

“IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.”

(REVELATION vii. 14.)

“THEY have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The words are familiar enough, but is the thought clear? The idea it is most likely to suggest to the ordinary English mind is most unnatural and repulsive. This is a chief reason why such passages are so seldom dealt with at all, and, when dealt with, so often slurred over, as when one of the first preachers of the day thus expounds it: “The blood signifies the suffering of mortal human life; and the whole declaration is, that this glorious fellowship of noble sufferers, the radiant brotherhood of triumphant saints, were exalted to their heavenly glory and perfectness through the natural and earthly steps of sanctified suffering.” Not a syllable about “the blood of the Lamb.” Surely that is not dealing honestly with the sacred Scriptures.

The true way of dealing with a passage of this kind is to put ourselves in the place of the writer and of his readers, to find if possible what was in his mind when he wrote, and what would be in theirs when they read. This may require patience, but surely the matter is of importance enough to demand it.

First then, what thoughts would be suggested by the reference to “the Lamb”? It would take them back, no doubt, to the paschal lamb, but would probably be still more closely associated with the daily offering; for every morning at sunrise it was the duty of the officiating priest to offer a lamb for the sin of the people. Day by day from time immemorial a lamb had been offered in sacrifice; and the remembrance of this would put full meaning into the familiar designation of Christ as *the* Lamb, “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.”

Next let us look closely at the expression "the blood of the Lamb." What did that mean to John and his readers? Literal blood? Nothing of the kind. Listen to what they had been taught from their earliest infancy—it would be as familiar to every one of them as "The Lord is my Shepherd" to a well brought up Christian child: here then was what they had been taught: "The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls." It is most important to remember this, for it is the very opposite of what we are accustomed to think. We associate blood with death; they were distinctly taught to associate it with life. "The life is in the blood."

The blood of the Lamb then meant the life of the Lamb. Perhaps the question might be asked, Why not say life, when life is meant? The answer is that the life disappears when the Lamb dies, and, as we shall see, it was necessary to the completing of the simile that the life of the lamb should be presented to God after it had been slain. How could this be done? Evidently not by means of the dead body; it could only be by the blood, which, after the death of the animal, still stood for its life. When then the blood of the lamb was shed, it meant the giving up of life, and when the blood which had been shed was caught up and put upon the altar, it meant that the life which, had passed through death and emerged out of it was presented to God. Every time the priest offered the lamb, it was as if he said: "I, in the name of the people of Israel, whom as their priest I represent, surrender the life of this lamb as a token that they surrender the life which they live in the flesh, giving it up to death, and I take up the blood which has been shed and put it upon the altar as a token that they will take up their life again as a new life, and dedicate it wholly unto God." It meant, in short, dying unto sin and living again unto God. What a noble ritual! By the daily offering of

the lamb the devout Israelite was taught every morning at sunrise to die to sin and live unto righteousness. Is not every night a death and every morning a resurrection?

"Oh, timely happy, timely wise
 Hearts that with rising morn arise!
 Eyes that the beam celestial view
 Which evermore makes all things new!"

This, remember, was done every day; but once a year the same thing was enacted with peculiar solemnity and impressiveness, for on this day, known as the Great Atonement Day, the blood which had been shed was carried through the Holy Place into the Holiest of all, and there, reverently, on the Mercy Seat, or "Propitiatory," as it is called in the New Testament, presented to God. The same idea, only more solemnly expressed: "I, priest of Israel, in Israel's name, surrender the life they are living in the flesh that it may be taken up again and consecrated unto God."

That was called "making an atonement for their souls." But clearly the transaction was only symbolic. It could not have validity in itself. It was not possible for the blood of bulls or goats or lambs to take away sin. The value of the ceremonial depended on the impressive picture it gave of the great atonement which it prefigured. And accordingly, when the fulness of the time had come, in room of the official priest of Israel appears the real Priest of Humanity, and the offering He brings is no symbolic offering, but the offering of Himself, so He is not only Priest but Lamb, "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." The blood He shed was His own, and in doing so He gave His life an offering for sin; and it was His own blood He took into the Holy Place; that is, He took His life after it had passed through death and emerged from it, and carried it into the presence of God.

