

The Hope of Progress and Purification.¹

PARADISE is not simply a home of rest and seclusion, but a place of preparation for the last great stage of life, that of the resurrection glory. As this active life prepares for the quiet life, so the quiet life for the fullest life. As we shall have learned to conquer matter by our experience on earth, to "overcome," as the Scriptures say, *i.e.*, not only to use it as our servant, but to overcome all its solicitations within ourselves: so we shall have learned in Paradise the great hidden principles that underlie the outward forces of the world, to see the strength of the inward, the might of faith, the power that comes from contemplation. And in the third stage we shall unite both these experiences in the joy of complete mastery both of the inward and the outward.

In a sense Paradise is the goal of the soul, for its company consists of the spirits of "just men made perfect"—that is, to give the original its full force, of those who have already attained the end and purpose of their being. The time of probation is over. There is no more suffering, no more temptation, no more sin—sighing and sorrow have fled away. The object of life is made clear. The soul has reached its majority. It is as when a man who has finished with school and university life finds himself in a Government position or in his father's office. He has attained the coveted goal. He receives the congratulations of his friends, who recognize that he is now well started. Everything now depends on himself. He has his opportunity, of which no one can rob him. Given a fair use of his abilities and he is certain to rise to distinction. But the position so attained is only the beginning of a new chapter of his life. He has still much to learn, still many honours to receive.

¹ A chapter from "The Gospel of Hope: A Message of Comfort for the Sorrowing in this Time of War." By the Right Rev. G. H. S. Walpole, D.D., Bishop of Edinburgh. London: Robert Scott. 2s. net.

So with the spirits of the just who have reached their goal—they are now well started, but they have not received the full promise, "God having provided some better thing concerning us that apart from us they should not be made perfect." God's plan for His Church is that all His people should reach their ultimate destiny together. Saints like St. Paul and St. John, St. Mary and the Magdalene, are waiting for their final perfection. Perfect in one sense they are, not perfect in another. Perfect in sinlessness, but not perfect in the experience of the ages. As disembodied spirits they are at present incomplete, but in the day of Christ the crown of the resurrection glory will be placed upon their heads, as on all the redeemed, for the whole of Christ's Church, North and South, East and West, will be crowned together. Meanwhile they wait, and in that waiting become more ready to make full use of the amazing powers with which they will then be endowed.

This progress necessarily goes forward, for life is never stationary ; and Paradise develops life, for Paradise is the realm of truth, and there the soul sees, as never before, the two facts which dominate life, itself and God.

First it realizes as never before the Presence of God. The greatest fact of the Universe is not myself, nor my friends, it is God. He is the ultimate Reality, the foundation Truth which holds everything together, and Death brings me face to face with Him. On earth I can avoid Him or forget Him. A book, a picture, a piece of music, a conversation are all-sufficient to hide Him. Indeed the difficulty in life is to see Him, for God is Spirit, and our spirit which can alone touch His is embedded in flesh. He is, we know, in Nature, for Nature is His garment, but Nature often confuses by its outward features, and so not only do I not see Him, but frequently I admire Nature without thinking of Him. He is in my friend, for my friend is made in His image and after His likeness, but even when my friend is at his best I miss Him. He is in history, but I can read history without a thought of Him. In fact it is more easy to forget than to remember Him, to ignore

His Presence than to recollect it. The body, the distractions of the world, the work that I have to do, all seem to hide Him ; but when these are gone then I see Him "face to face." On the earth I am obliged to recollect myself, to will myself as it were into His Presence, but in Paradise His Presence makes itself felt. On the earth there are Churches, Ministrations of clergy, Sacraments, the Bible to awaken within me a sense of God's nearness ; but in Paradise these means of grace are needless, for "closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands and feet." On the earth questions are raised and discussed whether He exists, but in Paradise His Life so envelops the soul that nothing is felt to have any existence except in Him. On the earth I stretch forth my hands to feel after Him if I may find Him, but in Paradise He finds me and discovers Himself to me. Here I see through a glass darkly, contenting myself with such images as I can discern ; but in Paradise I know even as I am known. The vision of God, that is the amazing experience that first overwhelms the departed.

