

On "used with *emphasis* in the Judæo-Christian controversy,"—"?? (a middle verse of a long quotation not afterwards referred to)."

At the close of this paragraph Dr. Hort writes, "Nothing is said of the curious *σκληρῶς αἰσεῖς* for *φοβῆ* in both places."

(*To be continued.*)

"LIBERTY OF THE TREE OF LIFE."

REVELATION II. 7.

II.

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." What is the promise which these words convey? They are popularly thought to refer to a mystical and transcendental state—to a reward which shall be reaped in the world beyond the grave. They are taken to proclaim the existence of a second Paradise, of a new and higher Eden above the clouds and beyond the tomb, where the soul shall be nourished by a bread which the heart of man has not conceived. Now, however true such a doctrine is in itself, I do not think it is the idea of the present passage. I do not think the eyes of the seer of Patmos are here lifted above the present world at all. We have been misled by the phrase "in the midst of the Paradise of God." We commonly take it to mean "the tree which is in heaven." On the contrary, I understand it to signify "the tree which is spoken of in Genesis ii. 9." That the imagery is *built* on Genesis ii. 9 has, of course, never been disputed; but I propose to read the phrase as itself a quotation mark, "unto him that overcometh will I give to eat of that tree which in Genesis ii. 9 is said to be in the midst of the Paradise of God."

The effect of such a rendering is obvious. It removes the notion that the tree of life is something existing in heaven. When we are merely told that we shall be allowed to eat of

that tree which was formerly forbidden to the inhabitants of Eden, we are free to ask, “What was it?” “Where was it?” And it is clear that from this point of view there is no mystery about the answer. The tree of life in the garden of Eden never was in heaven; it was very much indeed upon the earth. It was not only *in* the present world; it was the present world itself in its most outward form. The tree of life was the opposite of the tree of knowledge. It was the spontaneous play of vital energy—energy not turned in upon the brain but turned out upon the world. To have liberty of the tree of life was to have the freedom of eye and ear, of hand and heart, of sense and soul. It was to enjoy life in all its branches, to taste the gladness of being a sentient creature, to feel the mere rapture of living, without counting what life shall bring. And, when the tree is placed in the midst of the garden, it is declared as plainly as words can speak that such liberty is the normal rule. The idea of the writer of Genesis and the idea of the writer of the Apocalypse is one and the same—that there is a physical element which man ought to have and which other things have. The latter author does not scruple to use the phrase “a *right* to the tree of life” (Rev. xxii. 14). He regards the want of it as something which makes man abnormal. To seek it is no presumption, because it is no novelty. The miracle of man is not what he has but what he has not; it is his comparative impotence in that humble field where the humblest are strong. If he is great where other things are lowly, he is lowly where other things are great. In the region of grace he may ask to be *elevated*; in the sphere of nature he desires simply to be reinstated.

Man has, then, according to the Apocalypse, a *right* to the tree of life—to the use of the present world. The ground of that right is the fact that the liberty of the tree has already been conceded in other spheres. That it has been so conceded is manifest. Look at the world of

nature. What is its prevailing voice? It is spontaneity—the absence of all appearance of restraint. The very word “nature” is used as the antithesis of restraining grace. Everything is of course limited to its own sphere, but within that sphere it is free; it is allowed to come up to the door of its natural environment. This impression is so strongly suggested by the physical world that it has everywhere found a voice in poetry. It makes the brook say, “I go on for ever.” It initiates the proverb, “as free as the wind.” It paints the river wandering “at its own sweet will.” And, when we pass to the semi-conscious forms of nature, the impression is deepened. The animal world seems permitted to expend more energy than it requires. The bird would do with less song. The dog would do with less barking. The cattle would do with less lowing. Everywhere and always, the unreflective forms of life seem to move within their own channel without let or hindrance, without cherubim or flaming sword. Their restraints are all from without; they have no limitations in the law of their being.

The first limit arises when we come to man, and to man it comes as a surprise. It is in the world of religion that the interruption occurs to human freedom. When the boy goes to church, he hears for the first time the click of the garden gate—that gate which used to be left open to all footsteps. For the first time he finds pleasure represented, not indeed as something forbidden, but as a thing which ought to be restricted. And, not the least striking feature is the reason for the restriction. It is not made on the ground that certain pleasures are innocent and certain others vicious. It is made on the ground that pleasure itself may come into antagonism with God if one has too much of it. A day is set apart from other days, distinguished by its limitation of outward enjoyments—a day when, over fields that were lawful yesterday, there are

written the words "no trespassing." And, the first sensation of the youth is one of anger. He feels antagonistic to religion. He feels that religion has defrauded him of something which he ought to have. Why should he be denied the freedom which other things enjoy—the freedom of the streams, of the rivers, of the winds? Why should the arrest which is not put to the song of the bird be imposed on the song of a human heart? You tell the youth that the one is a state of nature and the other a state of grace. He will answer, "Then, let me live in nature and avoid grace. Let me not sacrifice my freedom. Let me keep aloof from a religious life which promises me only mutilation, and exacts as the price of heaven the surrender of the earth."

