

ἐπὶ κάλλος." εἰς τρυφήν is "surely interpolated for explicitness (as ἐξόδου below, v. 25)."

p. 271. (On xxv. 25.) Dr. Hort's note is: "Possibly, and this would not exclude speech: but v. 25 suggests a more comprehensive sense. Cf. Prov. xvii. 14, Heb. (Oddly ἐξουσίαν...λόγους, LXX.) Surely it implies ἐξόδου." ["It," *i.e.*, I suppose, the Latin. "This," *viz.*, ἐξουσίαν, I imagine.]

p. 272. (On xxvii. 27.) The statement that "the reading of Cod. B (ὁ ποιῶν πονηρὰ εἰς αὐτὸν κολισθήσεται) is grammatically impossible," calls forth a note of astonishment. "For εἰς see Wahl 160*b* fin., 161*a* (sp. εἰς κεφαλὴν)."

p. 280. (On xlv. 17.) Dr. Hort says: "Rather B₄ is a corruption of B₃: the duplicates are variously combined, and the reading of N² and A¹ is ingeniously wrong."

THE CHRISTIAN PROMISE OF EMPIRE.

REVELATION iii. 21.

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne." These words bear the stamp of their environment. They were written at a time when the ideal of all men was the possession of a throne. Alike to the Roman and to the Jew the dream of life was the dream of dominion. The son of Israel contemplated his Messiah who should make him ruler over all nations. The son of Rome was eager to complete his almost finished work of universal empire. So far the promise was in harmony with the place and with the hour. But from another point of view it was in striking contrast to both. Who were the men that claimed to be the recipients of this promise? A band of obscure slaves. To the proud Roman leading his armies to victory, to the proud Jew counting his ancestors by hundreds, there must have been something almost grotesque in the claim. Here was a company of men not yet dignified with the name of humanity—the butt of the satirist, the jest of the

poet, the neglect of the historian—spending their days in menial toil, passing their nights in outhouses or top-garrets, leaving their bodies to a pauper's grave. And yet, in the face of the civilised world these men make the claim to an empire compared to which the dreams of Cæsar grow pale. They aspire to a sceptre higher than the Latin race had ever aimed at—above ædile, prætor, consul, senate, emperor—above every name that is named to constitute authority. To sit on the judgment-throne of God, the throne before which all hearts are open, to have the last word in the criticism of human actions, to give a verdict on the deeds of man, from which in all the universe there can be no appeal—that is the aspiration of these Christian slaves. Must it not to the age in which they lived have appeared the presumption of insanity?

Nor is it only to a Roman age that the claim of this passage seems to suggest the idea of presumption. Must it not appear so at all times to every man? The throne, as I have said, is a throne of judgment. How can any human soul aspire to such a seat? Is not the state of the Christian one of humility? Does not the amount of the humility increase in proportion as the Christianity grows? Have not the most purely spiritual souls been precisely those most conscious of their sin? Is it not least of all any of these that we can think of as claiming such a distinction? It is in the incipient stages of the Christian life that we find ambition. Peter begins by asking a perpetual seat on the Mount; but he ends with the aspiration to be "clothed with humility." John begins with the desire for a position on the right hand of power; but he ends with the humble hope, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." These are the normal utterances of the Christian heart—the utterance of the heart of that man who wrote the passage before us. Does it not seem as if he had here been untrue to himself, and had reverted to

that old presumptuous standpoint from which in youth he had been dislodged by the influence of the Master's love?

But let us look deeper. I think we shall find that we have altogether mistaken the meaning of the passage, and that the John of the Apocalypse is nowhere more like the John of the Gospel than in his present claim to Christian empire. So far from being influenced by the old feeling of presumption, he is actuated by the direct desire to avoid that feeling. His position is, that, instead of being presumption to claim a seat on God's judgment throne, it is presumption that prevents the Church of Laodicea from having a right to claim it. If that Church would adopt more humility, it would be more entitled to a place on the throne. That this is the idea of the passage will, I think, be quite manifest if we look back to the opening of the message. Addressing the Laodicean Church in verse 17, the seer of Patmos says, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." What is the state of mind here indicated? It is poverty unconscious of itself. It is the description of a Church which has no elements of strength within it, but which believes itself to be strong just because it has never been tried. Accordingly in verse 18 he says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich." The Church had an enemy to overcome within her own bosom. That enemy was presumption—the ignorance of her own weakness. How was the enemy to be overcome? By that which revealed the weakness. Nothing could reveal the weakness but exposure to the fire. The glitter of the alloy would melt before the scorching flame of adversity, and then the Church, emerging out of the flame, would be fitted to be what it had now no right to be—the judge of human actions. Let us try to make this last point clear.

