

THE PLACE OF REWARDS IN THE TEACHING OF CHRIST.

I. THE IMPORTANCE ASSIGNED TO THEM URGED AS AN OBJECTION TO CHRIST'S TEACHING.

IN Luke vi. 35 there is a striking divergence between the Authorized Version and the Revised Version in the rendering of the words *καὶ δανίζετε μηδὲν ἀπελπίζοντες*.¹ The former has "and lend, hoping for nothing again"; the latter, "and lend, never despairing." Those who adopt the latter translation of the words interpret them as referring to the heavenly recompence, i.e., "not regarding what you lend as lost, in view of the reward in store for you in heaven." On this interpretation the meaning of the Revised Version translation stands in striking opposition to that of the Authorized Version. In the one case we are told to hope for nothing, in the other we are urged never to lose hope; in the one case the thought of a return for our generosity is set aside, in the other it is encouraged; in the one case the disinterestedness of the agent's conduct is emphasized, in the other a direct appeal is made to his self-interest.

On the question of the meaning of *ἀπελπίζειν* here the balance of evidence appears to be pretty equal. In favour of the translation "despair," the evidence of contemporary

¹ The reading *μηδένα ἀπελπίζοντες* (T.WH.marg., R.V.marg.) is translated variously: R.V.marg., "despairing of no man"; J. Weiss, "robbing no man of hope," or "bringing no man to despair"; Tischendorf and H. Holtzmann, "neminis spem praescindentes." It has probably arisen through the doubling of the initial *a* in *ἀπελπίζοντες*.

Greek and Hellenistic usage is adduced ; while the rendering of the Authorized Version, which may be defended on the analogy of such words as *ἀποδιδόναι*, *ἀπολαμβάνειν*, appears to suit the context better. Since the question cannot then be settled on linguistic grounds, can it not, one may ask, be determined by a reference to the general spirit of Christ's teaching? The point in question is no trivial one. It concerns the motive of conduct, a subject which must be of the first importance to one who laid such stress on the righteousness of the heart as Christ, and introduces the question of rewards, a topic upon which He touched with considerable frequency. May we not expect, then, to learn from the teaching of Christ on other occasions what was the position He took up on this question; and where such a clear issue is presented to us as between the translations of the Authorized Version and the Revised Version, ought we not to be able to determine with considerable certainty which is the more characteristic of that teaching? But the remarkable thing is, that when we thus inquire into the general tendency of Christ's doctrine on this point, we find the very same ambiguity as obtains with regard to the translation of the present verse from Luke. Throughout the whole of Christ's teaching there are frequent appeals to two different, we might almost say, two opposite motives. At one time believers are urged to the performance of certain acts in a spirit of entire disinterestedness, at another they are encouraged by the prospect of ultimate gain. On the one hand they are exhorted to put aside all thought of return in their dealings with their fellow-men, on the other they are reminded of the reward with which God will recompense their benevolence, and stimulated by the prospect of it to the performance of duty. So far, then, from being able to draw from the general teaching of Christ

any conclusion as to the meaning of the phrase in question in Luke vi. 35, we find in that verse, with its ambiguous motive, only the reflection of an ambiguity which pervades the whole doctrine of Christ. Not only with regard to lending, but with regard to the whole practice of righteousness, does Christ exhort us at once to hope for nothing, and yet never to abandon hope, urge us to be disinterested in our conduct, and yet at the same time appeal to our self-interest.

A few references will suffice to illustrate this double tendency in the teaching of Christ. First, take some passages which insist upon the disinterestedness of those who practise the righteousness Christ enjoins. The verses immediately preceding the one we have referred to in Luke are in this strain. Here, and in the corresponding passage in Matthew, Christ takes various instances of kindly conduct towards one's fellows, such as loving them, doing good to them, lending to them, and greeting them, and declares that the practice of these kindly offices in expectation of a return at their hands is unworthy His disciples, being on a level with the conduct of the publicans, the Gentiles, and sinners (Luke vi. 32-34; Matt. v. 46 f.). We are to love not only our brethren who may reward us, but our enemies from whom we can look for no return. It is the same lesson that is enforced in figurative form by the injunction to invite to our feasts not our friends or rich neighbours, who may invite us in turn, but the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, who cannot recompense us (Luke xiv. 12-14). "It is more blessed to give than to receive," Paul quotes from Christ. Self-denial, not self-seeking, is declared to be the law for the follower of Christ. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it."

