

## STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

## XVII.—THE CRUCIFIXION.

THE cross of Christ has in a most wondrous way, like the glittering eye of God, held man spell-bound, and made him listen to its strange story "like a three years' child" who "cannot choose but hear." Were not the fact so familiar, men would call it miraculous. Had its action and history been capable of a *a priori* statement, it would have seemed, even to the most credulous age, the maddest of mad and unsubstantial dreams. For it is not only that in the immense history of human experience it stands alone, a fact without a fellow, the most potent factor of human good, yet with what seems the least inherent fitness for it, but it even appears to contradict the most certain and common principles man has deduced from his experience. We do not wonder at the cross having been a stumbling-block to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek. We should have wondered much more had it been anything else. In the cross by itself there was nothing to dignify, and everything to deprave. Men would at first interpret it rather by its old associations than its new meaning. It had by its positive achievements to prove its peculiar significance and merit before it could make out an indefeasible claim on man's rational regard. But the extraordinary thing was how, with its ancient obloquy and intrinsic unsuitableness to its destined end, it could ever accomplish any positive good. There would indeed have been little to marvel at in the posthumous fame and power of Christ. His was a name and personality that could hardly but be

made beautiful by death. One who had been so loved and lovely could not fail to be idealized when He lived only to the memory too fond to forget and the imagination too deeply touched to be prosaic. The dead are always holier and more perfect to us than the living. To lose is only to love more deeply, to become forgetful of faults that pained, mindful only of virtues that ennobled and graces that adorned. Could we love and think of our living as we love and think of our dead, the loftiest dreams and most hopeful prophecies as to human happiness would be more than fulfilled. But Christ's death was in all that strikes the senses not one the memory could love to recall or the imagination so dwell on as to idealize and glorify. It was the worst the men that hated Him could think of. Even they were satisfied with its horror and shame. It made Him, in the eye of their law and people, accursed.<sup>1</sup> We can hardly imagine what the cross then was—so different has it now become. It stood almost below hatred, was the instrument of death to the guiltiest and most servile. Rome in her nobler and simpler days had not known it, had only, when depraved by conquest and brutalized by magnificence, borrowed it from the baser and crueller East. But she had used it with proud discrimination, too much respecting herself in her meanest citizen to crucify him, crucifying, as a rule, only the conquered, the alien, and the enslaved. To be doomed to the cross was to be doomed not simply to death but to dishonour, to be made a name hateful, infamous, whose chief good was oblivion. The death was horrible enough, so cruel as to be abhorrent to the merciful

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxi. 23 ; Gal. iii. 13.

spirit that animated the Hebrew legislation. But the very horror that surrounded the death now commended it to "the chief priests and elders." He who had claimed to be above their law was to die a death it hated. The very act that ended his life was to outlaw Him, was to prove Him a disowned Child of Abraham, a Son Moses had repudiated. The name that had so gone down in infamy could never be honoured, bore a curse from which it could be saved only by oblivion. The voice that had first cried, "Crucify him!" seemed to have formulated a new and final argument against all high Divine claims—disproof by odium, refutation of the claim to the Messiahship by the abhorred symbol of shame and crime.

But Providence, by an irony infinitely subtler and more terrible than the priests', was to prove their genius but idiocy. Their elaborate attempt at refutation by odium became only the most splendid opportunity possible for the exercise of Christ's transforming might. The cross did not eclipse his name, his name transfigured the cross, making it luminous, radiant, a light for the ages, the sign of the gentleness of God. What is so extraordinary is the suddenness and completeness of the change. It was accomplished, as it were, at once and for ever. Suddenly, by the very fact of Christ's dying on it, it ceased to be to the imagination the old loathed implement of death and became the symbol of life. Time was not allowed to soften its horrors; it was not left to distance to weave its enchantments round it; in the very generation when, and the very city where, He died the cross was glorified. This is one of the strangest yet most certain historical facts. There is nothing more primitive in

