

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF REVELATION.

REVELATION III. 20.

'Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.'—R.V.

THE LANGUAGE.

The language is quite clear. But notice how much of it is recollection, almost quotation, of earlier Scripture. Says Dr. Anderson Scott, 'The diction and the thought of the verse alike are full of elusive echoes of the Fourth Gospel, all the more striking that they cannot be recognized as direct quotations.' 'If any man hear my voice' recalls Jn 10⁴⁻²⁷, 'My sheep hear my voice.' 'I will come in to him' recalls Jn 14²³, 'We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' 'Will sup with him, and he with me,' recognizes Christ as both host and feast, and recalls Jn 6⁴⁸, 'I am the bread of life.' Then the whole invitation seems to be a reminiscence of Cant. 5². And if that is so, then we have here, as Dr. Anderson Scott says, 'the beginning of the spiritual interpretation of the Song in terms of the relation of Christ to the soul.'

THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

The text forms part of the letter addressed to the angel of the Church in Laodicea. Now the Church in Laodicea was a lukewarm Church. It was noted for its want of note; it was characterized by its want of character. And the letter is a letter of severest censure. But the last three verses, of which the text is one, are addressed not to the Church as a whole, but to the individual members of it, and their tone is more encouraging.

Thus the invitation is addressed to Church members. It is addressed to the members of a lukewarm ineffective Church. If the Church is to recover itself it must be through the action of the individuals composing it. And so to each individual member the appeal is made to receive Christ into their hearts by faith.

THE SERMON.

The figure is that of a home. A Stranger (who should not be a stranger) arrives and knocks at the door. If He is taken in, the joy of the family is great. For He who was received as guest provides the entertainment. He even becomes Himself the entertainment. And He comes, not as He did when He came to the earth to sojourn for a time and to depart; He comes to abide for ever. 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'

Some of the old painters were fond of painting their pictures in three panels. This picture has three panels—on the one side a Vision of Christ, on the other side a Vision of a Christian, in the centre a Vision of Christ and a Christian together.

I. A VISION OF CHRIST—'Behold I stand at the door and knock.' Christ is always near, but He is determined to reach the very centre of the life, and the way He takes to reach it is wooing the Christian by love, not compelling him by omnipotence.

1. He is always near. He is near in Creation, for 'without him was not anything made that was made.' And He is ever creating anew. He is near in providence. 'His tender mercies,' as the Psalmist says, 'are over all his works,' and He never administers any of His tender mercies from a distance; as on earth so now, He puts forth His hand and touches to heal. He is near in all His works, simply waiting for our recognition and reception of Him. And as He waits He pleads with us.

The fundamental fact of the religious life is this—that the power and love of God are seeking man; that before we love Him, He loves us. . . . The same principle is to be noticed in regard to all truth. Take, for instance, any scientific discovery of a physical force, like that which we call the force of electricity. There is nothing new about this wonderful power. It has always been about us, playing through the sky, and inviting the mind of man. Then, some day, a few men open their minds to the significance of this force and how it may be applied to the common uses of life.

One of the most impressive things about science to-day is to consider how many other secrets of the universe are at this moment knocking at our doors and waiting to be let in;

and to perceive how senseless and unreceptive we must seem to an omniscient mind, when so much truth is beaten back from our closed minds and wills. It is the same with religious truth. Here are our lives, shut in, limited, self-absorbed; and here are the messages of God, knocking at our door; and between the two only one barrier, the barrier of our own wills. Religious education is simply the opening of the door of the heart; and Christian discipleship is simply that alertness and receptivity which hears the knocking and welcomes God's Spirit.¹

2. But He is not content to be near, He must be central. The Laodicean Christians were keeping Him outside their interests, outside their affections and activities. This was the reason of their lukewarmness. They believed in Him certainly; and in some degree they must have loved Him; they could not otherwise have been Christians in a city like Laodicea. But did they lavish their wealth of love and enthusiasm upon Him? Could they honestly sing

Be Thou alone my soul's delight,
My passion, and my love?

