

taught. The strength of the lectures is their morality—a lie is a lie everywhere and always; their weakness is the want of motive. For though it may be true that Mr. Smith's children tell the truth because it is the truth, many other men's children do not, and it has been found by large experience that the best way to get them to tell the truth is to fill their hearts with the love of Christ. But no one need find fault with the book (except for the incredible way it gets rid of the Gospel miracles). It proceeds from first to last on a fallacy, a fallacy expressed in the preface, that Faith is the opposite of Reason; but it proceeds harmlessly, and even tenderly, trying to bring us near to God—as near as we can get without the Cross.

A number of pamphlets have been issued lately. In the multitude of books it is difficult to find room for pamphlets either in our notices or on our shelves. Yet some of them deserve attention and preservation. They include *Primitive Christianity and Sunday Observance*, an essay by a theologian of originality and power, the Rev. J. R. Milne, M.A. (Norwich: A. H. Goose); *The Vision of*

Isaiah, by Dr. E. W. Bullinger (Eyre & Spottiswoode); *Actual Experiences in a Sickroom* (Marshall Brothers); *Pocket Notes on the International Lessons*, by F. Spooner, B.A. (S.S. Union); *In the Shadows*, thoughts for mourners, by May Wynne (Marshall Brothers); *The Aim of a Congregational Church*, by D. Macfadyen, M.A., an address of much catholicity and loyalty; *Miniature Gardening* (Wells Gardner); *Two Sermons*, by the Rev. C. B. Waller, M.A., the one on the 'Material Creation,' the other on the 'Spiritual Creation' (Unwin); *For Young Communicants and Christian Beginners*, by the Rev. J. Robertson, D.D. (R.T.S. of Scotland)—a third edition of a very good guide to the first steps in the new life; *Our Church's Holy Days*, by E. A. Strong (Stock); *The Holding of Truth*, by the Bishop of Rochester (Macmillan); also *Transformation and Experimental Religion* (Marshall Brothers). It ought also to be mentioned that Messrs. Passmore & Alabaster are publishing every month a sermon by the Rev. C. Silvester Horne, M.A., under the title of 'The Kensington Congregational Pulpit.' They are sermons great enough to make a preacher's reputation, but this preacher's reputation is made already.

Mercy.

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY.

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III.

MERCY in God, mercy in Christ, mercy in man,—these three are the sum of Christian theology and experience. Mercy in God, as unfolded in the Old Testament, has been studied in the two foregoing papers. It is covenant mercy; it is what may be called temple-mercy, that is, bestowed at the mercy-seat in the temple; and it is godlike in both its quality and its abundance.

We are now to consider

I. Mercy in Christ.

The Shorter Catechism (question 87) makes 'the apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ' the turning-point in a man's spiritual history. Dr. Denney, in his *Studies in Theology*, tells us that a

Hindoo society was formed which tried to appropriate all that, in their view, was good in Christianity, and to drop the rest. They accepted the definition of repentance in the Shorter Catechism, with the exception of these two words, 'in Christ.' They saw that these two words contained the essence of Christianity: 'they felt that here was the barb of the hook, and as they had no intention of being caught, they broke it off.'

All the mercy of God comes to us 'in Christ.' He is the Revealer of the Father. His mission was an errand of mercy. His history is an embodiment of mercy; His cross is the climax of mercy. A mistake here is fatal, and one would naturally think that such a mistake is scarcely

possible. Yet Luther tells us that in his boyhood he was taught that Christ was a stern, angry judge, and that he suffered all his life from this false teaching. 'Mary is Queen of Mercy as Christ is King of Justice: they divide the empire between them,' so writes a Roman Catholic teacher. In the average Roman Catholic this portentous error lies at the foundation of his Mary-worship. The New Testament must be practically a sealed book where such a mistake is possible.

We have the same mercy in the Old Testament and in the New: but mercy in the Old is, relatively, mysterious; in the New it is fully manifested. As the old Divines, who dearly loved antithesis and epigram, used to say, what is latent in the Old Testament is patent in the New. And yet it is surprising that the Old Testament saints so firmly grasped, and constantly rejoiced in, the sheer mercy of God. It is the darling theme of the praises of psalmists and prophets. Our surprise grows when we remember how profoundly they were overawed by the revelation of God's law and holiness. They had, it seems, a fuller realization of mercy than the average Christian has to-day. It was the very life of their life.