It is therefore not so much what the soldier loses which overpowers him at death as what he gains. Nothing like that change has he ever experienced. But an hour ago the French fields of corn, the cheer of his men as they rushed madly across it, the roar and din of the cannon, then the sudden shock of death. In a moment the hideous vision was gone like a bad nightmare, the awful noise was still, and he realized that a great and amazing change had passed over him.

He was alone, still thinking, still exercising his judgment, but not on the battle ; his mind had taken a new direction. It was not the position that his men had to win at all costs, that was now out of his hands, a new position was opened. It was not his relation to England, which he never loved so dearly as when he gave his life for her, that was swallowed up in a new relationship which began now to excite his awakening mind. It was not his old home which flashed with peculiar clearness before him as death stared him in the face, but an older fellowship which antedated that and claimed precedence. It was as

though some friendly hand had suddenly lifted him from the battlefield to a haven of rest, where something greater than England, more appealing than home-ties, and stricter than the sharp discipline of his regiment began slowly to enwrap him. He was now aware that he was not alone. Some One else was with him, making Himself known.

For tenderness it might have been his own mother, for close intimacy it might have been her whom he had hoped one day to have made his wife, for strict justice it might have been that of the Judge. There was no occasion to ask, "Who art Thou, Lord?" for he knew there was no one else who stood to him in these varied relationships. Of course he had known of Christ, had again and again confessed his faith in Him, and quite lately received the mystery of His life in Holy Communion, but he had always felt profoundly dissatisfied about his attitude to Him, at one time so fervent, at another time almost indifferent. Now and again, and especially during the last month when death seemed so near, he had clung to Him with such desperation that he had seemed almost to win back a response, as though Christ had pressed his hand, but these efforts of faith had been like the gropings of a man in a dark room who is feeling his way to the light and clutches here a table, there a chair for support. But now there was nothing to hinder Christ's perfect expression, or rather nothing to prevent his own realization of it. Christ came to claim him as His own.

And the first impression was one of indescribable Love. He was no Stranger, no new Friend just entering into his life, but One Who had always known him. He had often heard people say that at the moment of death the whole of life from beginning to end flashes across the mind; so, too, he saw the whole, but Christ in it, not a page of his life unknown to that clear Eternal Thought. And yet this fulness of exact and accurate knowledge had not killed His interest and affection. His sin, his follies, his weaknesses, had not wearied Him. He still loved. It was extraordinary the relief this brought, for it meant that the whole future, whatever it might bring, was secure.

All the puzzles of the past were gone, and with them all the fears for the future. His own little boat had come through the awful storm, was now rocking quietly in the harbour, and at the helm the Great Steersman. To what port He would take him next he could not tell, but he was safe. With this knowledge his past life seemed extraordinarily simple, everything fell into its place, his work as a soldier, his worship as a Churchman, his private devotions were all one. And Love awoke Love. He had never been emotional, never very responsive. That friends were kind, his parents unselfish, he took for granted. But one night he remembered when he was awake hearing his mother creep into his room, and after one long look, for he pretended to be asleep, her stooping down to kiss him. It gave him a start when he discovered how much she cared for him, and after that he never felt he could do enough for her. So now, as Love looked into his eyes, this still greater discovery of an old, never-wearying Love seemed to open the pent-up flood-gates of his nature, and his whole soul leaped out towards his Lord. He now knew what the great Apostle had meant when he said he was willing even to face dissolution, if only he might be "at home with the Lord." The words "at home" just expressed his feeling. There were no secrets he did not share with Christ, no reservations he kept to himself. Everything was open, for he loved, and loving he was naturally "at home with the Lord."

But this love, great and real as it was, was not unmixed with fear. That was inevitable. As the beloved Apostle fell at His feet as dead; as the great prophet Daniel felt when he saw Him, that all his comeliness was turned into corruption; as St. Peter, even at a time when his Master had given him a wonderful expression of His affection, cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," so he, in spite of his love and openness, felt a great horror as he saw, not only Christ, but his own character without any veil.

