

love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given unto us" (chap. v. 5). It is this love of God to us, which, through the response of love evoked by it in our hearts, is the guarantee for a good life. Love begets love—to be more specific, grace begets gratitude; and gratitude is the inspiration of all Christian goodness. This, much more than anything suggested by the idea of a mystical union with Christ, or an indwelling of the Spirit, seems to me the point of view from which the Apostle contemplates the problem raised in the sixth chapter of Romans. We cannot continue in sin, his argument runs; to do so would be inconsistent with our whole relation to Christ. It would be inconsistent with the death to sin which is involved in faith, and represented, as in a picture, in baptism; it would be inconsistent with our sense of debt to Him who died for our sins that we might be in bondage to them no more; it would be inconsistent with our hope of the glory of God. All this, I repeat, is intelligible, and it is on the level at which the Apostle writes throughout this section. Whatever it may be proper to say of the Holy Spirit, or of union to Christ, or incorporation in Him, must be said on the basis of such experiences and within their limits.

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### *JUDGMENT BY WORDS AND BY WORKS.*

IN St. Matthew xii. 37 our Lord declares that "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." That the judgment referred to is not that of men in the common intercourse of life, but the judgment of God in the last great day, appears unmistakably from the immediate context. He had just been saying that for "every idle word that men shall speak" they shall be called to account "in the day of judgment."

The solemn warning thus conveyed to us, that we ought to be a great deal more careful than we generally are as to what we say and how we say it, calls forth a ready response from the Christian conscience—comes home, indeed, very keenly to most of us. That is perhaps the reason why we fail, almost entirely, to perceive how extraordinary our Lord's declaration really is. Our spoken words, He said, will form the ground of our justification, or of our condemnation, in the judgment of the last great day. The statement is made without any qualification at all. It is not expressly said that by his words *alone* a man shall then and there be justified or condemned; but it is distinctly implied that his words alone would form a sufficient ground—a reliable ground—for that tremendous judgment. That is surely an amazing statement, and one which runs counter to the almost universal opinion of mankind as to the real value of words. So also is that other foregoing statement, which evidently stands in close connexion with it, that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”; in other words, that whatever a man feels strongly will declare itself in his speech. If we read that saying anywhere else than in the Bible, we should at once exclaim that it was very far from being true. We should even smile to ourselves at the simplicity, the inexperience, which permitted a man to make such a statement without qualification. There are *times* when people speak out of the abundance of their hearts, but these times are the exception rather than the rule. Even children frequently employ the faculty of speech in order to disguise their real feelings. Philosophers of a certain order have maintained that language was given to man for this precise purpose. If it be urged that such a paradox could only have originated in a highly artificial and corrupt phase of civilized life, it must be answered that the most un-

tutored savage will often say what he does not mean at all, and still more often not say what he does mean. The art and habit of reticence, of dissimulation, of falsehood, is common to the whole earth, is found among people in every stage of development, is (in many of its aspects) a necessary accompaniment of any sort of civilization. You cannot live with people if you are to tell them just what you think of them. You will not gain their respect or their confidence by wearing your heart upon your sleeve. A very slight experience of the disagreeable and dangerous side of life teaches the child, or the savage, to order his speech with "economy," or even with cunning. The educated and cultured man is, for other reasons, no less disinclined to let his mouth speak out of the abundance of his heart. His deepest feelings he keeps to himself, and in his converse with other men he either suppresses them altogether, or else gives utterance to them only on rare occasions, and for very special reasons.

It may be said that all this is exceptional and abnormal; that in all men the underlying instinct is to utter in words what they think and feel at the moment; that the general rule, therefore, stands as our Lord declared it. But it is not possible to hold such a position in face of the admitted facts of life. The exceptions, the limitations, are far too serious to be left out of sight. Those men who have learned — according to the well-known saying—to be silent in half a dozen languages are only outstanding examples of a world-wide art. Their words never give any positive clue to what they really think. Others—whose name is legion—practise habitual dissimulation all their lives; the relation between their words and their thoughts is one of contradiction, not of correspondence. Among the Pharisees, e.g., our Lord must have known men of this character. Apart from all that may be objected to as abnormal, it is certain that the

