and although the Pharisees had on other occasions taken umbrage at His persistent grace to sinners, no other instance can be found in the Gospels where He is represented as

deliberately, and as it were by argument, justifying His action in the bestowal of pardon. If therefore we search the story for proofs that Jesus regarded Himself as having a special relation to the imparting of forgiveness, we do so with the feeling that in the words quoted He is consciously and intentionally putting the case for Himself. Now He does not take pardon to be a matter of course; we have indeed seen that He felt it to be supernatural. Why then, if the thing were so amazing, did He expect the paralytic to believe there and then that his sins were blotted out? Surely the announcement of pardon, to convince, must be uttered by One whose personality is in itself convincing. Yes: and here the condition is satisfied. Jesus knew His own unshared power to represent God to men; He knew that at the very moment this power was taking effect in the man's soul: therefore He could speak as He does speak. There is no doubt a real sense in which we also impart forgiveness, as when in preaching or private words of friendship we declare the pardoning love of God. The difference, however, is that when we proffer pardon to men, we do it in view of Jesus, the surety and guarantee of grace to all the guilty; when in the Gospels Jesus does it, it is in virtue of Himself. Not as though He insisted that men should believe it apart from what they knew of *Him*. As Herrmann puts it: "Jesus did not write the story of the Prodigal Son on a sheet of paper for those who knew nothing of Himself. He told it to men who saw Him, and who, through all that He was, were assured of the Father in heaven, of Whom He was speaking." [1] We are plainly bound to give some reasonable account of the acknowledged fact that no one before or after Jesus has ever presented forgiveness in this absolute and personally authoritative way, and the explanation

[1] *Communion with God*, p. 132.

can only lie in the self-consciousness of Jesus as the Bearer of God's salvation. It was in that character that He dealt with men, and, as this incident proves, He could be recognised in that character by others. They found pardon really present in Him: they were aware that He put forgiveness in their hand; as He stood before them, He embodied for their faith the sufficient mercy of God.

II.

The difficult but interesting question how much or how little acquaintance with Jesus could yield a sufficient assurance of pardon, is raised by the story of the sinful woman in Simon's house, who wept over Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (Luke vii. 36–50). Here the word of pardon is spoken not at the beginning of the interview, but at the end. Had the woman met Jesus previously? A recent writer thinks not; she had only heard of Him from others. "Before He had seen her or she Him, He had turned her to God."[1] This is not convincing, and would not suit Zaccheus either, who, though he almost certainly knew something about the Messiah, does not hail Him with words of personal gratitude. But though we may judge that our Lord and the woman must have been face to face earlier, this had not had its full effect upon her. Otherwise Jesus would have chosen His words differently. He would not have said, in an aside meant only for her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The story is as moving in its omissions as in the elements of which it is actually made up. Thus we are struck by the absence of explicit condemnation. There is no harping on the enormities of the past, no probing of the wound, no denunciation. Not that evil is overlooked; how deep

[1] K. Windisch in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (*Festgabe für W. Herrmann*), p. 299.

goes the simple phrase: "Her sins, which are many"! But in its lack of flaming wrath against the guilty the story only reproduces a marked characteristic of Jesus' attitude to every sort of sinner except Pharisees. To Him the wish for reconciliation was enough. Repentance settled all accounts. He will not keep her waiting, or put her on probation, nor will He spoil His gift by cruel reminders of the past. To be sorry for what is bygone is all He asks. There is here a delicacy and magnanimity which we cannot praise, for it is above all praise.

Light too is cast on the value for God of simple penitence. The broken heart, Jesus feels, has no need of thundering accusations; what is in place is that wounds should be dressed with balm and tears dried from off the face that is dimmed with sorrow. At the touch of penitence all doors fly open, and the child is at the Father's breast. De Maistre somewhere relates a story he had culled from an old ascetic book, where the same point is made by contrast. "A saint," he writes, "whose name escapes me at the moment, had a vision in which he beheld Satan standing before the throne of God. And as he listened, he heard the evil spirit say: 'Why hast Thou damned me, who offended Thee but once, whereas Thou art saving thousands whose offences were so many?' And God made answer: 'Hast thou but once asked pardon?'"

