

America. He was holding religious services with his crew and studying the Scriptures, praying and composing religious diaries on deck, while the wretched cargo below were enduring the horrors of the middle passage. He never had a scruple about the lawfulness of what he was doing ; it was sanctioned by law, it was even looked upon as a genteel trade, and he was satisfied. It is an extraordinary instance of how religion may be dissociated from morality, and how law and custom may blind the conscience to the plainest facts. But the blindness was not John Newton's ; it was the blindness of the age. Both Church and State sanctioned the slave trade, and pronounced those engaged in it respectable. Civilisation and Christianity may well blush at the recollection of such moral insensibility ; but Evangelicalism has no special reason to blush for it, because it was by Evangelicalism that the conscience of the country was at length awakened on the subject ; the great abolitionists were leading Evangelicals ; and John Newton himself lived to denounce the horrid trade in which he had once participated.

JAMES STALKER.

OPERA FORIS ;

OR, MATERIALS FOR THE PREACHER.

Second Series.

I.

PSALM cxix. 98-99 :

Thy commandments make me wiser than mine enemies ;

For they are ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers ;

For Thy testimonies are my meditation.

Sometimes the so-called " teachers " of the church, the clever modern outsiders who are anxious in magazines and on platforms to put faith right, are hardly distinguish-

able from its "enemies" Faith is teachable, but it declines to listen to every self-constituted teacher. The Hellenising party in post-exilic Judaism, as Wellhausen says, "regarded the Law as antiquated, and preached culture and emancipation." Sincere or not, they were mistaken, and the psalmist, voicing the faith of the pious, says so. Then as now faith had a wisdom of its own—an instinct for the truth and law of God, which is not a mere blind conservatism nor the conceit of tradition, but the deeper religious insight which springs from the steady practice of obedience and thoughtfulness. *If any man shall say to you, Lo, here is the Christ: or, Lo, there; believe him not.* There are always knowing people of the demi-semi-Christian type who profess to know much more about Christ than His church does. It is part of the faith to distrust and even to despise these voluble teachers, however plausible and superior and up-to-date their pretensions may be. They are like the novelist Challis in Mr. De Morgan's story, *It Never Can Happen Again*. "When he came by chance on the sound of a harmonium making an unintelligible droning he conceived of it as Christianity going on in a corner, fraught with a quaint old-world feeling to the passer-by, but scarcely to be encouraged by enlightenment." Only, some do not pass by. They stop to enlighten this antiquated faith. And they are surprised, even amazed, when faith puts aside their patronising effort as the result of an ill-informed mind, saying ironically, "I have more understanding."

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Proverbs xviii. 13 :

*He that answereth a matter before he heareth it,
It is folly and shame to him.*

On the need of hearing both sides of a question and of waiting patiently till a difficulty is fully stated before

one blurts out an opinion. Otherwise, the proverb runs, one is liable to cover oneself with confusion and shame. In a recently published volume of essays, the late Father Ryder has some apposite remarks upon this subject of irresponsible opinion and the need of self-restraint in discussion. "Total abstinence," he observes, "has become a great power in this country, and the tiny shred of blue ribbon which pledges its wearer to allow nothing to enter his lips of a character to prejudice his wits has become almost fashionable. Is there no badge, or is no badge necessary, to mark those who are prepared to hear both sides and to suspend judgement until they have done so; to avoid at any sacrifice the epigrammatic exploitation of half truths or quarter truths when the whole truth is attainable?"

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*Hosea vi. 3:—His going forth is sure as the morning,
And he shall come to us as the rain,
As the latter rain that watereth the earth.*

The purpose of God, as realised by faith, is definite. The divine light and life are not shed abroad vaguely, like natural forces abroad on some indiscriminate impersonal mission, which may or may not refresh us as they pass. God shall come to us. Personal religion cannot rest satisfied with anything short of this personal response by God to human need. Otherwise it becomes merely what, in the words of Shakespeare's Helena, we may call Indian worship.