3. And how does He reach the heart? By knocking at the door, not by breaking it down; by respecting the will of man and waiting for its working. He does not annihilate every obstacle and enter the man, because in so doing He would annihilate the man. His demand is for love. And, as there is no fear in love, so is there no compulsion. 'If any man hear my voice'—it is a little word, but it arrests the hand of Omnipotence.

There is a story told of Holman Hunt's celebrated picture, 'Christ, the Light of the World,' that when the artist had finished the picture a friend called to inspect it at a private interview, and that, after looking at it steadily for a few minutes, he said that the picture was beautiful, but that there seemed to be a strange mistake in it. 'A mistake!' the artist said, 'what do you mean?' 'Well,' was the answer, 'you have painted a door, but there is no handle to it. Whoever heard of a door without a handle?' 'Ah!' replied the artist, 'that is one of the points of the picture. There is no handle to that door. If there were a handle the Saviour would not remain outside waiting for admission. That door can only be opened from the inside.' It is certainly so with the door of the human heart.

II. A VISION OF A CHRISTIAN—'If any man hear my voice and open the door.' It is a vision of a Christian's ignorance, of his wilfulness, and of his hesitation.

1. *His ignorance.* It is ignorance of the love of Christ and the ways in which it manifests itself.

¹F. G. Peabody, *Mornings in the College Chapel*, pp. 108-109.

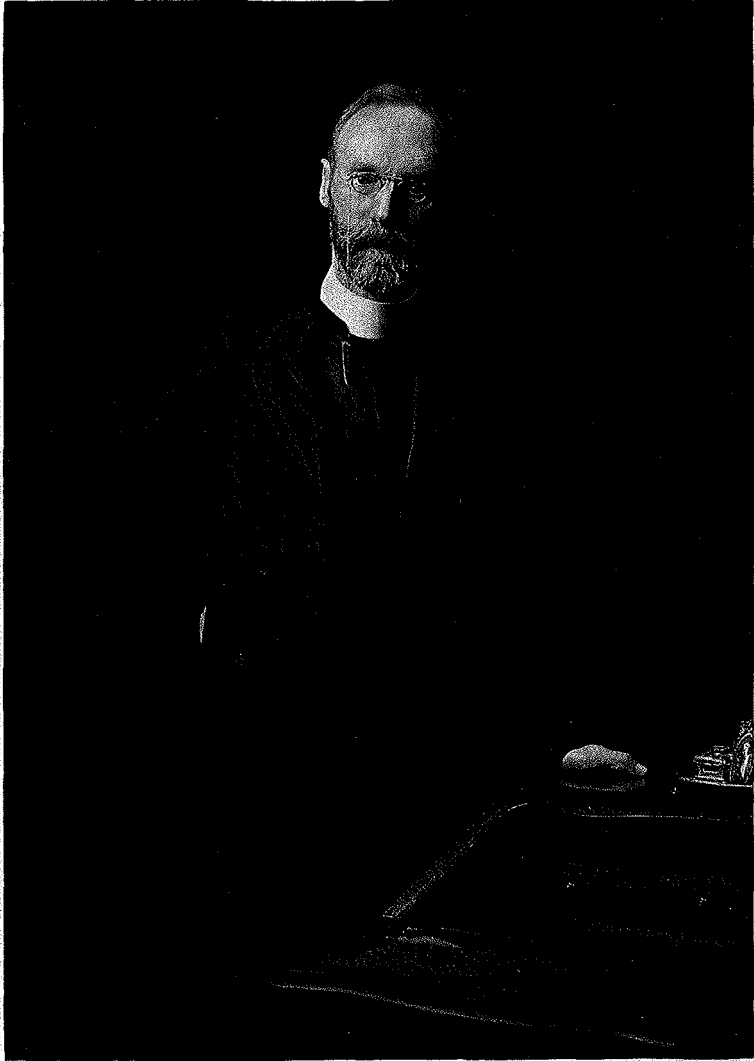
Sometimes it manifests itself in evident loving-kindness. But even then the health or the happy home or the prosperity in life is attributed to circumstances or our own deserts. We do not say it is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes. Sometimes it manifests itself in apparent adversity. And then we forget that whom He loveth He chasteneth, and that afterwards chastisement yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness. But the greatest and most culpable ignorance which the Christian shows is ignorance of Christ Himself. As Pearse says, we receive His gifts without receiving Him. 'We think of Christ as One who died on the Cross long since, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, and through Him we receive our forgiveness. We think of Him as gone up into heaven in great glory, and now, at the right hand of the Father, He is our advocate, through Whom we have the hope of life everlasting. But knowing this only can neither satisfy Him nor us. Then only do we know the joys of our religion, richest, fullest, best, when we find our salvation not *through Him*, but *IN HIM*.'²

