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Sin in the Making.

BY THE REV. J. E. GIBBERD.

MANY a paper of verses—outpourings of amorous hearts—has been treasured in loving bosoms as poetry, having merits imputed to it whose tune came from the partiality of bountiful affection. In after-years, it has sometimes happened, the man who sent poetic effusions in his youth came across his own compositions. Since indulging in rhythmical flow he has read the sonnets of master minds. His hours of care have been smoothed by the melody of tuneful words and the richer melody of inspired thoughts. His ear for poetry has been trained—corrected, taught, tuned. His sense of truth and worth in poetry has been refined. The consequence is fatal to his own composition. He holds the old form of lyric in his hands with blushes on his cheeks. “The miserable doggerel!” he cries; “burn that rubbish!” If the true poets had not spoken to him, his own verses had not had blame; if the master poets had not done for him works none other man did, his own work had not had blame. When true music finds a soul and wakes its response, tinkle is condemned.

And if the mind of God had not spoken through the mouth of man, man's barbaric notions had remained in possession; his crude, vindictive code of honour had continued to this day; his bleak pantheon of competing gods had still starved his reverence behind pillared porticoes; he would still have dared his sons to walk through fire to prove their yea was yea and their nay was nay, and have thought better of them, if they passed unscathed through the ordeal than if they had exhibited in their words and actions the gleams of an illumined conscience and the glistenings of a heaven-born faith. For to Christ's presence in the world, once, in the midst of the ages, all milder manners; all more generous thought; all prerogatives of good character over material possessions; all enfranchisement of

womanhood in equality of rank with manhood ; all preference for the arbitrament of justice over the appeal to force ; all generous and honourable sense of what is due to children and the poor ; all motive to arrest the course of the transgressor, the violent, the intemperate, the profligate ; all hope of redemption from tyrannies of error, temper, and baneful habit ; all Gospel of God's forgiveness ; all radiancy of the hope of heaven round death, are due. If He had not come and spoken unto men, they had not had sin. They would have had frailty and inconvenience, but not sin.

If He had not raised the tone of thought, they had not had sin. If He had not enlightened conscience and opinion, they had not had sin. If He had not dignified love and the mind of love and enwreathed it with the praise of God, they had not had sin. If He had not filtered the judgment of heaven into the will of men, they had not had sin. One has heard old people who were cradled in ignorance exclaim with delight when their boys brought copy-books home from school with legible mottoes on the lines. But the boys' masters set the *copy* beside the copies, and called the copies "scrawl." Thus the true word dethrones the false, the pure doctrine degrades the impure, the glowing pleasure in goodness and graciousness unfrocks and deposes the apathy of ungodly souls, the word that reveals God blights and shames all unregenerate hearts. Christ's word is man's criterion. Christ sets the copy. He chisels the statue, in form and features all Divine, in material human ; henceforth, the human, untenanted and unlit by the Divine, is sin. For light is come into the world, the true light shineth, and the darkness of mind and the fears of darkened hearts are silhouetted in black relief against a bright horizon.

If Christ had not done among us the works which none other man did, we had not sin. If He had not lived an unsullied life, stained and freckled lives had remained passable. If He had not forgiven His enemies, the implacable temper had continued to be manly. If He had not healed the sick, cleansed the leprous, given sight to the blind, it had still been right to

treat the disabled, the incapacitated, the destitute, as of no account. If He had not loved the harlot and the prodigal, it had still been just to consign them to the remorseful misery they made for themselves. If He had not given His life for the sins of the world, the world's redemption had still been a negligible weed. If He had not opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers, the world had still been a faithless, flowerless, songless desolation ; a barren plain littered with fallen chips of rock ; and its souls had been born to face an uncheered death, and to feel in view of death the pitiless satire of existence. With no anticipation of the open vision of God in a Redeemer who should come and no prophetic foresight of heaven being opened, the best spirits of men before Christ had been barren. With no well-grounded and lively faith in the Christ who has spoken and worked, the spirits of men to-day are feeble, and poor, and unclad. And their paltriness and commonness, their insolvency of soul, is this—they know not the righteousness of faith, they know not their Father in Heaven, for they know not even so much as sin. The Spirit is come which convicted us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and sanctuary is denied Him. If He had not come and spoken, if He had not done the works none other man did, we should not have the obligations to Him. Without obligation there can be no sin ; with it what was sinless becomes sinful.

"If ye say ye have no sin, your sin remaineth." Credit with men is yours, respectability is yours, with a grub at their core. A man may be at his worst when he thinks himself at his best. Prosperity may delude him ; industrious poverty may blind him. Engrossed in all that allures his senses and appetites, gratified by the successful pushfulness of his propensities, he may leave his spiritual nature unfed and unclothed. His side towards the world answers. The world elects him, and he is one sort of an elect man. But his side towards God is withered.

"For merit lives from man to man,
And not from man, O Lord, to Thee."

"If ye say ye have no sin, your sin remaineth."

Now sin, as Christ makes it by the new obligations He brings, has two modes of existence.

The obvious forms of sin appear in *action* as transgression. Conduct expresses sin. The preference for second-rate acquisitions, the feeble self-control, the faltering unreadiness for sacrifice, the cold immurement in selfish circles, the unchivalrous want of regard of opportunities for influence, the sordid eye that is unfair without intention, the love of mammon that is unaware of itself, the censorious judgment, the self-indulgence along the lines of passion, the easy condoning of one's own faults, and the faithless excusing of one's own secret sins—these are the less obvious forms of obvious sins—the tinselled transgressions—these and the like. Of vulgar, obtrusive, defiant transgression, it is less needful to speak. The patriot, the law, and the policeman, deal with these. Where they fail to restrain open wickedness, the many withdraw their skirts from the contagious touch. "Sin is the transgression of the law."