Again, we cannot but observe how Jesus represents God to the woman's aching heart; the name of God is not mentioned anywhere in the story, yet He is everywhere. He, in truth, is present in Jesus, and this Jesus knows. Is it not the first promise of escape for the imprisoned soul, that some loving hand should be felt leading the guilty one into the open air of heaven? There are steps in the experience of being forgiven, and at the outset we must encounter some one better than we who cares

for us and has a personal concern in the question whether we rise or fall. Faith in God's mercy flows from the touch of human kindness. Of this principle Jesus is the last and highest instance. His attitude to the woman was her sheet-anchor in the world of goodness; had He turned from her, she would instantly have sunk like a stone. She could have held out no longer against such evidence that she was beyond hope. But in Jesus' demeanour there was that which weighed the balance against despair. What is more, this aspect of Jesus we cannot be content to describe simply by the word "mystery"; it was that essential, distinctive and most fundamental quality of God which the New Testament calls love. Jesus was this woman's Saviour because through His attitude she once for all knew that God was on her side, and was there and then receiving her as His child. Thus there was laid down at the foundations of her life that initial certainty of His pardoning love which made goodness "an assured career."

We further gain from this story a significant indication of what Jesus believed to be the unfailing consequence of receiving forgiveness. In His view it is inconceivable that the pardoned should not begin to love. Where love is absent, there has been no reception of forgiveness. Our Lord does not hesitate to bring out this truth by a sharp contrast between the passion of gratitude shown by the fallen woman and the frigid reserve of His Pharisaic host. It was as much as to say to Simon: "You have never gained from Me or any other the wonderful conviction that in spite of all you are the Father's child, otherwise how could your heart be so cold?" The sense of infinite debt, the uncontrollable impulse to give outlet to that sense in loving and contrite act—all this He welcomes in the woman as the natural utterance of a changed heart. To know oneself forgiven is to have the spring of love unsealed.

III.

Let us finally take the incident that marks the commencement of St. Peter's discipleship. In the narrative of the draught of fishes we find the words: "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Depart from me, I am a sinful man, Lord.' . . . And Jesus said to Simon, 'Fear not; henceforth thou shalt be a fisher of men'" (Luke v. 8–10). From these words we learn new things about Jesus' impression on a sinner, as also about a sinner's experience in Jesus' company. It makes little difference to the meaning whether we do or do not hold that the story has got out of its right place.

Some points of similarity to the call of Isaiah (Isa. vi.) are fairly clear. In both cases, a sudden realisation of the Divine calls forth an overwhelming sense of creaturely nothingness and unworthiness. The man has abruptly become aware of the greatness of the Unseen, felt somehow as close beside him in Jesus' person. It is a usual comment on the incident that at this stage Peter's ideas were more or less primitive, and that his oppressed feeling of weakness and nullity had in it nothing or almost nothing ethical; what we see is just the reaction of a tolerably superstitious nature upon what seemed to him at the time an astonishing manifestation of Divine knowledge and power. There is truth in this, but not by any means the whole truth. It is inconceivable that St. Peter's experience should have been completely devoid of moral and spiritual elements. After all, what had so deeply impressed him had not been due to any chance passer-by; it had been due to Christ. Besides, he had been in the Worker's company; he knew something of His spirit; he had heard Him teach as well as do this thing. Hence, as an explanation, superstition will not take us far. The man did not say: "Leave me, for I am as nothing in Thy sight," but "leave me, for I

am sinful." His emotion may have been as much owing to astounded gratitude as to a sense of frailty, for there is nothing which so humbles us as to gain a great gift of which we feel ourselves altogether unworthy. But anyhow Peter's words and act reveal one of the most ineradicable constituents of religious feeling, on a par with that evidenced by the saying of Abraham: "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes" (Gen. xviii. 27). Here there appears a quality of authentic religion for which there can never be any substitute, and it is no merit in a man to have discarded it. In God's presence we go on our knees; we do not stand erect thanking whatever gods there be for our unconquerable soul. The experience of taking forgiveness from God's hand, when true to type, includes this strain of overpowering awe. He has a poor nature who cannot understand it, or would wish it away.

But is this really an instance of forgiveness, since of that there is not a word? True, but Jesus' language is full of pardoning import. "Have no fear; from now thou shalt catch men." In this reply to the stricken man Jesus first bids him have courage and stay on beside Him, next He intrusts him with the service of winning men for God. In the sense of being pardoned these two certainties are contained. We are given to know that God has not thrust us away, but in spite of our ill desert will have us by Him; He gives us a place, to be consciously realised, in His fellowship and Kingdom. We were prepared to take the lowest room, or not even that; yet He will neither depart nor have us depart from Him, but conveys instead the certainty that we are not forsaken. And further, we are made aware that God is bidding us share with Him in His redeeming work. He trusts the forgiven man; He sends him out with the ennobling consciousness

that he is held worthy to be the Father's servant. It is often through these certainties, gradually suffusing the mind till they form part of our very selves, that the complete assurance of pardon reaches the mind. But the chronology of forgiveness as an experience matters little; what is of importance is that immediately or by degrees a man should know that, in Luther's words, he "has a gracious God" —should be certain that he has God and that God has him.