An incident occurred some years ago near Inverness. A beautiful yacht had been sailing in the Moray Firth. The owners of it, two young men, landed at Inverness for a walking tour through the Highlands. But they lost their way, and darkness found them wandering aimlessly about in a very desolate spot. At last about midnight they came upon a cottage and knocked at the door for admittance; but the inmates refused to let them come in. Luckily they found shelter in another house some distance away. Next morning, the inhospitable family learned that the two young men who had knocked in vain at their door were the sons of King Edward VII.³

2. *His wilfulness.* If the Laodiceans had only been ignorant they would not have been censured so severely. They wilfully kept Christ out of the centre of thought and occupation. They were willing enough to admit other guests. A minister of the gospel knocked one day at the door of a house in a mission district in which he was visiting. A woman came to the door and listened. 'It's Mr. M.,' she said, 'shall I open the door?' 'Whisht!' came the sound from the room; 'don't let him in.' The family had friends, and they had been drinking together, and the minister was kept outside. Some of the Laodiceans had deliberately pulled a heavy chest across the door. It was a chest full of gold, or else full of the desire

²M. G. Pearse, *Thoughts on Holiness*, 224.

³W. Hay, *God's Looking-Glass*, 91.



Photograph by Wilham Denaku Edinboro.

for gold, and the one chest is just as difficult to move as the other. But how easy is it when the will is right. Dr. Matheson tells of a woman who was bed-ridden and lived alone. When he knocked at her door, 'Who is there?' she called. And when she knew, 'Just lift the latch,' she said, 'and come in'; and he came in.

3. *His hesitation.* The Laodiceans were lukewarm. They are well represented in the Church to-day. They were not so ignorant or even so wilful as they were divided in interest. They could not make up their minds to give Christ the central place in their life; it might mean so much in the way of change of life, and perhaps unpleasantness. Their excuse was that they were really not good enough yet; give them time for a little preparation. 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof.' It was unreal humility. But there is a humility that is the very atmosphere into which He delights to come.

Come, even now. But think not here to find
A lodging, Lord, and converse, to Thy mind:
The lamp burns low; the hearth is chill and pale,
Wet through the broken casement pours the gale.

Alas, ill-order'd shews the dreary room;
The household stuff lies heap'd amidst the gloom,
The table empty stands, the couch undress'd,
Ah, what a welcome for the Eternal Guest!

Yet welcome, and to-night; this doleful scene
Is e'en itself my cause to hail Thee in;
This dark confusion e'en at once demands
Thine own bright presence, Lord, and ordering hands.¹

III. A VISION OF CHRIST AND A CHRISTIAN TOGETHER.—'I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' It is a promise of good company, of lasting friendship, of good fare—all the things that are needed to make a supper delightful.

1. *Good company.* Christ Himself is company enough. How they loved Him who lived with Him on earth. What a fund of stories He had to tell. But He brings the Father with Him. As He says elsewhere, 'And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' And so St. John says, 'Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.' Nor does the Christian find the entertainment irksome, as he feared, for the Guest takes the burden of entertaining on Himself and becomes

¹ H. C. G. Moule, *Thoughts on the Spiritual Life*, 184.

the Host. The two disciples at Emmaus constrained Him to go in that He might be their Guest, and He went in; but He gave the blessing and brake the bread.