Thus, Indian-like,
Religious in mine error, I adore
The sun, that looks upon his worshipper
But knows of him no more.

To have confidence and joy in God, man needs to be able to believe not simply that He is sure to visit human

life but that He has a conscious and direct interest in His people. "He shall come to us." "There is born to you a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

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Matt. xxvi. 26 :—*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it ; and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body.*

In a recent article upon the Messianic vocation of Jesus (Preuschen's *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1911, pp. 285-286), Kattenbusch asks, how did Jesus the Messiah arrive at this thought of a sacramental fellowship of the disciples in His own *σῶμα*? How did he make them conscious then and for all time of belonging to a *σῶμα* of which He Himself was the *κεφαλή*? "It is to be noted that the Greeks knew nothing of this idea, or at any rate of this expression, for a philosophic school in relation to the master. There was no *σῶμα τοῦ Πλάτωνος*, not even *τοῦ Πυθαγόρου*, although the Pythagoreans felt themselves bound by a specially close tie to Pythagoras. To all appearance, no members of any Greek cult described themselves as a *σῶμα* of their God, and I am not aware of any similar title in the old Testament." Where then did Jesus find this unique expression for the relationship between Himself and His people? Kattenbusch refers it to a Messianic interpretation of Daniel vii., and the mysterious figure of *one like a Son of man*. "The author of Daniel certainly knew no republics, nor did Jesus." Obviously this Son of man, the symbol of the people of the Most High, denoted a personal Lord along with the people, as their head, embodiment, or representative. For Jesus this Most High One was not God Himself but His Messiah or representative. Consequently, Kattenbusch argues—assuming, as we must, that Jesus on the eve of His death was conscious of His Messianic

vocation—the Lord “instituted a representation of the people of the Most High in a sacramental *κοινωνία* between Himself and His disciples, the latter forming a unity, i.e. the *σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ*.” This meant the establishment of a new community or *ἐκκλησία* of Christ, a *corpus Christi mysticum* (cf. 1 Cor. x. 17, Col. i. 18), belonging as such to heaven, existing on earth as a holy people, and sharing in the eternal lordship of Jesus the Messiah.

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John vii. 17 :—*If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself.*

At the close of his essay *De Monarchia* Philo refers to the remarkable prediction of Deuteronomy xviii. 18, where Moses, he declares, promises that if Israel are steadfast in their devotion to God “they shall not be deprived of the knowledge of the future, but an inspired prophet will suddenly rise and prophesy, saying nothing of his own (*λέγων οἰκειῶν οὐδέν*)—for he who is really possessed and inspired by God cannot understand what he is saying—but giving vent to his utterances as under the prompting of another.” To Philo an ecstatic rapture, in which the speaker was unconscious of what he said, was the mark of inspiration. Jesus reverses this conception. He claims to speak with God’s authority, not *ἀπ’ ἑαυτοῦ*, but the teaching which He offers men as a proof of his mission is quiet and self-possessed (ver. 14), not the hectic outburst of one in a trance.

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1 Corinthians iv. 1 :—*Let a man so account of us as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

Paul has just been correcting one extreme, the extreme of attaching an exaggerated importance to individuals in the Christian ministry. *What is Apollos, and what is*

Paul? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase . . . All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas. In the name of the apostles and teachers Paul passionately repudiates, as Johannes Weiss puts it, any "cultus of their persons." Then, rapidly turning to the opposite extreme, as though to check any equally exaggerated depreciation of the ministry, he adds: *let a man so account of us as of ministers of Christ.* No doubt, they are but *stewards of God's mysteries*, administering and revealing what He discloses; still they are stewards, entrusted with this high commission.

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Galatians v. 5-6:—The passive and the active sides of faith. *By faith we wait for the hope of righteousness.* But faith is more than the attitude of expectancy. *In Christ Jesus* nothing counts except *faith working through love.* The one reacts upon the other. Faith does its best work in the light and strength of its hope, and it is the practical energy of faith which helps more and more to justify its outlook on the future.