And first, let us consider that, as a matter of fact, every man has seated himself on a throne of judgment. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is not the occupation of a throne. It is that the occupation of the one is legal, and the occupation of the other usurped. Every man by nature has constituted himself the judge of other men. He has seated himself on a tribunal before which he calls his brethren to appear. As the stream of his contemporaries passes by, the books of the judgment are opened and the sentence of each is written. Some are dismissed with contempt, some with indignation, some with anger, some with indifference, some with repulsion, and some with that patronising commendation which is equivalent to censure. Before the natural man are gathered the representatives of all nations; he has proclaimed himself the judge of quick and dead.

But to all such the seer of Patmos exclaims, "Come down from that throne; you have no right to be there; you have not overcome." He tells them that until they have felt the temptations of their own nature they are in no condition to judge others. Not only have they no right to sentence their equals, they are not qualified even to judge those whom they call the lapsed masses. "What," says one, "do I ever steal? do I ever, like these violent people, put out my hand to take that which is not mine?" John answers that there are forms of stealing which take nothing, which can rob a man of his reputation by simply keeping silent when a word would save. "But," says another, "have I ever done such an uncultured thing as raise the hand to strike?" John answers, "Did you never strike *with* culture, *by reason of* your culture, through the very refinement which marks you out from the lapsed masses? are there not wounds which are inseparable from the gloved hand?" All this seems to be implied in the exhortation, "Anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see"—

cure the soreness of your own eyes before you criticise the soreness of others. And when he says, "I would thou wert cold or hot," he seems to take ground more general still. He implies that there is an absence of temptation which comes from sheer lukewarmness. There are those who are never led up into the wilderness for the simple reason that they are never led up into the Mount. They have a native sluggishness of heart which makes enthusiasm in any cause impossible. They make no allowance for errors arising out of worldly allurements. They themselves are incapable of being allured either by the day or by the night. They have all the negative qualities ascribed to the Church of Laodicea—qualities which free from great deeds of wrong as much as great deeds of right. The throne of judgment on which they sit is therefore a usurped throne. They have no claim to it. They do not possess the two sides of the question. They have set themselves to legislate in a cause in which they have only heard the pleadings of one advocate. They are called to condemn temptations, not because they themselves have conquered them, but because they have never felt them. They have not yet "overcome."

Now, the next question is, what would be the effect of what is here called overcoming—of vanquishing the temptation? It would clearly be to transform a throne of judgment into a throne of grace. For, be it observed, the value of overcoming is not the victory but the struggle. There are two ways in which a man may reach freedom from temptation—by innocence or by virtue, by never having known or by having known and vanquished. If mere freedom from temptation were the goal, we ought to be content with the first. What makes the overcoming better than the innocence is the fact that in struggle we learn our weakness, and that in learning our weakness the throne of judgment becomes a throne of mercy. The prophet of Israel is not afraid to apply the principle even to the sinless

“servant of God.” “He shall see of the travail of his soul, by the knowledge of it shall my righteous servant justify many.” The idea is that the knowledge of his own travail shall make him tender to others. In what sense such words can be understood of Him I shall presently consider. Meantime I note the fact that Paul has not scrupled in Galatians vi. 6 to name this principle distinctively “the law of Christ.” He calls on the spiritual to restore the fallen—not on the ground of their spirituality, but by that memory of human weakness which their own struggle has left behind. He tells them to bear one another’s burdens on the ground that each has had a burden of his own to bear—a burden which either still exists or has left in remembrance the traces of its power. He promises the throne to the spirit of meekness—to those who have washed their robes in blood and by the sight of their remaining scars are able to pity the wounds of the actual battlefield.

And now the passage takes a remarkable turn. To the inspired ear of the seer of Patmos the Christ who offers the conditions of empire is heard declaring that He Himself has reached empire by conforming to these conditions, “even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne.” There is something startling here. There seems at first sight to be no analogy between the case of Christ and the case of ordinary men. Ordinary men are sinners; Christ claims to be without sin. How can it be said that the Son of Man has been taught to be tender by realising through struggle the difficulty of being pure? Is there not to the Christian consciousness something revolting in the very statement and something impossible in the conception? Undoubtedly there is; but it is neither the statement nor the conception of the passage. For, let us consider the principle which John means to unfold. It is that no man is entitled to judge another until he has himself been tried in the fire. But what is the

fire? there lies all the question. "It is temptation," you say. Of course it is; but temptation to what? To sin? Not necessarily. There are as many forms of temptation as there are circumstances of life. Sin is only one form of temptation. I may be tempted without sin. If I come to two cross roads and have a struggle as to which I shall take, that is temptation. Whatever exposes human nature to a crisis of perplexity, whatever presents a conflict of motives to the soul of any man, that is his hour of trial. It may be a solicitation to sin; it may be a solicitation to love; it may be a solicitation to venture; so far as the revelation of human frailty is concerned, the cause is immaterial.

