

THE STATURE OF CHRIST.

As opinion is always very far ahead of institutions and it ought to be, so ideals are always infinitely in advance of what is practicable for the present, and they ought to be. This perpetual collision between the two, and the eternal reference or challenge from the one to the other and from the achieved to the unachieved, constitute the chief factors in human progress. And strange as it may appear, the ideal is much more real than the actual of the passing moment, just because it embodies the ultimate truth. We must never suppose that the ideal represents the unattainable, though it be only possible when impossible. The merely possible suggests no temptation, offers no splendid risks, confronts us with no insuperable obstacles. Christ recognized this singular fact, this curious element in human nature, in the Sermon on the Mount and in all His fundamental doctrines. He proclaimed the Gospel of the Impossible, and said that what cannot be must be and will be eventually in the final and supreme synthesis. He knew that nobody could pitch too high the standards of ethics and daily conduct. How indeed should Christ have given us a type of excellence short of the very loftiest and of absolute perfection ? When we ask the question, we have answered it. For an ordinary ideal accommodating itself to the passions and prejudices of the time or even of centuries, would at length be reached and passed and explained and despised. Man, meant for greater things, carries eternity in his heart and accepts this measure alone !

It seems inexplicable that the transcendental side of our Saviour's teaching has never been fully faced or adequately estimated. Often indeed we find it lightly or ostentatiously ignored, as something either temporary and local intended

to inspire the initial enthusiasm demanded by a new movement, or impudently discounted and depreciated as something known by Christ Himself to be Utopian, and never required to be carried out and translated in serious act and fact. But such a supposition is purely gratuitous and an unwarranted and unwarrantable assumption. Jesus was the most practical Preacher who ever lived. Prophets, or dreamers and seers and visionaries, as we falsely and foolishly call them, are invariably the most sane and sober of persons because they alone see things whole and see the uttermost goal. The politician who shapes his country's course by an obsequious regard for present conditions alone may be a consummate time-server or a master of compromise, but a statesman he is not. We must endeavour to take a complete view of any given subject, by interpreting it in terms of the future. Principles, before their publication, should be thought out to the bitter end and worked out to their remotest logical consequences, however extreme and even contradictory they may appear just now. If we do not begin by going down to the bottom, we shall certainly not arrive at the top. And the beauty of our Master's doctrines resides mainly in this, in their sweet and sublime *unreasonableness*. If we read the Beatitudes, we perceive in a moment the revolutionary reversal of all the old standards and early measures. *Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the*

Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in Heaven.

We note in astonishment that the promise of both worlds, all place and power, are lavished on the very last people we should expect to receive them. We feel a shock similar to that which would be inflicted if a master were to present with prizes the boys at the bottom and not at the head of every class and reserved his chief favours for them. " *The poor in spirit,*" " *the mourners*" and penitents, " *the meek*" in conduct, those with a passion for " *righteousness,*" " *the merciful*" and not the mighty, " *the pure in heart*" and not the wise and learned, " *the peacemakers*" and not the conquerors, the " *reviled and persecuted*" and not the rich and prosperous—these are the future possessors of earth, and the present inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. All ancient former methods of esteem seem stultified here. At first sight, the teaching looks like beautiful madness or a sort of Divine insanity. But a closer and deeper examination of these announcements, at once so simple and so exalted, reveals the secret. Christ looked beyond. He saw, He knew that in the end, whether imminent or remote, the reward or victory assuredly awaits the patient and gentle who bear and forbear, who are sinned against and suffer, but yet overcome all and everything at last by their very meekness and weakness.

Popular judgments are often, and perhaps usually, false. And never were they more erroneous or mischievous than in their exposition, or rather explaining away of Christ's great ruling doctrines. We must disregard the letter, we are told, and obey the spirit. For, it is contended, our Lord, who knew human limitations better than we know them ourselves, did not seriously suppose that any one

would take literally His extreme statements. This, we need hardly add, is a cheap way of eluding a difficulty, or a disagreeable task. As it seems quite certain that Christ expected not merely His first followers on their missionary march, as pioneers of a new morality and a new religion, but all believers of every age and country, to practise at whatever cost His tremendous precepts. Because He wished us to understand that Love alone could effect permanent changes and consequences, and saw the whole in the part and the end in the beginning. But this, we shall perceive, is very far from exhausting the subject. For our Saviour, in setting before us a stupendous ideal of character and conduct or ethics in action, *ipso facto* did something far more. He became, He embodied, He *was* the Ideal Himself. *The law was given by Moses, but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ.* We may maintain that our Lord represented and typified the Ideal, and this cannot be disputed. But this assertion does not plumb the unfathomable deeps and “*unsearchable riches*” of Divine Love. Christ *was* all that He taught, His Life *was* the revelation we required. He proclaimed an Infinite Ideal, and expressed it in His own daily words and works. In Him knowing and being were identical. And thence follows logically an immense and immeasurable consequence. For as the One Perfect Man, our Lord prefigured the future man—what every one would finally attain, in His Power, by a Divine birthright.

