

CURRENT ISSUES.

IN one of the newly published letters of Carlyle to John Stuart Mill, we come across the Scotsman exhorting the Englishman to read the Bible. "On the whole," Carlyle writes from Craigenputtoch, "it is the thorough *heartiness*, the intense and entire *sincerity* of the Bible, that makes it still the Book of Books. In no other Book is there the same quality in such a degree. . . . I advise you to persevere in reading the Bible (in *seeing* it, through all distances and disguises)." What Carlyle meant by "seeing" the Bible was particularly an appreciation of Jesus Christ. He comes back to this more than once. He was in one of his moods of intense antipathy to anything or anyone of the dilettante order, and this made him sensitive to the straightforward reality of Jesus. What he meant by "distances and disguises," he does not explain. Every age has its own. The distances between us and the Bible are not distances of time; they are distances of sympathy. When people feel that the Bible is far away from their modern life, it is not really because the Bible is so Oriental, but because the lines of their own life are so remote from the purposes of the Bible. They may be moving in regions of selfishness or hate or low comfort, where the Bible is out of sight. And as for the "disguises"? Well, Carlyle has a trenchant word to say about one of them. It is the misinterpretation of Jesus which he resented in some religious circles of his own day.

* * * * *

He felt drawn to a more vigorous Jesus than he found presented by the Church. "How different is that honey-mouthed, tear-stained, soup-kitchen Jesus Christ of our poor shovel-hatted modern Christians from the stern-visaged Christ of the Gospels, proclaiming aloud in the market-place (with such a total contempt of the social respectabilities): 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, *hypocrites*!'" This was the Jesus after Carlyle's own heart. He believed this to be the real Jesus, and he resented the "disguise" of the ecclesiastical drapery. It was

hardly a fair criticism. The Jesus who said, *Woe to you!* also said, *Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden.* Renan was nearer the mark, some years later, when he remarked that no book had dried so many tears as the New Testament. But there was enough in the religious world of the day to justify Carlyle's petulant verdict. He was writing before the re-discovery of the historical Jesus, and then, as always, the very interest of the Church in Christ was apt to hide His real nature from the eyes of men. The impact of Jesus upon life, the disturbance He set up wherever His words went home, the demand He made for a new and trenchant estimate of human relationships—all this was not yet realised by those who were the official representatives of His religion in this country. What art had done in earlier ages, theology was doing then; it was in all good faith exaggerating the passive side of Jesus, till a protest was necessary.

* * * * *

Dean Inge's new book on *Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion* has a chapter upon joy. He begins by asking, "Why did Christianity need a new word for *Joy*?" The answer surely is, that Christianity did not need a new word. Christianity apparently had to coin a new term for *love*. But the Church took over the old Greek word for *joy*. What it did was to transfigure it.

* * * * *

On the new content of the term Dean Inge has some pointed though rather obvious words to say. He distinguishes it from pleasure. He defines it as "the triumph of *life*: it is the sign that we are living our true life as spiritual beings." He calls attention to the truth that joy is bound up with achievement; it is the unselfish and dutiful who come by real joy. And so on. We are reminded that "mental depression is often the aching of an unused faculty," and that "joy will be ours, in so far as we are genuinely interested in great ideas outside ourselves." Sound teaching. For it is the good and faithful servant who enters into his Lord's joy. But we come to the end of the chapter, missing two truths.

* * * * *

One is, that joy in personal religion flowers at its best for those who are not isolated units. To rejoice truly means that one is

in fellowship with others. *Rejoice always* is a plural command. For to rejoice in God is more than to rejoice in what one enjoys personally at the hands of God. It is to be glad that such boons are common to others. It is even to thank God when others enjoy what is denied to ourselves. The analysis of the Christian experience throughout history shows that some of the most vivid and healthy forms of religious joy are bound up with the sense of worship or of mutual co-operation. Wherever a life withdraws from the responsibilities of the Christian fellowship, because it feels superior or fastidious, one of the vital sources of joy is dried up. The psalmist remembered how he *went with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise*. The voice of joy is often a chorus, not a solo. At any rate, it will never rise from anyone who is content to regard himself as a pious particle. There must be the consciousness of a great common life shared with others, and provided by the one God.

* * * * *

The other truth is, that Christian joy requires a redemptive experience. If there is one fact about it more certain than another, it is the vital connexion of forgiveness and joy; what is shared by Christians is the saving power of God's love in dealing with their sins. Dean Inge's mystical Platonism misses this. But Christianity from the first has bestowed joy on men and women, mainly because they become conscious of a redeeming God. And wherever the sense of sin and pardon is ignored or undervalued, there is sooner or later a falling-off in joy. Christian, says Bunyan in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, "gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing." That was after his burden had fallen from him at the Cross. New Testament joy has the Cross behind it. Dr. Dale was acute in his criticism of Dean Stanley's faith. "The absence of joy in his religious life was only the inevitable effect of his conception of God's method of saving men; in parting with the Lutheran truth concerning justification, he parted with the springs of gladness." We need not call it "Lutheran," however. It is older than Luther; it is anticipated in the thirty-second psalm and in the fifty-first, and Christianity revealed it to the hearts of men. It is a joy to be forgiven by God; it is a joy to know how we are forgiven by God. No analysis of Christian joy embraces the fundamental facts if it does not include this central experience.