A simple illustration may help us to understand the completeness and effectiveness of the manifestation of God's mercy in Christ. Suppose that an effort had been made by teaching to persuade the savages in the heart of darkest Africa that white men and Christians loved them. How poor would have been the impression! The very conception of unselfish love had to be created in them. But Livingstone goes to them; lives among them, and dies for them. His words and deeds of love carry home to the minds of the rudest a true conception of, and a firm faith in, the love which Christians bear to them.

II. Mercy in Man.

The modern Jews are divided into four parties: the Rationalists or Deists, with whom Judaism is a nationality rather than a religion; the Pharisees or Talmudists, who are devoted to Rabbinism; the Karaites or Readers, who reject the Talmud and follow the Old Testament only; and the Chasidim or Chasids, the most mystical, earnest, and fanatical of their race. Their name is the Old Testament word for a saint. *Chasid*, the passive participle of חָסַד, 'to be merciful,' is translated *godly* in Ps 4³ 12¹ 32⁶, and *holy one* in

Ps 16¹⁰ 86² 89¹⁹ 145¹⁷. Isaiah (57¹) speaks of 'merciful men'; his phrase there is men of *chasid*. *Chasid* literally means be-mercied, mercy-made, a receiver of mercy, steeped in or saturated with mercy, one in whom mercy has done all its blessed work. It was probably words like this which led Luther to say that he would not part with the little Hebrew he had for all the Turkish Empire. The Evangelic creed is in this word, for it proclaims that Jehovah's man (as Rabbi Duncan used to call him) is the child of Jehovah's mercy. 'I am Grace's man,' Samuel Rutherford used to say. 'I am Mercy's man,' the ancient saint said in effect every time he used this familiar word. It brings down to us the universal consent of the ancient Church concerning the mercy of God as the deciding and creative spiritual power among them. This one word is their confession of faith.

We shall briefly analyse this creed of the Old Testament saint.

1. He *believes* in God's mercy. To him it is a fact, indeed the fact of facts. It is the crowning gift of God, the heart of the covenant, the sum and substance of the teachings of the rich and varied symbolism of the temple. The awful holiness of God does not becloud this mercy. His faith is the self-renouncing, despairing attitude of the soul, which exactly answers to God's free mercy.

2. He *yields* to it; for it is offered mercy, and so is all his for the taking. This mercy steals into his soul, and masters and wins his heart. It becomes the very atmosphere of his life. He is like the persecuted Russian Jew when he reaches London. He often goes into the open air,—so Zangwill says,—expands his chest to its utmost compass, and opens his mouth wide that he may take in a large draught of the life-giving air of freedom. Mercy is his life-sphere, his life-element. As a student his aim is to explore its length, breadth, height, and depth. As a saint, his problem is to keep himself in the mercy of God. His hymn-book, the Psalter, shows that he is constantly rehearsing and reciting God's mercy to his soul.

3. He is *satisfied* with mercy. He believes that God has no way to satisfy him but the way of mercy. Satisfied with it, he desires more of it, and so makes his own the prayer of Moses, 'O satisfy us in the morning with Thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days' (Ps 90¹²).

As the pathetic images in that Psalm—all borrowed from tent-life—show, he is a child of mortality, of sorrow, of sin, and of failure. His soul reveals its excellence by its profound dissatisfaction even with its best earthly experiences: it has instincts far too great for its environment. It thus turns to God, its true home, and solaces itself with His mercy. This mercy is to be the companion of all his journey, the sweetener of every part of life, his death-song, and his guide to the mansions of eternal mercy (Ps 23⁶).

4. He *represents* God's mercy. It begets in the receiver a merciful temper, and conforms the heart to its own nature. It makes him merciful, that is, full of mercy. His soul, like the dyer's hands, is subdued to that he works in. The sweetness of the divine mercy has created in him that congenial sweetness which we call saintliness. Barrow translates *chasdim* 'gentle ones.' Jeremy Taylor defines the Christian as 'a son of everlasting mercy, to whom pity belongs as a part of his inheritance.' He is the child of his Father in heaven, who, as we have seen, has רחמים, 'bowels of mercy.' This mercy creates an overflowing wellspring of pity in the heart: it becomes a new and benignant nature, which, like God's, embraces man and beast. 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' is the divine law; and all Christ's benedictions are for the merciful. The poet puts it well—

. . . You are as god above us;
Be as a god then, full of saving mercy.

