

as to give up His Son to die for us, in order that His grace might reach us in unison with that Righteousness in being raised to which alone *salvation* is to be found. We repeat, therefore, that unless this conception of the Cross be embraced in a doctrine of the Cross, it cannot be a completely moral one.

[The writer of the foregoing may be permitted to say that in his Book, *The Cross and the Kingdom*, he sought to confine himself to what he believed could be fairly inferred from the Synoptic narratives alone; St Paul's Doctrine of the Cross was dealt with in his previous work, *The Spirit and the Incarnation*].

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### A DAUGHTER OF JACOB.

THE conversation between Jesus and the woman of Samaria passes into the first of its deeper phases with the Lord's remark, *If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.*

*If thou knewest.* But she did not know. She failed as yet to realize her opportunity. The woman was upon the edge of the supreme moment in her life, and apparently she could find nothing better to do than talk and tease, until it seemed as if she would actually allow the chance to go, oblivious of its size and offer. For, as not unfrequently is the case in human experience, the turning-point came unawares. Nothing warned this woman of the significance attaching to the conversation or of the wide possibilities with which she was trifling in this interview. No presentiment, inward or outward, had she of the crisis, ere swiftly and quietly it was upon her. The sunlight flickering on the sand, the stones and water of the well, the common sights and sounds of the place, were as they had been on

countless other days, while she herself had probably trudged out with her pitcher in that listless mood which renders people too dull to expect any fresh experience or any vital change.

*If thou knewest.* The keen sense of capacity and aspiration may readily flicker out of life. Any thought of a God actually moving and speaking, or breaking into the circle of experience, is practically as foreign to certain people as it was to this woman. And sometimes for much the same reason. The trouble is that they stand upon a level where religion is presented mainly in the past or in the future tense, rather than as a reality for present experience, a force and factor of to-day. *Our father Jacob*, she exclaimed; and then, *When Messiah cometh*—as though religion were to be resolved into antiquarian retrospect or apocalyptic prospect. She could talk glibly of past religious history and of future hopes, but it is curious to observe that the single point of connexion between her and contemporary religion evidently lay in religious controversies, upon which she could speak freely and sarcastically, with that perverted sense of superiority which marks those who in print or conversation love to toss words about religion and the churches. Any notion of God as a living presence, or as one who had a personal interest in herself, had practically faded from her mind. In her case, doubtless, insensibility to God was not due, as it was with Nicodemus, to that subtle satisfaction with oneself which has been properly termed “the chief inward enemy to grace.” The juxtaposition of the two figures is a dramatic touch of the author which has been often noted. But it has not been so often noted that one point of this contrast consists in the fact that both are represented as unconscious of Christ’s claims upon them, the one owing to the complacency that deems no further attainment needful, the other owing to that

cheerful acquiescence with a low level which loss of reputation and a stained past are too apt to instil. Expectancy was lacking in both natures. It cost this woman, as it cost Nicodemus, a real effort to understand that the revelation of Jesus means some fresh experience for the highest as for the lowest. At the outset, neither expected anything new or strange or great at the hands of God ; nor, as the author plainly hints, was such expected of them by other people, the one being regarded as too good, the other as too degraded, for anything of the kind.

“ I do not wonder,” said Ruskin once, “ at what men suffer : but I wonder often at what they lose.” A pregnant saying ; only, we might add that suffering streams out often through loss, and that losses are due frequently to nothing else than insensibility. It is so in religion. As the old proverb has it, God comes to us without bell, and the conception of this pulsing environment lends an unwonted wealth and zest, especially to lives which happen to be beset by apparently inexorable limitations of circumstance. This truth, beloved and believed, renders life, in short, more modest and intense. It is a favourite idea of the author of the fourth gospel, and it recurs in the first epistle of John. *If thou knewest the free gift of God . . . Ye did not choose me, but I chose you . . . Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us . . . We love because he first loved us.* It is the chord of graciousness ; the spontaneity, the priority, of God—God always first, his love the cause and the condition of ours, God moving under and behind all human aspiration, communion starting not from man’s side but from God’s.

God comes to us  
With every day, with every star that rises,  
In every moment dwells the Righteous,  
And starts upon the soul with sweet surprises.

The initiative is with him. The soul is touched, not self-impelled, to finer issues.

