

The Three Cups.

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'I WILL not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine,' that is, the fruit of the vine that stood in the half empty cup before Him. 'Until I drink it new with you,' that is, fraught with a new meaning, endowed with a new quality. 'In My Father's kingdom,' that is, the kingdom to be established in the resurrection world, when the first earth has passed away, and instead of it there has come another, wherein dwelleth righteousness. It is not the kingdom of grace, then, that is here referred to, but the kingdom of glory, as is always the case when the word kingdom is combined with the word Father. 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their heavenly Father.' 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.' 'And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me, that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom.'

It was in the Eden to come then,—the perfected paradisaic state, and not during the forty days, nor at any time, nor in any sense, during the spiritual dispensation that followed, that the cup now laid aside was to be retaken. It was to be retaken only at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Such is the Saviour's declaration, and there is something beautiful and affecting in it. It is beautiful and affecting, if for no other reason, on account of the note of farewell in it.

We know the feeling ourselves. It may be in a dim and distant fashion, but still we know it. Something is going to happen, and we say, 'This is the last meal I'll take, this is the last walk, before it happens. When I take my next meal, when I take my next walk, it will be amongst other and changed circumstances, amidst other and changed scenes.' To take an illustration,—an illustration adopted by Christ,—the illustration of bridegroom and bride. Here are two who are one day to be united in the closest of earthly bonds. But they have first for a time to be separated. And on the eve of that separation, he who is going to leave closes the

'For I say unto you, I will not drink from henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.'—Luke xxii. 18 (R.V.).

book they have read together, puts away the music they have sung together,—symbols as they are of sympathy and of intercourse,—saying, 'I will not read that book again, I will not sing that melody, till such time as we meet to renew our companionship and fulfil our joy in a union to be broken no more.'

So with the Bridegroom who speaks in the text. His converse with His own had been deep and full. And now that He is going to depart, He lays aside the symbol of that converse, namely, the fruit of the vine. He reserves it for a converse that is deeper and fuller by far,—the converse of the perfected partnership, the ultimate bliss,—saying, 'I will taste of it no more till I drink it new with you in My Heavenly Father's kingdom.' And, as I say, even in this sense, the sense of a tender and touching farewell, the words have a strange and a solemn significance. But this is after all but the outside. They are not only very tender, these words, they are very profound. Wrapped in a veil of metaphor (for of course it is metaphor we have here), we have certain great and important truths brought before us in regard to Christ's fellowship with His people,—its basis, its limits, and its future consummation. What these truths are let us accordingly try to discover, that mystic figure may resolve itself into solid and instructive fact.

Before we touch on the kernel of this passage, however, there are certain points to be noted with regard to the circumstances. This great word of our Lord's was uttered twice,—twice, that is, while He sat at the table in the upper room. There was a twofold celebration at that table, and a twofold repetition of the saying to correspond with it. You have it first, according to St. Luke, in connexion with the celebration of the Passover, which in this case, as in others, was closed by a cup of thanksgiving. When that cup of thanksgiving was passed round and partaken of, our Lord said solemnly, 'I will not drink from henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until the

kingdom of God shall come.' But (and here is a matter of importance) upon this occasion, the occasion of the Passover celebration, Jesus had already participated, had put His lips to the cup with the rest. I think that that is a legitimate inference from the words preceding, 'With desire I have desired to eat this Passover,' for if He ate He would also drink. Bear this fact in mind, then, that at the early and preliminary stage of the feast, while the rite was the rite of the Passover, Christ tasted the cup. He made Himself one with the guests that sat with Him, meeting them on their own level, joining them in their own experiences.

But while you have the text in St. Luke associated with the Passover, you have it in St. Matthew associated with the Lord's Supper,—instituted immediately after, at the same table, with the same cup. When that cup, the cup of the Lord's Supper, was passed round and partaken of, our Lord said again with increasing solemnity, 'But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' But at this point, the point when the Supper took the place of the Passover, there is a change. Christ did not share. Christ did not drink. He put the cup to the lips of His followers, but He did not put it to His own. At least there is no hint that He did so in the narrative. On the contrary, what the narrative lays stress on is the handing, the giving, away from Himself, for others' acceptance, for others' use. Note it carefully as we pass. At this farther and more solemn development we speak of, when the Jewish ceremony became the Christian rite, with a special Christian emphasis, a special Christian meaning, and a special Christian blessing, Christ refused to taste the cup. However closely He allied Himself with the company,—and He *did* ally himself closely,—it is plain that in this particular matter, at this particular time, He drew off from them. 'The fruit of the vine,' He says, 'which I have shared with you in the ordinance of the Passover, I must not and cannot share with you in the Supper. No, nor shall I drink it at all, till I can share it in a happier and a holier sphere—even the Father's presence where is fulness of joy, the Father's right hand where are pleasures for evermore.'