But, on the other hand, there are far more utterances

in the opposite strain. Even those passages already quoted in disparagement of the spirit which seeks *immediate* recompence, conclude with the promise of reward in the future. They who do good to those from whom they may look for no return are assured that their reward shall be great, and that they shall be the children of the Highest (Luke vi. 35). They who invite those who cannot invite them again are promised a recompence at the resurrection of the just (Luke xiv. 14). If he who will save his life is warned that he shall lose it, still he who loses his life for Christ's sake and the Gospel's is assured that he shall save it. The whole Gospel of Christ glitters with promise of future blessing. Again and again does our Lord hold forth the prospect of the reward in store for the faithful as an inducement to loyal service. The trials and persecutions which they have to endure are declared to be ground for rejoicing in view of the great reward with which they will be compensated. No act, however trivial, shall be allowed to pass unrecompensed. A cup of cold water given in Christ's name shall not lose its reward. At one time the strict equivalence of the reward to the conduct which secures it is emphasized. The merciful obtain mercy, they who confess Christ are confessed by Him before His Father. At another the excess of the reward over the desert is represented. For what we give we receive good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. Present renunciation is rewarded with hundredfold recompence now in this time, and in the world to come with eternal life. Open the Gospels where we will, we cannot read far without finding Christ holding forth the promise of the reward prepared for us as an inducement and an encouragement to faithful service.

The apparent inconsistency between these two sets of passages is but superficial and may easily be removed.

It is quite true that in those cases where Christ requires disinterestedness in our conduct He speaks disparagingly of those who look for any immediate recompence for their actions. But what He objects to in this is not the looking for a reward at all, but the looking for it *immediately*. So far from discountenancing the prospect of reward as a motive for action, He goes on Himself, as we have seen, in the next breath to assure those who do not expect the reward immediately that their future recompence will be sure and liberal. From this it appears that the disinterestedness upon which He insists is not so ingenuous as it appears at first. When we hear the injunctions, "Lend hoping for nothing", "Invite those who cannot invite you again", we feel as if the spirit which inspired these exhortations were one which shrank from all thought of self-interest, one to which the very idea of a reward for one's conduct in any shape or form must be abhorrent. But when Christ goes on to assure those who are willing to forgo the immediate recompence that they will obtain a far more liberal one in the future, we feel that that puts a very different complexion on the matter; and whereas we had thought before to find a spirit of sublime unselfishness inculcated, we now recognize that the appeal to one's self-interest is none the less direct because the gratification held before one is transferred to a more remote future. The motive which inspires the agent in either case is the same, the prospect of some recompence for his conduct,—only in the one case he looks for it now and at the hands of his fellow-man, in the other case in the future and at the hands of God. Christ does not appear to disapprove of our doing our righteousness with the view of obtaining a reward for it. He expressly holds out the prospect of the reward the Father in heaven has for us as a motive for action. What He does disapprove of is our expecting

a double reward, one here and another in the future, one at the hands of man and another at the hands of God. That is the point of view from which He criticizes the ostentation of the Pharisees in their religious exercises. He does not blame them for allowing the thought of recompence to sully the spirit in which they perform them—He even speaks of prayer Himself as something for which we may expect a reward!—but for forfeiting their prospect of reward in the future by the fact that they have already obtained it in the admiration and esteem of their fellows. There is, then, no inconsistency between the two sets of passages to which we have referred, in which Christ touches upon this question of looking for a recompence for our conduct. He appears to recognize and thoroughly approve of the practice. He Himself frequently holds before our eyes the certainty and the liberality of the recompence in store for us, as a motive for the conduct to which He would urge us. When He speaks disparagingly of those who do righteousness with an eye to recompence, it is not because they desire payment in return, but because they are content to receive the payment in baser coin. With the choice between the heavenly and the earthly, the temporal and the eternal, before them, they prefer the inferior. However Christ may disapprove their choice and despise the baseness of their preference, that does not alter the fact that, so far as the question is concerned of allowing the thought of recompence to weigh as a motive for conduct, His own position is nowise different from theirs. In both cases this motive is recognized, only that in the one the recompence is looked for immediately and in the shape of some earthly good, in the other in the future and in the shape of some heavenly blessing.

