

Christ the Hope of the Nations.

“AND now?” The question in its abrupt brevity is being asked probably by thousands to-day. The period of the visits by Bishops’ Messengers in connexion with the National Mission is just running out; and fervent hearts that have been moved, and cynical hearts that never meant to be stirred, are asking practically the same thing though in different accents. Let us reply frankly in the words of St. Paul, “and now abideth HOPE.” It is part of his reply to the criticism that all things pass; preaching and knowledge and extraordinary spiritual phenomena fade; but some things remain. And Hope is one of the constant and undying assets of the Church of Christ; frequently overlooked, seldom preached on, underrated as a force and understated as an inheritance, nevertheless now abideth Hope. The reason of our failure to enrich ourselves by it is probably twofold. Hope is necessarily future, and most of us are unimaginative enough to live in the present. And Hope is a relying on the invisible: “hope that is seen is not hope,” said St. Paul; and the large proportion of Christian men still depend on things seen. Yet Hope has never left this shadowed earth of ours. The old Greek myth, with its dim memory of the story of the primitive days, said that the Greek Eve, Pandora, lost all the blessings she was intended to bring to man through her curiosity in peeping into the treasure-casket entrusted to her when she left Heaven: yet when all the winged benefits had flown, Hope still remained in the box. These things are an allegory, as St. Paul would have said. However men may have lost their blessings of innocence, the windows need never be closed or darkened heavenwards. The Old Testament as well as the New is full of that great truth. The man of God is to be a man of Hope. Men “without God” are “without Hope”:¹ men who dwell upon the pages of the word of the Lord patiently and teachably are filled with Hope;² even when the beating of death’s wings is heard above their roof-tree they sorrow not as “men without Hope.”³ And as we try to estimate our position spiritually, in view of the endeavours of these past months, let us remember that if it was a call to repentance the mission is also the kindling of the torch of Hope.

¹ Eph. ii. 12.

² Rom. xv. 4.

³ 1 Thes. iv. 13.

The visits of the messengers are over ; but the Mission must never be allowed to end till the Advent of the King has completed our spiritual campaign. The words of the speakers fade from our memories, but the witness of the Church of Christ must burn ever more clearly. Our lamps were going out and we were slumbering, but they have been replenished with fresh oil, and we must not relapse into idle indifference or cowardly inaction. Let us ask ourselves then what are the ingredients of this divine manna on which the Church of Christ must be daily sustained.

First we must place the element of longing. The word Hope appears to come from a root meaning " desire," and this sentiment is never absent from true Hope. However much we rejoice in what we have, or in what Christ is, either to us personally, or to a congregation, or to a community, there is always room for more. There are divine things which we have not ; and God means His world to have them. The Mission will fail unless it leaves in all of us a heavenly discontent, which amid restfulness in Christ can never rest until God's Will is done on earth as it is in Heaven. Hope always touches the fringe of that beatitude which speaks of the blessing of a hunger after righteousness that shall be satisfied, and a thirst after holiness that shall be slaked.

The second great element is that of joy. The Greek notion of Hope appears to mean " pleasure to come," and we recognize the idea as true. " We rejoice in hope of the Glory of God,"¹ wrote St. Paul to the Christians in the Imperial city. Anticipation may be shadowed with apprehension ; Hope has her face towards the sunrise. This is what makes the Christian unabashed in circumstances that are often equivocal. To the world we always appear to be staking everything on the chance of achieving little or nothing. And as St. Paul says, it is Hope that " makes us unashamed."² Checks are only temporary ; the embarrassment is only the result of imperfect vision. Hope never despairs. So the issue of the Mission is to be a vanishing pessimism. We shall have said farewell to discouragement.

What can we do, o'er whom the unbeholden
Hangs in a night with which we cannot cope ?
What but look sunward, and with faces golden
Speak to each other softly of a Hope ?

¹ Rom. v. 2.

² Rom. v. 5.

Yet a third element is that of trust. Hope is the smile upon the face of faith. True Hope always has trust behind it. The writer to the Hebrews has some words which have been suggestively illuminated by recent papyrus discovery. "Faith is the title-deeds, of things that are being hoped for." We may possess what we cannot see, by faith, and even though our eyes never behold it yet it is ours. Here again is a memory to cherish. The National Mission is an endeavour by the Church of Christ to preach confidently about the city of God, which one day is undoubtedly coming. We are assured of this by Hope: we cling to it by faith. And in spite of civic heedlessness, or municipal corruption, or political intrigue, or national forgetfulness, we may not forswear either our ideals or our aspirations. Our Hope is based on faith. We are hopeful because in God we trust, and we know that we shall not be confounded.

There is a fourth element involved in the New Testament conception of Hope, that of certainty. The tendency to whittle down the assurance of the word is quite illegitimate. We say "I hope so" in such dubious tones that men have come to think Hope means doubt. St. Paul told the soldierly Macedonians that Hope was the helmet in the armour of salvation. The trench-helmet means greater security. Hope keeps the soul when others are losing their heads. Hope makes the disturbed atmosphere tranquil when brains would otherwise be turned. The writer to the Hebrews says that the Christian Hope is an anchor, when all else is going adrift. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" sings the man of God, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him." We are not merely vague mystics walking in a golden mist. We are cheery warriors following out our loyalty to a victorious Leader. "The Lord Jesus Christ is our Hope,"¹ wrote St. Paul to that rather pessimistic aide-de-camp of his, Timothy the Lystran. And we do well to remember that behind the seeming chaos God has a surely weaving purpose. More potent than all War Councils or Peace Councils is that which Mr. Chesterton sings of—

The Council, eldest of things that are
The talk of the Three in One.