Christianity than the preëminence of the cross, and apparently there is nothing more permanent. Peter, in his earliest discourses, emphasized the fact of the crucifixion.<sup>1</sup> The one object Paul gloried in was the cross,<sup>2</sup> and the one thing he determined to know and make known in the cities he visited was Christ and Him crucified.<sup>3</sup> The death and its symbol constituted the very heart of his theology, what gave to it being, vitality, and significance. In the very age when the cross was most hated, when its bad associations were intensest and most vivid, Christ crucified was preached as the power and the wisdom of God.<sup>4</sup> And as extraordinary as the preaching was its success: "the word of God grew mighty and prevailed." Suddenly, as it exchanged infamy for imperishable fame, it became the organ of Divine recreative energies, stood up like a living being, breathing the breath of life into our dead humanity. And its might has not been short-lived; its energies seem inexhaustible. For centuries it has been the sign of the grace that reigns through righteousness, the pledge of God's peace with man and man's with God, the comfort of the penitent, the inspiration of the philanthropist, the symbol on fields of slaughter of Divine charity working through kindly human hearts and gentle human hands, the banner which, as a New Shechinah, has witnessed to the Divine Presence in the van of every battle good has waged with ill. If we think what the cross had been to the centuries before Christ, then what it has been to the centuries since Christ, we may find it in some degree a measure of the exaltation of Him who could

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 22-24; iii. 13-15; iv. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. vi. 14.

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. ii. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. i. 24.

so exalt it. His enemies meant it to make an utter end of Him and his cause, but He made it the emblem of the eternal reconciliation worked through Him of God and man. Their worst against Him became their very best for Him. The setting of crime and passion which they gave to his death only makes it look the Diviner, surrounds it with a glory more wonderful than any the radiance of heaven has ever woven out of the darkness of earth. The shadow of the cross is like the shadow of the sun, the light and life of the world.

Now, how was it that Christ was able to work this most extraordinary, as it were, posthumous miracle? For miracle in a real sense it undoubtedly was. The achievement of his death was a more violent contradiction to the probabilities or uniform sequences which men call laws of nature or of history than any achievement of his life. No death has had for man the same significance as his; no instrument of death has ever exercised so mysterious a power or subsumed and symbolized so many transcendental truths as the cross. And why? Why out of the innumerable millions of deaths that have happened in history has his alone had so extraordinary a meaning, and been a spiritual force so immense and permanent, capable of working the mightiest changes while itself incapable of change? The reasons are not apparent to the senses. A sensuous description of Christ's death may fill us with horror, or touch us with pity, but cannot subdue us to reverence or win us to love. There have been thousands of deaths more tragic and terrible, more ostensibly heroic, with more immediate and evident and calculable results. Nor can the dogmatic meaning

attributed to his death explain its unique preëminence in place and power. The very point is, why it only, of all the deaths man has suffered, came to have this dogmatic meaning, to be so construed and interpreted? Dogma did not create its preëminence; its preëminence created dogma. Christian doctrine is but a witness to the infinite peculiarity which belongs to Christ's death. Centuries before Augustine and Anselm speculated the cross had proved itself to be the power and the wisdom of God; and their speculations were but attempts to find a theory that would explain the fact. Nor can the reason be found in the nation and descent of the Crucified. The Jews had, indeed, an ancient sacerdotal worship, a system of sacrifices extensive and minute; but the thing after idolatry they most abhorred was the association of the sacrificial idea with any human death. Into the heart of Judaism, pure and simple, the notions, so familiar to the apostles, which represented Christ as the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world, a propitiation for sin, dying for our sins, could never have entered. Then, too, as we have so distinctly seen, the affinities of Jesus were not with Jewish sacerdotalism. It crucified Him; He stood in absolute antagonism to it. The preëminence of the death is due to no secondary or accidental cause, but to the preëminence of the Person who died. It is only as the death is interpreted in its relation to Him and his history that its wonderful significance and charm for the world can be understood.

But is the significance attached to his death really due to Jesus? Was it not rather created by Paul and other and later Christian teachers?