It is an easy matter thus to vindicate the consistency of Christ's teaching. But there is a much more serious

question suggested by the consideration of the place which the subject of rewards occupies in the teaching of Christ, which it behoves us to face. As we have seen, Christ recognizes and approves of our doing our righteousness, to use His phrase, with a view to the reward which we shall obtain in the future. Is this not an unworthy motive to admit? May this not be reckoned as one of the defects which may be alleged against Christian morality—that it degrades the practice of righteousness to a piece of refined self-seeking? Goethe tells us that what fascinated him especially in the Ethics of Spinoza was the boundless unselfishness which shone forth in every sentence of the book, and reached a climax in that wonderful saying, “He who loves God truly must not desire that God should love him in return.” It may be open to question whether unselfishness is any longer to be reckoned a virtue when it reaches such an exalted pitch. But apart from the merits of this extreme conclusion to which the principle of unselfishness is carried, the question forces itself upon us whether the doctrine of Christ, with its appeal to the prospect of recompence as a motive for action, does not compare unfavourably with the ethical system of the Jewish philosopher with its sublime unselfishness. Or again, take this extract from Schiller’s *Philosophical Letters*, which deals with this subject of the prospect of reward: “True, it is ennoblement of a human soul, to sacrifice present advantage for eternal—it is the noblest stage of egoism—but egoism and love divide mankind into two classes, in the highest degree dissimilar, and separated from one another by lines of demarcation which never merge into one another. Egoism sets its centre in itself; love plants it outside of itself in the axis of the eternal whole. Love strives after unity, egoism is solitude. . . . Egoism sows for gratitude, love for ingratitude. Love bestows, egoism lends—it

matters not, before the throne of the Truth which judges, whether with an eye to the enjoyment of the following moment, or in prospect of the martyr's crown—it matters not whether the interest falls due in this life or the next.” What are we to say of the doctrine of Christ in view of these statements? Under which principle, egoism or love, are we to range it? So far as the position taken up by Schiller in the paragraph we have quoted is concerned, there can be no question. Christ's admission of the prospect of recompence as a motive for action clearly brings His teaching under the category of egoism on Schiller's principle of judgment. It is true, as we have seen, that the recompence which He urges His followers to strive after is a nobler one than any temporal advantage, and that its enjoyment is postponed to the next life. But Schiller contends—and is there not justice in the contention?—that that does not make any essential difference in the position, or obliterate the distinction between love, which thinks not of self at all, and egoism, which, in however refined and tortuous a manner, is still seeking its own good.

But, apart from the doctrines of philosophers and thinkers altogether, there are perhaps many who will confess to a feeling of something akin to disappointment at the frequency and the frankness of the appeals which Christ makes to this motive. We do not like to think of the moral teaching of Christ as anything short of the very highest and best. We can tolerate blemishes in the systems of other moral teachers, but not with Christ. Any suspicion of the admission of an unworthy motive, or the acceptance of an inferior standard of morality, pains us. Yet we cannot, perhaps, rid ourselves of the feeling that in respect to this question of rewards the teaching of Christ is open to criticism. It seems to encourage mercenary views of religion. The practice of morality is degraded to a calcu-

lation of profit and loss. ' Present renunciation is rewarded by future recompence. " Behold we have forsaken all, and followed Thee ; what shall we have therefore ? "—that question of Peter's seems quite justified from the standpoint Christ takes up in His preaching. Yet what man is there of finer feeling upon whom it does not jar ? And when we think of this question being asked not merely by one disciple with regard to his conduct, but by the Christian community as a whole with regard to the whole practice of that righteousness to which Christ exhorts them—and are we not justified in so conceiving it in view of the position which Christ assumed in His teaching ?—when we convert the maxim underlying Peter's question into law universal, and imagine the question put generally by all who accept Christ as Master, " Behold we have done what Thou hast required of us ; what are we to get in return ? " does not this degrade religion to a kind of mercenary policy which robs it of all spiritual worth, and reduce it, in spite of all the specious disinterestedness and magnanimity with which it decks itself out at times, to a piece of sordid self-seeking ?

One may hesitate to formulate any such charge against the teaching of Christ. The very thought of such a thing savours of irreverence. But one has the uncomfortable feeling that if the argument were pressed to its logical conclusion, something of the sort might result. At any rate we believe that there are many who will confess to a feeling of regret at the prominence which this matter of reward receives in the Gospel of Christ, many who, while not prepared themselves to admit the cogency of the objections to the moral teaching of Christ which bolder spirits may found thereon, are not capable of refuting them, and are pained at the thought that there should be any *primâ facie* case against the moral worth of a doctrine which

they had always imagined to be not only unsurpassed but unapproached in point of moral sublimity.