We discuss with mingled hopes and fears what men may do. Let us look with high-hearted expectation to see what God will bring

¹ 1 Tim. i. 1.

out of the crucible. Jeremiah in the midst of his sorrows preaches the blessing of the man "whose Hope the Lord is."¹ It is the focussing of all Hope into one event, the Advent, "the happy Hope,"² and upon one person, the Saviour, which makes the New Testament Church buoyant so that no storm sinks it, radiant so that no night darkens it, and tireless so that no opposition checks it. "We are persuaded that neither things present nor things to come shall separate us from the LOVE of GOD in Christ Jesus our Lord;"³ and we are confident that after the night of toil is over, there will come a morning, when in the crimsoning dawn a figure will stand silhouetted against the sky, upon the shore whither we are tending, and with the glad cry "It is the Lord" we shall leap ashore, rejoicing in our reunion and recounting our struggles. "And every man that hath this Hope set on Him purifies himself even as He is pure."⁴ We gird ourselves to a new courage, we lave ourselves with a new scrupulousness, and go forward to our great task. For be it remembered this period of weeks and witnessing is but the beginning. The Romans thought of Hope, "*spes*," as the spaciousness of the time to come; and it is a noble conception worthy of an imperial race. The undying marvel of eternity is that there is always a future, and never a terminus.

So we can never stop short in our prayers or endeavours merely with an England on its knees. Nothing less than the world can satisfy the Master whom we follow. In all endeavours at reconstruction which will commence when the war ends, let it be our prayer that kings and generals, statemen and diplomatists, politicians and reformers, may turn their faces Christwards. The inferno of this war may only be surpassed by a fire seven times hotter unless men long never to learn war any more. The highest aim of this terribly glorious crusade should surely be to break the greatest and most dangerous war-machine our world has known, and not to replace it by something bigger. War may be unavoidable. I believe that this war was. But war in itself is as preposterous and wicked a method of settling differences as duelling. We may not be able to abolish it, but we may work and pray that man may want to do without it. Christ is the real Hope of the Nations, and in His reign "they shall not learn war any more."

¹ Jer. xvii.

² Titus ii. 13.

³ Rom. viii. 38.

⁴ 1 John iii. 3.

Men who dream of the glory of adventure, the glow of patriotism, the fire of zeal, will find full scope and more than satisfying hardships in endeavouring to plant the banner of Christ above every senate-house in the world. The warriors who long to live the fullest life in the daily thrill of sacrifice and risk, may find every variety of peril to brace their souls and kindle their imaginations, in an advance of missionary gallantry which shall carry the knowledge of Christ, not as a theory but as a passion, to the watching and ever calculating areas of China and Japan—to the vibrating pulses of Indian Nationalism—the excited vivacities of the Moslem world—and the developing dawn of the African tribesmen.

Nor must we forget that even Europe is only nominally Christian. Can we estimate the difficulty of making the atmosphere of our Chambers of Commerce and the Stock Exchange and the Houses of Parliament openly and confessedly Christian as well as moral, with no unctuousness and yet with no shame? For the present it seems as though the Central Empires had deliberately blotted out every ideal that comes through Christ. Self-banned, they are the lepers of the world. No amount of Christian forgiveness from us can restore them. But what a crusade for some knightly Christians in Germany—and there are such—to bring back a conception of faith and rule that shall send the nation and its dupes in sorrow to the throne of God, forgetting the hymn of hate in the sobbing of the penitential psalm. And we too who stand in the steel ring round about the battling foe, we trust that we have a good conscience in the war. But can any of us face unflinching the inspection of God's gaze into our national life and practice? The Seine and the Thames, the Neva and the Tiber, need replenishing from the crystal waters of the River of Life that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb.

If the "Comrade in White" can be made a living reality to the gallant French Nation—if the "white Christ" can be made the foremost message of the erstwhile dulled Eastern Church, and the once sodden but now sober moujik—if the intrigues of the Vatican can be turned into a spiritual passion for eternal gains rather than temporal aggrandizements—if England can slough her sectarian trammels, her petty bickerings, her airy pleasure hunting and dogged money-spinning, and come forth in shining armour to battle on moral fields instead of military, to purge the slums of the East

End and the stews of the West End, to help her men to keep sober and her maidens to preserve their chastity, to make bribery impossible and sweating unthinkable, to make prayer a reality and worship the breath of life, and the Sacrament of Christ's death a true gathering of filial devotion and unclouded brotherly love round about the Heavenly Father's Table of blessing—then will the hope be realized which the National Mission is intended to kindle, and the spark now glowing leap into a flame.

Surely He cometh, and the earth rejoices
Glad in His coming, who hath sworn "I come."

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