

For (their) fruit must mountains bring him,
 While all the beasts of the field sport themselves there,
 Under lotus trees lieth he down,
 In cover of reed and fen,
 Hedged in by shady lotus trees,
 Surrounded by willows of the brook.
 Though the stream sink,¹ he heedeth not;
 Light-hearted is he when it² gusheth up to his mouth,
 Who³ will seize him by the teeth,⁴
 And pierce his⁵ nose with a snare?"

T. K. CHEYNE.

THE PLACE OF THE CROSS IN THE WORLD.

(REVELATION XIII. 8.)

THERE have been two extreme views of the destiny of this world—optimism and pessimism. The optimist looks upon all things as working for the highest good; the pessimist regards them as tending to the utmost evil. Neither can deny the presence of the sacrificial element in the existing system of things; but they differ as to the position which it holds. The pessimist looks upon the design of life as essentially malignant; everything in his view is constructed so as to bring man to a sense of his limitation and his nothingness; the cross is with him the goal. The optimist, on the other hand, regards the goal as individual happiness; but, before reaching the paradise of self-gratification, he holds that man has a dark avenue to tread either by way of discipline or by way of penalty; the cross is with him an interlude.

The representatives of these two tendencies are respectively the Brahmanic and the Jewish creeds. To the

¹ Reading ישקט for יששק.

² Omitting ירד.

³ Reading מי הווא.

⁴ Reading ביטניו.

⁵ Reading נשן.

former, the promise of life to the individual soul is a delusion, and by the crosses of life we learn that delusion. To the latter, the promise of individual happiness is a profound truth; we only want a little present restraint in order to prepare us for a life of unlimited indulgence. The Indian and the Jew, as representing the extreme wing of the Aryan and the Semitic races, have each expressed unqualifiedly their opposite reading of the problem of existence.

Now, the theory of Christianity is radically different from either of these; but the strange thing is that it reaches its difference by uniting the opposite elements of each. It agrees with the distinctive features of both systems. It agrees with the optimist in holding that all things work together for good—absolute good, final good. It agrees with the pessimist in holding that all things are constructed with the view of teaching the individual life its own impotence. How does it reconcile the statements? By the bold paradox that the highest good is sacrifice, and that the greatest happiness which can come to the individual is simply his despair of finding it in himself. Christianity joins the hands of the Brahman and the Jew. It declares with the Jew that good is the final goal; it affirms with the Brahman that the final goal is the cross. The thing which the Brahman repudiates as evil is the thing which the Christian eulogises as good. The Christian reaches his Messiah on the very road by which the Brahman reaches despair. The hell of the one has become the heaven of the other. Christianity has accepted the pessimist's facts, but it has built upon them the opposite inference. The one says, "I find life not worth living, because it is always crucifying the individual man." The other says, "I find life infinitely precious, because, in the crucifixion of the individual man, emerges his highest joy."

Now, in the passage before us we have a striking statement of this view. "The lamb slain from the foundation

of the world." St. John imagines himself standing at the beginning of creation. By a bold act of fancy he puts himself in the position of the Divine Artist. He says that at the foundation of the world the first thing seen was not the foundation, but the superstructure. When God was laying the first stone, He was not looking at the stone, but at the topmost tower. This, of course, is true of every artist. The thing last in execution is the thing earliest in contemplation; he would never begin his actual work if his inner eye did not first rest on the completed picture. The mystery of John's words does not lie in the fact that God saw the flower before the seed; every planter does the same. But when John goes on to tell us the object which God contemplated as the flower of creation, it is then that we are startled. *What* is here said to be the goal of creation as it appeared in the sight of the Divine Artificer? He is laying a physical basis, which as yet is very chaotic and imperfect; should we not expect that His inner eye would rest on the completing and perfecting of the physical? On the contrary it rests on the collapse of the physical altogether, on an act of sacrifice by which the outward form is crucified and the bodily life suspended. The Lamb is said to have been slain from the foundation of the world. It was not the result of an accident; it was not the result of an emergency; it was something involved in the plan of the creation itself, a part of its purpose, a design of its being. Its first stone was laid with a view to the development of the sacrificial life.