common course of life and education does in general work in us a large amount of discrepancy between what we say and what we are. In some ways our speech is worse than our self, because we do so often speak with a certain recklessness (most of us), not expecting to be taken quite seriously. A large proportion of Englishmen, e.g., do not hesitate to call their opponents—political or otherwise—“fools.” Some will even apply that epithet to their wives and children, and this without any regard to our Lord’s well-known warning about that very word. What is more remarkable is the fact that no one, however conscientious, thinks much the worse of these people, or counts them guilty of a crime. At the worst, this common habit is a regrettable one—the habit of using exaggerated language, language which, in its dictionary meaning, expresses sentiments indefinitely more hostile and contemptuous than those which the speakers really entertain. Some of the most admirable people (it may be) whom we may ever have known, were in the habit of using language of this violent kind. Knowing their real sentiments as we did, we were quite rightly persuaded that it was but a venial fault. Nothing would induce us to believe that for idle words of this kind, *which they did not really mean*, they were to be condemned in the last day. For assuredly in such cases as this the mouth does not speak out of the abundance of the heart; the heart is sound and good; it is only the habit of speech that is at fault. In other ways, again, and more common ways perhaps, our speech is habitually better than our self. Very few educated people commit their worse thoughts or feelings to speech. Their conscience is enlightened enough to make them shy of doing so, and the tacit agreement of decent society discourages it. Our speech, like our action, is very largely determined by the sense of what is expected of us, by the moral standard

which has the approbation of the society to which we belong. This constraint however has, notoriously, but little effect on the real self; it does not control the inner play of thought and feeling (*i.e.* "the heart") at all effectively. Consequently the majority of people in a Christian country have their words much better under control than their "hearts." In other words, their speech is decidedly better than they are themselves. Nor indeed is this to be regretted; for if we gave free vent to all the thoughts and feelings which we tolerate within ourselves, we should not only corrupt others but harden ourselves. We recognize instinctively, but quite properly, that we can only allow the better-behaved part of us to enjoy the prerogatives of speech. Taking both these things together, we may assert, without hesitation, that, for one reason or another, what we say is only a very partial, and a very unreliable index to what we think, what we feel, what we are. Old and young, rich and poor, cultured and savage, Christian and heathen, one with another, we speak to a great extent *from the teeth outwards*. What we say is indeed in some sort an expression of self; but so unconsciously modified, or so deliberately altered, that it is quite unreliable. So well is this understood, that in the literature of all nations the antithesis between words and deeds, between profession and practice, between what a man says and what a man is, embodies itself in a multitude of epigrams, of truisms, of popular judgments. Indeed it may be found easily enough in the New Testament itself.

Yet our Lord declares, without reservation, quite simply, quite positively, that we shall be judged and sentenced according to our *words*.

This is really important because it proves conclusively that a declaration made by our Lord in the most absolute way may be of such a nature that it cannot possibly

be true in the shape in which it stands before us. God forbid that any one should dream that any word of our Lord Jesus Christ is not true. But this is certainly not true in any ordinary sense. If any divine were to set it down in a theological manual that men will be judged at the great assize according to their *words*—the things they have said, the sentiments they have uttered—it would be neither more nor less than a false statement.

Why is it that the ordinary reader, although he is quite aware of this, does not stumble at this saying of our Lord? Is it not because he instinctively takes it in close connexion with, and dependence upon, the previous saying that the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart? That statement is known to everybody to be true only in a very limited sense. Our Lord is therefore understood to be insisting that words are far from being unimportant; that they are (rightly considered) emanations of the inner self; that they may even be looked upon as forming the ground of our own future and final judgment, so far as they really represent the inner self out of which they spring. Instinctively the reader perceives at once that, as far as the judgment is concerned, our Lord's declaration has very little *doctrinal* significance, because obviously a man's words form but a very uncertain index to his character, and are far less reliable in that respect than his deeds. But as far as our present life is concerned the reader perceives at the same moment that the declaration has a great *practical* significance, because it puts in so tremendously solemn a light the duty of keeping a watch over the door of our lips.

It follows; then, that our Lord made this declaration about the judgment in this very positive shape, not with a view of telling us anything about the procedure of that day—for we cannot possibly accept it in that sense—but with a view of enforcing upon us a moral duty of our present life.

To put it so bluntly may seem irreverent; and yet there does not appear to be any possibility of escaping the conclusion. No ingenuity will enable us to accept the assertion that we shall be judged according to our words, except under reservations so large and so profound as to leave the assertion itself theologically useless. The more awfully conscious we are of the all-penetrating glance of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, the more absolutely certain we are that what we say will form but a small element in His estimate of what we are and whither we have to go, for good or evil. Our words, in fact, do not correspond with any accuracy to our inner selves. The stream of words, which is ever flowing on, takes its rise on the outer slopes of our human life. It does not draw upon the hidden reservoirs of thought and feeling, which more than anything else determine the true character. Or, if it does, it is only intermittently, when these overflow.