IV.

If we look back over these characteristic scenes, one outstanding feature is vital to all three. It is that Jesus meets the natural hesitation of sinners to believe in God's forgiveness by His personal attitude of loving friendliness and good-will. He does not pour out words either about sin's horror or the Father's love, for in a tragic situation we most need not words but the silent touch of a friend's hand. He persisted in this attitude notwithstanding the shocked protests of Pharisees. But He does not act thus in lax indulgence, as though the sins were of no account. He sought the company of the sinful habitually and with open eyes, and He did so not for subtle reasons, or as an example to anyone, but because by nature He could do no otherwise, because it was the only possible outcome of His intimacy with the Father. This is not conjecture but certainty, for it was as a result of complaints made on this very ground that He told the story of the Prodigal. The unforgetable picture of a father who made merry over a wandering son's return, and was gentle even to the elder brother, was Jesus' illustration of His own thrilling word: "There is joy in heaven over a single sinner who repents." He expressly justified His intercourse with outcasts by pointing out that to act so is a reflection of God's own mind.

The same principle must go with us when we try to explain how the Cross mediates to the sinful an assurance that their sins are pardoned. For Jesus to keep beside Him the stained and the covetous was doubtless an expression of love like to God's, but also it meant such pain as *we* can barely understand. It is an agony to see vileness eating into the life of those we love. Of this willingness to suffer in prolonged and faithful proximity to sinners the Cross is the last and highest manifestation. Calvary is the pain, felt in unison with God's mind, whereby the Divine readiness to forgive is sealed.

This leads on to a second reflection. All will agree that forgiveness is invariably presented in the New Testament as a free gift of the Father. It is without money and without price. The heathen sense of propitiation has here nothing to say: pardon is not wrung from God by any sacrifice that persuades Him to put away anger and be friends. But these obviously true thoughts may easily hinder us from raising a cardinal question; the question, namely, whether Divine sacrifice, visible and implemented in Jesus, may not have none the less been present in the impartation of forgiveness, not as a precondition but as an element. On any showing, Jesus assigned to Himself a central part; He was not merely the reporter or spectator of pardon, He was, in this sphere, mediator or agent. He could not do His share in the conveyance of pardon to men except at a cost. It was not with a heart of stone that He stayed on beside the fallen, to lift them up. And the Cross, borne in vicarious participation of human shame, is the climax of this fraternal sympathetic agony. Jesus, in other words, could not convey the Father's pardon to the guilty in absolute fulness except by carrying His identification with them to the uttermost point; at that point He gave Himself in death. The Bearer of forgiveness perishes in giving

complete expression to the mercy and judgment which in their unity constitute the pardon of God. It is tragedy, it is that inscrutable and catastrophic collision of good and evil of which in its measure human life is full. But, if the phrase be permissible, it is not pessimistic but optimistic tragedy; Jesus does not fall along with His cause, He falls that in Him the cause may live.

The Gospels show us Jesus imparting forgiveness to particular individuals not by speech alone but chiefly by the co-efficient of His personality which infinitely magnifies the power of His explicit words; and, in principle, it is the same in the Apostolic Age and ever since. From that day till now faith in Him has been preached as the sure way to peace with God. And yet there is a difference. His human voice, His look, His touch, the deep and holy kindness of His mien—all those traits which had enabled doubting men in Palestine to believe themselves forgiven—these now are gone. No longer does He stand amongst us in His habit as He lived. Are we then worse off than His contemporaries? Not so; for now the Cross is there, and upon it the Crucified, to whom we can turn our longing gaze, and find in the sight all and more than all the persuasiveness which before used to look out of His eyes and bear the knowledge of pardon into the contrite heart. The Cross, as the guarantee of God's forgiving love, has replaced the old actual touch with Jesus in the days of His flesh. Its efficacy to this end has been proved by long centuries. Some replacement there had to be. If even we can see this, it was still more clear to Jesus Christ; and this is one of many reasons why every theory which scouts the notion that He regarded His own death as the pledge of forgiveness must fail to satisfy.

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