

OPTIMISM THE ATTITUDE OF FAITH.

PROFESSOR ORR opens his admirable Kerr Lectures with an exposition of the German idea, "Weltansicht," and pleads with much force for a Christian theory of the world. It is an interesting coincidence that the two eminent men who delivered the last Gifford Lectures have both addressed themselves to the same subject in their treatment of religion. The Master of Balliol, in his *Evolution of Religion*, and Professor Pfeiderer, in his *Philosophy of Religion*, have felt it necessary to embrace "Optimism and Pessimism." It is a sign of the times: it is also a reflection on the past. Philosophy for more than a century has realized the situation and has faced the problem of the Race with energy and tenacity. "What is the meaning of Life?" and "What is its drift?" this kind of question lay heavy on the mind of thinkers, and they did their best to answer it. Unfortunately the apparatus at their command was defective, for the philosophers were not able to avail themselves of the two chief factors in the situation—the revelation of the Will of God in sacred history and the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. They worked with the postulates of reason and the visible facts of history. Sometimes they came to a conclusion of hope, sometimes of despair: but they wrestled to the end with unshaken courage. Whether philosophy has failed or succeeded, it deserves the credit of an honourable attempt. Philosophy was not blind to the world-outlook, nor indifferent to the world-sorrow.

While the problem has taken shape within a century, it has existed since the beginning of ordered thought, and the pendulum has swung with regular beat between two extremes. The Homeric age with its frank joy in nature—the brightness of the sky and the glory of a man's strength—which is the fresh youth of the world—was followed by

the age of Æschylus with its sense of the tragedy of life—its shameful falls, its irresistible hindrances, its inevitable woes—which is the haggard manhood of the world. The splendid idealism of the greater Hebrew prophets who saw the dawn breaking afar on the Person of the Messiah gave way to the bitter cynicism of the author of Ecclesiastes. Judaism, if you accept the Prophets as its most characteristic interpreters, raised optimism to a creed and embodied it as a people. Buddhism, if you judge it by the example of its illustrious founder, disparaged even existence, and has clouded the horizon of the East. At the beginning of last century Leibnitz declared this the best of all possible worlds, and towards its close Rousseau preached a state of nature as Paradise, but after this century had been born in blood and fire, Schopenhauer considered that life was less than gain, and Leopardi hungered for death. In our own day we have heard Emerson lift up his voice in perpetual sunshine, and have gone with Carlyle when he walked in darkness and saw no light; and if Pippa sings,—

“God’s in His heaven,
All’s right with the world,”

Thompson has written the “City of Dreadful Night.” It is a long action and reaction—an antithesis that, outside Religion, has no synthesis, and one is driven to the conclusion that optimism and pessimism are only half truths. They are the offspring of moods of thought, and carried to an extreme include their own Nemesis. The shallow optimism of Leibnitz was the preparation for Schopenhauer, and the morbid pessimism of Hartmann is a prophecy of optimism.

The controversies of philosophy have often been meta-physical—in the regions beyond life, but no one can deny that this long strife has been practical—in the midst of life’s hurly-burly. No human being can escape it unless he be

dead to the passion of Humanity, or unless he have never realized the distinction between what is and what ought to be—the Real and the Ideal. The unspeakable agony of human life, which has been a long Gethsemane, and the unintelligible condition of the lower animals, which is a very carnival of slaughter, beat on the doors of reason and heart. It is not wonderful that some have tried to shelter themselves in a fool's Paradise from the groans they could not still, or that others feeling the hideous facts judged it better to die than to live,—that some have imagined no other God than a blind and cruel necessity, or that others have conceived two contending forces of good and evil. Nothing is wonderful in speculation or action save indifference to the enigma of life.

One recognises the limitations of Philosophy, and turns with expectation to Theology, which is fully equipped for the solution of this problem. Theology is the science of religion, whose work it is to collect and analyze the facts of the spiritual consciousness, and it is rich in treasures. It has, for instance, a doctrine of God, with profound conceptions of His righteousness and love, His wisdom and power. Correlate the character of God and the destiny of the Race. Should not this illuminate the darkness? Theology has a doctrine of the Incarnation, which implies the union of humanity with Himself in the Eternal Son of God. Is this high alliance to have no influence on the future of the Race? Theology has also a doctrine of the Holy Ghost, which asserts the Presence of God in this world and His continual operation. Will not the immanence of God carry great issues? From her standpoint Theology commands the situation in its length and breadth, and can speak with a solitary authority on the mystery of life and the goal of the Race. It suddenly occurs to one as amazing that Philosophy should undertake a subject for which Theology alone can be adequate.