Was St. John then an optimist, or a pessimist? In the worldly sense of these words he was something different from either, and something which admitted a truth in both. On the one hand he holds with the worldly optimist that all things do work for the highest good; the universe is to him the product of love. But on the other hand, just because it is the product of love, he could never admit that it

is a field for self-gratification. It is essential to his idea of the world that it should be a disappointment to self-gratification. He would have endorsed the whole Indian indictment against life as a medium of individual indulgence. The glory of life to him was just that it did not admit of individual indulgence. He found in it a sphere that, from the beginning to the end of the day, disappointed every selfish hope, wrecked every ship that sailed only for its own cargo. And why so? Because to him the essence of God was love. The highest good of any world must be to be made in the image of its Creator. If God be love, the highest good must be to be made in the image of love. St. John asked himself how that could be done on the Greek principle of self-indulgence, or the Jewish principle of a physical Messiah. He felt that if the end of life were simply to wear purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day, and if life itself were amply suited to such an end, then life was incompatible with love. He felt that to make it compatible with love it must be restricted from the liberty of a Greek or Hebrew paradise—denuded of much of the purple, stripped of much of the fine linen, reduced in the amount of its sumptuous faring. This world, in short, is to St. John a development, and an upward development; but it is a development of self-sacrifice. The Apocalypse has been called a sensuous book; it is to my mind the least sensuous book in the Bible. It describes the process of the ages as a process of self-surrender. The very joy of the New Jerusalem is said to be a joy which springs from the sacrificial spirit. If they hunger no more, neither thirst any more, it is not because they are surfeited with outward plenty; it is because the Lamb in the midst of the throne has led them, because in the power of self-forgetfulness their own burden has dropped in the sea.

This, then, is the meaning of the passage, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." It means that

Christ was all along the goal of creation, and that all creation is a making for Christ. More particularly, it means that the line of this world's progress has been a development of self-sacrifice. It seems to me that in this last point the writer of the Apocalypse has come nearer to a philosophy of history than all who went before him. If you take any other line of progress, you will fail, in my opinion, to prove that there has been an advance in the march from the old to the new. Shall we take intellect? Do we feel that the amount of mind force is greater in the modern Englishman than it was in the ancient Greek? It would be difficult to feel it, and it would be impossible to prove it: are Plato and Aristotle inferior to the best intellects among us? Shall we take imagination? Are we not becoming impressed with the notion that the old age of the world is unfavourable to art? Have we reached the architectural conception which planned the pyramids? Have we outrun the triumphs of Greek sculpture? Have we surpassed the poetry of Homer? Have we sustained the fame of the mediæval painters? Still less here I think can we boast of progress. But, you say, What of invention, mechanical discovery, the application of the forces of nature to the needs of man? Surely here there is a field where our advance cannot be disputed. Yes; I grant it. But have you ever considered how much of this invention is itself due to the spread of the unselfish principle? Why have the great ages of discovery been the ages after Christ? Is it not just because Christ has been before them? Is it not because the spirit of sacrifice has awakened man to the wants of man? The times of self-seeking were not the times of invention. As long as a man had no interest in any country but his own, he made no effort to facilitate the course of travelling. The increased provision for locomotion has been the result of a demand—the demand of man for man. It has come from the breaking of limits—

not only of individual but of national limits. It has sprung from the sense of brotherhood, from the increasing conviction that it is not good for the man to be alone. It is therefore an effect and not a cause. It is not a source of progress; it is the result of a progress springing from another source. What that source is, it leaves us still to inquire.

And if we do inquire, I think we shall find that St. John has put his hand upon the one thing in the world which is progressive. It is not intellect. It is not imagination. It is not even invention; that is the result of altruism. It is altruism itself—the inability of the individual to live for his own interest. St. John says creation is moving toward a type—a lamb slain, and it is moving toward that type in a straight line—the line of sacrifice. It is climbing to its goal by successive steps which might be called steps downward—increasing limitations of the self-life. “The Lamb slain from the foundation” means “the Lamb slain *in* the foundation.” It is really an assertion of the fact that sacrifice is bound up in the constitution of nature, that the law of sacrifice is the law of nature, and that progress in the power to sacrifice is progress in the life of nature.

