

PERSONALITY AND GRACE.

VII. JESUS CHRIST.

WHAT is the relation of Jesus Christ to this faith? Faith manifestly is in God, and it is in God as He meets us day by day in our trials and duties. What connexion, then, can that faith have with a person who lived long ago and who meets us in a book?

First, faith in Jesus is not a substitute for this practical work-a-day faith in God. Mankind is only too ready for that way of escape from real faith. They imagine they can believe in Jesus without believing in the things Jesus stood for, and that through that faith they can be saved without needing to be saved from themselves. They can still believe that. Blessed is the man who rebelliously kicks against life's limitations, who seeks to live at ease even at some cost of conscience, who is a person of substance and repute even at the price of doubtful compromise and of concentration upon personal profit. Belief in Christ becomes a mere password which it is thought God will respect when we come knocking at the doors of eternity, and which is in no way inconsistent with putting our present faith for our own security in a bank account and for our country's in cannon balls. That any one can read the Gospels and come away with such an idea, or even an epistle, remembering the kind of person his faith had made the writer of it, only shows what power we have of self-deception.

Second, faith in Jesus is not an addition to this faith in God, a further burden upon it. That also no one ought to be able to read the New Testament and believe. The one thing of which every writer of it is convinced is that Jesus bears up and does not burden faith. Hence every word of it thrills with a strange, new, contagious joy.

Yet, in these critical days, can belief in Christ be more than a hard effort, a kind of intellectual venture? Can a Christ whose words are so uncertainly reported and whose life is told in such hazy outline, be other than a perplexity for faith? How can faith even at its highest stretch hold Him as more than a tentative hypothesis? Instead of being a succour of faith, is He not precisely the most difficult thing faith can reach up to? Instead of being the source of grace, is not faith in Him the last victory grace can win for us?

To believe in Christ, however, is neither to make Him a substitute for faith in God nor an additional burden upon that faith. Belief here also is a discovery, and necessarily our own. It is precisely the discovery that He is the supreme succour of our genuine, practical, working faith in God.

Consider how we are judged in respect of Christ. It is not as He meets us in scripture or in doctrine, but as He meets us in life. When He is hungry, the blessed of the Father feed Him; naked, they clothe Him; sick and in prison, they visit Him. As we treat Christ when we meet Him in flesh and blood in our brother, as we recognise the power of His meekness and purity amid the actual claims of wealth and dignity, so is our living faith in Him. How, He asks, can ye believe who receive approbation one of another, and not that approbation which is of God alone? The thing is impossible because it means two opposite and flatly contradictory views of what is life's highest good and final security. How, asks James with astonishment, can men hold the faith of Christ "in respect of persons," which, being literally interpreted, means "in flunkeyism." What, in short, is the good of looking for Christ who was meek and lowly in heart in the Gospels, when we should be certain not to recognise Him in our next-door neigh-

bour? Till we believe in Him there, we cannot possibly believe in Him anywhere else.

Even after we believe in Him in life, many intellectual questions may remain, and we should not think that our belief gives us a right to silence them. It does not decide what sayings in the Gospels are authentic, or what miracles are related without any exaltation of the miraculous, or in what formula we shall express Christ's nature, though no one will ever answer these questions aright without it.

But, when we believe in Christ in life, however many intellectual problems remain, we shall find no religious difficulty in believing in Him in scripture. We believe on Him simply because He is the strength of our faith in God. By manifesting God's love in life's hardest appointments and sternest demands, by touching us with the love of God in its infinite requirements and infinite succour, and by lifting up our sins and weaknesses into God's compassion and pardon, He lays us open, as the manifest presence of God alone can lay us open, to God's whole appeal through the whole of life. Here, as nowhere else, we can discover that the weak things are the mighty, that, in the end, the things of love, not of violence, prevail. We believe, and we only can rightly believe, because the manifestation of our true blessedness in Jesus Christ is its own evidence.

In that sense faith is not of ourselves. It is the gift of God. A faith which is of ourselves would be no faith but a delusion. Every real belief is a belief in reality. Nor can it be belief except in so far as it comes from the reality itself. We do not find it, it finds us. It always is a gift, not an acquisition. And if we have faith in God, that necessarily is God's gift. But it can only be God's gift in the way all faith is given, by manifesting its object. It does not mean that He implants faith as a mere emotion, but that we being its object manifests

Himself, and so calls it out as a conviction. That He does above all else in Jesus Christ. By Him we can truly believe, because in Him God's infinite love and patience are so manifest, that only our manifold self-delusions can hinder us from trusting in them.

In that way alone the question of faith becomes a moral question. Directly it is no more a moral question than an intellectual. It no more depends on moral endeavour than on intellectual demonstration. But it is a moral question in the far deeper and more searching sense, that its only requisite is moral sincerity, just as it is an intellectual question in the deeper sense of utter loyalty to the whole truth.

JOHN OMAN.

ST. PAUL AND THE MYSTERY-RELIGIONS.

III. THE CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE OF THE MYSTERY-RELIGIONS.

WE know far less about the actual ritual and doctrines of the Mystery-Religions in the Graeco-Roman world than we do of their wide diffusion and potent influence. This is not surprising, for, on the one hand, their votaries were strictly enjoined to keep silent on their most sacred experiences, and, on the other, stern critics of Paganism like the early Christian Fathers must inevitably have been biassed in their casual representations of the facts. The literary remains of these communities are very scanty. Some mystic formulae, a few hymns and prayers, some narratives of initiations and allied ceremonial practically exhaust the list. To supplement them, there are vague allusions and isolated fragments of information which may be pieced together from Hellenistic and early Christian writers. Further, the extant material has to be used with