Now, it is on this difficulty that the passage in Revelation throws a flash of light. Does it admit that the religion of Christ imposes a limit on human pleasure? Yes; so far the youth has judged rightly. But it declares that Christianity issues its prohibition for exactly the opposite reason from that which the youth supposes, nay, from that which the Church itself often supposes. The common view is that the restrictions are sent because a full amount of earthly liberty is incompatible with the grace of God. It is here said to be incompatible with the want of it. It is not because we are religious, but because we are not, that the tree is forbidden. The passage, like that in Genesis, is evidently based upon the simile of a child's diet: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life." The idea is that the child is unfit for sumptuous living; or, to drop the metaphor, man is said to be denied the liberty of the things of nature because he has not become thoroughly natural. He cannot become equal to other things in naturalness until he has reached that which he supposes to be the enemy of nature—grace. Man is God's youngest child—His delicate child. He possesses a very tender mechanism,

which streams do not possess, and which is very easily put out of order—conscience. It is not enough for this mechanism that it should do nothing wrong; the act of indifference, the abstaining from doing right, is equally prejudicial. Conscience becomes blunted by the use of things *outside* of Christ's kingdom, even though not adverse to that kingdom. Until this delicacy is overcome, until the conscience gets the power to go outside without being hurt, there is no choice but to wall in the garden, no alternative but to place the cherubim and the flaming sword on every side of human nature which would open the liberty of the tree of life.

Now, the question is, how is this weakness in the natural constitution of man to be got rid of? Is there any suggestion in the passage before us of the mode in which it is to be rendered robust and fit for freedom? I think there is. Observe the imagery of the passage. If the disease is represented under the simile of a child in need of spare diet, the cure of the disease is described under the metaphor of a conquering soldier, "he that overcometh." Now, what is the idea involved in conquest? It is the abolition of the distinction between your country and the enemy's country. What is the literal meaning of the English word "overcome"? It is to "come over"—to cross the gulf which divides your land from an opposing land. To conquer or overcome a nation is to make it one with your own, to destroy the middle wall of partition, to obliterate the landmarks on either side, and, if possible, to call the name of the vanquished region by the name of your own conquering land.

Now, this is precisely the thought of the passage before us. The Christian conscience in its incipient stage is hurt by meeting anything outside the kingdom of Christ. The course open is to deny the outsideness. There have been always two extremes in the religious life—the principle of

asceticism and the principle of worldly accommodation. The one advises a withdrawal from the things of earth; the other counsels a little latitude in deference to the weakness of humanity. The gospel of Christ, as understood by this passage, is radically different from either of these. It refuses, on the one hand, to withdraw itself from the world; it repudiates, on the other, the idea of worldly accommodation. What remains? What path is left for a religion which will neither consent to be imprisoned within itself nor yet agree to admit the forms of the world? One path alone is left for it—conquest. It must claim the world as a bit of its own property. It must come over the gulf that divides it from other things. It must annul the separation between the secular and the sacred. It must say with the writer of Revelation himself, in sublime illustration of his own principle, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ."

It will be seen that this gospel of Christ, with all its liberality, leaves room for asceticism, nay, as a preliminary stage, demands asceticism. There is a time in which man is not allowed to eat of the tree. He is kept upon manna until he is ripe for the old corn of the land. The day in which he is permitted to pass over the border is the day in which he overcomes the contrast between Christ and the world—in which he can say with Paul, "If I am Christ's, all things are mine." The test of his fitness to cross the border is his power to say, to feel this. The liberty which a Christian claims is not claimed by him on the ground that certain objects are innocent and harmless. To a frivolous mind no pleasure is innocent; the want of character simply feeds the frivolity. The Christian claim of liberty rests on the opposite ground—the ground that a mind full of Christ must impart Christ to everything, that a heart imbued with love must see everywhere the object of its love, that a spirit impregnated with the music of God

must hear even in the rolling of a railway train the rhythm of that music. That is the thought on which the right to Christian freedom is based, and every worldly pursuit is tested by its conformity to that thought. Let us look from this point of view at one or two branches of the tree of life.