We touch here one of the most interesting problems

in the history of New Testament thought. How was it that the apostles came to give such prominence to the death of Christ, to assign to it a place so cardinal, and to attribute to it so constitutive a significance? The Tübingen school used to argue: The primitive Christian creed was simply this, Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. In making this confession the first Christians did not renounce Judaism. They remained good Jews, distinguished from their brethren—all of whom held Messianic beliefs, many of whom believed particular persons to be the Messiah—only by their special faith, Jesus is our Christ. But this speciously conceals a radical difference. The predicative term may be in each case the same, but what it expresses is an absolute antithesis. Jesus is *not* the Jewish Messiah—is in character, mission, fate the exact opposite. He is no prince, no victor in the sense known to Judaism, no militant incorporation of its most violent antipathies. He is meek and lowly in heart, gentle to the alien, tender to the sinner, friendly to the publican, a patient sufferer who, disbelieved by the Pharisees and priests, is crucified by the Gentiles, and pitied for his pains and weakness by the Gentile who crucifies Him. Now there were no notions so radically incompatible with the Messiah of Judaism, and the development and interpretation they at once received made them more incompatible still. What has to be determined, then, is how this set of new and alien notions came to be associated with the idea of the Christ in order that Christhood might be attributed to Jesus? Pfleiderer<sup>1</sup> has ingeniously attempted to explain this by tracing the psychological genesis of the Pauline theology.

<sup>1</sup> *Paulinismus*, pp. 1 ff.

Paul comes to believe in the resurrection of Jesus ; that changes his whole mental attitude and outlook. One who has risen from the dead and now lives and reigns must be the Messiah. It was a more wonderful thing to die and to rise than never to die at all. The death as the condition of the resurrection was glorified by it, became with all its passion and pain necessary to it, and therefore to the full and perfect Messiahship. The moment this position was reached Old Testament prophecy came to help out the Apostle's thought. He recalled the idea of the suffering servant of God, despised and forsaken of the people, bearing their sins, carrying their sorrows, for their sakes stricken, smitten, and afflicted, yet by his very patience and self-sacrifice redeeming Israel and working out for him a nobler and holier being. The attributes and achievements of this servant Paul transferred to Jesus, and so gave a new significance to his passion and death, and planted Him in a relation to Old Testament prophecy that made Him at once its fulfilment and Messiah.

Now, all this is clever, ingenious, subtle ; indeed, exceedingly so ; but—it is not historical. Grant that it explains the genesis of the Pauline theology, what then ? Greater things are left unexplained, and things that are necessary to explain it. There is the power of this ingeniously analyzed and derived doctrine over the hearts and minds of men, Gentiles as well as Jews. It did not strike them as a dogma strongly marked by the idiosyncrasies of an intensely Hebraistic nature, working with scholastic tools and combining old convictions with a new belief ; but it came to them as a revelation of God. It was not the theology of Paul that converted men and created Churches, but the doctrine of the



cross common to him and the other Christian preachers. The speech to Peter at Antioch,<sup>1</sup> the confession in the crucial passage in the First Epistle to Corinthians,<sup>2</sup> that by Apollos as well as by himself men had been persuaded to believe, proves that Paul on this point recognized their essential agreement. Then Pfeleiderer's evolutionary theory might shew how well adapted Paul's theology was to conciliate the Jew; but it fails to shew how, with all its adaptation to the Jew, it was so deeply offensive to him, and how, in spite of its twofold root of rabbinical scholasticism and prophetic idealism, it was so splendidly real and potent to the Greek. This ingenious theory but helps to throw us the more strongly back on the reality. The passion and death of Christ do not owe their significance to Paul, but to Christ. The Apostle sought to explain a belief he found in possession, but the belief was created by the Person in whom he believed. The ideas as to the death of Christ current in the primitive Church were Christ's ideas. He is here the creative Presence; his Person dignifies the death; his words interpret it.

It is necessary, then, to reach Christ's own idea of his death and what it was to be, and then see how He realized it. He early anticipated his death, knew that without it He could not be faithful to Himself and his mission. Its scene was to be Jerusalem, its agents "the chief priests."<sup>3</sup> Its place and meaning in his history were typified to the imagination of the Evangelists by the Transfiguration.<sup>4</sup> Just about the time when He began to speak of it openly, Moses and Elias, the founder and reformer of Israel, the representatives

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 14 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. iii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xvi. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xvii. 1-13; Mark ix. 2-7; Luke ix. 28-35.

