

THE PROMISES OF REWARD.

THE question¹ raised lately about Christ's Promises of Recompense is so vital, not to Christianity only, but to the ethical principles which underlie religion, that it deserves earnest consideration. It is easy to show on this point in the utterances of the Christ a certain—"ambiguity" is hardly the term, but a certain—discrepancy, which, so far as we have the very words spoken, cannot be explained away.

The imagery used, on those occasions, when rewards are promised "(thrones, kingdom, etc.*)" may be merely Oriental. The promises do not appeal, like a Mohammedan Paradise, to lower appetites: and, inasmuch as they are not immediate, they demand a greater subordination of self. Still the alloy of what S. T. Coleridge called "other-worldliness" is there; they sound mercenary. But no collation of the words of Christ can be complete without including the whole scope of His life and death. He came—it cannot be repeated too often—not to found a school of philosophy, nor even to lay down rules for conduct; but by deed as well as by word to combat the Principle of Evil, which makes havoc in the world. The Oliveyard, the low hill of Self-sacrifice, let alone the daily walk of the Saviour, reveal the essence of His Message, the real "Wesen" of the Gospel, unselfishness. "Tolle crucem." This self-renouncement He exacted again and again from would-be disciples. He never bribes nor bargains. How then can we understand His promises of reward?

The teaching of the Christ was always germinative, progressive, and, though meant for all times and places, in the first instance personal. The seed, not the full-grown plant, was dropped into the soil; it was to ripen by degrees; the precept was invariably suited to the capacity of the

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hearer. As the greatest of thinkers taught long ago, there must be due regard to the *ποῦ, πότε, πῆ, πῶς, κ.τ.λ.* "The rich young man," for instance, whose stumbling-block was his "great possessions," was told to "sell all and give it to the poor." Yet parable after parable tells us to be good "stewards" under God of our money. Sometimes, accordingly, the hope of ultimate reward was needed as a help, as a stimulant, as a "stand-by."

"—pueris olim dant crustula blandi
Doctores, elementa velint ut discere prima."

—*Horat.*

Perhaps, if we could date the several occasions, we should find the rude fishermen of Galilee and others led on, step by step, away from the dreams of self-aggrandisement, which even "the beloved disciple" had at first.

Man never acts from a single motive. The saint confesses that self will intrude into his purest aims. The good soldier fights for king and country, but he draws his pay. Doctor or clergyman works for love, but takes the fee. The artist is not less devoted to his art because he gets his living by it. So He, who "knoweth whereof we are made," provides reward and punishment, *not as the main motive*, but for a counterpoise to the weight of temptations. The Ideal is there all the time; unattainable in its perfection, yet never to be lost sight of—single-minded devotion of self to what is higher than itself, higher even than the highest altruism.

So far I have tried to suggest, as succinctly as I can, some considerations which seem to lie very near the root of this great question—How are we to understand the Promises of Recompense from the lips of Christ? If there is any force in what I have said, others more competent than I will be able to educe adequate conclusions. It is not by accepting *en bloc* what has been worked elaborately

out by others, but by assimilating for ourselves the principles in question and by our active participation in the search that each one of us can hope to contribute a something towards arriving at the truth.

There is another aspect of the question, "Does Christ hold out the promise of reward at last to His followers?" which must not be left out of sight. It is an integral part of the question; or, more exactly, it is the same question viewed from another side.

For, indeed, hope and fear in the microcosm of human nature are analogous and correlative, each to the other. As we instinctively wish for that, which is the opposite of what we dislike, so we dread what is the opposite of what we wish for. All the tangled, many-coloured play of the emotions, which surge within us, contending with one another till they are reduced to order by the reasonable control of the Will, may be summed up under the twofold heading of hope and fear, of attraction and repulsion. It is as natural to shrink from punishment as it is to long for rewards.

What has been said already about Reward as a secondary and subordinate motive, applies equally to Punishment. If the Christ invariably makes self-renunciation the test and foundation-stone of true allegiance, and yet on occasions encourages and stimulates those who need it by a bright vista of reward hereafter, so it is about punishment. As He will not have in His ranks the mercenary, who fights only or chiefly for what he can get, so He will not have the slave crouching in fear of the lash. Xavier's beautiful hymn is the motto of the true servant.

"Not for the sake of winning heaven,
Nor of escaping hell."

They serve from gratitude. They love Him because "He loved them"; the "beauty of His holiness" is to

them a magnet irresistible. Self must take a secondary place. He who "would have *all* men come to Him," that they may "have life," nevertheless warns us that he "who seeks to save his life shall lose it."

Temperaments vary. One of the commonest mistakes in legislation is to prescribe indiscriminately, as if men were all of one pattern. None is a duplicate, a facsimile of another. But discrimination is a special feature of the Christ in His intercourse with men. Surely it was an outcome of His perfect sinlessness, this insight into character, this quick understanding of all who come near Him. He read their thoughts, saw through their motives, could anticipate what each would say and do. He "needed not that any one should tell Him."

If the soul is absorbed by mundane cares, it must be startled by the trumpet-peal of doom before it can hear the Message. Oriental tropes, such as the "undying worm," the "quenchless flame," may wake the dormant sense of right and wrong; but, like the promises of reward, these threatenings are only the first step on the ascent to heaven.

When the traveller on the snow-mountains sinks down in the drowsiness which means death, his comrades use violence to him, lest he wake no more. Sin benumbs and paralyses the Will. Some there are constituted so happily that their conscience responds quickly to the Voice of God. In others, from temperament or some other cause, the appeal has to force its way as through a thick wall. Even a pagan moralist can tell us

"Oderunt peccare boni virtutis amore."

But human nature in its frailty needs to be reinforced by subordinate motives against temptation. And, be it remembered, they to whom the Gospel was first of all addressed needed it, in those days of fiery trial, even more than we.

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