If we are willing to acknowledge so much, must we not go further, and confess that it is the same (though to a less extent) with our *works*? Under many conditions of life, a man's action is nearly as much limited and regulated as his speech. If he is lacking in what we call originality, he hardly asserts himself perhaps in his doings much more than in his sayings. One may find hints, of course, in both of these of what he really is, but only hints. And we, who cannot go behind these, are often grievously mistaken in our estimation of the man. In order that the real character should stand disclosed, a concurrence of favouring circumstances is required, which cannot be reckoned on in any particular case. So clearly is this recognized, that it forms the motive in many popular tales. Here, e.g., is a young officer who is universally credited with a frivolous and even fatuous character, because his speech and his manner of life point to that, and to nothing else. But the chances of war throw him into a situation in which all depends upon

him. Immediately he exhibits a strength of mind and a fertility of resource which make him equal to the occasion, and along with these an unpretending heroism of self-sacrifice which wins for him the grateful affection as well as the admiration of all beholders. The story is nought; but the assumption on which it turns, surprising as it is, is abundantly justified by the known facts of human life. Circumstances, however unusual, do not alter people: they have no creative or re-creative power. But circumstances do not infrequently bring to light that real self—that better or worse self—which had never disclosed itself before either in word or deed. It seems to follow certainly that many a man lives his life out on earth without ever knowing, or letting it be known, what his real value is, simply because the opportunity has never come to him. In other words, a man's actual works form, in many cases, no fair criterion of what he is really worth. His manhood, with its want of stimulus, its absence of opportunity, its failure to bring him face to face with high responsibility, has left him as undeveloped, as unrevealed to himself and to others, as his childhood did. It does not, of course, follow in the very least that this man—or any other man—remains unknown or obscure to God, who searcheth the heart and the reins; but it *does* follow that, precisely for this reason, God will no more judge us according to our works than He will according to our words. What a man says, even habitually, may easily give a false impression of what he actually is. So, it seems, may what he does—even what he habitually does. To judge a man by his words is too rough and ready a method even for us: we habitually set it aside in common life in favour of the much more satisfactory test of conduct. But this also is too rough and ready a standard for the all-seeing and all-righteous God, since it is never quite satisfactory, and sometimes would be altogether unfair.

It will probably seem to many that such an argument as



this is, after all, useless—or worse than useless—because it is so repeatedly and so definitely stated in Scripture that men *will* be judged according to their works, and it is vain for us to try to go behind the statement. The Almighty (they will say) will make all necessary allowances—for want of opportunity, as for everything else—but still He will, and must, judge all men according to their works, for He has said so. It is just here that we may find our Lord's declaration about *words* so valuable, and, indeed, so decisive, for our present purpose. He speaks of judgment by *words* every whit as positively, as much without reservation, as He speaks elsewhere, or as any of the sacred writers speak, about judgment by *works*. Yet there is no theologian in the world who teaches that a man's conversation—or anything that comes out of his lips—will form the actual ground of his final acceptance or rejection before God. His words will not be without importance there, because they are not without importance here: but there, as here, the importance must be of a very secondary character. It cannot, therefore, be presumptuous to hold that both these declarations about judgment to come—so precisely similar as they are in form—stand in reality on the same level.

What is that level? What does it really mean when it says in this place that we shall be judged by our words; in that, that we shall be judged by our works?

It seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that in both cases the reference is in form to the day of judgment, but in substance to the time of our sojourning here on earth. The passage in St. Matthew xii., which culminates in *v.* 37, has, so far as we can judge, an exclusively practical reference to the duties of to-day, to the responsibilities of our present life. It emphasizes, in a startling manner, the importance and responsibility of speech. A word, properly considered, is a living thing: it is a direct product of the inner self wherein that inner self, in all its vigour and

complexity, becomes audible to the world. The self-manifestation of man, in and by his words, resembles, however faintly, the self-manifestation of God, in and by His Word. It reveals the man, as he is, in his good or evil. Practically, indeed, this aspect of human speech must be considered transcendental: in actual life it is so broken up and obscured by the manifold incongruity between a man's speech and himself that it is almost without value for testing purposes. Nevertheless the transcendental truth remains true in its own sphere: and because it does, a really good man will never speak without a more or less strong sense of responsibility. Not what our words will be to us *then*, but what they ought to be to us *now*; not what we have to hope or fear from them at God's judgment-seat, but what we have to remember concerning them in our daily converse: *that* was what our Lord really had in view as He spoke. The reference to the judgment of the last day is not prophetic and theological; it is dramatic and religious.

Is it not just the same with the celebrated passage in St. Matthew xxv. 31 f., and with other like passages? They do not help us in the very least to know anything, or to say anything, about the methods or the results of the last assize. They do not even persuade us that we shall really be judged according to our works in any literal or exclusive sense—for that would be incompatible with God's self-revelation in Scripture. But they do help us, in the most emphatic way, to know what it is that God loves (or hates) to find in us *now*. And they do, with the same emphasis, persuade us so to live by help of His grace *here* that He may have mercy upon us in that day. It hardly seems too much to say that almost every reference to the day of judgment in the New Testament is dramatic (or rhetorical) in its character. Its real (and often transcendent) significance is exhausted when we have drawn out its application to the life of Christians here and now.

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