It is all very mysterious. This fellowship, first held, then renounced, then resumed again

more fully and gloriously than before; this cup, first tasted, then laid aside, then taken up again, and partaken of by the Saviour in a feast that shall never pall and shall never end while the ages of eternity roll on, what does it signify—what does it teach? Now the longer you look, and the closer you study, the more you will incline to this explanation. This threefold attitude of Christ to the cup, first as taking it, next as leaving it untasted, and next as tasting it again, corresponds to the threefold attitude of Christ to man as his human brother, as his atoning Saviour, and as his eternal host. Christ in the flesh, coming very near us in experiences we all know well, Christ on the Cross cut off from us in an experience which none knew fully but Himself;—Christ on the Throne, the Throne of the glorified world, coming near us again, and nearer than He ever did before, in new experiences He fits us to share with Him,—here I think is the meaning of the text. Is it fanciful? Is it far-fetched? Is it putting a meaning into the words which is beyond what they will reasonably bear? Let us see.

I. First the cup that is tasted—the Paschal cup. The Paschal cup was a cup of thanksgiving. The wine that filled it was a symbol of the pleasures and bounties of life. And as often as the Jew put it to his lips, he owned his need of these blessings, he expressed his gratitude for these blessings. He drank, not in remembrance of spiritual blessings merely,—he drank in remembrance of temporal mercies. Golden harvests, purple wine vats, prosperous business, happy homes, pleasant friendships,—every gift that enriches life, every tie that binds it,—all were symbolized in the draught. Refreshment, simple human refreshment, refreshment through human pleasure, refreshment through human supply,—such was the meaning of the first cup. Was it not meet that Christ should partake of it? Was it not meet that He should partake of it who was Himself while 'on earth our true human brother, made one with ourselves in all things,—our pleasures as well as our pains, our gladness as well as our griefs? Perhaps we reflect too little on this side of Christ's humanity—His companionship with His brethren in their comforts. As man with a man's faculties and a man's desires, He sought and He found a man's consolations, in earthly beauty, earthly sympathy, and earthly society and solace. For all this the Saviour gave

thanks as He took up the cup, and to all this He bade farewell as He set it down. We might illustrate by various considerations, but just take two, in which His joy was exemplified, by which His joy was sustained. I mean human wonder and human affection.

Take the joy of human wonder. Wonder is a necessary and healthy faculty of our nature. Wonder as much as anything is the wine of earthly existence, giving it flavour and edge and zest. Do you say, 'Ah! but the Saviour was incapable of wonder. He was God, knowing all things; how could He possibly wonder?' Yes, but He was man as well as God, to whom as a man things were gradually unfolded, to whom as a man things were gradually revealed, and He *did* wonder, and the Bible says once and again that He wondered. Did not He wonder as He opened the book of nature; and learnt the lesson of sun and star, of opening flower and ripening grain? Did not He wonder as He opened the book of Scripture and pierced the mystery of law and prophecy, ancient history, and mystic type? Did not He wonder as He opened the book of character, and found the surprises His Father prepared for Him there, in minds that were ready to bow to Him and hearts that were ready to receive Him, in places the least likely and expected? We are told that He marvelled, marvelled at faith, as at unbelief. Christ on earth tasted the joy of wonder, and in tasting it was our human brother, the same in experience with ourselves.