It is much more amazing to discover that on this burning question Theology up till quite a recent date has been silent, and still delays her deliverance. Christian Theology has nothing to say to the Race; her concern has been wholly with the individual. The Race has been the subject of a huge catastrophe, and is left out of account. It is on the individual Theology expends all her labour, and her most elaborate doctrines are the explanation how he is to be saved from the general wreckage. Her outlook for him is an unqualified optimism so far as he is separated from his Race. He will be sustained and trained in this life as in a penitentiary, and then will begin to live in heaven—his real home. No single doctrine of Theology, with the doubtful exception of original sin, has, till recently, been applied to the Race. The realization of the Fatherhood, and the expansion of the Incarnation, are of yesterday. Theology will now explore the consequences of the Incarnation, and tell us soon what it means that the Son of God is also the Son of Man. Hitherto pessimism or optimism lay outside Theology because the Race had been abandoned.

When one consults the supreme Book of Religion, the result is at first a perplexity and then an encouragement. Any one might take a brief for the pessimism of the Bible, and prove his case to the hilt. The irresistible assaults of evil, the loathsome taint of sin, the inevitable entail of punishment, the wrong of the innocent, the martyrdom of the righteous, the slavery of labour, the futility of life, the moan of sorrow, are all in this Book, through which the current of human life rushes to the eternal sea. But if one should choose to take a brief for the optimism of the Bible, he could as easily win his case. The beauty of penitence, the passion for God, the struggle after righteousness, the joy of forgiveness, the attainments in character, the examples of patience, the victory over this world, invest

human life in the Bible with undying beauty. It is natural that both pessimists and optimists should claim the sanction of the Hebrew Scriptures: that any intelligent reader might lay down the book with the vision of the Race carrying its bitter cross along the Via Dolorosa or crowned with glory in the heavenly places. It seems a contradiction: it points to a solution. No one would dare to say that there is no ground for the alternation of moods of hope and despair that have lifted and cast down the seers of our Race. Within one connected and consistent literature both moods find their strongest and sanest utterance—a pessimism that, even in Ecclesiastes, still clings to God and morals, an optimism that is never shallow or material. Within the same book we look for the reconciliation of this long antinomy and the revelation of a deeper unity. We are not disappointed; it is found in Jesus.

No one has seriously denied that Jesus was an optimist, although it has been hinted that He was a dreamer, and no one can object to the optimism of Jesus, for it was in spite of circumstances. He was born of a peasant woman: in early age He worked for His bread: as a Prophet He depended on alms; during the great three years He knew not where to lay His head. But the bareness and hardship of His life never embittered His soul, neither do they stiffen Him into Stoicism. A sweet contentment possesses Him, and He lives as a child in His Father's house. This poorest of men warns His disciples against carking care and vain anxiety; He persuades them to a simple faith in the Divine Providence. They are to "take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow will take thought for the things of itself." "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." They are to "behold the fowls of the air," and to "take no thought for meat or drink," to "consider the lilies of the field," and to "take no thought for raiment." Jesus met the grinding poverty of a Galilean peasant's life with

one inexhaustible consolation,—“Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (St. Matt. vi.).

The severity of Jesus' circumstances was added to their poverty, since this Man, who lived only for others, was the victim of the most varied injury. He was exiled as soon as He was born; His townsmen would have killed Him; His brethren counted Him mad; the city of His mighty works did not believe; the multitudes He had helped forsook Him; the professional representatives of religion set themselves against Jesus, and pursued this holiest of men with ingenious slanders; He was a “Samaritan” (or heretic), and “had a devil”; He was a “gluttonous man and a winebibber,” and kept disreputable company; He was a blasphemer and deceiver (St. John viii. 48). A huge conspiracy encompassed Him, and laboured for His death; one of His intimates betrayed Him; the priests of God produced false witnesses against Him; the people He loved clamoured for His death; the Roman power He had respected denied Him justice; He was sent to the vilest death. During this long ordeal His serenity was never disturbed; He was never angry save with sin. He never lost control of Himself or became the slave of circumstances. His bequest to the disciples was Peace, and He spake of Joy in the Upper Room. He was so lifted above the turmoil of this life, that Pilate was amazed, and, amid the agony of the Cross, He prayed for His enemies. Nothing has so embittered men as utter poverty or social injustice. Jesus endured both, and maintained the radiant brightness of His soul. His was optimism set in the very environment of pessimism.

Jesus saw the Race into which He had been born in the light that illuminated His own life, and held out to them the Hope which sustained His own soul. Pagan poets had placed the age of gold in the far past; Hebrew prophets

referred it to the distant future. Jesus dared to say it might be now and here. It was the glory of Isaiah to imagine a Kingdom of Righteousness that would yet be established with outward sanctions of authority on earth. It was the achievement of Jesus to set up the Kingdom of Righteousness within the heart with the eternal sanctions of Love. He was the first to insist that the one bondage a man need fear was sin ; that no man need be the slave of sin unless He willed ; that freedom from sin was perfect liberty, and that any man could enter into heaven by retiring within a clean and loving soul. The highest reaches of optimism have conceived a state of physical comfort and placed it far away. Jesus preached a Kingdom of Holiness, and placed it in the soul. He had the faith to deliver this Gospel where the Jewish world was a hollow unreality, and the Pagan world one corruption. It was the very extravagance of optimism.

