

*SCRIPTURE STUDIES OF THE HEAVENLY
STATE.*

IV. THE NATURE OF THE HEAVENLY BLESSEDNESS.

(Matthew xxv. 21.)

THE idea of personal joy is essential to the very existence of religion. No form of worship has ever found place in the world which has not contained this element at the root of it. There are modes of veneration, indeed, which seem to bring nothing but pain to their votaries, and which appear to have been selected chiefly on account of their pain. But, in these cases, the pain itself has been contemplated as the avenue to a higher joy. The Brahman seeks a life of asceticism, but he does so in order that he may crucify the old life and enter into the new. The Buddhist tells men to despise existence itself, but that is because to him existence is a pain; death is his joy. No man ever chose a religion whose ultimate end was what he conceived to be misery. Men have sought death, like the early martyrs, but it was for the sake of life eternal. Men have despised life eternal, like the ancient Buddhists, but it was for the sake of death—their highest ideal of peace. In one form or other, all religions have in their future the advent of a golden day. The Confucian contemplates the restoration of the old kingdom in all its primeval glory. The Brahman looks for an age which shall destroy the present things and construct the world anew. The Parsee dreams of a kingdom of light which shall disperse the power of darkness. The Platonist conjured up the hope of a golden republic in which the best men would come to the front, and the ruling power would be virtue. The Jew, through all the chequered and devious path of his history, never lost hold of that unbroken thread which bound his paradise in the past to a paradise in the future; never

ceased to hope for the day when his country would bask in the sunshine of the infallible Prophet, the spotless Priest, and the perfect King. All religions have a goal of joy.

It may be thought, it has been thought, that the religion of Christ should have been an exception to the rule. The idea of personal joy as a motive for human action seems to involve the very essence of selfishness. That a religion whose symbol is a cross, that a faith whose foundation is the self-sacrificing love of Christ, should allow men to join its standard with a view to the inheritance of a future reward, is a problem which has often perplexed the moralist, and often furnished a weapon to the adversary. The Deist of last century not seldom pointed to the rewards of Christianity as a hindrance to the development of conscience; and contended that the immortality of the Bible made virtue valuable only for the sake of its recompense. The school of Port Royal, animated by an opposite and a highly Christian spirit, yet held itself bound to discourage in its followers any outlook towards the visible reward; the creed of Fenelon, of Madame Guyon, of the best and most devoted of the Sons of the Oratory, was one which set itself in sharp antagonism to the association of religion with ideas of personal advantage. And yet it is quite impossible to deny that the Bible does sanction an appeal to such motives. It is not the Old Testament alone which points to the hope of a recompense. Can we forget that on the very threshold of the Christian morality there are written *seven* inscriptions all inviting us to enter in order that, by entering in, we may find a rich reward? Can we forget that the writer to the Hebrews is, if possible, more explicit still, and tells us in so many words that one great element in the faith of Moses was the fact that, in preferring the reproach of Christ to the treasures of Egypt, "*he had respect to the recompense of the reward?*" Can we forget, in fine, that our Lord Himself, in exhorting his disciples to a

life of holiness, does not shrink from the appeal: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The entire structure of the New Testament morality is based upon the fact that virtue has a reward.

Now, the question is simply this: "Is Christian morality vitiated by such a basis? Does the fact that a man in any moral action is influenced by the hope of a reward detract from the value of the moral action itself?" Our answer to that question must depend on our answer to another: What is the nature of the reward which he contemplates? If before performing a good deed he should say to himself, "If I do this, I shall win respect," he is in measure at least influenced by a motive outside the morality of the action; there is an element of self-seeking in the deed, and to that extent it falls short of the highest goal. But if he should say to himself, "If I succeed in performing this good deed, it will thereby become easier for me to perform other good deeds," who does not see that the case is entirely altered? The man is no longer seeking a reward outside the action, but only power to *repeat* the action. He is in search of a spiritual enlargement, of an ability to do good more abundantly, of an increase of virtue *through* virtue. To desire such a reward as this is not only consistent with morality; it is of the very essence of morality; it is the love of virtue itself. The man who does not seek this reward has not begun to learn even the alphabet of ethics. There is a hunger and a thirst which, according to the highest moral authority, cannot be separated from morals—that hunger and thirst after righteousness which *shall* be filled. This is the profit which a man gains for his soul.

