

more to desire. He would have believed, of course, that there was a fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore to come by-and-by, that buried delights would rise from their graves, that all discords would change at last to sweetest music in heaven. But he would have said that all this, in its fulness at any rate, was for those who cared for this truer "good" most and first. It was one of the Apostle's first concerns that man should secure the transformation of experience which God-ward love could perform; and his song of gladness was inspired by the thought that already, in so far as a God-ward love was there, "all things are yours."

HENRY W. CLARK.

*"THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."*

(HAB. II. 4; GAL. III. 11; HEB. X. 38; ROM. I. 17.)

THE principle of development, so fruitful in physics, begins to play a great part also in theology. Already we can see plainly that much was authorized and almost sanctioned in one age, which was promptly denounced when the race had learned enough to profit by its denunciation.

The vine which was brought out of Egypt had to strike its roots and spread its branches far. Messiah had to await the fulness of the times, before the ideas which slowly took form in the Old Testament could become the historic facts of the New.

It is therefore little wonder, when the whole system was developing, advancing, taking newer and deeper meanings undiscerned before, that sometimes a phrase, a text, quoted from the Old Testament in the New, assumes there a depth and richness of significance which the writer little meant. Instead of reckoning as a difficulty this contrast between

the first and the ultimate meaning, we might find it a help, and almost an evidence. Our religion shares with Nature, as being the work of the same God, this germinal quality, this power to unfold and to expand itself. It belongs to many of the greatest sayings in the Old Testament. But this does not mean that we should accept with submission any interpretation, however unreasonable and far-fetched, which a New Testament writer could conceivably impose upon an ancient utterance. It means that what seems arbitrary at the first glance is only an unfolding, if the germ be there.

A fine example of this principle is the saying of Habakkuk, “The just shall live by faith”; and the three quotations of it in the New Testament, each with a slightly specific and distinct shade of meaning.

What did the prophet intend by Faith? Scarcely that which St. Paul meant by it in his citation. Isolated from its context, the Hebrew word scarcely seems to mean “trustfulness” at all, but rather stability—trustworthiness.

To justify the Greek and English rendering (that is to say, the inspired interpretation in the New Testament), we must seek for light from the context. Then we quickly discover that the stability and trustworthiness of the verse is in contrast with the prophet’s own condition, whose soul is profoundly shaken. He has made a passionate appeal to God against the prevalent iniquities. “I cry out unto Thee of violence and Thou wilt not save. Why dost Thou show me iniquity?”

And God has answered that the vengeance upon these iniquities will be surely signal. “I raise up the Chaldeans . . . they are terrible and dreadful . . . they fly as an eagle . . . He scoffeth at kings.” But this scourge of God is a still greater offence to the moral sense than the evils which he comes to punish. “His might is his god . . . Wherefore

lookest thou on them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he ? ”

To this conqueror men are as the fishes in a net, and he sacrifices to his net (which is his army) and burns incense to his drag. In other words, the chosen race are abandoned to conquerors who deify brute force. And the prophet cries wildly to the skies—“ Wherefore ? ”

No wonder that a picturesque commentator heads the first chapter “ The Prophet as Sceptic.” Now the reverse of scepticism is Faith. It begins to work when he resolves to stand as on a watch-tower and see what God will answer to his complaint. The reply is so memorable that he is bidden to write the vision on tablets for all to read, since, though it may tarry, it will not really delay.

The answer as concerning the Chaldee is “ his soul is puffed up, it is not level within him,” and therefore, being out of plumb, must sooner or later fall. Not he therefore “ shall live,” but the just shall live through his stability (which the sorely tried prophet needs, and to which he is clearly being exhorted)—through his fidelity amid all that cries out against his faith in a moral rule upon earth. This firmness when the writer had failed, what else is it but a victorious and splendid faith ? And this, said Habakkuk, should preserve him amid the horrors of a fierce invasion. Such temporal protection is plainly what the prophet had in mind. But it is plain also that such deliverance implies the Divine favour : he who thus “ lives,” lives because he is acceptable to God, and his life is given him for a prey.

And now let us see how far the New Testament carries this pronouncement.

St. Paul quotes it first of simple forensic justification, of release from the guilt of past sins. None, he argues, can possibly be justified by the law, for even in the Old Testa-

ment it is written that life, and even the life of a just man is by faith (Gal. iii. 11), and the law is not of faith ; its offer—nay, rather its challenge, which never yet has been accepted with success—is very different ; it says “ The man who doeth these things shall live by them.”

The citation is entirely justifiable ; for it was not written The just shall live by his works, but by the staunchness of a mind stayed upon God.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, which though not Paul’s is thoroughly Pauline, the text reappears. But now the question is not of the beginning of life, but of its maintenance. There are teachers of conversion, as if it were the whole of salvation, who forget that the New Testament insists with equal emphasis on both of these. There is a Sacrament of the feeding as well as of the quickening of the soul—and much confusion would be saved by remembering that these are complementary to each other, so that no theory of Sacramental language is satisfactory which cannot be applied to both. That life, we read, is sustained, as it began, by faith. “ The just shall *live* by faith, but if any man draw back (instead of continuing in life), my soul shall have no pleasure in him ” (Heb. x. 38).

Now this citation lies even closer to the original than the first, since Habakkuk wrote of the maintenance of the righteous man among perils, and perils of temporal death. Evidently the man whom God maintained in the day of trouble was abiding in His grace and favour. And this is what the Epistle urges.

St. Paul himself quotes the verse yet again. All true vitality is progressive. The period when the body really ceases to grow—which does not only mean to increase in external bulk—is the period of its beginning to decline ; thenceforward, death worketh in it. The spiritual life also must grow or fall away. And so the Apostle writes, “ The

righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith."

Perhaps the best commentary upon this assertion is the Gospel of St. John. Because Jesus said, I saw thee under the fig-tree, Nathanael believed. But presently, when Jesus turned water into wine, Nathanael was among the disciples who believed on Him there. In the same chapter we read that when He was risen from the dead, they remembered—and they believed. Again and again in the interval the same assertion is made. And who fails to understand this? Who does not know that the way of faith is that of a mountain climber, whom each footstep cut with the ice-axe serves but to sustain while cutting another higher footstep, which serves the same purpose in its turn? Every experience of Habakkuk's Israelite during the invasion would advance him "from faith to faith."

From this text, and its use in the New Testament, we see what Scripture means by Faith. It is not the acceptance of even the most precious dogma concerning God or the soul of man. It is the reliance of man upon his living Lord and Friend. It is the same, adding to graces already attained the last grace of the ripest Christian, as at the beginning, purging him from the stain of his old sins.

G. A. DERRY AND RAPHOE.