The attitude of Jesus was amazing in the wideness of His vision, in the assurance of His hope. His kingdom might be as a grain of mustard seed : in its branches the souls of men would yet take refuge. It might be only a morsel of leaven hidden in the mass of society : the world would be regenerated by its influence (St. Matt. xiii. 33). He prepared twelve men with immense care that they might carry His kingdom to the ends of the world. Although He never passed beyond the borders of Syria in His mission, He grasped the nations in His faith, and saw them " come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south," and " sit down in the Kingdom of God " (St. Luke xiii. 29). Before His betrayal Jesus administered a sacrament that was to last till His second coming (St. Luke xxii. 17-20). After He rose from the dead He commanded His disciples to evangelize the world (St. Matt. xxviii. 19). He did not hesitate to say that all men would be drawn to Him, Who was a synonym for Righteousness,

Joy and Peace. Jesus hoped the best, not for the individual only, but also for the Race.

The grounds for Jesus' sublime optimism were three, and the first was the will of God. With the extreme left of pessimism Jesus believed that there was a Will at the heart of the universe working slowly, constantly, and irresistibly. But it is not blind, immoral, impersonal—mere Titanic force. It is the expression and energy of Love. This Will might appear under strange phenomena, might impose great sufferings, might have immense restraint, but it works for goodness. It might send Jesus to the Cross, but now and ever it was a sure and gracious Will. The future lay in that Will and must be bright. It was an ancient Father that said, "God works all things up into what is better"; and a modern heretic who declared, "God, who spent ages in fitting the earth for the residence of man, may well spend ages more in fitting rectified man to inhabit a renovated earth." This was the faith and patience of Jesus.

Jesus also believed in man, and therein he differed from the pessimists of His own day. The Pharisees regarded the mass of the people as moral refuse, the unavoidable waste from the finished product of Pharisaism. With Jesus the common people were the raw material for the Kingdom of God, rich in the possibilities of sainthood. When Jesus made His own *Apologia* in the 15th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, He also offered their apology for the people. They were not callous and hopeless sinners, only sheep that have wandered from the fold, and know not the way back; not useless and worthless human stuff, but souls that carried beneath the rust and grime the stamp of their birth, and might be put out at usury; not outcasts whose death would be a good riddance, but children loved and missed in their Father's House. This wreck, Jesus perpetually insisted, is not the man—only his lower self, ignorant, perverted,

corrupt; the other self lies hidden and must be released. That is the real self, and when it is released you come to the man. "When he came to himself," said Jesus of the prodigal (St. Luke xv. 17). This was Jesus' reading of publicans and sinners,—the pariahs of that civilization. He moved among the people with a sanguine expectation; ever demanding achievements of the most unlikely, never knowing when he might not be gladdened by a response. An unwavering and unbounded faith in humanity sustained His heart and transformed its subjects. Zacchæus, the hated tax-gatherer, makes a vast surrender, and shows also that he is a son of Abraham. St. Mary Magdalene, the byword of society, has in her the passion of a saint. St. Matthew abandons a custom-house to write a Gospel. St. John leaves his nets to become the mystic of the ages. St. Peter flings off his weakness, and changes into the rock of the Church. With everything against Him, Jesus treated men as sons of God, and His optimism has had its vindication.

Jesus' attitude of hope rested also on His ideal of Life. His own disciples could not enter into His mind or see with His eyes. Modern reformers have sadly missed His standpoint. Laden with reproach and injury, He seemed to His friends the victim of intolerable ill-usage. As the Cross loomed in sight they besought Him to save Himself. They pitied Him who did not pity Himself; they were furious for Him who was Himself satisfied. For life with Jesus was not meat and drink, nor ease and honour. It was the perfection of the soul, and the way unto this high goal was the Cross. If suffering was the will of God, then it is a good in disguise; if it be the discipline of holiness, it is to be welcomed. The Son of man must be crucified before He can rise in power. He must fall as a corn of wheat into the ground before He can bring forth much fruit. This was the order of things for Him and for all men, and out of the

baptism of fire men will come clean souls. Jesus did not ignore the black shadow of sin; He did not fall into the sickly optimism of last century. Jesus did not regard man as the sport of a cruel Fate; He did not yield to the gloomy pessimism which is settling down on this dying century. He illuminated the darkness of human misery with the light of a Divine purpose, and made the evidence for despair an argument for hope.