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Hebrews xiii. 2-3: *Forget not to show love unto strangers.*

Hospitality (*φιλοξενία* as Rom. xii. 13) was specially a duty for Christians of the first century, since all travellers except the rich were otherwise obliged to put up at inns or caravanserais, which were notorious as a rule not only for their discomfort but for their low tone. Poorer Christians who had occasion to travel were thus dependent on the hospitality of their fellows, if they were to avoid the contamination of these hostelries. "For the most part," Professor Tucker writes (*Life in the Roman World of Nero and St. Paul*, 1910, pp. 20-21), "the ancient hostelries must have afforded but undesirable quarters. They were neither select nor clean. . . . You must be prepared

to bear with very promiscuous and sometimes unsavoury company, and to possess neither too nice a nose nor too delicate a sense of propriety."

A duty of this kind was naturally obvious. When a stranger who was a Christian arrived, the local Christians could hardly help knowing of his presence. But the range of brotherly love is wider than hospitality towards those who may cross our path. It embraces thoughtfulness and consideration for those whose situation is not brought under our eyes. Therefore, the writer adds, *Remember (to pray for and to succour by your charity, cf. ver. 16) them that are in bonds, as bound with them; them that are evil entreated, as being yourselves also in the body.* Imagination enters into the adequate practice of brotherly love. There are many cases of need in which sympathy requires the imaginative faculty to call up the facts and enable us to realise them. It is as if the writer said, do not be slack in showing hospitality towards any travelling Christians who happen to come your way, but remember also those who need your prayers and help though you only hear of them at a distance instead of seeing them at your own doors: keep them also in mind.

II.

Genesis xxxi. 49: *The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.*

So Laban is said to have named the cairn of Mizpah; but not in any pious spirit of friendship towards his son-in-law. The words have passed into a modern usage of affection and trustful prayer which is the opposite of their original meaning. Neither Laban nor Jacob had much confidence in each other. Each had old scores to pay off, and as the payment might be expected when they separated, they were endeavouring at this moment, before parting,

to safeguard their interests against any unfriendly act by either of them; each distrusts the other, and the distrust voices itself in this final attempt to invoke God's interposition, in the event of either trying to take unfair advantage of his rival. The words, therefore, express not the tender memory of friends but the suspiciousness which sometimes creeps in between people who, though connected by marriage or some common interest, have roused a distrust of their honesty. Laban cannot trust Jacob when he is out of his sight. He suspects that his son-in-law may spitefully strike at him through his daughters. Consequently he invokes God's watchfulness. *If thou shalt afflict my daughters, no man being with us* (i.e. to see how you treat my family), *behold, God is witness between me and thee* (to avenge any breach of our contract).

A similar instance of words being raised and altered occurs in the well-known line of Shakespeare, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." This is not a description of sympathy and fellow-feeling, as people ordinarily suppose. Shakespeare (*Troilus and Cressida*, iii. 3, 175) puts it into the mouth of Ulysses as he moralises cynically to Achilles upon the fickleness of popular applause. Achilles is jealous of the praise and notice lavished by the Greeks upon Ajax. Whereupon Ulysses remarks—

Beauty, wit,
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating Time.
One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,
That all with one consent praise new-born gawds.

The Shakespearian line, therefore, like the Hebrew sentence, reflects upon the poverty of human nature, instead of exalting its loyalty.

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Numbers xxiii. 10: *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!*

From the lips of an insincere man, consciously yielding to his lower instincts, this is a specious form of piety. An apt illustration of it may be found in the nauseous claim of Napoleon's will, "I die in the Apostolic and Roman religion in whose bosom I was born more than fifty years ago." As Professor Fournier observes, Napoleon had priests brought to St. Helena to pray over his coffin, "to avoid wounding the religious sentiments of any of the people": to the very last, he posed, and the above-quoted sentence is singularly reticent upon the life which lay between his birth and his death. How little meaning can be attached to such a profession of faith may be gathered not only from the actions of his career but from his remarks on Christianity at St. Helena. A man, e.g., who could say, "I am not convinced that Jesus ever lived, and I would only believe in the Christian religion if it had existed from all time," may die in any religion he pleases, but he has neither part nor lot in the apostolic, particularly when he is a materialist at heart who looks at Christianity as a political factor.

