

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

THE personality of Jesus is so passing rich and various that no single author seems to succeed in bringing the whole into "the eye and prospect" of his thought. Like the painters who catch an aspect of His Face rather than His Face itself—an unimaginable wealth of feature and of form—the writers represent a side or section of the personality, every one essential but none complete. This is no matter of surprise, it is rather what one might expect. But it is matter of surprise that amid the burning discussion of the day one side, and that the side of most significance, should ever fail to obtain its rightful place. It is the side which is conspicuous in the New Testament, and as represented there indeed is so vastly more than a side as to be the centre and secret of the whole. Paul with his commanding insight saw and set it in its place, of which there is no more striking proof than his favourite and familiar benediction "The grace of the (or our) Lord Jesus Christ be with you." In every one of his epistles, supposing them all to be ascribed to him, either at the end or beginning, or at both, this phrase is found or one but slightly different. And his benediction might well be said to be the burden of his thought. He is the apostle of grace. No word, no theme, no thing is so often on his lips as *χάρις*. It is his message and its motive in one. Paul was a miracle to himself. Something extraordinary had occurred in his experience comparable to Creation itself (2 Cor. iv. 6), and nothing could at all explain it save the grace of God, as he beautifully describes it, "which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."¹ Henceforth

¹ ἡς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ, (Eph. i. 6). Cf. J. Armitage Robinson, *Ephesians*. He says that the sense appears to be, "His grace whereby He hath endued us with grace." This is a more em-

he views his whole career and interprets all its stages in the light of it. God of His good pleasure has "separated" him and called him through His grace to reveal His Son in him, that he may preach Him among the Gentiles (Gal. i. 15, 16). And all through the Epistle to the Romans runs the same one master-thought of the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounding to the many (Rom. v. 15) till in chap. viii. 31, 32 it mounts on wings of eloquence to the climax, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us who is against us? If God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, He shall certainly give us all things by His grace (*τὰ πάντα ἡμῖν χαρίσεται*) when He has given Him."¹

Χάρις likewise is the master-thought of his preaching, that which sends him forth and the others alike as ambassadors on behalf of Christ, "as though God were intreating by us, we intreat that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. v. 20; vi. 1). How moving their appeal could be, we hear or overhear in the pathos of a strain like this, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. viii. 9; cf. Phil. ii. 7). And in many another passage born of the same inspiration Paul shows how it is grace that does make rich, how, in other words, grace is as wide and deep as life; it covers its entire course from its "making its bed in hell" to its partaking of the inheritance of the saints in light. Grace is involved in the sanctification of life as in its seeking and salvation. "Through Jesus Christ we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of

phatic way of saying, "His grace which He hath bestowed on us" (p. 228; cf. pp. 229-233).

¹ W. G. Rutherford's translation.

God" (Rom. v. 2).¹ Grace is the abounding spirit of God in Christ which issues not only in rescue but regeneration, not only in repentance but perfection. "By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. For we are His workmanship (*ποίημα*, poem) created in Christ Jesus for good works." "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (Eph. ii. 10; 1 Thess. iv. 3; cf. Rom. xii. 1, 2; 2 Cor. ix. 8).

It would not be in place here to discuss the vexed problem of the relation between Paul and Jesus, but at least in what we have culled from Paul's evangel it is easy to find an essential continuity with the evangel of Jesus. No one indeed, before or since possessed himself or was possessed so fully of the mind of Christ. Truly it had pleased God to reveal His Son *in* him. Deep down in the soul of him grace itself had come in a perfect form and made its dwelling there, so that Paul was "no longer I, but Christ that liveth in me." Grace and Christ were not only interchangeable terms but interchangeable realities, realities interwoven like the strands of a cord with his life and faith; and therefore among the contrasts to be found between Paul and Jesus, and even their divergences, it is essential to keep in view their fundamental unity of spirit. Such a unity is congruous with difference, for Paul was no mere echo or imitation of his Lord, but one who through his own experience and the characteristic needs and yearnings of his mighty soul fought and found his way to a faith which was his own—"the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. i. 20). Revelation never means the contraction of the soul, but always its expansion, by which it grasps anew and for itself the living

¹ Rutherford translates, "Through whom we have also obtained our access to this state of grace in which we are and triumph in the hope of attaining God's glory."

word of God. And nothing is more sure in all the work and witness of Paul than his insight, creative, impassioned, personal into the mind of Christ.