Now, Jesus was tempted; that is one of the cardinal features of the Gospel. He was tempted in such a way as to make Him feel the inherent weakness of humanity; that is one of the cardinal features of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But He was tempted also "without sin." What is the meaning of these words? They are popularly thought to mean that He did not *succumb* to the temptation. I do not think this is their significance. I take them to express the writer's conviction that the temptation of Jesus had in it no solicitation to sin, that it came in the form of a tendency to choose a short road to the path of goodness—the establishment of His kingdom. It was a wish to realise without death the Messianic expectation of His people. None the less, it was a temptation which involved for Him the most severe struggle. Why should death have seemed to Him the longest road? Clearly because it was something from which He shrank. On the one hand He seemed to be impelled towards it by the stream of events, which for Him was the will of the Father; on the other, He was repelled from it by an instinct of His own nature. If the purpose of death had been quite clear to Him, there would have been no room

for temptation ; He could not have hesitated for a moment where He saw without dubiety the Father's will. But, in the absence of perfect certainty, the repulsive aspect of death was allowed to have its sway, and the spirit of the Son of Man was in a strait betwixt two.

But, it may be asked, why was death so repulsive to Jesus? In this respect He differs from most teachers of the old world. The philosophies of the past had been distinguished by the little hold which death had over them. The Brahman longed for it ; the Platonist scorned it ; the Stoic despised it. Why should the purest of all the religions have been the most fearful? Why should the faith most full of God have been that which most palpably and most unblushingly shrank from the idea of death?

The answer is plain—just because it *was* the faith most full of God. To the Brahman, to the Platonist, in some sense even to the Stoic, the life of physical nature was a barrier to the life of the soul. To the first it was a delusion ; to the second it was an imprisonment ; to the third it was an incentive to feelings which ought to be overcome. But to the human soul of the Son of Man the life of physical nature was communion with the Divine Life. What others had called natural was to Him supernatural. The lily of the field, the bird of the air, the sower going forth to sow, the wind blowing where it listed, the mustard-seed expanding into ample branches, the fig-tree putting forth its leaves to tell that summer is nigh, were to Him, each and all, gleamings of the Life Divine — windows that opened in heaven to give a glimpse of God. Death was a shutting of these windows. To the mind of Jesus the physical world was a stream of the life of God. The sting of death lay not in itself, but in its idea. Death was to all men a loosing of the thread of nature ; to the Son of Man the thread of nature was one of those golden cords which bound the human spirit into communion with the Father.

This was His temptation—not a temptation to sin, but a temptation to live. He had a love of life which grew not out of His earthliness, but out of His very spirituality; had He been less full of God, He would have been less averse to die.

I am speaking, of course, of what is called the human soul of Jesus—of that in Him which, the Evangelist says, “grew in wisdom and knowledge.” It is only in this sphere that temptation is ever possible. Temptation always demands limitation, though it need not be a moral limit. We have the testimony of Jesus Himself for the statement that there was a sphere in His earthly nature and a time in His human life from which the knowledge of the future was veiled. Such veiling was essential to His sacrifice—is essential to any sacrifice. The clear foresight of a successful result would in all cases mar the sacrificial element. The sacrifice of Christ is mainly based on His death. It can only be so on the ground that death was to His human nature environed with similar clouds and encompassed with similar difficulties to those which burden the race of man. I say “similar.” There are clouds over death which are inseparable from sin. There are those who shrink from death because they think it will bring God nearer. Such a cloud Jesus could never have known. But, to shrink from death because it seemed to separate from God, to shrink from death because it appeared to break the thread of communion, this was a temptation which the purest might know, this was the temptation of the Son of Man.

And it is this temptation which, according to the writer to the Hebrews, gave Jesus the moral claim to the judgment of humanity. John himself in his Gospel does not hesitate to declare that Christ’s judicial authority rests, not on that in Him which is Divine, but on that which is human, “He hath given Him authority to execute judg-

ment because He is the Son of Man." The idea clearly is that His right to judge others rests morally on the fact of His own struggle—the struggle with the thought of death. It is a singular circumstance that His invitation to the labouring and heavy-laden is based by Himself upon His consciousness of human weakness: "I am meek and lowly in heart." He means that on the human side of His nature He has learned by the things He has suffered—learned the frailty of the frame of man. And, it is to my mind a circumstance no less remarkable that His assertion of human power is in exact proportion to His contact with human weakness, "all power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth; go ye therefore and teach all nations." When did Christ utter these words? It was after He had faced the great temptation and vanquished it. Why should all human power be given Him only after the conflict with death? Because "all power" means "all sympathy." In His dealings with man He acknowledges no power but the sympathetic. And, what is the root of universal sympathy? Is it not universal experience? If I would have sympathy with all nations, I must know experimentally the weakness with which all nations contend. Jesus emerges from the conflict with death wider in His human capabilities, stronger in His hold on man. He comes forth enriched by His poverty, enlarged by the struggle of His human nature, Judge of quick and dead because He has come into contact with the spirits in prison. He is able to promise rest to the labouring and the heavy-laden because He has known a kindred labour and felt an analogous ladenness. He has made the law of the Christian life the law of His own spirit: "I also have overcome, and am set down with My Father on His throne."

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