What, then, is the distinctive joy of the Christian heaven? Observe, we say the *distinctive* joy. There is a joy in Christianity which is not distinctive of Christianity, but which belongs to it in common with other faiths. We must never forget that the religion of Christ has taken up

the religion of nature ; and that, therefore, in the heaven of the Christian there are found purely natural joys. The Divine Spirit of Christianity does not profess to destroy the natural man, but to build upon him. The result is that, in the building of God not made with hands, there is a place prepared even for the secular life of man. It does not, therefore, surprise us that, in the descriptions of the celestial city, we have pictures which speak to a sense of earthly comfort. That there shall be no more pain, no more death, no more sea ; that men shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; that God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes, and that henceforth sorrow and sighing shall cease—all this is consistent with a faith which has adapted itself to the physical needs of man. That the city should have golden streets and pearly gates, and rivers clear as crystal and trees that yield manifold fruits ; that it should be so inherently beautiful as to have no need of the sun by day nor of the moon by night ; this too is consistent with a faith which has entered into union with man's sense of beauty. Yet it is not too much to say that none of these things either represents or embodies the distinctive joy of Christianity. They are necessary accessories to the joy, things without which it would not be possible ; but they are not the joy itself. They are but the pictures that dispel the fears of nature ; they are not the sources of hope to the life of grace. It is not of these our Lord said, "Great is your reward." None of these things could ever be the reward of goodness as such. To be clothed in purple and fine linen, and to fare sumptuously every day, may be a legitimate reward of toil ; but it is not necessarily the reward of *honest* toil. It is the legitimate result of diligence in business, apart altogether from the justice or injustice of that business. It is that which is gained by the hand, and therefore, it can only be regarded as the reward of the hand ; the act is outward, therefore the recompense must

be material. But what shall be the recompense of an inward state of mind? What shall be the recompense of the spirit of self-sacrifice, the spirit of love, the spirit of purity? Would a man, with the germ of such qualities in his soul, deem himself recompensed by the vision of a crystal river or the sight of a beautiful tree? Would not this be to reverse the Pauline utterance, and say, "He that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap corruption." By "corruption" St. Paul does not mean anything sinful; he only means that which is material, that which is liable to death. He would never dream of quarrelling with that law by which the flesh reaps corruption, in other words, the law by which material work gets a material reward; he would say it was quite right that the builder of a house should be paid his wages in current coin. Nor would he think it a strange thing if a man of holy life should be put in a position of affluence and power, made a possessor of corruptible things; the material sun rises on the good as well as on the evil. But what St. Paul would protest against is the doctrine that the outward affluence is the harvest of holiness; he says that, in that case, the thing reaped would be less than the thing sown.

If we call a man a saint for rejoicing in the hope of heaven, it can only be on the ground that heaven opens up the prospect of a distinctively saintly joy. There are men and women in this world whose hope in another world is something like this: "We have toil here, we shall have rest yonder; we have care here, we shall have freedom yonder; we walk on foot here, we shall have chariots and horses yonder." We do not for a moment say that there is anything morally wrong in cherishing such an expectation; our criticism rather is that there is nothing moral about it, nothing which can be said to be either right or wrong. We simply ask, What has such a hope to do with saintship? In what respect is a man who believes in such

a heaven better than the man who has no belief on the subject at all? We can very well see how he is happier, but in what sense is he better? We presume it is just as legitimate to desire houses and lands in heaven as it is to desire houses and lands on earth; what we contend is that the two acts are precisely of the same nature. What is the difference between the desire of a house in the sky, and the desire of a house on the ground? The difference is one of physical altitude and nothing more. They are both secular acts, breaking no moral law, yet involving no moral virtue. But if any kind of hope can give a man the right to the name of saint, it must be a hope which looks forward to the joy of being a saint, a joy which is kindled by the promise of power to diffuse joy. To set our affections on the things above would be of no value at all if the word "above" only meant physically uplifted. There must be something about the joy of heaven which makes it saintly in a man to wish for it.

And if we turn to the passage to which we have referred at the head of this article, we shall find that the distinctive character of the heavenly joy is emphasized in a very striking way. The words to which we specially refer are these: "Enter thou into *the joy of thy Lord.*" The joy reserved for the good and faithful servant is said to be precisely that which animated the soul of the Divine Master. What, then, was the joy of Christ?