For Death had not done with him as some had represented, it had not burned out the effects of sin, it had not destroyed his

moral corruption. He had not lost the disfigurements that an evil will had wrought in him. He remembered how when in hospital one of his men had lost a leg he was surprised to find that he had not lost his ill-temper. The operation, so successful for the limb, had not affected the self. He had supposed a physical shock would have brought about a corresponding moral change, but it had not. So, too, Death had robbed him of his body; that was gone never to be recovered, but the old self had not gone. He felt sure that if he were back in the body he would speak and act very much as he had done before he died. He could not help himself, for he was the same person. It was not that this amazing change had not solemnized him; the new life into which he had been suddenly introduced, and the departure from earth and its belongings had done that, but it had not greatly altered him. He could see by the light of conscience, never so clear as now, his old faults, his impatience with not getting hold of things at once, his indisposition to think along other lines than the one to which habit had accustomed him, his pride at his own achievements. They seemed to be still there within his own nature, though quiet and inactive, for sin was impossible. And all this superficial knowledge deepened and ever deepened as the bright whiteness of this encompassing Presence lighted up the dark hidden depths of his being. There was no occasion to search for faults as in those brief self-examinations before he went to sleep. The darkness was made visible by the light. It was with him as the poet had predicted :

“ When then—if such thy lot—thou seest thy Judge
The sight of Him will kindle in thy heart
All tender, gracious, reverential thoughts.
Thou wilt be sick with love, and yearn for Him,
And feel as though thou couldest but pity Him,
That one so sweet should e’er have placed Himself
At disadvantage such, as to be used
So vilely by a being so vile as thee.
There is a pleading in His pensive eyes
Will pierce thee to the quick, and trouble thee,
And thou wilt hate and loathe thyself; for though
Now sinless, thou wilt feel that thou hast sinned

As never thou didst feel ; and wilt desire
To slink away, and hide thee from His sight ;
And yet wilt have a longing eye to dwell
Within the beauty of His countenance."

But this wrongness did not disturb his peace. For though the Presence disclosed a moral ugliness of which he had had no conception, it also revealed a height of moral perfection which he had never supposed possible. He had always wished to be a straightforward, upright, gallant soldier, loving home and country, and doing his duty so far as he knew it to God and man, and was always thankful for the considerate appreciation of his friends. But now he saw that this was a very small part of what God intended him to be. He remembered how he had longed to be a Bayard, a Havelock, a Gordon, but these were only the foothills of range after range of perfection which he was destined to tread. Height upon height, even to the highest heaven, perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect, all this was now open for him, and the marvel was that he lay in the lap of the resources that made them possible.

For there lay the hope. There was an affinity between Him and this gracious Presence which filled him, in spite of his moral disorders, with a boundless hope. It seemed some time before he discovered this. To his own vision there was nothing. But when he began to frame words of questioning, "Why am I not destroyed? Why am I not thrust away? Why is it that He the Perfect One has still hold of me, still hopes for me?" then it seemed as though the whole of that Presence in which he was enwrapped enveloped him more closely as a mother does her child when a sign of weakness excites a sudden burst of compassion. And back came a response which silenced fears. "Does Love destroy what it has made? Does Love throw aside that which it has redeemed? Does Love despair of that which it has hallowed? If the potter can out of the same clay make a new vessel for honour, will the Eternal Maker of Heaven and earth be baffled by the effects of evil? Does the love of the Crucified ever fail? And in thy life there has been an expression of Mine. Away from thy home thou wentest, not