In the process of the centuries, time is cheap, and a million more or less can make no difference. God thinks in ages and provides accordingly. And Christ only summarized in Himself and anticipated in His Sacred Person, the grand ultimate issues, when we shall all be like Him and be as gods. Indeed, were not this expressly and exactly symbolized by His doing and suffering, His healing

and teaching, His miraculous deeds and yet more miraculous silences and inactivities, we might almost venture to suspect a waste of effort or meaningless parade of infinite possibilities. Had not Christ aimed at a direct personal application of His Ideal to ourselves, as something to be eventually appropriated and assimilated by every disciple of His, much of His overflowing energy might look not unreasonably idle or non-significant. This, we recognize at once, is inconceivable. Divine Grace, though the most prodigal thing in the world and lavished universally without stint or stay, we are obliged to consider also as the most parsimonious. In this respect, that every outpouring of Love or Power has a definite object and never was a bow drawn at a venture. God knows precisely what He wants, so much and no more, and the means are severely proportioned to the end desired. Divine Bounty and Divine Parsimony invariably work together, go hand in hand, and mutually correct, if the language may be allowed, and complete each other.

So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth : it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. The appeal lies to the future, but we read the promise that nothing will be or can be wasted. Nothing determined by God ever was in vain. Divine teleology rests at the root, however latent or obscure, of the humblest aspiration or the dimmest and feeblest *nisus* of the embryo recapitulating in the womb of his mother the history of the race, that it may so some day contribute its own tiny effort and go a little farther still itself. Christ's miraculous Powers, as we call them—though if we stood in the same perfect relation to God and in the same perfect harmony with the cosmos and its laws and God's Will, we also should have at our disposal all the resources

(known and unknown) of the Cosmos and should find ourselves lords of Nature with matter malleable in our hands—were a promise and prophecy of our own future powers. He has given pledges that cannot be broken. The shadow of His mantle, so to speak—nay, of His own Omnipotence, in the shadow of the Cross, fell on the whole of humanity then. Theologians have rashly assumed that our Lord's extensions of consciousness and ability, of wisdom and might, began and ended in Him, and possessed no value or application for His followers. While, as a matter of fact, the very contrary holds true. And there is nothing that our Saviour did which we shall not accomplish ourselves when He has realized Himself in us and we have realized ourselves in Him and entered into the fulness of His and our Kingdom.

The history or course of evolution shows, if it shows anything, that organs to be future factors of vital importance in the development of the species, by natural selection and the survival of the fittest, commence by being apparently the unfittest and utterly useless, while they really adumbrate the perfect powers to come. This then being an elementary law, as every text-book of science on the subject teaches, it follows that we should antecedently expect the same testimony in the various stages of man's progress since history. If, our Lord declared—*Consider the lilies how they grow*—the contemplation of the lilies was a liberal education (*καταμάθετε*)—we may well hope to find even more profitable instruction in human development. Nurses protest that babies talk Hebrew, which they believe to be the language of heaven, though this would put a heavy premium on Oriental or Semitic scholarship and would severely limit, at any rate for a time, our intercourse with each other hereafter. But, though babies do not talk Hebrew, there can be no reasonable

doubt that they repeat the early efforts of the race in speech, and yet at the same time their actions look forward as well as backward. For they not merely display marked reminiscences of their arboreal ancestors the anthropoid apes, but they foreshadow, though dumbly and darkly, the grand and gracious destiny that awaits them. And, whatever view we may take of man's evolution, we must all agree at any rate that from the dawn of history the movement on the whole, in spite of temporary eclipses and interruptions, has been upward and not downward.

Man has been in the making, physically, mentally, morally and spiritually. His record is one of ascent and not descent, as we increase our knowledge of it. Races have come and gone, mighty civilizations appeared and disappeared; there were often intervals of prolonged and profound darkness, with occasional reactions and brief returns to the early lower type; still on the whole we delight to believe in a general improvement all round, in spite of the vices and follies that accompany growing culture and like weeds endeavour to choke it. Now have we any right to set a limit to this upward trend and argue that man is in body and mind and morals and religion complete? It seems hardly philosophical to do this. We can only proceed by analogy, and reason from the behaviour of the past to the probable behaviour of the future. If universal improvement has characterized the one, we may confidently reckon on universal improvement for the other. We only learn by failure, but yet we do learn something at least, and to understand our present lack of success guarantees a final achievement of success. An ignorant child, at first, while watching the flowing tide, might imagine from the retreat of every broken wave that there was no advance. But he would soon discover his mistake. None but the pessimist can maintain "*Sic omnia fatis in*

pejus ruere ac retro sublapsa referri," But humanity at heart is infinitely and eternally optimistic, and knows better.

For while the tired waves vainly breaking
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back through creeks and inlets making
Comes silent flooding in the main.