of the Law and the Prophets, appeared to Him. "The decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" they approved; their approval was ratified by Heaven and symbolized by the glory which changed "the fashion of his countenance" and made his "raiment white and glistening." The idea so expressed is evident: the death is to perfect his work and make it the fulfilment alike of Law and Prophecy in Israel; though it may seem to shame, yet it is to exalt and transfigure Him; though it may be worked by human hate, yet it pleases and glorifies God. And these ideas penetrate all Christ's references to it. He is the gift of God, sent into the world that the world through Him might be saved.<sup>1</sup> He is the Good Shepherd who giveth his life for his sheep.<sup>2</sup> His death is to be so rich in Divine meaning and power as to draw all men unto Him. And these thoughts possess Him the more the nearer He comes to death. They receive fullest expression in the words that institute the Supper, in the Supper He institutes. Its symbols perpetuate the mind of One who believed that He died for man, shed his "blood for many for the remission of sins."<sup>3</sup>

But now we must see how Christ realized his own idea of what his death was to be. In order to this we must study Him in the article of death. And, happily, in it He stands, as it were, clear in the sunlight. It is not here as in the trial, where the shadow cast of man almost hides Him from our view, save when by the graphic hand of John He is drawn forth from the shade and set living and articulate before our eyes. But now in death and on the cross He fills the eye and prospect of the soul, the shadow of man only helping the better

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 16, 17.    <sup>2</sup> Ibid. xi. 11.    <sup>3</sup> See THE EXPOSITOR, vol. x. pp. 49-51.

to shew Him clothed with a light which makes the very place of his feet glorious. In those last hours how dignified his silence, how Divine his speech, how complete his self-sufficiency! Round Him there is fretful noise, in Him there is majestic calm; about Him violence, within peace. In his last extremity, when man's faith in Him has perished, He knows Himself, and dies, while He seems to men the vanquished, the conscious Victor of the world.

In every moment of the Passion Jesus stands before us as the calm self-conscious Christ. He knows Himself, and no event can unsettle his knowledge or disturb his spirit. The hour of greatest prostration is the hour of supreme solitude; where He was most alone there He felt most awed by the magnitude of his mission and the issues it involved. But man's action, however fierce and fatal, failed to touch the quietness and the assurance which possessed his soul. The priests and the people, Herod and Pilate, were all depraved by the trial; no one of them was after it as good as he had been before. Successful crime, disguised in legal or patriotic and pious forms, is more injurious to the moral nature than crime ineffectual and confessed. Judas was happier in his death than Caiaphas or Pilate in his life. The priest would henceforth be more a man of subtlety and craft, the readier to use his sacred office for selfish and immoral ends. The governor would be a man less upright before his own conscience, fallen deeply in his own regard, less careful of justice, more respectful to astute strength, more fearful of the intrigue that could create a tumult, and might work him grief. But the trial had not broken Christ's spirit or lowered his judgment of

Himself, had only made Him the more clearly and consciously the Messiah. The mockery, the scourging, the presentation to the people, did not make Him in his own eyes any the less the Christ. We feel the almost infinite impertinence in Pilate daring to pity and patronize and, in his obstinately vacillating way, seek to save Jesus; but He was too lofty to feel the impertinence, was too surely the King to feel as if anything could deny or destroy his kingdom.

And this serene consciousness of his Divine dignity and mission He carries with Him to the cross. He does not go to it as one condemned, or as one who feels evil mightier than good. He is not despondent and reproachful like conscious virtue driven vanquished before victorious vice. Luke enables us to see Him as He emerges from the trial on his way with the cross to the crucifixion.<sup>1</sup> The men around Him are brutal enough, but the women leave Him not unpitied. The once loved but now forsaken, round whose name so many hopes had gathered, of whose deeds so many praises had been spoken, they cannot now dislike or despise. The contrast of his present misery with his past fame only the more appeals to their imaginative sympathies, and, womanlike, it is the mother they pity even more than the Son. But an object of pity He cannot allow Himself to become. His lot is not one to be bewailed or lamented—theirs is who are working his death. There is nothing pitiful in his sufferings as He bears them, though much to pity in those by whom they have been inflicted. The standpoint is not subjective or egoistic, but objective and universal. He does not need compassion, but is able to give it.

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 26-31.