Or, again, take the joy of human affection. For affection, even more than wonder, is the wine of life. And we may well believe that this human affection—affection in its most natural, normal, and instinctive form—was one of the earthly refreshments of our Saviour. He had His favoured companions. He had His special friends. You say, 'Nay, but the great heart of Christ went out to all, and went out to all alike.' Yes, if you speak of Him as the Divine Redeemer. But we speak of Him as an earthly friend, dependent on earthly ministries, acknowledging earthly ties, and we say the heart of Jesus went specially out to some. Sweet was love to Him as a child, but sweetest the love of home. Sweet was fellowship to Him as a teacher, but sweetest the fellowship of John. Sweet was entertainment to Him as a pilgrim, but sweetest the entertain-

ment of Bethany, with its holy and congenial circle—Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

Do you see now what I want to establish? It is the fact that there was a whole sphere of human and natural gladness, as there was a whole sphere of human and natural sorrow, in which the Saviour moved while on earth, thus made in all things like unto His brethren. And the one sphere is as real as the other. Do not make His dependence on these things fictitious. It was a true dependence, as true as is yours or mine. It was a true thirst for information that made Him put His questions to the Rabbis in the temple. It was a true thrill of gratification that made Him commend the widow at the Treasury and vindicate Mary at Simon's board. It was a true craving for sympathy that made Him long for companionship in the upper room, saying, 'Come quickly, come close. With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.' These things, telling as they did of human qualities, human wants,—even now and again human weakness,—were no mere instructive drama, they were the genuine natural outcome of a genuine natural experience. And of that natural experience, the first cup we speak of—the Paschal cup, the cup of thanksgiving—was a symbol. It was meet then that He should taste it.

2. But, again, pass from the cup that is tasted to the cup that is untasted. That is, the cup of the Supper. And what did the cup of the Supper signify? If the cup of the Passover means refreshment through earthly joy, the cup of the Supper means nutrition through atoning sacrifice. It means pardon, and pardon through suffering. It means acceptance, and acceptance through death. With this sense the Saviour formally endows it. To this use He solemnly consecrates it. 'This cup,' He says, 'is the New Covenant in My blood, shed for the remission of sins. Drink ye all of it. To you I give it. With you I leave it. I touch it not, taste it not Myself.' So the Saviour, who has hitherto kept close to the disciples, draws at this point off from them. He separates Himself from their company. He recedes from their experience. He practically says, 'In this matter of atoning sacrifice there is a great gulf fixed between us. We stand upon different footings. We occupy different spheres. It is you, not I, that benefit. It is you, not I, that receive.' Do not you see the deep truth that

lies here? Why, had Christ put His lips to this second cup,—the cup of the Supper,—what would the meaning have been? The meaning would have been this, that He needed acceptance through His own sacrifice, that He needed pardon through His own death. But He did not. Not for Himself did He suffer. Not for Himself did He die. He suffered and He died for others. And therefore it is to others that He gives the draught, in which His sufferings and His death are symbolized.

So He looks beyond. From His high point of vantage in the upper room He looks onward and forward,—past the coming Cross, past the coming Resurrection, past the long, long centuries of separation to follow, till His eye rests on the final consummation, when the last enemy shall be destroyed and the last one ransomed brought home. 'Then,' He says, 'though not till then, shall I feast with you.' Then and not till then shall I drink the fruit of the vine.'

3. And here we pass from the cup that is tasted, and the cup that is left untasted, to the cup that is to be tasted again. Refreshment as before, you see, but this time neither refreshment through earthly sympathy, nor refreshment through sacramental grace, but refreshment through heavenly felicities. You see how the circle sweeps round. From the human (as symbolized in the first cup), through the atoning (as symbolized by the second cup); back to the human again (as symbolized by the third cup), only glorified and made perfect. From the fellowship betokened in the first stage, through the separation suggested in the second stage, back to the fellowship that is promised in the third—only a fellowship, not as before in the wilderness, but crowned and consummated in the Paradise of God. First Christ comes down to man's level, by a condescension to his fleshly experience; then He lifts man up to His level by an admission to His heavenly life. So turns the great wheel of grace, back to the point it began with, only on a higher spiral than before. It commences with a meal, a meal in the upper chamber; it ends with a banquet, a banquet in the many mansions. It commences with the personal society of an earthly Christ; it ends with the personal society of a heavenly Christ, amidst the brightness and beauties of God. Wine—the wine of joy—is provided in both cases, wine of which the redeemed and Redeemer partake

together and alike. But for this new table and new fellowship, new wine.

And new how?