It must be admitted that Jesus had moods, and in one of them He sometimes lost heart. One cannot forget the gloom of certain parables:—the doom of the fruitless tree; the execution of the wicked husbandmen; the casting out of the unprofitable servant; the judgment on the uncharitable. He once doubted whether there would be faith at His coming; He prophesied woe to Capernaum; He wept over Jerusalem; He poured out His wrath on the Pharisees. But it was not about the world—the Samaritan woman, the mother from Tyre, the Roman centurion—His faith failed. It was about the Church—the Priests, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Rulers. It remains for ever a solemn warning that while the Church is continually tempted to lose hope of the world, the one section of humanity of which Jesus despaired was the Church.

When one turns for facts to verify Jesus' optimism, the handiest, although not the most conclusive, is the growth of the Christian Church. The Church is to the kingdom what the electric current is to electricity. It is the kingdom organised for worship and aggression; it is the kingdom coming to a point and reduced to machinery. You could have the kingdom without the Church, and that day may come; you could have no Church without the kingdom. The Church is a rough index of the spread and vitality of the kingdom, and no one can deny that the history of the Church has been the outstanding phenomenon of modern times. It began with a handful of Jewish peasants, cast

out by their own nation, and it embarked on a march of unparalleled conquest. From Jerusalem to Antioch, from Antioch to Asia, from Asia to Rome, this new unworldly faith made its victorious way, and from Rome to the ends of the earth. There is almost no land now where the Church has not sent her missionaries, has not planted her standard, has not enrolled her converts; and if there be such, it is watched with greedy eyes. Her weakness, her failings, her blunders, her sins, have been patent to all, but they have only served to prove how prolific were the sources that recruited her shattered ranks, how constant the force that made itself felt through so imperfect an instrument. There are great religions on the earth besides the Church, but they have seen their best days, and have begun to decay. The faith of Jesus is moving to its zenith. There are strong empires to-day dividing the world between them, but none will venture to say that one of them is so likely to live as the Church Catholic. Her increase may be by thousands or millions, but it is evident she has no serious rival to dispute her final triumph, no hopeless hindrance save her own coldness.

But no one can have understood Jesus, who concludes that the Church embraces the kingdom of God. Are there not many persons who have no formal connection with the Church, and yet are keeping the commandments of Jesus and have the likeness of His character? They have not been baptized into His Name, but they follow in His steps; they do not show forth His Name, but they die daily in His service. They have been born into a Christian atmosphere; they have inherited the Christian nature; they have responded to the Christian spirit. What is one to say about these Samaritans? They do not answer to their names at the temple with the Priests and Levites, and therein they may have suffered loss; but they show well on the roadside where the sick man is lying. What did Jesus mean by His

marked approbation of the Samaritans? It was not that He thought them right in their separation from the Jewish Church, and He spoke plainly on that matter to the Samaritan woman. It was to show that life is deeper than forms, and that incorrect doctrine may be consistent with the noblest character.

The kingdom Jesus imagined is wider even than the sphere of Christendom, and extends where men have owed nothing to the subtle strain of Christian heredity. In that great Mogul Emperor Akbar, who in the sixteenth century had discovered the principle of religious toleration: those Moslem saints whose fine charity is embodied in the legend of Abou-ben-Adhem: the renunciation of Buddha, the light of Asia: that Roman Emperor, whom the young men called "Marcus my father," the old men "Marcus my son," the man of middle age "Marcus my brother"—in such lives one recognises the distinctive qualities of the kingdom. It is surely a narrow mind, and worse—a narrow heart—that would belittle the noble sayings that fell from the lips of outside saints or discredit the virtues of their character. Is it not more respectful to God, the Father of mankind, and more in keeping with the teaching of the Son of Man, to believe that everywhere and in all ages can be found not only the prophecies and broken gleams, but also the very children of the kingdom? In Clements' noble words, "Some with the consciousness of what Jesus is to them, others not as yet; some as friends, others as faithful servants, others barely as servants."

The Sermon on the Mount is the measure of Jesus' optimism, and its gradual fulfilment His justification. His ideas have matured in the human consciousness, and are now bursting into flower before our eyes. Thoughtful men of many schools are giving their mind to the programme of Jesus, and asking whether it ought not to be attempted. The ideal of Life, one dares now to hope, is to

be realized within measurable distance, and the dreams of the Galilean Prophet become history.

When the kingdom comes in its greatness, it will fulfil every religion and destroy none, clearing away the imperfect and opening up reaches of goodness not yet imagined, till it has gathered into its bosom whatsoever things are true and honest and just and pure and lovely. It standeth on the earth as the city of God with its gates open by night and by day, into which entereth nothing that defileth, but into which is brought the glory and power of the nations. It is the natural home of the good ; as Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, said in his dying confession, " Not one good man, one holy spirit, one faithful soul, whom you will not then behold with God."

JOHN WATSON.