In passing to the Fourth Gospel we pass to a system of thought which is likewise deeply interfused with personal experience and which has its centre in the same enthralling Person whose *πλήρωμα* is equally real to the author as to Paul. It consists essentially in grace. "Of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace" (i. 16), which means grace succeeding grace perpetually, i.e. the richest abundance of grace. The verse is connected with verse 14 where it is said, "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, . . . full (*πλήρης*) of grace and truth," and here as there the accent falls on grace. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (i. 17). It is the same contrast as Paul draws in Rom. vi. 14, where he says, "Ye are not under law, but under grace." Grace is the essence of the new dispensation. While the essence of the old is the law which demands and imposes, the essence of the Gospel lies in grace which offers and communicates. And that is the truth of things, the fulness of the revelation of God as compared with the law which was but a preparation, "a shadow of good things to come." It is enough now to remark the subtle concord of experience and phrase between Paul and the Fourth Evangelist.

In the Gospel of Luke we meet with a sentence of which the Johannine *πλήρης χάριτος κ.τ.λ.* might be said to be a recollection or perhaps a deeper recollection of the same fact, "And the child grew and waxed strong, becoming full (*πληρούμενον*) of wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke ii. 40). It is significant that in the same Gospel in the first record of His preaching what is singled out as its especial note and character is its grace, that being the Spirit of the Person "poured into

His lips" and on His hearers; "And all bear Him witness and wondered at the *words of grace* which proceeded out of His mouth." It is not too much to claim for the Gospel of Luke that every page bears witness more or less to the same thing.

Although the Gospels of Mark and Matthew do not describe His preaching at Nazareth or anywhere else as *λόγοι τῆς χάριτος*, they are at one with Luke, and even go beyond him in recording the glad amazement of the hearers (*ἐξεπλήσσοντο* in the parallels Mark. vi. 2 and Matt. xiii. 54), just as on the occasion of His preaching in the synagogue (Mark i. 22) and at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vii. 28) and elsewhere, and they both make a point of the impression of His *σοφία* and *δυνάμεις*. If also they do not include the passage from Isaiah (chap. lxi. 1 2; Luke iv. 18, 19), still one may find it embedded in Matthew xi. 5, where, in the roll of *δυνάμεις* which Jesus sends to the prisoner John by way of answer to his doubt, He gives the crowning place to the preaching of glad tidings to the poor. It is worth observing in view of the matter before us that in neither passage is there any reference "to the day of vengeance of our God," Jesus evidently refusing to identify Himself, His message or His mission with the ancient threat. It was not of the kernel of His "words of grace" or of His "powers," or congenial to the Spirit of the Lord which was upon Him. One may imagine that for a mind brooding on the axe, and fan, and fire, such an answer charged with grace would scarce avail. Nevertheless it was the answer appropriate to the Messiah; it proclaimed the Messianic age, the advent of the acceptable year, or the year of the grace of the Lord. And conscious of all it meant to others as well as to Himself, He added the impressive words, "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

Now, of this sentence it has been said in a recent volume,¹ that "there is not a word in the Gospel which reveals more clearly the solitary place of Jesus. It stands on the same plane with those wonderful utterances already considered in which He speaks of confessing and denying Him before men, of hating father and mother, son and daughter for His sake. . . . It makes the blessedness of men depend upon a right relation to Himself; happy with the rare and high happiness on which God congratulates man is he who is not at fault about Jesus but takes Him for all that in His own consciousness He is. That Jesus in this informal utterance claims to be the Christ is unquestionable; or if 'claims' is an aggressive word, we can only correct it by saying that He speaks as the Christ. . . . By taking this simple sentence in its simplicity we do not hesitate to say of it, as of Matthew x. 32, that there is nothing in the Fourth Gospel which transcends it. The attitude which it so calmly and so sovereignly assumes to men, the attitude which it as calmly and sovereignly demands from men—even from men so great as John the Baptist—is precisely the attitude of Christians to their Lord in the most 'Christian' parts of the New Testament. It is not they who gratuitously, and under mistaken ideas of what He is, put Him into a place which no human being ought to give to another; but He Himself from the very beginning spontaneously assumes this place as His."