knowing whither thou wentest, and so thou understandest My going forth to succour the world. In the trenches thou hadst no cover for thy head, no rest for thy limbs, and thou learnedst there the weariness of Him Who had not where to lay His head. For days thou hadst short rations and hard fare, and in uncomplaining cheerfulness didst support the courage of thy followers ; and so didst thou enter into the Fast of the Son of Man. Again and again I saw thee in the night watches, facing the mystery of death and agonizing in the conflict that it brought thee, and there thou didst have thy share in My Gethsemane. And then in obedience to the call that thou knewest meant death thou didst willingly lay down thy life, and so hast learnt the secret of Calvary more surely than a thousand books could have taught thee. All this was My plan for thee, that in a few weeks thou shouldst sum up the whole of life and entering into the fellowship of My sufferings mightest share the rest that leads to the glory of the Resurrection. There lies the promise of thy great future. Thou hast gone but a little way, but My good Spirit Who has been with thee from thy Baptism onward will carry thee farther, under these new conditions so easy for growth and fruitfulness."

It was now that the old words became clear, "Christ in you the hope of glory." He had been all unknown to himself an expression of Christ, for Christ had been behind him and through him suggesting by His Spirit, this word, or that deed. Dreadfully slow and awkward he had been in perceiving it and letting himself go in obedience to it, but the fact was plain and he adored Him for His condescension. And then it seemed to him as though the whole self with its corruptions and entanglements was bathed again and again in the fountain of blood that seemed to flow from His side, and what old Naaman had experienced in his body without, he experienced in his character within ; his soul came again like the soul of a little child, and he was clean. All the strange complexities and moral intricacies, all the self interests and indulgences, all the stains and other effects of sin were gone, and he began again with

all the simplicity and purity of another childhood to learn without temptation or sin the essential characteristics of a life patterned after that of Christ.

This would be necessarily gradual. Life here knows of no sudden leaps into perfection; on the contrary, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. And there is no reason to expect that a law which obtains universally here will fail there. We shall only ripen slowly in sunny Paradise. It is not that sin is any longer possible, that is gone for ever. The soul is in complete harmony with its blessed surroundings and has not a thought or wish apart from them. Christ, and all that the character of Christ means, is the permanent Ideal. But the great joy of the soul lies in the thought that it will grow more and more into likeness with it. It takes its stand upon the old promise that "He Who hath begun a good work will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ." Gradually but surely it makes progress towards this goal. The old ways of thinking are unlearned, and the new ways adopted. Years of living in a material world have engendered certain dispositions which must be changed; habits formed by the social relationships of earth require alteration. Not all at once do we become familiar with the laws of the spirit world, there is much to be discovered, much to think quietly over. And it is the combination of the old experienced with the new, the exercise of new faculties that are called out by the new life, the pressure on all sides of the blessed company of the redeemed showing an infinite and amazing variety of moral perfections; and, above all, the enwrapping Presence of Him Who expressed all that every one expressed, and yet showed a beauty of Holiness that was incomparably beyond—all this expands the soul's life more and more, and gives that sense of real growth which is the most certain evidence of life. And so Browning's thought for his sorrowing friend is realized:

" If it seem
That He draws back a gift, comprehend
'Tis to add to it rather—amend—
And finish it up to your dream."

The progress of our lad that we watched from birth to death with such pleasure, not unmixed with anxiety, for it had its ups and downs, is now assured. He goes forward without check. There is nothing to dim the brightness of his outlook, nothing to hinder the advance he is making. What you thought for him and hoped for him will be seen when you look into his face again to be finished "up to your dream"—nay, beyond your dream—and the cruel war of 1914 is seen to be in your hero's life the great opportunity which suddenly brought heaven and all that it means within his reach.



The City of Peace.

BEYOND the verge of the iron years,
 Where the Past and Future meet,
 Where the dreams we dreamed in the golden days
 Hover on shining feet,
 Lies, foursquare, in a land of calm,
 Untravelled, strange, untrod,
 A city set on the mystic hills—
 The timeless City of God.

Here, in the region of endless storm,
 Weary, perplexed by fate,
 With journeyings sore, in perils oft,
 Our spirits watch and wait ;
 Yet ever, above the clouds that veil
 Yon pathway still untrod,
 The gates of the City stand unbarred—
 The gates of the City of God.

E. H. BLAKENEY.