It seems to us that there are two very prevalent and very glaring misconceptions regarding the source of our Lord's joy. To one class of minds the joy of Christ was a prospective one. When He says, "My peace I give unto you;" when He exclaims, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy may remain in you;" when He cries out, "Father, I will that these may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory"—in these utterances, and such as these, they see only the prophecy of a majestic

resurrection and a glorious second advent. They hear *Him* saying, as they hear their own hearts saying, "I weep now, but I shall soon laugh; the cross is worth bearing for the sake of the crown." There is a second class, a little more spiritual, who yet, though from an opposite point of approach, tend to a similar error. They admit that the joy of Christ was not merely a future joy. They admit that it formed a constituent element in the earthly life of the Master. But they remind us that in the earthly life of the Master there were two natures—one human, one divine. They tell us that these natures were marked off from one another as two pieces of ground are marked off from one another. That which is said of the one cannot be said of the other; they contain different products, they nourish different soils. In his human nature Christ was a great sufferer; He bore the cross of humanity, He wept, He toiled, He died. But in his Divine nature He was incapable of all this; here He was the Christ indeed, the true Messiah, wielding the rod of empire. The side of his being which touched humanity might be a vale of tears; it was contiguous to the Bethanies and the Nains of this life, and therefore it was subject to sorrow. But the side of his being which touched Divinity was very differently situated; it was up on the mountains where no cry could pain it, and where no cross could reach it; *this* was the scene of the Son of Man's joy. It was into this secret place that He retired from the burden and heat of the day. It was into this quiet pavilion that He withdrew Himself when the conflict grew too fierce; and it was its power to make Him forget that gave Him his peace. Curtained within the folds of the Divine pavilion, distanced by an infinitude of being from the life of humanity, He became oblivious of the human cross and the dolorous way, and entered his heavenly joy.

For our part we have no hesitation in saying that if

this view of Christ's person be the true one, we must worship in Him that which is human and not that which is divine. But *is* this view of Christ's person the true one? Does his divine nature stand to his human nature in the attitude of an unconcerned spectator? Is the joy of our Lord, as it is represented in our Gospels, a joy which consists in the experience, or in the prospect of liberation from, the cross of humanity? If we think so, let us turn to those remarkable words (Matthew xi. 28) in which He addresses the labouring and heavy-laden sons of men. What makes them well worthy of our study is the fact, that the comfort which our Lord seeks to impart is one which He professes to derive from his own experience. If we accept them as a genuine record of his experience, we are lifted at once beyond the reach of all argument. It is no longer a question on which commentators and interpreters are free to differ; it is no longer even a matter to be determined by the authority of inspired prophets or apostles. If it is Christ who speaks here, He has laid bare once for all the secret of his peace, the source of his abiding joy. He has told us in the plainest terms what it was that gave *Him* rest.

When He calls to his side the labouring and heavy-laden, it is to promise them his own rest, the rest which He Himself had found in conditions like their own. What, then does He say? Does He tell them that if they come to Him, He will free them from the yoke of toil and pain? On the contrary, He says: "Take this yoke, my yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." He refers them to his own experience as an index to the source of spiritual joy: "Learn of *Me*." He tells them that He Himself had entered into rest by following the very method which in their view was the negation of rest—by bearing the yoke. Not in the independence of his divine nature had his joy come; it had come in quite the opposite way—in the surrender of his

divinity to the purpose of his humanity. "I am meek and lowly in heart," are the words in which He expresses the secret of his peace. It is only a commentary on these words when, at a later date, and under the shadow of the heaviest and sharpest cross the world has ever seen, He asked that his joy might remain with them, and that his peace might abide with them. To the ear of the world it might have been, and doubtless was, a paradox. But it was no paradox in the life of Christ Himself. The joy of our Lord was *in* the Cross, not apart from the Cross. The rest of our Lord was in the labour and the pain He bore for us, and not in the escape from these. The joy of Christ was love, and love is the essence of sacrifice. The very act of loving is itself sacrificial. It is a species of death; it is the passage of a soul out of its own life into the life of another soul. The joy of love is always its self-surrender. It enters into its glory only through suffering.