That is a typical passage—one of a hundred from an able book, the feature of which, and much of its force lie in its insistence on the solitary place of Jesus. It is the place, as the author is never done repeating, which is not merely assigned Him by the faith of the Church, but from the first assumed and asserted by Jesus Himself. It is the place, the cathedra, as it were, from which He

¹ *Jesus and the Gospel*, James Denney, pp. 259, 260.

speaks, from which He proclaims Himself and His demands upon the obedience of men. And like His place His consciousness of self is "solitary, incomparable, incommunicable."¹ Place and person, person and place are all of a piece, and in the faith of the Church "He is set"—and set "unquestionably" as the author thinks—"on the side of reality which we call Divine and which confronts man." "There is no Christianity except through a particular attitude of the soul to Jesus, and that attitude is demanded at every point, in every relation and in every mode, tacit and explicit, by Jesus Himself."

In quoting parts of any argument one always runs the risk of misquoting the whole, and one shrinks from any such thing in regard to a writer of such manifest sincerity and power as the author of this work. But amid all his insistence on the solitary Person and His solitary place one wonders if there is any room at all for that quality or spirit of grace which the New Testament singles out in Jesus and in His word and way. One would not deny that there is an important truth in the line which the author takes. One would not attempt in the unwarranted fashion of the critics whom he criticises to explain away the uniqueness of Jesus and His attitude to men which, rightly understood, is vital to the Gospel. One is thankful for much in the book bearing on this point which required to be said or said again. But the question recurs, is the uniqueness of Jesus, or what amounts to the same thing, the uniqueness of His attitude as fully and as fairly represented as it ought to be? One cannot truly say that it is. One feels as if the representation were almost entirely evacuated of the grace which is the glory of Jesus and the gospel. No author, one would imagine, could be less oblivious of grace than the author of this book,

¹ *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 206.

and yet as one turns its forceful pages one is more and more impressed by the absence of the one thing which makes all the difference. Where one parts from him is not so much in what he says as in what he leaves unsaid. What he leaves unsaid is what we may call the atmosphere of the whole, that something which is deeply interfused through all the gospel and the personality of Christ, and which is more unique than all the features of uniqueness he describes. It is really the secret of the uniqueness of both, that which lies behind the solitary person and the solitary place, but which is essentially communicable, self-diffusive, imparting itself as life in creation, "the gift of God." The interfusion of grace does not take from the solitary person or his solitary place, but it adds, or provides, that basis between Himself and others upon which something can be given or communicated and something received. And that surely is the essence of Jesus and His Gospel and the one thing to insist upon. It transfers the emphasis from the solitary to the social, from the self-exclusive to the self-inclusive, from the one as confronting man to the one as in the midst of men, from the claim to the communication, from the demand to the gift and the glad tidings. It is a question of right emphasis which again is a question of right analysis of the elements contained within the comprehensive unity of "Jesus and the Gospel" and their determination in the light of the last and highest of all. Now in that analysis we come with the author to a stage where Jesus stands by Himself, where He asserts Himself, proclaims Himself, and the conditions whose acceptance on the part of men alone sets them in that right relation to Himself which constitutes their blessedness; where "it is not enough to say that He claims," but "rather assumes that He will obtain that martyr devotion to which only righteousness and

God are entitled"; and "Until we see this," he adds, "we do not see Jesus." It may freely be admitted that to see "this" is to see a part or side of Jesus—necessary and not to be ignored—but surely it is not to see *Jesus*. For the last and highest side of all, and the secret of the whole, drops out of the analysis, and what we see, therefore, is really more a law than a gospel, and more a dictator than a deliverer, and a monitor than a mediator. To omit grace from the analysis and interpretation of Jesus and the Gospel is to omit the one thing needful and unique, the atmosphere, the tone, the spirit which pervade both utterance and act, both character and creed, both life and death, and which far more than anything He ever said or did is Jesus' contribution to the life of the world. Grace is the one word which adequately describes the spirit of Jesus, that unique endowment or development of life within Him which moulded everything it touched, so that His severity and sympathy, His compassion and power, His truth and holiness are all its various aspects and activities, and all devoted to its twofold task of revelation and redemption. The task of grace is simply grace itself, the bringing together of God and man in a union of holy love and holy life. Grace is love, grace is holiness, not apart but fused together in that wonderful influence or effluence by which the ends of God are satisfied and the ends of man are realised. In grace there is no confronting man save only to "create" him anew, nor any solitary severance from man save only the more effectually to save and hallow him. In grace there is no dictating or demand save only to define the path of blessedness and plant man upon it, nor any self-assertion save only in the way of conscious self-oblation to the will of God. Hence we do not see *Jesus* so long as our eyes are fixed upon the solitary person seated in the solitary place, but only as we see Him stooping from the