'Men are anxious enough to boast that they have entertained the lion of the day, the man of some flashy success and momentary notoriety. But what have they gained from such intercourse except an increase of self-conceit? We want to entertain guests who will make us feel humble at our own comparative baseness; who will afford us glimpses of a glory and grace far beyond aught we have attained. Who can do that like Jesus Christ? He is the matchless Guest. How often does He sup with us?'²

2. *Lasting friendship.* Not only is there good company, but lasting friendship is formed—'We will abide with him.' 'It is characteristic of human nature that it cements its fondest ties around the table; so much is this the case that it is difficult to conceive of friendship apart from hospitality. Your friend has been to your house, and you have been to his; oft have you dined or supped together. A fact both pleasing and curious is that once we sit at the same table, we understand each other better. Through the bodies of us we seem to arrive at the souls of us, and the seas which roll between these solitary islands are oftentimes happily navigated. Life would be strange without the supper-table and all it represents. In our homes and institutions, even in our churches, it plays an important part. And in our spiritual intercourse the word "sup" has a sacred significance. On the eve of Calvary our Saviour supped with His disciples. We, His followers, follow the example, and deem it our most sacred ordinance to sup together in remembrance of Him. And the silence of that hour is sweet to our souls. We draw nearer one to another and realize that He is in the midst.'³

3. *Good fare.* For it is of His own providing. It is the Bread of Life; it is the love that went to death, that out of death life might be born to us; it is the love that loved us everlastingly and now is ours through Calvary and the glory. It is grace to help us in every time of need.

But it is of our providing also. We love Him because He first loved us. 'It is just when we waken all the love of our hearts in the service of

² L. A. Johnson, in *Christian World Pulpit*, lxiv. 422.

³ E. Rees, in *Christian World Pulpit*, lxvi. 372.

Christ, not till then, that life's great feast of joy begins. When in the deepest heart and soul of us there is such earnestness of devotion that it really brings our heart to touch the heart of Christ, our soul to touch the soul of Christ, our life to lay itself upon the life of Christ—then it is that, with the whole world shut away, He who has all joy can most fully bestow on us His gifts of joy, and most clearly speak to us His words of joy, and most generously spread for us His feast of joy.¹

Travelling some years ago in a thinly populated part of South Africa with a cart and horses I got belated on the way, and, after a long day in the hot sun and over dusty plains, towards evening I saw a small house not far from the road. Having no food with me either for myself or my horses, I was compelled to turn thither and beg hospitality for the night. I was very kindly received by a Dutch Boer and his wife who lived there with their three little children. They welcomed me to share what they had. Their house was small, consisting of only two rooms, and evidently they were poor, but cleanly. As evening closed upon us, I wondered what I was going to have for supper. The table was laid, and they invited me to join them in their simple meal consisting of dry bread and coffee without sugar. Before eating, the farmer said 'grace' over the food, asking God's blessing upon these His gifts. I shall never forget that meal. The hunger of the guest, the heartiness and evident sincerity of the hosts, made it more enjoyable to me than a feast at a rich man's table. After supper, before we retired—I to pass the night on a 'shake-down' in the dining-room and kitchen combined—the family Bible was brought out and a chapter read, after which the master of the house committed us to God in prayer.

CONCLUSION.—Among the sermons, in Old French, of the Franciscan friar, Oliver Maillard, which have come down to us from the fifteenth century, there is a remarkable one on the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is altogether occupied with the thought of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us as in a hostel or inn, and the entertainment that is provided. Quaintly the preacher says that to make the entertainment good the inn of the conscience should have three serving-maids—Prayer, Obedience, and Peace. The office of the first is to invite the Guest to enter. The office of

the second is to open wide the door that He may enter freely and find a hearty and sincere welcome. The office of the third is to receive Him joyfully and make Him feel at home.²

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¹ W. Clark, *Meanings and Methods of the Spiritual Life*, 104.

² See J. Maskell, in *Church of England Pulpit*, xxx. 3.