(a) New, for one thing, because endowed with a new meaning. What was the meaning of the wine in the first cup? Earthly refreshment: so Christ ceased to drink that, because the day of His earthly refreshments was over, and the night of His sore and solitary struggle came on. What was the meaning of the wine in the second cup? Atoning blood: so Christ refused to drink that, it was not for the sinless to drink of, but the sin-laden; not for the Saviour, but the saved. But what is the meaning of the wine in the third cup? Neither earthly refreshment nor atoning blood, but full and everlasting victory. Not yet, indeed, is the Christ victorious,—He is only on the path to victory. Not yet has He put His enemies under His feet,—He is only expecting till He does so. Not yet does He put the last crown on His head,—the crown of a redeemed and regenerate world,—He is only preparing it. When this last and new crown is brought forth, 'with shoutings of grace, grace unto it,' then, and not till then, will be brought forth the new wine, and the conqueror's coronation will be followed by the conqueror's feast. At His table His people shall sit. In His draught His people shall share. It is a faithful saying that if we have suffered with Christ, we shall also reign with Him. 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit on My Throne, even as I also overcame and sit on My Father's throne.' This wine is new because endowed with a new meaning.

(b) And it is new, too, because gathered from new soil. Where was the first wine gathered? From fields such as these round Cana, which, with all their luxuriance and with all their beauty were surrounded and mingled with the thorns and the thistles of a curse-struck earth. Whence was the second wine gathered? From the awful thickets of Gethsemane, and the wine-press in the midst of them, which the Son had to tread alone, even the wine-press of the Father's wrath. And whence is the new wine gathered? From the smiling plains and the summer hills of a glorified world, restored to more than Eden's innocence, and therefore bright with more than Eden's bloom,—a world from which the trail of the serpent is for ever wiped out, in which sorrow and sighing and discord and death overshadow and embitter no more.

The Rabbis have a saying that when the six days of Creation were over (or was it rather when the Fall had taken place?), the wine of the grapes of Eden was removed by God into heaven, and there treasured up, to be drunk in the mansions of bliss, when the Father takes His children home. There is a glimmer of truth in the thought. But it is not perfect. It is not complete. For it is a better than the wine of the first Eden that the Saviour will taste with His people gone home. It is the wine of the second,—new wine, drawn from new grapes, ripened on new ground, grapes more rich than Adam tasted, ground more fertile than Adam tilled.

Here we touch upon mysteries. So much we can say with assurance, that in the Resurrection world, whatever that world may be, there will still be the element of the physical. But the physical will be exalted. The physical will be purified. The physical will be glorified. Here and now every physical object has its danger. Every physical pleasure has its pain. Hard by the brightness is the shadow. Hard by the sweetness is the sting. Hard by the comfort is the snare. And therefore in this physical sphere, Christ has meanwhile no part with us. He drank of the fruit of its vine for a season, but He drinks it for the present no more. He will drink it no more till a change comes, and the physical is purified by the spiritual, and becomes the framework and setting of His Father's kingdom, wherein dwelleth righteousness. There, too, His saints shall drink it along with Him, without constraint, for it will never injure, and without satiety for it will never pall.

What shall we more say? For the coming of this kingdom the saints look forward, for they await the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body. And for its coming the earth waits too, for the

banishing of its blight, for the development of its beauty, for the hushing of its discords, and for its full and final redemption, when the creature shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

The cup tasted, the cup refused, the cup tasted again, so runs the process of grace. A certain union over the first cup, a certain severance over the second, a certain union over the third, more glorious than the first,—such is the circle of redemption,—redemption in a parable. Two thoughts in closing. First, see the connexion between the different steps of salvation. Had Christ not tasted of the first cup He could not have blessed the second. Had he not said, Behold, I drink in communion with you, He could not have said, 'This drink in remembrance of Me.' That is to say, if Christ had not begun by a likeness to His brethren as man, He could not have gone on to atone for them as Saviour. Yes, and if Christ had not filled the second cup with sacramental grace, He could not have promised to fill the third cup with eternal glory. That is to say, if He had not atoned as Redeemer, He could not have welcomed as Host. That is one thought, the connexion between the steps of salvation. And the other thought is this, the place of the Lord's Supper. It stands midway between two cups; on the one hand the cup of a Saviour's fellowship in the flesh, on the other hand the cup of a Saviour's fellowship in the glory. In both those cases He tastes. In this case He does not taste but looks on. He looks on while His followers take the draught, suited to a sinner's state, a sinner's history, and a sinner's need. Is the fellowship less upon *that* account? Nay, if He does not taste the cup, He gives it. And in giving the cup He gives Himself.