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Psalm xxxii. 8 :

*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way thou shalt go :
I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee.*

It is still disputed among editors whether God is the speaker, or whether the psalmist is not instructing his readers. Some of those who advocate the latter view even deny any organic connexion between the first and second parts of the psalm, but there is a good sequence of thought, especially when the speaker in the second part is taken to be God. In that case, moral guidance follows pardon. One of the effects of forgiveness, truly received, is a new submissiveness to the will of God, accompanied by a sensitiveness of conscience. So long as sin is being harboured and conscience stifled, a man fears the searching glance of God. But "observe now that he has been forgiven," says Canon

Cheyne, "the speaker no longer fears that keen but tender glance. 'The eyes of servants look upon the hand of their lord,' but friends look in each other's eyes." This interpretation of the words is deeper than the rival one which understands the reference as educational, the eye being that of a teacher fixed upon every movement of his pupil.

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Psalm lxxxiv. 10 : *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand* (elsewhere).

There is an interesting parallel to this noble verse in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (v. 2, quoted by Martensen in his *Christian Ethics*, iii. 29) : "O philosophy, guide of life . . . we take refuge in thee ; of thee we seek help ; we yield ourselves to thee with all our heart, and entirely ! A single day lived rightly and according to thy commands is preferable to an eternity of wrongdoing (*peccanti immortalitati*)." But a phrase in the fourth of the newly discovered odes of Solomon outdoes even the psalmist's estimate. The odist also begins by praising the sanctuary : "No man, O my God, changeth thy holy place." But, in his glowing sense of religious fellowship, he is inspired to add (ver. 6) : "for one hour of thy Faith is more precious than all days and years." As Harnack puts it, referring in his note on the passage to the earlier psalm, "What an advance in the inwardness of religion !"

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(a) Luke ii. 42 : *And when he was twelve years old, they went up after the custom of the feast.*

(b) Luke iv. 16 : *And he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day.*

(c) Luke xxii. 39 : *And he went, as his custom was, unto the Mount of Olives.*

For a sermon upon the customs of Jesus. (a) The customs which we inherit, and which are made for life by an older generation. (b) The customs for which we are responsible

ourselves, in the religious life, in connexion with public worship and (c) with private devotion. The garden of Gethsemane had its associations for Jesus. He had grown accustomed to it as a place for retirement and prayer. Hence it was charged with sacred memories and inspiration for Him, in the moment of His supreme conflict of soul. The juxtaposition of (b) and (c) suggests that, in addition to the habit of joining in the common worship of our locality, we must invest special places—often out-of-doors, in the presence of Nature—with the practice of devotion and thoughtful communion with God.

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Luke xv. 31 : *Son, thou art ever with me.*

So he was, and yet how far he was from understanding his father's heart! The elder son was with his father outwardly; no breach had occurred in their relations. But the event proved that he had very little in common with the father in whose house he had lived with such propriety and external harmony. In the third volume of *Praeterita*, Ruskin describes how he attended for the last time an evangelical drawing-room meeting at the Earl of Ducie's. After an address upon the prodigal son, Ruskin ventured from a back seat to ask the evangelist, Mr. Molyneaux, "what we were to learn from the example of the *other* son, not prodigal, who was, his father said of him, ever with me, and all that I have, thine'?" After a pause of a minute, gathering himself into an expression of pity and indulgence, Mr. Molyneaux explained to me that the home-staying son was merely a picturesque figure introduced to fill the background of the parable agreeably, and contained no instruction or example for the well-disposed scriptural student." Like Ruskin, we disagree with so cavalier an attitude towards the figure of the older son. He is a foil to the father, however, rather than to the younger brother.

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