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THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE OF THE UNDERSTANDING.

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JOHN LOCKE, towards the close of his life, wrote a little treatise on *The Conduct of the Understanding*. It was intended as a practical supplement to the famous *Essay*, which had already gone through four editions. *The Essay on the Human Understanding* has long been a text-book in our Universities, though now it has to be read with a careful regard to its historical setting in the development of philosophic thought. The later tractate was unrevised and incomplete at Locke's death. It has the form of a first sketch, but in substance it is not only readable, but more than up to date, as little has been written since, and nothing so searchingly and of quite such practical value, on a most important branch of conduct, dealing as it does with the moral causes of fallacious reasoning—prejudice, mental indolence, over-regard for authority, self-sufficiency, and the various other conditions of mind which bar the way to the perception and veneration of truth.

Hallam, in his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, says: "I cannot think any parent or instructor justified in neglecting to put this little treatise in the hands of a boy about the time when the reasoning faculties become developed." Whatever parents might do with their children, and in these days we cannot but think rather smilingly of such a wish as Hallam's, one would like our students in any branch of knowledge, "sacred or profane," in looking forward to their lives' work, to make a careful study of Locke's treatise as part of their preparation.¹ Certainly no class of students should benefit more from such a study than those who intend to offer themselves for Ordination. The subject is one which those who have to train and examine such students might place foremost in their syllabuses. There is all the more reason for laying stress on such a subject now as it has been so noticeably overlooked in the past.

Lecky has brought the serious charge against organised Christianity that it habitually disregards the virtues of the intellect. Whatever truth there may be in that allegation as regards later Christian influence in different parts of the Church, it certainly does not hold good of the essential genius of the Gospel of Christ, nor indeed of the first Christian teaching.² Christ Himself emphatically

¹ A handy little edition, with introduction and notes by Thomas Fowler, D.D., is in the publication list of the Clarendon Press.

² "On the sanctification of the intellect the ancient Church, and especially the ancient Eastern Church, laid great emphasis; but its teaching on this point is saved from the dangers which beset mere intellectualism by the constant recognition of the Holy Spirit as the source of all true illumination."—H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*, p. 403.

taught men to love God with the mind as well as with the heart and the soul, and He repeatedly called upon His disciples to take "heed to what they heard"—to exercise their understandings about the things that He told them. His method of instruction was to implant seed-thoughts in men's minds for them to ponder over at their leisure and to turn to a good account by a devout meditation. "He that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit" (St. Matt. xiii. 23). The New Testament writers generally, as we shall see, presented Christianity to the world in the same reasonable light, as demanding the consecration of the full powers of the mind to the purposes of religious belief and conduct.

It may be remarked here, by the way, that in this regard Christianity confirms and re-emphasises the doctrine of the moralists of Greece and Rome. It is from them that we have derived the term "cardinal virtues" as signifying those pre-eminent excellences of character on which all others hinge. Among the cardinal virtues the first place is always given to wisdom as "the lampbearer showing the way to the rest," its principal business being "to descry the goal to which they should all strive and the point to which the whole course of life should tend." In the ethical teaching of both Plato and Aristotle the highest good is specially associated with knowledge, and is indeed made to consist in the contemplation of Divine things with all the best powers of the intellect. It is a doctrine which is not very far short of our Lord's declaration, "This is eternal life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent" (St. John xvii. 3).

In the mystery religions of Greece, which had so great a vogue at the beginning of the Christian era, the word "perfect" (*τέλειος*) came to be applied to the person who had attained to the full knowledge of the esoteric doctrine of the "Mysteries," and the New Testament so far adopted the word in a similar sense as to use it of those who had reached a ripe maturity of moral and spiritual understanding. Some such meaning is intended in the passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews in which we are exhorted to be "borne on to perfection," as is shown in the verses immediately preceding. "Every one that partaketh of milk is unskilled in the doctrine of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat is for those who are full-grown (*τελειών*), who through habit have their powers of perception trained to distinguish between good and evil" (Heb. v. 13, 14). St. Paul's teaching in the Epistle to the Romans is exactly in accordance with this: "Be not fashioned according to this age: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. xii. 2). So to the Corinthians he writes, "Be not children in understanding, howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be full-grown men" (I Cor. xiv. 20), using the same word, *τέλειος*, that occurs in the similar passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews. When again from his prison in Rome he poured out his soul in prayer on behalf of his beloved Philippians,

his first and chief petition for them was that "their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all discernment, so that they might approve the things that are excellent," or, as it is in the margin of the Revised Version, that "they might prove the things that differ" (Phil. i. 9, 10). At the beginning also of his Epistle to the Colossians, "who had not seen his face in the flesh," he told them that, from the day that he first heard of their love in the Spirit, he did not cease to offer prayers on their behalf, specially entreating that "they might be filled with the knowledge of God's Will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. i. 9).