To what extent did St. John see this? He had much less evidence for it than a man has now; that is just what proves his inspiration. He anticipated a truth before it was demonstrated. He was too young for the eye of science; but just by reason of his youth he had the eye of poetry. He looked into the face of nature as the child looks into the fire—to see forms there. He saw in visible nature a series of gospel pictures; everything seemed to live only by losing itself. He saw the waves of the sea of Patmos passing into waves of light; he beheld the waves of light passing into eddies of the sea. It seemed to him that even in that lonely spot God had inscribed upon the walls of nature the image of a cross. By-and-by, before the

eyes of the seer there flashed a higher order of creation, and it was clothed in the same garb—the robe of sacrifice. He passed from the pictorial representation of sacrifice in nature to its actual, though involuntary, representation in animal life. The very reference to a slain lamb is a reference to an animal sacrifice. The shedding at the altar of the lower creatures' blood must, to the gentle mind of St. John, have presented the same problem of pain which presses on the modern mind as what is called the survival of the fittest. How did St. John reconcile himself to that spectacle of an involuntary sacrifice of the animal life prescribed by the Old Testament? He said it was a type of Christ. We in modern times smile at the naïve answer. Yet it may be questioned if, from any theistic point of view, a better can be found. If sacrifice be the law of the highest being, it is desirable to reach it. You can only reach anything by a repeated experience of it. The first experience of everything must be unconscious. Life itself is unconscious at the beginning; so in general is love. What is Mr. Herbert Spencer's account of the origin or conscience? He says it began with compulsion; one generation did good deeds from fear, and the next did them from habit. Is it not as reasonable to hold that sacrifice became voluntary from first being experienced involuntarily? The lower forms have been made to yield to lives more fit for the universe, and by their yielding they have made these lives fitter still. They have propagated something—something which to them was a painful necessity, but which to the generation to come was to be a stimulus and a joy. They have transmitted to posterity the battlefield on which they themselves have died, and, in the act of transmitting it, they have transformed the field of battle into a garden of roses.

In man that garden bursts into bloom. How, we need not here inquire. Some say it grew out of the animal;

others, with whom I agree, that it required an added force. Be this as it may, all are willing to admit that one side of our nature is allied to the life below. That which has burst into flower is the thing which originally dropped blood. What is it that has produced the change? It is the advent of a power called love. St. John in this very book has the image of a woman rushing with her child into the wilderness to protect it from a dragon. This shows there passed before him the natural sacrifices of the human heart. There is, in my opinion, as much sacrifice of life in man as there is in the animal creation. I believe that the cares of the heart prevent every man from living the full amount of his natural years. What is the difference, then, between the sacrifice of the animal and the sacrifice of the man? It is an inward difference; the obligatory has become the voluntary. What has made it voluntary? It is love, a force to which in the animal world nothing exactly corresponds, a force which adds to the sacrifice, and at the same time helps to bear it. It has increased at once the burden and the lever, the weight and the wing, the suffering and the power of sustenance; it has for the first time made the cross a crown.

And yet, merely natural love is far from having reached the goal. It is noble; it is beautiful; but it is not the topmost triumph. For, what after all is that which it seeks? Simply the survival of that which it deems the fittest—the nearest to itself. In all its natural forms love seeks its own. The mother's love, the brother's love, the husband's love, the son and daughter's love, are each and all the search for something kindred to ourselves. St. John looks out for a vaster type—a love that can come where there is no kindred, no sympathy. He seeks a love that shall strive for the survival of the unfittest—the blood of a spotless soul that can wash the sins of the absolutely impure. He seeks such a love as Paul sought in 1 Corin-

thians xiii., whose every step was a step downwards, a step into hearts foreign to its own—believing against present facts, hoping against existing clouds, bearing against daily disappointments, enduring against labour seemingly thrown away. This is to John the perfect type of altruism—the Lamb that was slain.

It is the progress towards this type that constitutes to St. John the philosophy of history. The world, he would say, is made for Christ, and therefore it is not a perfect world. It is not suited to the satisfaction of man—either his physical or his mental satisfaction. It cribs and narrows his individual life at every corner, because it is made for another life than the individual. It breaks the unity of the family, because it wants man to look further than the family. It interrupts the peace of the tribe, because it desires man to see beyond the tribe. It destroys the boundaries of the nation, because it would stimulate man to a wider altruism than even the life of the patriot—an altruism which shall seek elements foreign to itself, and find a place in its heart for every country and kindred and people and tongue. “Behold He cometh with clouds,” is John’s summary of the purpose of creation. The clouds are made to rest upon everything with a local colouring, just that man may gaze upon that which is not local—that every eye may see Him.

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