I propose to examine more closely the position which Christ takes up upon this question, and to inquire what justice there is in the objections that so readily suggest themselves with regard to it.

First, let us consider the force of the argument that the conduct which Christ contemplates on the part of His followers is not entirely disinterested. We shall not at present enter into any closer examination of the nature of the appeal which Christ makes to our self-interest, and discuss its legitimacy. That we shall consider presently. Meanwhile, let us confine our attention to the fact that Christ *does* make such appeal, that He does not rule all question of the interest of self out of court, and insist upon conduct in which there shall be absolutely no thought of self at all. Is this a defect in Christ's Ethics? Does Christianity compare unfavourably, in this respect, with the Ethics of Spinoza, for instance, with its sublime unselfishness, which Goethe admired so much? When we recall the part which the "effort after self-preservation" plays in the system of Spinoza, it may be questioned whether the doctrine of the Jewish philosopher is after all so free of taint of self-interest as Goethe maintained. But even were the Ethics of Spinoza as irreproachable in this respect as Goethe supposed, it might still be questioned whether it was on that account to be preferred to Christ's doctrine. No doubt the thought of a perfectly pure disinterestedness appeals to one forcibly. We seem here to approach the very summit of moral perfection. But is such sublime unselfishness practically attainable in any system of morals? If we reject the very thought of self-interest in every shape and form, what interest has the self any further in the practice of that morality which is set before it? Does

not the very thought of an ultimate good involve an appeal to our interest, using the word in the highest sense? In the attainment of that good, do we not look forward to the development to the full of all the possibilities of our being? Would not a system of morals which inculcated absolute unselfishness fail to enlist our sympathy? Why should I engage in this course of conduct that is prescribed? Why should I deny myself? Why should I live for others? In order that any such code of morals appeal to me, I must feel that along the line of conduct here indicated I attain more nearly to the stature of the perfect man, i.e., that my own life is developed to richer fulness. And if such tacit recognition of the interest of self is involved in the exhibition even of the most altruistic spirit, then it is evident that there can no longer be any question of an absolute unselfishness untainted by any consideration of self-interest, no longer any question of living *wholly* for others without any regard for self at all. Absolute disregard of self would be suicidal. The suggestion that self-denial is the final duty for man amounts to a contradiction in terms. It may be my duty on occasion to deny myself. But the very fact that I recognize the duty as *mine* involves the acknowledgment of self, even at the very moment that we feel constrained to reject certain claims made on its behalf. Absolute disinterestedness is an ethical fiction. We can no more escape from the self in morals than we can jump off our own shadow. However unselfish the line of conduct we resolve to adopt, in recognizing it as *our* duty, we have asserted the self in the very breath in which we thought to deny it.

It is no objection, then, to the morality of Christ that it is not absolutely disinterested, seeing that the same charge may be brought against any system of morals that can lay claim to practical efficacy. Whether the kind of

self-interest to which it makes appeal is of the elevated nature one would expect, or whether Christ does not condescend, at times, to encourage a baser kind of self-seeking which is little better than sordid selfishness—these are questions which can be answered only by a closer consideration of His teaching to which we now address ourselves.

In proceeding to discuss the tenor of the various utterances of Christ upon this subject, we would direct attention to one characteristic of His teaching which it is necessary to keep in mind in order to avoid drawing false conclusions from His own express statements—viz., His tendency to use modes of thought and speech which it is the result of His doctrine to transcend. However true it may be that He is the Universal Teacher, whose doctrine is not of any particular age or clime, but is destined for all mankind, we must remember that in a very real sense He was the child of His own age, addressing Himself in the first instance to the people of His own nation, and using the language and modes of thought that were familiar to them and to Himself. So far as the vehicle of His doctrine was concerned, He simply availed Himself of the forms of thought and religious imagery supplied by the Old Testament and the later Jewish literature. He used the old forms, but He breathed into them a new spirit; and sometimes the form is no longer able to stand the strain to which it is subjected, the thought is too great for the imagery used to convey it, and it becomes evident that to accept that imagery literally would be to do violence to the thought. For instance, Christ uses the familiar figure of a banquet to express the blessedness of the future life in the kingdom of heaven (Luke xiii. 29, xxii. 30); but He has Himself warned us, by His reference to that life as one in which “they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are