Suffering can be to Him no ultimate evil, is rather the condition of perfect obedience and perfect power. But to the men that work it it must bring ill. The last calamity to the doer of a wrong is complete success in doing it, for then it becomes a challenge the Righteousness that rules the world cannot allow to go unaccepted. And retribution cannot always touch the guilty and spare the innocent. The guilty so contain the innocent, so act and speak for them, that they become, as it were, incorporated, participators in the crime and in its fruits. All this is most apparent to the mind of Christ. There has been a national sin, which must have national consequences, and the calamities which come of criminal folly shew no mercy to those who have been neither criminal nor foolish. And the heart of Christ is touched not at the thought of Himself, his wrongs, and his sufferings, but at the thought of the innocent who are to suffer with and through the guilty. "Daughters of Jerusalem," He says, "weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." And then, in language which recalls his later and prophetic discourses, He tells what the end is to be. Two pictures stand before his soul, one grimly real, the other finely ideal. He sees a besieged city, gaunt famine and hungry pestilence in its homes, fierce and fanatical factions in its councils, impotence in its hands and on its ramparts; while despair has turned the mother's love to misery, and made the barren seem blessed, and the warrior's courage to the despondency that covets death to escape defeat. This is the picture of what is to be; the answer to the cry, "His blood be on us and on our children."<sup>1</sup> Then beyond it He

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvii. 25.

sees another vision—two trees, one of ancient growth, immense, many-branched, umbrageous, but utterly dry and decayed, its vitality spent, its glory almost gone; the other, green, young, sapful, a tree that has sprung from the roots and grown under the shadow of the older and vaster. Wisdom had said, "Spare the green; let the withered perish that the vigorous may live." But craft and passion struck down the green that it might underprop the dry; yet all in vain. Trees live not by being propped or girded, but by their own vital and inherent energies. The fate of the green tree will only make the fall of the dry more utter and inevitable. Here is the ideal picture. Christ is the green tree, Judaism is the dry. He must be sacrificed that it may be saved. But Nature laughs at the cunning of man; in her realm there is only room for the living; and he who seeks by destroying the living to preserve the dead will find that Nature disdains his sacrifice, and, in her own beneficently inflexible way, reserves what ought to live, removes what must die.

Jesus, then, even while He bears the cross, knows Himself to be a source, not an object of pity; able to compassionate, not fit to be compassionated. The evil that was being worked in selfish fear was an evil to its workers, not to Him. In the bosom of their future there was lying the most calamitous retribution; in his the most enduring glory and power. The dry tree which was to be burned with fire unquenchable needed pity; the green tree, which no flames of their kindling could consume, needed it not. And this consciousness waxed rather than waned under the experience of the cross. It was a kindly Jewish custom, unknown to the harsher Romans, to mitigate the

agonies of crucifixion by giving a stupefying drink to the condemned. But when, in conformity with the custom, drink was offered to Jesus, He refused it.<sup>1</sup> His death was of too universal significance to be suffered in stupor. He must know both dying and death; conquer not by drowned senses but by victorious spirit. And the spirit stands before us incorporated, as it were, in its own words. Jesus uttered seven sayings on the cross—three in the earlier stages, while the tide of life was still strong; four in the later, while life was painfully ebbing away. The first concern his relations to the men and the world He is leaving, the second concern his relations to God and the world He was entering. Together they shew us how Christ in this supreme moment was related to God and man.

The three sayings of the earlier period form a beautiful unity, shewing Christ first in his universal, next in his particular relations to the guilty, and then in his personal relation to the true and saintly. The first saying is like the tender echo or Amen to the reply to the weeping women, is the perfect expression of compassion for the guilty and pity for the innocent who were to suffer after and for them. In his supreme hour self, in a sense, ceased to be, and Christ was sublimed into universal love. He had no tear for his own sorrows, no lament for Himself as forsaken, crucified, dying. His grief was for those wicked enough to crucify the Sinless, to sin against the light. Before Him lay the city, white, beautiful, vocal with religious songs, busy with festive rites and preparations for solemn sacrifice, but its heart defiled with blood, a bond

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvii. 34; Mark xv. 23.