It has been remarked of St. Paul himself that "in him there was the fruitful union of two spiritual activities, two orders of faculties which are rarely united to the same degree in the same personality—dialectical ability and religious inspiration, the rational element and the mystical element, the activity of the mind (*νοῦς*) and that of the spirit (*πνεῦμα*).¹ The Church owes an incalculable debt to St. Paul for the stand he made against the imposition of the Mosaic customs on Gentile converts, for his unparalleled insight into the mind of Christ on all such matters, and for the wealth of argument and exposition in his letters to the Churches; and this is the result of his own full consecration to God of his powers of mind as of spirit.

When Christ promised the illuminating influence of His Spirit to His disciples He spoke of it as that of a Guide. "He shall guide (*ὁδηγήσει*) you into all the truth" (St. John xvi. 13). The word indicates the particular manner in which the disciple is to use his own powers if he is to go forward to perfection. He must pick his steps warily and keep a good look-out. What the Spirit will do for him, according to this metaphor, is to show him the way, to help him with counsel, to check him when he is inclined to err, and to cheer him and give him confidence when he is walking in the right direction.

"He shall guide you into *all* the truth." It is a promise of the widest range, opening out vistas of ever-extending knowledge of God's universe, visible and invisible, as the disciple lends himself to the Spirit's guidance in diversified study and research. But our primary concern is with "the perfect will of God," as revealed in the Life and Teaching of Christ; so the promised illumination of the Spirit is specially to be sought with a view to an ever-increasing knowledge of Christ. "He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (St. John xvi. 14). There were various things in our Lord's teaching which His first disciples could not fully understand at the outset; but they had their recollections of Christ always with them, and it was as they meditated on these that the light from above came, revealing what had been but dimly, if at all, perceived before.

We have the recollections of the Apostles recorded for us in the New Testament; and the promise of the guidance of the Spirit, in the sense of help for those who are exerting their own powers,

¹ A. Sabatier, *L'Apôtre Paul*, p. 76.

implies that we must "search the Scriptures," for "they are they which testify of Christ" (St. John v. 39). No religious exercises of any other kind, no study of the most choice and helpful books of devotion can take the place of this regular and thoughtful study of the Bible, carried on with the best assistance, from information of a textual and historical kind, that is available to us for such study.

The Bible is, of course, to be put in the highest place among sources of knowledge concerning the "perfect will of God." Yet it has to be borne in mind that the Will of God is revealed elsewhere, and that there are supplementary sources of knowledge which cannot be neglected without loss by those who are aiming at the perfection of the whole of their higher nature.

"I have a real conviction," [said Archbishop Temple, formerly of Canterbury, in a charge to his clergy] "that all this study of science, rightly pursued, comes from the providence of God; that it is in accordance with His will that we should study His works, and that as He has given us a spiritual revelation of His Word, so also He has given us a natural revelation in His creation: I am convinced that there is nothing to lose, but everything to gain, by a true and careful study of God's works, that the more light we can get, the more cultivation of our understanding, and the more thorough discipline of our intellect by the study of all this which God has scattered in such wonderful profusion around us, so much the better shall we be able not only to serve Him in our vocation, but to understand the meaning of His spiritual revelations."¹

What is true of science generally is true of all learning and culture—of history, philosophy, poetry, art, and music. The various powers of the mind and soul are strengthened and matured by such knowledge and cultivation; and by the exercise of our talents thus we are qualifying ourselves for a full and diversified service, and for pleasures which are not only recreative in the highest degree but have the promise of continuance in the life of the world to come.