This He did, like the priest, as the representative of His people. The lamb which was offered daily could only be

representative in symbol, but the Lamb of God is a real Representative; for He is truly Man, is, in fact, *the* Representative of humanity, for He is "the Son of man," the Ideal of humanity. His life was spotless and pure; but, associated as He was with the weakness of flesh, identified as He chose to be with the race as a whole, He accepted on its behalf the condemnation of sin in submitting to death. But that was only half of the work, and it is important, for many reasons, not to leave out the other half, as is often done, from the Atonement. Remember what Himself said on the subject, "I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father." The laying down of His life, then, was only part of the Atonement; the other part was the taking it again, to be united with the life of God for evermore.

Now, we are prepared for seeing clearly and fully what would be in the mind of John and of his readers in the expression, "the blood of the Lamb." It would mean the life of Christ as a life in the flesh surrendered on the cross on behalf of humanity, and so taken up again in the resurrection as a life in the Spirit. It only remains to see what was meant by the preposition: "*in* the blood of the Lamb."

Picture again the devout Israelite at sunrise, with his face turned to the temple and his heart lifted up to God as the morning ritual was performed, the blood shed, and then caught up and put upon the altar. What would be his morning meditation? Would it not be something like this: "I am in that blood of the Lamb, for it represents the life of Israel, and I am one of Israel; I accept what the priest is doing as done on my behalf; I make it my act; it is I who give up my life in the flesh, so full of imperfection and sin; I lay it down and put it away, and accept the new

life which is caught up by God's representative, and offered on His altar. I am dead to my old selfishness and sin, and alive unto God through this holy offering which has been made on my behalf"? In the same way the Christian, looking to the Lamb of God as his Representative, says, "It is for me He has surrendered His life; it is for my sins He has become obedient unto death; it is for me that, having laid the old life down, He takes the new one up; it is in my name that He returns to the bosom of God. I am in that blood which is first poured out in death, and then caught up and carried into the presence of God; my life is wrapped in that life of His; I believe in Him; I associate myself with Him; I unite myself to Him; I die in His death; I make a complete surrender of my old life of fleshly weakness, and gladly take it up again in the power of the Spirit which He sheds forth upon me; I give myself to Him; I lay my life upon the altar; I gladly enter into the secret place of the Most High, to abide under the shadow of the Almighty, a new man, born again to newness of life. 'I have washed my robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'"

Now I ask of any who have been good enough to follow this exposition, whether there is anything repulsive or horrible in the words when we understand them as John intended, and as his readers would be sure to understand them. For we must remember that no exposition would be needed to them; the whole circle of ideas was as familiar as our daily family worship is, or ought to be, to us.

And this view of the force of the preposition is in harmony with its use in the same connection in other parts of the New Testament. We admit that there is a temptation here to connect the preposition *in*, not as we have suggested, with the people, but with the act of washing. But it is at once corrected when we find that the same phrase is used when the verb is quite different. The remark

applies even to this book of Revelation. In Revelation v. 9 the Lamb is addressed in these words, “Thou wast slain, and hast *redeemed* us to God *in* Thy blood.” Our versions, both Authorized and Revised, vary the preposition, but it is the same in the Greek. So, too, in Revelation i. 5 the approved reading is, “Unto Him that loved us, and *loosed* us from our sins *in* His blood”—again the same preposition, though R.V. translates “by.” The same expression is familiar in the writings of St. Paul, who seems to use it as parallel with his oft-repeated “in Christ.” “In Christ,” “in Him,” “in the Lord,” such are the expressions he uses when he speaks in general of the union of the believer with Christ; but when he wishes to confine attention to the Atonement, as distinguished from the work of Christ in its large sense, he uses the expression, “in His blood.” As illustrations of this we may point to such great passages as Romans v. 9, “Much more then, being now justified in His blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through Him”; or Ephesians ii. 13, “But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ.” When the passages are examined, not in the translations, where the preposition is so frequently changed, but in the original, it seems not too much to say that the entire *usus loquendi* is in favour of the interpretation which we have ventured to give in this paper.

It should, of course, be understood that this is simply an expository paper. It makes no attempt fully to deal with the large and difficult subject of the Atonement; but it has seemed to the writer of it worth while to show that an expression so characteristic of Biblical phraseology is not properly interpreted by those who represent it as unnatural and repulsive.

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