One reason for laying stress upon this truth may have been a desire upon the part of the writer of the fourth gospel to correct the prevailing semi-philosophic conception of religion as the upward struggling movement of the human spirit to attain divine communion. This motif is audible enough elsewhere in the book. But a more practical interest perhaps lay nearer to his mind. Note how he represents the first word of direction and comfort spoken by Christ to this woman as this : *If thou knewest the gift of God, thou wouldst ask. The gift is the free gift ;* it is Paul's strong, rich term, ἡ δωρεά. And there is a remarkable intention in this method of delineation. For the generosity and spontaneity of God are precisely what many people, like this woman, find it hardest to realize. Like her it is possible that we may allow ourselves gradually to become so pro-occupied with the sectarian animosities and vendettas of the religious world, that the thought of an untrammelled free boon tends to wither even out of our conceptions of God. Or, the very eagerness and need of self-exertion in religion, the duties of prayer and watchfulness and service, may lead us to exaggerate at times the function of the will in faith. Or, for a more general reason, there may be some difficulty about believing heartily in the Divine liberality and generosity. Paradoxical as it may seem, that belief has never proved quite easy to human nature. It takes God to convince men of God's spontaneous love. Primitive paganism, for example, was usually haunted by an incurable suspicion of the gods, as though they were jealous of mankind. The ancient legends explain, with a deliberate and pathetic emphasis, how such comforts as fire and the like had to be stolen or extorted from reluctant deities ; while nothing, it may be fairly said, lay further

from the average pagan mind than the conception of a God freely benefiting men, of a divine being whose favour had not to be won by force or fraud. Survivals of this pagan spirit cling to human nature still. Unconsciously they reappear, for example, in people who tacitly assume, in practice if not in theory, that the initiative in religion rests with man rather than with God.

Think you 'mid all this mighty sum  
Of things for ever speaking,  
That nothing of itself will come,  
But we must still be seeking ?

To how many people in the religious world might not Wordsworth's verse of remonstrance be applied ? To how many of us, it must be confessed, a God who can be found is really more credible than a God who finds ? How often God who may be worshipped seems more intelligible than one who actually *seeks worshippers to worship him* ? A welcoming Father, is not that now and then more authentic to the faith of men than a Redeemer who comes to *seek and save* ?—for sometimes, if he is to save, he must seek and seek for long. Even upon a fairly trained Christian belief is it not occasionally a strain to preserve a simple belief in a God who acts on us and for us freely, having access to us in ways beyond our consciousness, and influencing us of his own accord ? May there not be a danger that the shadow even of our own suspiciousness and ill-fortune, as well as of our self-assertion, may fall across our conceptions of the divine nature ? For in some cases the generous hopes and trustful impulses with which people start in life are rudely beaten down in actual experience, as advantage is taken of their good-nature. It was so with this daughter of Jacob. Like her, some learn to be shrewd and suspicious of their neighbours, till frankness and graciousness ebb almost out of their relations with one another. They dole

out gifts, as this woman doled out her tardy boon of water to the thirsty Christ, perpetually on their guard against being taken in or imposed upon. They distrust any lavish profession of goodwill. They suspect designs in the simplest claims. And the further mischief and misery is the latent reaction of this spirit upon their religion, till a certain reluctance is insensibly associated with God himself, as though he too bargained somehow with men, instead of seeking them without reserve, without any grudging, and without demanding guarantees from them.

If I mistake not, this feature of human faith or incredulity was present to the mind of the writer as he penned the dialogue between Jesus and the woman of Samaria. It is met implicitly in the words, *If thou knewest the free gift of God, and who it is that is speaking to thee.* Christ, in short, is adduced as the convincing answer to such a scruple or hesitating faith. His person and revelation furnish the plainest evidence that God makes a real and disinterested offer of himself to men. For *the free gift of God*, it is suggested, instead of being an abstract boon, is simply an expression for God giving, and giving of himself in Jesus, in ways that are tender, wise, inimitable, various. Christ is himself the Giver and the Gift. The mercies and promises of God are not some vague, magnificent idea, but personally conveyed to men through Jesus, rippling upon human experience through a life like to our own. God spared not his Son, and the Son spared not himself, to make the gift real to mankind. And as the higher gifts cannot be conferred apart from some capacity or sensitiveness in the receiver—since you may not receive an influence as you do a flower or a coin—the preliminary task of God is to stir in men, as in this puzzled, heedless woman, those feelings of uneasiness and wistfulness and vague dissatisfaction which are the earliest symptoms of a diviner change. Such is the

process of discipline. Christ and this woman met that afternoon. *Then cometh he . . . to the well. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water.* But his thirst for her awoke before her thirst for him. He was a stranger to her, but she soon discovered that her life was not wholly strange to him. And that, as the writer implies, was the saving of her. For, in the last resort, everything must depend upon the insight, the initiative, the persistence, the wise handling, of him who is first at the divine tryst of the soul. To be trusted by one person has often proved the saving of a man. To be understood by a single human being may be a moral redemption for blunted and lowered lives. And in a sense is it not still the gift of gifts to be assured of God's belief in us? Men are justified by God's faith in them as well as by their faith in him. They awake at times to find themselves believing in him because, in spite of their unpromising past and as unpromising present, he generously believes in them.