For some vocations and functions a wide and accurate scholarship is all-essential. We are not, indeed, all called to be teachers or professed theologians; but we are not qualified to dogmatise on technical points of theology, still less are we entitled to criticise adversely opinions we may suspect or dislike which are dependent on exact scholarship, if we have not travelled over the same ground of research as those who hold those opinions. All the errors and heresies and doctrinal disputes and divisions of Christendom have arisen, more or less, from reliance on knowledge which is inaccurate and incomplete, and too often from the fault in religious circles which the Roman historian remarked as characteristic of the multitude generally, that of insufficient reverence for truth.²

One of the best preservatives against such a fault, which, in the past, has caused such grievous injury to the Church and its influence, as well as to individual souls, is the habit among Christian people, to be acquired from general study, especially from the

¹ Quoted by J. C. Shairp, *Culture and Religion*, pp. 113-14.

² *Vulgi indiligentia veri.*—Tacitus.

study of science, of surveying carefully all the facts which should be taken into account before any conclusion is arrived at, and of being ever ready to revise a judgment previously formed when new facts come to light.

He who submits himself most constantly and prayerfully to the guiding influence of the Spirit of Truth will best avoid the faults of which we have been thinking, and will make the most gainful use of such knowledge as he is able to acquire on any subject ; while, apart from the Spirit's guidance, one who has acquired a good general culture may lose his way sadly, and, indeed, fail altogether to apprehend the deepest things of God. On the other hand, there are many who have had but the slightest educational advantages, who have scarcely heard even the names of the greatest poets, philosophers, and scientists, and yet have been led, as by some secret way, up to the serenest and most beautiful heights of character. "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise see the Kingdom of God." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Not as men of science nor as critics, nor philosophers, shall we acquire the true wisdom. "Many a poor unlettered Christian far outstrips your School rabbis in this attainment," said Archbishop Leighton (himself one of the foremost scholars of his day), "because it is not effectually taught in these lower academies."

Wise and weighty words are these, but it is to be noted carefully that they do not give sanction to any presumptuous abuse, in relation to spiritual things, of a deficiency of mental attainment or of a neglect of opportunities of acquiring exact knowledge. Certainly those who have the means of a proper mental approach to truth can hardly expect the guidance of the Spirit of God if they neglect the use of such means. In other words, Divine enlightenment is not to be the reward of human indolence.

After all, it is not defects of knowledge so much as defects of character which warp the judgment. Such defects of character may indeed in course of time quite impair the power of judging rightly on almost any subject ; and a naturally gifted man may, though without being conscious of it, be suffering permanently in his moral nature the consequences of his want of intellectual conscientiousness ; just as the physical constitution of one who has been habitually inebriate may be irretrievably weakened by such indulgence. To set over against all this, when the soul has been wholly given to God, and prayer has been offered continually for guidance from above, there is a wonderful clearance of prejudice and sharpening of perception, so as to "approve the things that are excellent," and to discern between truth and falsehood and between right and wrong.

In a time of upheaval and of division of opinion like the present it is the difficulties arising from psychological causes that are of chief moment. Old practices are revived without a proper appreciation of the reasons for which they were rejected in the past ; new doctrines are brought to the front without sufficient sureness

as to their proof. Intellectual judgment is warped by ill-regulated emotion ; and discussion, which should lead to a wholesome interchange of opinion, is too often embittered by personal prejudice and by fear of having one's own opinions disturbed. It is not uncommon, for example, in some quarters for attempts to be made in book-reviewing to hinder the demand for a book by satirising the author or by misrepresenting or even mis-stating what he has said. This is something quite apart from just criticism, whose aim is to show things as they really are.

Obviously there can be no steady progress towards a better understanding between different sections of Christians till this sort of thing is made to die down through the action of a public opinion which will condemn it as strongly as the unfair playing of a game. And there is no prayer that needs to be more earnestly or widely offered than that in our daily service, that "all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth," and so "may hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life."

Within the limits of such a sketch as this it would be impossible to discuss at all adequately the importance of the Christian discipline of the understanding in relation to everyday life and conduct. It would take us, too, a little off the line of thought we have been pursuing, which has had regard mainly to the formation of our opinions. Yet it is difficult to refrain from just indicating by an illustration or two how necessary this discipline is in order that we may think and act rightly in reference to ourselves, our neighbours, and our circumstances.