as the angels which are in heaven", that that figure of a banquet is not to be taken literally, or to be allowed to suggest any gratification of sensual desires. Again Christ speaks of Himself as if He regarded Himself as a kind of higher law-giver, sets up His own authority as against the law that was given "to them of old time", and declares that He gives a new commandment to His disciples. Yet nothing is more certain than that that is an inadequate category to describe the relationship in which Christ stands to His followers. Nay, we have but to consider the nature of this new commandment which Christ laid upon His disciples—to love one another—to realize that we are here beyond the province of the law-giver; for love is that which will not be constrained, and a commandment to love is almost a contradiction in terms. In the same way we may find that though Christ uses the figure of a reward in store for those who do the works of righteousness, the thought to which He seeks to give expression is of a profounder and more spiritual nature than can be done justice to by any such simple figure. There is one case, at any rate, in which Christ introduces this figure in which this is manifestly the case, viz., in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. At the end of the day the labourers receive their wage. Now, the very idea of a wage involves some reference to the amount of work done to secure it. The greater the amount of work, the greater the wage. But in the parable all the labourers receive the same, whether they have worked the whole day or only for an hour or two. Ostensibly this money is paid as a wage for the day's work, but evidently in reality it has ceased to be a recompence for what has been done, and has become, in the case of the workers who were hired later, a free gift. The parable, as Holtzmann says, "kills the idea of recompence even while it applies it." We

seem to be dealing with a case in which the category employed is that of recompence for service rendered, but the thought which Christ desires to enforce is one to which that category proves inadequate. It may be that we shall find something of the same kind in other cases in which Christ introduces the idea of reward. At any rate it is well to utter a preliminary warning against the tendency to take Christ's use of this figure *au pied de la lettre*, and to draw the conclusions which we reach by pursuing the idea to its logical issue.

Keeping these considerations in mind, let us turn now to examine the bearing of Christ's utterances upon this subject of rewards, and inquire whether they are open to objection from the moral standpoint. What is the nature of the objections that may be urged, has already been suggested. The prominence given to rewards in the teaching of Christ lays His morality open to the charge of giving encouragement to selfishness. It involves an appeal to a spurious motive. We should practise righteousness for the love of it, not from the expectation of what we shall get in return. The man who does the right from such a spurious motive does not really do the right at all, for the righteous act in the true sense is not the mere outward action, but the action done under the influence of the proper motive. The fact that Christ holds the prospect of reward before His followers as an inducement to action seems to imply that the worthier motive is absent, for otherwise why hold this inferior motive before them? Where a higher motive for the practice of righteousness is present, the anticipation of the reward promised will be unnecessary; and where it is necessary the conduct will still lack that true righteousness which comes from the worthiness of the motive which inspired it. In fact, Christ's promises of recompence are little better than

direct bribes to the practice of righteousness addressed to those who lack the love of it in their hearts.

These are grave charges. We shall endeavour to meet them in our further discussion of the subject.

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*NOTES ON THE OLD CANAANITE RELIGION.*¹

THE Old Testament, the excavations in Palestine, and the evidence of monuments and inscriptions show that the old Canaanite religion during the latter half of the second millennium before Christ did not differ essentially from that of agricultural and pastoral peoples who depend upon the fertility of the soil. Such communities tend to develop similar conceptions of the relation between animate nature and themselves. The customary rites, the thank-offerings, the regular festivals, the promotion of growth and fertility—these were essential to Canaanite popular cultus both in our period and in the age when its licentiousness brought the condemnation of the prophets of Israel. But it was not accompanied, in our period at least, by any rudimentary mental or material culture. By the side of amulets, talismans and idols we must observe resource in fortification, building and even in tunnelling. The sacred places, which presuppose organized ritual, the crude plaques of the mother-goddess of nature, and the grim sacrifices of human victims give only one side of the picture. On the other side are the diplomatic letters (discovered at El-Amarna) written by the Canaanite chieftains to the king of Egypt, and the less official communications more recently found at Taanach. These reveal a by no means inferior mental ability and a not

¹ Based upon a paper read before the Third Congress of the History of Religions, Oxford, September 1908. See further the *Transactions*, i, 259-262, and the writer's *Religion of Ancient Palestine*.