of invisible darkness lying across its radiant sunlight. Round Him were the priests and scribes and people untouched by pity, spiteful while their noble enemy was in the very article of death, crying at Him in mockery, "He saved others, himself he cannot save." "If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him."<sup>1</sup> And their blindness, their guilt, their insensibility even to sensuous pity, filled his soul with a compassion that could only struggle to his lips in the cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>2</sup> The flight from man to God, the sense of the Divine paternal presence amid the desertion of man, is most beautiful. The prayer, "forgive them," is the finest blossom of his own teaching, what makes forgiveness of enemies a reality to all time and a possibility for every man. It was the creation of a new thing in the world—love deeply wronged daring to love, unashamed, in the face of the enormity that wronged it; and the new was to be a creative thing, making the apotheosis of revenge for ever impossible. But the miracle of tenderness is the reason—"they know not what they do." Passion is blind, hate sees only the way to gratification, not whither it tends or what it means. Christ does not extenuate the ignorance, but He allows the ignorance to lighten the sin. It does not cease to be a sin because done in ignorance—the very ignorance is sin—but Christ wishes, as it were, that everything personal to Himself should perish from the Divine view of their act. The prayer may be said to embody the feeling of God as He looks down upon man, sinning in fancied strength, heedless that Omnipotence lives, Omniscience

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvii. 42.<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiii. 34.



watches, and Righteousness rules, just as in the crowd about the cross we see man, untouched by the wondrous Divine pity, going on his mocking way, vengeful to the bitter end.

The saying that expresses his particular relation to the guilty is also peculiar to Luke.<sup>1</sup> The priests, no doubt, thought it a happy stroke of policy to place Jesus between the two thieves. Association in death was the nearest thing they could get to association in guilt. It made it impossible to deny that He had died the death of the guilty with the guilty. The men who had loved Him could not recall his life without also recalling his death; but the one was so steeped in horror that they would be willing, in order to escape it, to forget the other. The death on the cross and between the thieves was sure to break the beautiful image of his life, and make it a thing too hideous to be loved, too horrible for memory. But Mephistopheles is most foolish when most cunning; his subtlest are his least successful deeds. The transfiguring force in Christ compelled their wicked design to speak his praise. Their fine combination became an acted parable, a living symbol of Christ's action in time. The inmost nature of the men beside him blossomed at his touch. The one thief was possessed by the spirit of the multitude, the other was penetrated by the spirit of Christ. The first mocked with the mockers, felt no sanctity in death, no awe in its presence, no evil in sin, dared, though stained with many a crime, to associate himself with the Stainless, and demand with cool profanity, "Save thyself and us." The second, like one who sits in the shadow of eternity and gropes that he may touch the hand of

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 32, 33, 39-43.

God, feels that men who are "in the same condemnation" ought to be sacred to each other, knows himself to be justly, while Jesus is unjustly, condemned, believes that one who is condemned for his very goodness, and is so good as to be gracious to the men who condemn Him, must be indeed the Christ, the very gentleness of God come to live and suffer in soft strength among men. And so he prays Jesus to remember him when He comes in his kingdom, recognizing the Messiah in the very article of death. The answer is extraordinary—"To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise." Christ is serenely conscious of his dignity. The cross has not shamed Him into silence as to his claims. He knows Himself to be the Son of God, that He has paradise before Him, that He has the right and the might to save. Perhaps in no other saying does Jesus so strongly witness to Himself as the Christ. In beautiful silence He hears the railer, leaving him to be reproved by the echo of his own words; in beautiful speech He answers the prayer of the penitent, and promises more than is asked. Was the promise but an empty word? The heart of the ages has confessed, if Jesus was ever real it was now. He who after such a life could so speak in the face of death to the dying must hold the keys of paradise; and if He could open it then, what must He be able to do now?

But more than the guilty demanded his care. At the foot of the cross stood a group of women, in its heart the mother of the Crucified, by her side the disciple Jesus loved. The tearful face of the mother touched her Son, and called up perhaps visions of childhood, memories of the happy home at Nazareth, where care dwelt not, and love brooded, and the shadow

of the cross was too distant to dash the sunlight that streamed over all. But the visions of the past died before the sight of the present. Before his mother's agony He forgot his own. The look of desolate and ravished love, of the despair that had quenched her once splendid hopes, of horror at the loneliness that was creeping into and poisoning her very life, pierced Him to the heart. He seemed to feel what it was to a mother so to lose such a Son; and so with richest tenderness He gave her one she could love for his sake, who himself would be comforted in loving the mother of the Master he loved. "Woman, behold thy son!" was his word to Mary; "Son, behold thy mother!" his charge to John. The world has loved Him the more for his filial love, and feels maternity the holier for his dutiful and beautiful Sonship.