St. Paul, after his admonition to the Romans about "proving what is the good and acceptable and perfect Will of God," gives immediately this practical turn to the admonition,—“I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith” (Rom. xii. 3). A man, so the Apostle teaches us, is really to be measured by his faith, that "gift of God" (Eph. ii. 8) by which he throws himself upon God and becomes receptive of the various powers and graces of His Spirit. In this light it is seen that whatever good a man thinks or does is from God, and the merit of it is God's, while his mistakes and evil-doings are his own. Yet, in blaming himself for his faults and in trying to correct them, the man will not be unreasonably condemnatory of himself. He will recognise the strength of the tendencies and impulses which have made him what he is in his natural state and the persistence in him of these tendencies and impulses. He will be moved to reflect too that in his spiritual life, as in his bodily life, he is subject to the law of growth, so that progress in spiritual things can be but gradual.

Further, under the enlightening discipline of the Spirit, a man is instructed to take note of the laws of his own particular nature—physical, mental, and emotional. He is guided to deal wisely with

himself by giving due attention to his health, by making a careful estimate of his capabilities of strain and effort, and by reserving his most exacting tasks, when he is at liberty to do so, for the seasons when he is at his best and can therefore perform them most satisfactorily.

Yet again the "right judgment" which is the gift of the Spirit will prompt the Christian man to seek retirement when he is in need of rest from spiritual as well as bodily strain; it will place him on his guard when he encounters those temptations to which he knows himself to be especially liable; and it will cause him to set down to "his own infirmity" (Ps. lxxvii. 10) those despondent thoughts and even doubts of God's loving-kindness with which he finds he is not so troubled in his normal and more healthy moods.

It is to be observed, further, that the "right judgment" is indispensable if we are to think and act wisely, lovingly, and justly towards others. It has been said, perhaps rather cynically, that, if we desire to love our fellow-men, we must not expect too much from them. Certainly it is unreasonable to expect from others what we, knowing ourselves, should not wish them to demand of us. We should be ready to make all such allowances for others as we would wish them to make for us, and to recognise in them those peculiarities of temperament and nurture which make their preferences, tastes, and habitudes inevitably different from our own.

It is an act of wisdom, too, to credit our fellow-men with much more goodness and capability of goodness than may, at any given time, appear in their conduct. We know concerning ourselves that the best side of our nature, that wherein God works effectually with us, is not that which is most apparent to men. So it must be with others. Moreover, if we wish to draw out what is best in other men, we must appeal to that best by our patience and sympathy and goodwill towards them. Men are to us very much as we are to them, responsive to our moods of kindness or indifference. Besides, we may exert a wonderful reformatory influence over our neighbours by thinking the best of them and so stimulating them to be what we think them capable of being. When the young Alexander, afterwards Archbishop of Armagh, one of the most moving pulpit orators of his day, was at Oxford, he got into debt, and his parents were put to considerable straits to free him from his difficulties. His mother, in telling him in a letter of the arrangements that were being made on his behalf, said to him, "I have an unalterable belief in you." "From that moment," remarked Alexander in later life, "everything was very different. On reading this letter I determined to be a Minister of the Gospel of Love."

It remains just to notice how this "wisdom from above" is essential to right thought and right action in regard to the everyday duties and experiences of life. It prompts, of course, to great carefulness in ascertaining the facts which should be taken into account in forming a judgment on any subject. "Be not ignorant of anything in a great matter or a small" (Eccles. v. 15). There follows deliberation over the facts, sometimes to give scope for

unconscious cerebration, which counts for so much in the intellectual life. With this there will be prayer of the sort that will prevent or remove prejudice, quicken insight, and purify the motives. It will be very patient prayer, if need be, till clear direction comes, and there will be a readiness all the while to submit the ultimate issue to the all-controlling Will. "I like to be in suspense sometimes," said John Wesley, "for it teaches me dependence upon God."

"Lead, Kindly Light, . . .
I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

To walk by this rule is the secret of efficient service, and also of tranquillity of soul.

WILLIAM VISCOUNT BRENTFORD.

JUNE 23, 1865—JUNE 8, 1932.

A MEMORIAL RONDEAU.

A FAITHFUL man in our degenerate days
He sought to walk in hallowed wisdom's ways;
He stood for right upon the senate floor
Like a brave warrior in the days of yore;
He made his way through controversial maze
With the safe guidance of his legal lore,
His party much to him, his honour more,
From first to last proved to the public gaze
A faithful man.
Nor less for Church than State he witness bore
Against liturgic forms that would ignore
The present truth and history past dispraise,
Resting on the foundation Scripture lays,
And now is he with Christ passed on before—
A faithful man.

JAMES SILVESTER.