But deeper, more penetrating and pervading, is indwelling sin. This is sin in the grain. This is the general demerit that covers the whole surface and saturates the whole substance of the interior life. It is the thistle where the herb should be. It is the foul smoke vitiating the atmosphere; the unconsumed products of combustion in a life that cannot cleanse its own output and discharges its waste on the world. "When I would do good, evil is present with me." "My sin is ever before me. Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." Sin is bad quality as well as bad works. It is mildewed grain traded off as wholesome grain. It is shoddy, mercerized. It is base metal silver-plated. Sin is in the quality. A man's quality matters most. "Out of the heart proceedeth" all the obvious transgressions. The man is guilty for what he is much more than for what he does. Counterfeit coin is bad and unlawful whether it be passed or not. Its existence is without justification. There is the sin of being as we are.

And as sin appears in exterior and interior modes so also does guilt, the moral offensiveness of sin, the odour of it that renders it fit only for the scavenger.

First there is the guilt that adheres to the sinner. His blame sticks on him. Whatever names the disobedient spirit has are his names. He wears the broad arrow of the convict. As the blight clings to the tree the offence clings to the wrong-doer. Men blame him—men who are as blameworthy as himself. They resent his awkwardness, his caprice, his crookedness. They draw round him the speckled cloak of unpleasant opinions. In their view he might be a much more agreeable man than he is. His sharp angles and rough edges maim their feelings. The blame they inflict on him is inflicted by him on them. So the common consent to guilt moves round in an endless circle. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” And man’s blame is a faint reflection of God’s judgment. Christ’s Spirit would come to convict the world of sin because they believed not on Him. The surest mark of culpability was the want of response to, and confidence in, the Christ of God. For unbelief shows incapacity—a gap where a growth ought to be. When a great climber was on a lofty spot upon an Alp, his guide in front raised his axe, and by a blow that was intended to hew out a step to plant their feet in for the ascent, drove his axe through the snow. Instantly he took alarm. Beneath the snow there ought to have been the solid mountain, but instead of mountain there was a hollow cavern. The peril of the situation was realized, and the party of men hurried off a thin crust that had no foundation. Not less perilous is a heart that has no foothold outside its own guilt. For a blameworthy state of spirit and life has no more security than the thin crust of snow over a yawning cavern. Guilt is imputed to the sinful because it is theirs. By man and by God the responsibility of sin is laid on them.

But, beside this guilt that adheres, is the guilt that inheres ; that evinces itself in the dissatisfied heart, the unacknowledged self-reproaches, the waves of doubt, the eddies of conscience ; in the sense of a void, of incapacity to be as good, as true, as high-souled, as intimate with the Father of spirits as one feels he should be.

For in observing the Lord Christ's holy union with His Father, His placid confidence in the Providence and Righteousness of His Father, His self-denying consent to His Father's will at the cost of His own abasement in suffering, His splendid faith that God would use His sufferings to draw men to Himself, the limping heart of the crippled man knows its own lameness, the empty heart of the hollow man knows its own ill-desert. And the man who has begun to know himself in the light of God cries the cry he felt but could not utter in the days of his ignorance : "In me dwelleth no good thing." This is the voice of inherent guilt.

So the Holy and True One came, gifted by His heavenly descent and His unerring perception of God, convinced that one of the greatest services He could do us, and one of the most beneficial ministries He could render us, was to expose the deep-seated ill out of which our discontent and our unsettled feelings, our disability and our misery, arise. If He had not come and spoken unto us, if He had not done among us the works none other man did, we had not had sin. Now if we say we have no sin, our sin remaineth. To fix the complaint is the first act towards the cure. To convince the man with diseased organs that he must lend himself to the remedies is the first step towards his healing.

At the beginning when God created the heaven and the earth He divided the light from the darkness. In the fulness of time He divided enlightenment from benightedness. For Christ boldly affirms that His coming imparts sin to kinds of thought and lines of conduct. Sin is *had* through Him. It is as though sin were a property, a calculable asset. And is it not ? Can you think of a beaver, a swallow, a salmon, a horse, having sin ? Can you think of a human being without sin ? It is the moral capacity of mankind which divides man from other animals. Because we can be made right we are under blame for being wrong. We deserve ill of God who made us. Our ill-desert is palpable to us. The light of God in Christ has divided it from the darkness of creaturely ignorance. One had better know

remorse than remain blind. For the fabric of a life that can be condemned can also be approved. Quality in character carries value.

It is no cynical Master who spoke and worked that we might come to our own sin and our own censure. In a factory the man who examines the products, dividing the good from the defective, has the reputation and prosperity of the mill in his charge. Among men he who has grace from God to show forth the radiance of a right mind and righteous life cannot help but show up the drab inferiority of a mind and life that is less than right. Christ appreciates the eternal possibilities enfolded in the culprit's knowledge of his mean quality of life, of his worthless character. The man who can be redeemed and made Christ's own by the purchase of His blood must needs be made aware of moral values. He who comes that we may have sin comes that we may have quality. He comes to reveal to itself the neutral, indifferent, insensible soul, and stir it to its depths, clearing out the silt that chokes the channel in which healthy and holy vitality may flow.

" It's wiser being good than bad ;
It's safer being meek than fierce ;
It's fitter being sane than mad.
My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched.
That after last returns the first,
That what began best can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst."