We may decline to accept the facts, but it is useless to dispute the report that since the world of history began there have always been men and women and sometimes even children with abnormal faculties, whether consisting in the indefinite enlargements of those that we all enjoy in common or in senses altogether new. Such persons may be classified indifferently, according to the point of view or the prejudices of science, as cranks or monsters with some part of the mind hypertrophied at the expense of the remaining powers, or as incarnations of divine genius. But whatever we call them, it is from such individuals with such astonishing extensions of consciousness, or such super-consciousness, that the prophets and poets and seers and artists and musical composers and great writers and orators arise. We may sometimes think them half insane, and sometimes say so, and yet it is the madmen on the last analysis that rule the world. It is their glorious intuitions, transcending at a single bound the circuitous processes of reason—it is their ideas and ideals, their splendid inspirations, that are all our light and life. The fire they steal from heaven, from the region of the ruling universal thoughts—

The thoughts that wander through eternity—

illuminates our lower skies and lower earth, and keeps ever burning the sacred flame of that altar at which we kindle all our petty tapers, though we know it not.

Now in our Lord Jesus Christ these abnormal faculties became normal, because in Him alone they found a Being in absolute correspondence with both the Divine and the material environment. He could not help healing the sick and suffering when virtue went out of Him wherever He was and whithersoever He moved. Free full Life, embodied in Him, and in perfect tune with the will and laws of God, necessarily and naturally communicated itself to all around Him who were receptive and possessed hospitable hearts and minds in faith that operated through Love. *He could not be hid. The odour of the ointment filled the house,* and the whole world has been sweet with it ever since. *His Name was as ointment poured forth.*

Never man spake like this Man, for He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes. We are all aware how the mere presence of a beautiful, strong, sympathetic personality radiates health and strength on all within its reach and even far outside the visible and sensible limits. Superabundant faculties of life and hope, of hope and faith and happiness, diffuse themselves at once and impress their own vital character on all around them. But in Christ that overflow of virtue or vitality, that we feel occasionally in a few gifted persons, was constant and continuous because liable to no interruptions of human infirmity or imperfection. He concentrated, epitomized, in Himself every glorious faculty sparsely distributed among isolated individuals and other gifts till then unknown.

Because He was completely "*pure in Heart*" He read people's thoughts as we read an open book. The flesh presented no veil to Him, when the Spirit reigned and ruled and kept the servant in its proper position as a tool and not a tyrant. He stood face to face always with eternal realities, and from His perfect knowledge of everything could make a perfect and immediate use of everything

—not for Himself but for others. In obedience to the supreme cosmic law of self-sacrifice and vicarious suffering, He realized Himself in us by bearing the burdens of our sins and sorrows. Love, unsophisticated love, is when once really reached and lived an immense extension of faculty, and multiplies all our commonplace powers a hundredfold. As much may be asserted of faith. They both annihilate old boundaries, and bring new worlds into being and reduplicate our usefulness. Power without faith would be uncertain in its action, like the strokes of a blind and blundering giant. Power without love would be merely diabolical. It may be that men will sooner discern the foolishness than the wickedness of sin. But however it be accomplished, the victory over sin for every soul was promised infallibly in the Person of Christ, and the pledge was signed and sealed by His precious blood upon the Cross. Even now, upon the whole, we may dare to believe evil is a diminishing quantity. And in the light of our Ideal we can rest assured that its pride has been broken for ever.

The abnormal of to day will be the normal of to-morrow. The wildest dreams and speculations of poets and visionaries are now the trifles of fools and the toys of children. The golden age lies before us and not behind. Science, though it repudiates its ancestry and forgets that it was cradled by religion, while devoutly fighting against Christ's Gospel of the Impossible, yet every hour is helping on and making more practicable the very thing that it professes to hate but adores at heart. It really co-operates with Him in fact, while in words it denies its Master. Telepathy and telaesthesia, clairvoyance and clairaudience, illustrated by wireless telegraphy and the mysteries of radium and "radiobes" and those awful new forces now beginning to reveal their secrets, seem no longer so incredible. We still

draw the line at Spiritualism. But after all the ancient barriers between the two worlds, the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, are breaking down, and it appears exceeding difficult now to decide where matter ends and mind or spirit commences. And to the dispassionate and unprejudiced it does indeed look as if the coming man, the man of the future, will be almost Godlike in his capabilities and have even read the innermost secret of life. "*They that seek the Lord understand all things.*" "*Thou shalt see greater things than these.*" "*He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father.*" Popular belief and expectation have always travelled along these lines. "*But when the multitudes saw it they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.*" The apostles certainly entertained this faith. "*Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*" The endless process of transfiguration will continue, till each of us at last recognizes the stupendous fact, that we cannot escape our Divine obligations, or retreat from the battle to which the cosmos calls us—that each of us is like God the Prisoner of Love and the Prisoner of Eternity.

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A SUGGESTION ON ST. JOHN XIX. 14.

IN his *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* Dr. Edersheim gives strong reasons for maintaining that St. John's Gospel does not differ from the Synoptists in regard to the Last Supper. He takes the passages which are superficially said to be contradictory and argues that they really support a consistent agreement.

1. St. John xiii. 2, *δείπνου γινομένου*, every one now