solitary place and becoming in and through His very solitude the perfect Son and Saviour of the world. His solitude is all subservient to service, His difference to unity. As the apostle strives to express it in the Ephesians, and the full force of his language is only found in the original: "But God . . . quickened us together (or made us to live together, *συνεζωοποίησεν*) with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up (*συνήγειρεν*) with him and made us to sit with him (*συνεκάθισεν*) in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus: for by grace have ye been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. ii. 4-10).

To see Jesus, therefore, in the sense in which the New Testament sees Him is impossible until we see Him arrayed in the exceeding riches of His grace, going about His Father's business of communicating life, giving of his fulness to the need of men, the gift of God incarnate. But this is not to be blind to the measure of truth in what is said about the solitary person and his solitary place. For what makes Him solitary and His place, is just the fulness of grace that was in Him, but, just that same fulness of grace is what makes Him the one whose touch is all-essential and whose place is in the midst of men. From this point of view it is possible to speak of His "demand," but only as a mode of defining the "gift"; possible to speak of His "claim," but only as a way of voicing His authority the soul or sense of which is appeal (Mark vi. 45), constraint (Mark i. 17, 18; Matt. xi. 28), and great desire (*Ἐπιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα*, Luke xxii. 15; *ποσάκις ἠθέλησα*, Matt. xxiii. 37, Luke xiii. 34); possible to speak of His self-proclamation, but only in the sense of self-communication. And all this, so far from subtracting from the solitary person or

His place, only adds to both and justifies them. We are dealing with a person whom in a real sense it is true to describe as solitary; as indeed the most inaccessible, inapproachable, lonely figure in history. He enters in by the narrow gate of a most uncommon independence. He is as fearless of the frown, as careless of the favour of men. Far from seeking their advice or shrinking from their blame He goes in the face of their traditions and of popular opinion and desire, working out His task with the clearness and swiftness of necessity, and with a dignity no cunning can check, a devotion no pain can chill. Not that He is callous or superior to their motions of friendship and hate. Thus He does not heedlessly or needlessly expose Himself to danger, but chooses on occasion to avoid it, learning by His own experience what He teaches others, "to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." At the same time He is utterly aloof from the ordinary pleas and covetings of men: "the prince of the world cometh and he hath nothing in me." Again, "Ye shall leave me alone." Truly the world has never seen so extraordinary a figure of independence, independence of thought, independence of judgment, independence of purpose, carried to the last limit of holy pride and the power of God. "His soul" indeed "was like a star and dwelt apart." Both at the beginning when He is tempted to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and at the end when He is enticed to come down from the Cross, He grapples to His lonely calling and His lonely Cross inflexible, invincible, alone, and as such conceding nothing and at no time to the tempter or the throng He summons men to follow Him and "agonise to enter by the narrow door."

"Get thee behind me, Satan." "Abba, Father, thy will be done." There is surrender of nothing to the one because there is surrender of everything to the other. It is inde-

pendence rooted in dependence, pride rooted in prayer, aloneness in alliance, fortitude in faith, self-assertion in self-devotion, loneliness in loyalty and love which passeth knowledge. In that unsearchable word, with its mingling of tears and rapture, the word with which He leaves the garden and finally accepts the Cross, it is all profoundly stated: "Abba, Father, thy will be done." That is the secret of the solitary person and His solitary place, and of this also which is greater and is the point before us; the secret of the paradox by which the solitary person is the Saviour and His solitary place the centre of the life and destiny of men. We do not see the highest we can see in Jesus while we see Him in His solitude. We must see Him in that larger vision in which His solitude is but an aspect of His being and is all that it is, like every other aspect, as the servant of His grace. His solitude is only in and through His grace, the plenitude thereof, and therefore it is not His solitude but His plenitude that is supreme and makes Him and His gospel what they are. We do not see Jesus till we see Him clothed with the universal grace which brings Him to the world and the world to Him, through which God shines in the hearts of men, to give "the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." In other words, the most inaccessible is the most accessible of beings, the most lonely and apart of persons is the most divinely winsome person known to men, the first to earn and the last to keep the name of the friend of publicans and sinners. It is grace making isolation the instrument of love, independence the organ of compassion, difference the bond of unity, or doing this besides which adds another touch of wonder. To think of the power residing in Jesus and "proceeding from Him" (Mark v. 30; Luke viii. 46) is to think of power of "saying with a word" (Matt. viii. 8; cf. Mark i. 41), power of leader-