But now we must consider the four sayings of the later period of the agony, when the tide of life was painfully ebbing. They fall into two pairs. Of the first pair, the one expresses his physical distress, the other his spiritual desolation. The cry of physical distress is, "I thirst;"<sup>1</sup> the cry of spiritual is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The first is significant of the coming end, and stands fitly enough in the Fourth Gospel, where the very history is an allegory and each event the symbol of a sacred truth. To the mind of John Christ is the Paschal Lamb; at his cry the men about Him who have prepared Him for the sacrifice now make ready for the feast. Their acts are a mockery of the real, a perversion of the true. He thirsts for the consummation,

<sup>1</sup> John xix. 28.

and in derision they prepare Him for the end. But the cry of spiritual desolation is of immenser meaning and must be understood if Christ in his death is to be known. Does it mean that at this tremendous moment the Father hid his face from the Son, turning away in wrath from Him as the bearer of human sin? Does it mean that Jesus was in his darkest hour absolutely forsaken of the Father, left, when his need was sorest, without the light and help of the Divine Presence? Looked at from the standpoint of system, these positions may be affirmed; looked at from the standpoint of spirit, there is perhaps no position more deeply offensive to the moral sense. It introduces the profoundest unreality into the relations of the Father and the Son, and empties the most tragic event of time of all its tragic significance. Here there can have been no seeming, and the cry must be interpreted in the light of principles valid and universal. Here, then, two points must be noted:—

1. The relation of the Father to the mission of the Son. He sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. The Son came to do the Father's will, made obedience to it his delight. He did ever the things that pleased God, and God was ever pleased in Him. But if the death was necessary to the work, if the very obedience culminated in the cross, how could it be that the Father would then desert the Son, or turn from Him as from an object of wrath? The hour of death was the moment of supreme obedience; how then could the Love obeyed forsake the Love obedient? If there was reality in the relations of Father and Son, if the work the one did the other approved, then it was simply impossible that He who is faithful to his love and his promise

could have forsaken the One who most trusted Him in life and trusted Him most of all in death.

2. The person of the Son in relation to the Father. Jesus Christ was a being in whom man could find no sin and God only holiness. His joy in God was perfect. In Him the union of the Divine and human was absolutely realized. He was in the Father, and the Father in Him. He had a will, but the will was not his own. His words and works were not his, but his Father's who had sent Him. The union of his being and will, heart and conscience, with God's was so complete as to become almost identity. He lived and He died to finish the work the Father had given Him to do.

Now the cry of desertion must be interpreted in the light of these two principles. It cannot stand in conflict with either. It is the solitary cry with despair in it that ever proceeded from the lips of Christ; but the despair was the child of human weakness, not of Divine conduct. He went into his sorrow deserted of man, yet upheld of God, certain that He was not alone, strong in the strength of the Unseen Hand.<sup>1</sup> He went out of his suffering into the silence and peace of the Eternal, certain that the Father waited to receive his forsaken and crucified Son.<sup>2</sup> And the cry that stands between these filial confessions describes no act of God, but a real and sad human experience which only the more shewed Jesus to be the Brother of man while the Son of God.

But we must now seek to understand the experience which prompted the cry. Here, then, it is necessary to note that Christ, while a supernatural person,

<sup>1</sup> John xvi. 32.

Luke xxiii. 46.

accomplished his work under natural conditions. His power existed and was used, not for Himself, but for others, not for personal, but for universal ends. His Divine might helped man, did not help his own weakness or relieve his own hunger. The paralyzed under his touch stood up strong and supple, but He Himself had to rest by a wayside well and ask water to quench his thirst. The sick unto death came back at his bidding, but though He had power over his own life, He never used it to escape the doom that compels every child of Adam to go down into the silence and darkness of the grave. He is the splendid and solitary example of One who was by nature and for others more than man, but by choice and for Himself man only. And being man in all things, born into our common lot, unaided in his work, in his conflict with evil and against sin, by any supernatural energies or diviner agencies than are common to man, He tasted in the exceeding weakness of man the exceeding terror and gloom and strength of death. And yet He could not feel in the jaws of death like one of its common victims; He was more to it, it was more to Him. His consciousness was vaster than ours, his relations with man as with God infinitely closer and more complex. He came to death as incarnate humanity, our race personified, the second Head, the type and germ of a new and spiritual mankind. And so the issues in his dying, as in his living, were immenser than in man's. The father is a man, but also a father, bears in him the happiness, well-being, comfort of a loved home, and death to him is painful not for what it is, but for what it brings to them who love and are about to lose. The general is a man, but also a general; and if he falls wounded in the

battle, he fears death less for his own sake than his army's, the men who in losing him may lose everything. So Jesus dies as the Man and as the Christ; and the cry of desertion comes from Him as the Man, but the the Man dying as the Christ.