"The most melancholy thought," as George Eliot once wrote to Mr. F. W. H. Myers, "surely would be that we in our own persons had measured and exhausted the sources of spiritual good." To have the opposite of this brought home to us, even in disconcerting ways, can hardly fail to prove a spring of cheer and strength. *If thou knewest . . . thou wouldst ask.* This sense of human capacity and need, and of a God who lives and loves to meet it, it is one function of Christ to create amid our conventional religion, where a bias, half creditable, half deplorable, is always reappearing towards complacency and self-sufficiency. The whole impression made by the life and spirit of Jesus, according to this gospel, goes to excite and justify man's faith in the great generosity of God; if people, it is implied, had any living sense of that, they would all be asking, and none would ask in vain. For faith is, in the last analysis, not a contrivance, the rare product of some spiritual craving. The life with God is some-

thing larger than the struggle of man's soul to reach and to persuade God of its need. *My soul followeth hard after thee.* Yes, but while the consciousness of our own mental and moral powers often comes first in the order of experience, the condition of such efforts has always to be added—*thy right hand upholdeth me.* Communion with God is no adventure of a pioneer on dim, unsounded seas. Prayer is not the clamour of a soul beating at the high gates of heaven. The impulse to all these forms of agony and effort, fortunately for most people, rises from the previous working of God's free love and purpose, that make their way down into our lethargy and underlie even our most spontaneous and instinctive moments. Men are born into Christianity, says our author elsewhere, *not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.* And this work is no series of fitful impulses, but a stream of steady purpose ever falling and flowing through the shadows of the world upon the faith, aye and upon the very incredulity, of men.

For this regenerating movement can reach down to any level or line of experience, not only to intellectual conceit, to the patronizing, good-humoured attitude assumed by men like Nicodemus towards religion, but also to those who are morally unsatisfactory, to the disappointing and the disappointed, to those who, if ever they think about their soul, regard it as a bird with broken wing. Of the latter class the writer presents this woman as one type. His study of her is a study of moral regeneration. What, he would suggest, what though we may have tasted the heartlessness of other people, the emptiness that follows indulgence in hot passions, or the drudgery and vicissitudes of life? What though we are prejudiced and ignorant and shallow? What of all that, when under our vain and vacant moods, beneath the accumulation of trivial and sensual circumstances, Christ is here to stir, in our bewildered and stained characters, a



fountain of fresh hope towards God ? He gets behind our evasion and levity for nothing else. He steps, as it were, into human life just for that purpose.

To realize that, is the point on which all turns. *If thou knewest !* This woman came to know it. *Our father Jacob*, she said, and she was a truer daughter of Jacob than perhaps she understood. For as her ancestor once awoke in a strange bare place to find God had been beside him, though he knew it not, so centuries later did this woman of Sychar realize Christ's presence with a start of wonder. And so, centuries later still, do we. For the revelations of life surge upon us often as they surged upon her, along some ordinary, simple channel. Most people are familiar with the experience of being disappointed over some notable place or person. The visit is made with keen expectation, yet some return pretty much as they went, curiously unmoved. They are ready to blame themselves or other people for the failure of their high hopes. The event has failed to come up to anticipations. Upon the other hand, it is well and wise to make sure that the opposite law and truth of experience shall not be forgotten, viz., that some of the best influences and most regenerating impulses which reach life, arrive in the guise of the mechanical, the casual, and the commonplace. Such moments, strange and sudden, vary in intensity. But what seems common to them all is the heightening of our personal life, which in the religious sphere is tantamount to a keener sense of the Divine presence in us and with us. It is the change from vague, conventional expectation to definite experience, from *When Messiah cometh, he will tell us all things*, to *See a man which told me all things that ever I did*. Suddenly through a conversation, or a reverie in some glen or lane, through a phrase of music, a text of Scripture, a sentence in some book, God starts upon us as upon our sister at Samaria, with some noiseless, arresting experience, some reaction

against the lower self, some disturbance of our languor and prejudices. In a flash, as it were, life seems to fall apart, leaving us face to face with a Presence that will not be put by. We see things for a brief season in a new light. Life appears rearranged in nobler forms, with openings and opportunities near us. The inertia of things is broken up. What hitherto has slept in the ear now burns in the heart. Christ is known in the breaking of the bread. Through some casual and ordinary event, as it were, God becomes more real and near and dear to us, and the result is that from these precious, pregnant moments we go back to life with something—something intimate, holy, and abiding, that often makes the world a new place to us afterwards.

‡ No attainments can outgrow the need of this free, glad visitation. Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, has to be surprised by the unwonted range opened up for the respectable character by the presence of the living Christ, with whom influence means possession. But equally so, the writer of this gospel implies, must the daughter of Jacob learn that no failure need disqualify for these moments of development. These entrances into the higher fellowship with God are not forfeited by the poor penitent. For such is the wonder and wealth of human life, as it lies beset by God in Christ, that none forfeits wholly his opportunity of growth, nor is any beyond the reach of him who stoops to win men from their shallowness and failures, who is here to give them heaven on earth, and give it for the asking.

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