ship, power of law, power of life; so that at one time the people are crowding round Him with their sick (Mark vi. 53-56); at another are fain to take Him by force and make Him king (John vi. 15; cf. Mark vi. 45 *ἠνάγκασεν*), and at another are leaving Him alone, self-driven from His presence (John viii. 9; cf. Luke iv. 30)—such power as has always been to men the acme of temptation. Never is it used by Him to grasp at selfish privilege or for the sake of show or the glory of this world, but always and without exception to bestow unselfish service and in renouncement of the world. "This temperance in the use of supernatural power is the masterpiece of Christ." It is more than His masterpiece, it is Himself. Once again it is grace transforming a quality of solitude into one of sympathy so deep and exquisite that they of old time saw the prophecy fulfilled, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases," and we of our time see in flesh and blood the picture of the Good Samaritan (Luke x. 33, 34). It is grace transforming the utmost difference into the medium of perfect unity.

If then "the face of Jesus Christ" is a vision of benignity appearing from a background of solitude, a vision of winsome Saviourhood emerging from a covert of seclusion, a vision of grace in its divine sufficiency in virtue of which the New Testament is glowing with a light that never was on sea or land, then it is wrong analysis and wrong emphasis alike to exhibit Christ as first and chiefly a solitary person in a solitary place, wrapped in an "incommunicable" consciousness of self, addressing His demands to men and claiming their allegiance. That may be a side, but it is not the centre of His personality, and we do not see the side until we see the centre. We do not see it in its true proportion. It is but a fragment by itself, and such a fragment as, had it been the whole, neither gospels nor epistles would have been the books they are, with their glow of atmosphere,

irradiance, life. They partake of the personality they present, and therefore belong to the sacred Canon. They are touched and informed by His Spirit, which, far from being solitary and "incommunicable," they being witness, is self-communicative up to the measure of the fulness of His grace. Self-communication is of the essence of personality as it is of grace, so that when personality and grace are both alike at their pitch in Jesus, as they are, we must allow that what differentiates Him is not what separates Him from, but what connects Him with, humanity. In other words, He is what He is not in His solitude or as confronting men, but in His self-communication—essentially a fulness to be imparted and received.

It is from this point of view it seems best to interpret the Messianic consciousness of Jesus and all those sayings which, being interpreted from any other point of view, are too aggressive and severe to be described as "words of grace." More than any other sayings they are fraught with personality. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." Their teaching lies as much in their tone as in their truth. We might almost say that they are not so much statements of principle as expressions of personality, the principle in their case being so wholly carried up into and merged in personality. They are personality manifesting itself in speech as in action, so that the speech is without meaning or at least its maximum of meaning in separation from it. It is immanent in them, and they are therefore what they are as words that are not only truth, but grace and truth. It must make a difference in the matter of their interpretation when the supreme thing about them is remembered, viz., the immanence of personality, the interfusion of grace without which they do not form a Gospel at all. A gospel, or as we know but one gospel, the Gospel, is not simply "a new teaching" and

nothing more, but essentially a new teaching that is also an old teaching, with all the gathered force of personal life behind and in it moulding it and making it what it is. It is the sum of life-sayings in which He who gives them gives Himself to men. Himself is in them, hence their meaning and momentum, their virtue and vitality, their permanence and incomparable soul-renewing touch from age to age. Such terms accordingly as "claim," "demand," "authority," as used to describe the Gospel, are far from true unless they be understood in the light of the personality who communicates *before* He claims and gives *before* He demands, and whose authority is illumination more than proclamation, and influence more than ordinance. Herein lies the distinction of what we know as the Gospel.

JAMES ROBERTSON CAMERON.

(To be continued.)