And now, perhaps, we can understand why it is that the servant, more than all other men, should receive the invitation: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." It is because heaven is itself a life of service, and because the joy of heaven is the joy of service. The paradise which Christ opens to the eyes of his followers is no pagan Elysium, no motionless Nirvana, no Mohammedan scene of luxurious ease. It is a world of action, a world of what the selfish man would call *toil*. No selfish man could possibly be happy in it; the joy of the Lord would simply be his hell. It is this, and this alone, that makes the belief in heaven a virtue. Bad men may desire to go to an Elysium, or even to a Nirvana, but not to the heaven of Jesus. The heaven of Jesus is a place of self-surrender. Have we forgotten that in the view of the writer to the Hebrews, which is the view of the first age of Christian literature, the great High Priest has passed *into* the heavens? The power to be touched by the feeling of our infirmities is

claimed as that part of his human nature which He carries within the veil. In the deepest sense the Cross was and is his Crown. And as the sacrificial labour of love was and is his rest and joy, so also is it the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

It may be objected, But is there room in heaven for a labour of love? Can love *give* anything in a sphere where all things already abound? We can understand why men should be called upon to make sacrifices for the good of others in a world where every man is in want, but is not the Christian heaven a perfect state? Yes, but its perfection is the perfection of a corporate body, whose members are united by their mutual needs. It is the perfection of one spirit which realizes itself in a diversity of gifts. The mystical body of Christ must alike in heaven and on earth attain its divine harmony through the supply by one member of that which is lacking in another. This is St. Paul's distinct statement, and it is well that he has made it. The absence of this Pauline figure would have left us in a difficulty—a difficulty of a very painful, because of a moral, kind. We should have been forced to ask the question, Where is the room for love? The idea of a world in which every man is self-sufficient would have destroyed the moral sense, or, where that sense could not be destroyed, would have added a new horror to death. If no man in the world of the departed has aught to ask, and no man need to give, then we have no hesitation in saying that the present system, with all its terrible imperfections, is infinitely higher, grander, purer, than the state to which we are taught to lift our eyes. In all possible worlds the goal of a moral being must be not happiness, but blessedness; in all possible worlds the joy of a moral being must be the attainment of that goal. Happiness is the joy of receiving; blessedness is the joy of giving; and the joy of giving is the joy of our Lord.

That this is the true nature of the heavenly blessedness will, we think, be evident from the study of a single passage in which the entire teaching of Scripture on this subject seems to be concentrated, viz. Matthew xxv. 35, where the kingdom of the Son of Man is sharply distinguished from the kingdoms of this world. But what is the ground of the distinction? Two classes of human beings stand before the Son of Man, and He declares the one to be fit, and the other to be unfit for his kingdom. Why? Christ Himself tells us. "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was athirst, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in." To say that *these* are the men who are fit for heaven is to tell what heaven itself is. It was to say that heaven is a place of ministration. It was to say that the future life of the soul in its ideal perfection is to be a life of labour for the good of others, a life in which each is to communicate to others a share of the special gift which constitutes its individual glory, and to receive in return from all other souls those gifts which are lacking in itself. The life of blessedness to which Christ calls men is a life which can only be a boon to those who are already blessed—the blessed of his Father. Put into this higher world a man who never felt one desire to feed the hungry, or heal the sick, or clothe the naked, and he would find no blessedness in it, no happiness even; the kingdom would not be prepared for him.

To sum up. The personal life and personal teaching of the Son of Man give the first illustrations of a new order of joy—a joy distinctive of the Christian heaven. They tell us that in this higher world of being there is a law of moral gravitation by which a soul only finds its satisfaction in the attraction towards other souls. The question now remains, Is this law universal? Is the force of moral gravity in the kingdom of heaven like the force of physical gravity in the kingdom of earth—one that fills all spheres? We have

seen its operation in the highest sphere—in Christ, the firstfruits. We have seen that this law of moral gravitation, or love, constituted the joy of our Lord. Is that which is true of the Head true also of the members? Were we to descend the steps of the heavenly hierarchy, should we find at every stage of our descent the illustration of this same principle of self-sacrifice which we have found to be at the summit of the celestial ladder? To a consideration of this great question we shall return in our next article.

GEORGE MATHESON.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE APOCALYPSE.

HER WORK AND SUFFERINGS.

AMONG the points connected with the view of the Church of Christ presented to us in the Apocalypse, and distinct notions upon which are necessary to the interpretation of the book, is one which seems to us worthy of a larger measure of attention than it has yet received. We refer to the extent to which her work and sufferings are distributed over her members. It is clear that the Church as a whole is thought of as a working Church. This is emphatically brought out in the Epistles of Chapters ii. and iii. In each of these Epistles, with the exception of the second and third, the very first words of the address to the angel of the Church are: "I know thy *works*." It is true that the word "works," in conformity with the general use of it in the writings of St. John, is to be understood in a larger sense than that assigned to it in the English tongue; not merely active deeds but the whole character and life of the worker are denoted by the term. What