And, let us begin with the world of art. When Christianity first came to earth, its votaries despised art. They did so because they thought it heathen, *i.e.*, sensuous, and therefore fitted to withdraw men from the study of the soul. And so the first Christians separated themselves from art and shunned the sight of an image; they felt themselves forbidden to touch this branch of the tree. And so they were—but not through anything in the tree. As Paul would say, they were "straitened in their own affections." Their Christ was not commensurate with the world—did not yet fill all things; and they were right to abstain. But now, suppose a man should come to a different conclusion. Suppose he should arrive at the conviction that art, instead of being sensuous, is the proof that the spirit can shine through the sense. Suppose he should look upon it as the evidence that the actual forms of life are unable to imprison the spirit of beauty. Imagine, in short, that he came to regard art as itself a protest in favour of a new heaven and a new earth, of a beauty more unblemished and a symmetry more flawless. What would be the effect of such a state of mind? It would clearly be an extension of the boundaries of the religious world. It would confer on the man a right to cross the border, to incorporate the domain of art in the sphere of religion. Instead of being a barrier to Christ, he would come to recognise it as practically a search for Christ. It would be to him an attempt to figure in the mind and to express by the hand an ideal which is suggested by, and yet transcends the visible. It would be an aspiration towards the resurrection of the body, towards a larger and higher physical

development in which the outward life of man shall approximate more nearly to the standard of the soul.

Let us pass from art to fiction. The reading of fiction has often been a reproach in the religious world. It has not been on the ground that there are many immoral novels. It has been based on the fact that they *are* novels, and therefore a waste of time. It is asked why, with so many earnest realities around them, men should spend voluntary hours over that which is a dream. How are we to meet this objection? Shall we say that we must have some relaxation from the earnest business of life? That is quite a natural desire. But is it a claim to liberty? If I ask permission to read a novel on the plea that the flesh is weak, I am asking, not a right, but an act of grace; I am claiming, not the charter of a free-born man, but the charity of a beggar. If I am to have a right to this branch of the tree, it must be for a different reason. And there is such a reason forthcoming. There may come to me a time in which a very ideal novel may be to me the most real thing in the world, more real than anything which men call actual. That time shall come whenever I recognise Christ to be a reality. The moment I say to myself, "There is a beauty which eye has not seen nor ear heard nor natural mind conceived," I have set up a claim to the Christian reading of that which men call fiction. I have claimed it on the ground, not of the weakness of the flesh, but of the strength of the spirit. I have asserted my right to this branch of the tree. I have done so on the principle that the gospel of Christ has revealed to me the absolute reality of all heroism that transcends the earth. In reading of a high heroism which I have not seen in actual life I do not feel that I am wasting my time in unreality. On the contrary, I am turning from the unreal to the real, from the imperfect to the perfect, from the prophecy to the fulfilment, from the

temporal shadow to the eternal substance. The Christian is by nature a worshipper of things not seen as yet. He is a believer in the existence of a star which lies beyond the range of the telescope. Is it surprising that he should be prepared to welcome the record of that which is above experience, and accept by the eye of faith an order of human things which the eye of sense as yet cannot discern?

The only remaining instance I shall notice of the relation between Christian life and Christian liberty is the set of actions comprehended under the general word "pleasure." The common view is that when a man becomes a Christian the thing called worldly pleasure is there and then lessened to him in value. The Christian position is exactly the reverse. It is that the possession of Christ for the first time makes pleasure possible. The doctrine of Christianity is that the root of all earthly happiness is self-forgetfulness. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you," are the words in which the law of pleasure is declared. The petition, "Thy will be done," precedes the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Nor is it without reason that it does so. It is a matter of the most everyday experience that "he who loveth his life shall lose it." Fix your mind upon the personal joy which any pleasure shall bring you, dwell on it night and day, cherish it hour by hour, and the result will inevitably be disappointment. Pleasure will not stand to be scrutinised; it must come in at the side door. Its most successful moments are its most forgetful moments. It is not the fact of anticipation which disqualifies; it is the anticipation for one's self. Figure in advance the pleasure, not which will come to you, but which will come to another, and the result will be quite different; it will come into your own bosom "pressed down, and shaken, and running over." The Christian has for the first time

received the organ of joy, the sense by which pleasure can be known. He has the right to pleasure which comes from the possession of the faculty—the right which the eye has to see, which the ear has to hear, which the heart has to feel. He has got back the liberty of nature because he has himself for the first time become natural—acquired all the organs for physical enjoyment. He has entered into the pleasure of natural things because he has entered into their spontaneity. He has overcome the tendency to self-consciousness which is the death of happiness. He has ceased to say we shall be “as gods, knowing good and evil.” It is the thought of being like gods that expels Paradise from the eyes, that stops the flow of the rivers, that withers the foliage of the trees. The overcoming of my own shadow restores the banished light, and the spontaneity of a sacrificial soul unbars my way to that play of energy which belongs by nature to created things.

GEORGE MATHESON.

CHRIST'S ATTITUDE TO HIS OWN DEATH.

IV.

WHAT we have hitherto attempted to understand and define has been Christ's *prophetic* attitude to His own death, and we may now add that its most remarkable characteristic is its objectivity. If He has not conceived and described it as if it were another's death rather than His own, yet He has even in His most inward moments thought of it with a certain detachment of mind; and has represented it more as an idea He had imaged than as an experience He had undergone. In other words, His attitude to it was rather intellectual than emotional, more historical than personal, more that of one who saw than of Him who suffered. This was inevitable, and expresses one of those limitations which