In order to understand why it was so two points must be considered; first, the universal experience in death, and next, the particular circumstances of Christ. As to the first, He was experiencing at this moment what man in all his multitudinous generations had experienced, or was to experience, in the hour and article of death. What death is to man, to human nature as such, it then was to Christ. He tasted it to the uttermost—its darkness, its loss to the living, its dread to the dying, its mockery of hope, its cruelty to love, its fateful defeat of promise, the stern and merciless foot with which it walks over and tramples down the fondest dreams and affections of the heart. It is hardly in human nature to love God in death, for death seems the negation of God. In dying time is lost, eternity is not yet won, the known is fading, the unknown has still to shew its unfamiliar face, so as to let it be seen, all old experiences are perishing, no new experiences are formed. And so the supports of faith have fallen utterly from the spirit, and it feels for the moment absolutely alone. It is a moment when neither time nor eternity is to the spirit, and God has ceased to be. And this moment, inevitable to human nature, Christ realized as Man—as, in a sense, collective Humanity—and out of its absolute loneliness, out of its dense gloom, came the despairing cry, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The experience so expressed completed, as it were, his identification with man. Our

nature's last and utmost misery was tasted, and the Captain of our salvation died perfected through suffering.

As to the particular circumstances of Christ's death, it is to be noted how they intensify the common human experience as realized in Him. These were creative of the sorrow that was realest suffering. The wooden cross of Calvary was not the cross of Christ, but what it symbolized, the contradiction of sinners, the bitterness and evil of sin. In physical suffering as such there is no intrinsic good, but much actual evil. It does not by itself tend to elevate and sanctify the mind, but rather to harden and deprave. In plague-stricken cities the worst passions are often developed: Men grow indifferent to life, indifferent to death, coarse, even brutish, in thought and feeling, speech and action. If a distinguished sufferer is also a distinguished saint, it is not because of the suffering, but because of a Holy Presence in the soul transmuting the base metal of earth into the pure gold of heaven. Now the grand thing about Christ is not his physical pain, but his spiritual sorrow. And this sorrow is due to sin. The guilty may feel its legal penalties, but the guiltless are touched and pierced by its moral results. The devil's sin is a greater sorrow to God than to the devil; and the crime of the crucifiers is a pain to Christ infinitely beyond what retribution can ever make it to them. He had loved, still loved, them, yet their only response is the cross, with all its mockery and hate. And his sorrow for their sin is mightiest as he goes down into death. For the moment his experience is double; coincident with his sense of being forsaken is his sense of the power of sin. Loss of God is a transcendent evil; loss of being were better. A saintly



spirit would prefer annihilation to exclusion from the vision of the Divine face. But to feel as if the soul had lost hold of God just as the life was being quenched by victorious sin, may well indeed seem the last and worst agony. And this was Christ's—a moment long perhaps, yet intense as eternity, expressed in the cry that has so long thrilled with awe the pulses of the world, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

But the darkness soon passed. The Father heard and answered. Into the consciousness of the Saviour a Presence came that changed his consciousness of desertion and loss into one of victory and peace. And this consciousness lives in the sayings that are his last. One breathes the serenest resignation, the most holy and beautiful trust, like the smile that comes across the face of the dying in response to greetings not of this world—"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The other welcomes the end, celebrates the triumph, proclaims that the death accomplished is the work done—"It is finished." In the first He confesses that God has not forsaken Him, that the eternal hands are round his spirit and the eternal face brooding over his uplifted soul; in the second He declares that sin is not victorious, that He is, that its evil has but helped the completion of his work. And fitly, with the double testimony, "He bows his head and gives up the ghost." He dies on the cross, but not by it. Men marvel that his struggle is so soon over; pierce his side, and shew to the reverence and love of all ages that—He died of a broken heart. And they love Him, and are constrained by his love to live not unto themselves, but unto "Him who died for them and rose again."