5. He *spreads* God's mercy. He is called to be its messenger and herald. He wishes it to be proclaimed and received through all the earth. He has the spirit of Home and Foreign Missions, which is just the spirit of Christ in happy action. Our pity, like the divine mercy, should flow low and reach the lost. 'The Colony of Mercy' is the fitting name which von Bodelschwing has given to his hospital for epileptics. The names for the various parts of it, as in most of our Orphan Homes, are all borrowed from the Bible. We may envy the Romanists the beautiful name which they have given to their deaconesses, 'Sisters of Mercy.' Mrs. Hilton has given the name of Crèche to her homes for poor little children. She thereby intimates that this merciful work has been inspired by the Child who lay in the manger at Bethlehem. All kindred

institutions are the outgrowths of Christian mercy. 'How gracious a thing is a man, if he be but a man,' says an old church-father.

But our thoughts should take a wider range.

For the preacher and the thoughtful Christian there is probably no more fascinating and fruitful employ than the historical study of mercy among mankind. It can scarcely fail to be a liberal education and also a diet of confirmation in the faith. We can now easily remount the stream to its source. Lay alongside of each other B.C. and A.D. Take Rome in the days of Christ—it was just a fair specimen of heathendom. What strikes us most in it, is its cruelty, which baffles both our belief and our imagination. Think of the infant Church standing by the deathbed of the old world and at the cradle of the new. Trace its career on its mission of mercy—freeing the slaves; tending the sick, caring for children, women, and widows, abolishing gladiatorial shows, bringing in just laws. At the top of the list of excellent masters in this fascinating and fruitful study, I would place Brace's *Gesta Christi*, and Uhlhorn's *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, and his *Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism*; Storr's *The Divine Origin of Christianity*; Schmidt's *The Social Results of Early Christianity*; Lecky's *History of European Morals*; and Kidd's *Social Evolution*. All these books show that the hearts of fishermen and slaves, when quickened by the divine mercy, at once, by instinct or intuition, by direct spiritual vision,—call it what you will,—became the seers, prophets, and pioneers of all our modern humanities. Their faith in God's mercy created in them the genius to discover and the power to achieve: it made them heaven's *chasids* in this poor loveless world.

Taking a hint from Matthew Henry, I shall close this study of Mercy with a few words upon

III. The Great Parable of Mercy.

The fifteenth chapter of Luke is Christ's own exposition of such a text as Ps 103, 'Like as a father pitieth his children.' Mercy's eyes, love-quickened, saw the son 'when he was yet a great way off.' He was on the outlook, then: he had been watching for weary months or years. Love and longing had trained his eye, as need trains the touch and ear of the blind. And he recognized his son though crushed, and bemired, and covered with rags, while, probably, the dogs that

had played with him when a boy barked fiercely at the suspicious ragged stranger.

Mercy's *feet* ran to meet him. Every thought of his age and dignity was lost in his eagerness to welcome the returning prodigal of whom conscience had made a cripple and a coward.

Mercy's *lips* kissed him. The phrase means that he rained kisses upon him as a mother showers kisses upon her babe in a moment of fondness. Yet the boy was dirty, travel-stained, blistered in face and arms, smelling dreadfully of the swine,—the most hateful of all odours to a pious, cultured Jew,—and his life had made him more swinish than the brutes he fed and *fed with*. And these kisses cut short his well-conned words of confession, and were the surest, sweetest tokens of forgiveness. Mercy's lips seal the pardon of the penitent soul. Pardon outruns confession, and leaps along more quickly. Someone has said that the Mediator is concealed in the Father's kiss.

Mercy's *hands* clothe and adorn the ragged outcast with beauty not his own. Very great is the abundance of the splendid gifts. This apparel proclaimed that the prodigal had put off the old man and put on the new; put off the swine-herd and put on the loyal son. Every part of his new clothing has delightful mystic meanings.

Mercy's *mirth* called for 'the fatted calf,' music, and dancing: it was like a long-continued royal wedding festival. This is a picture of the joy of a forgiving God over a forgiven man, and the joy of a forgiven man in the forgiven God, and also the joy of angels and good men over a prodigal's home-coming. 'Heaven has its merry-makings as well as earth,' says an old writer; they are held when mercy has triumphed.

Mercy's *heart* 'had compassion on him' (v.²⁰). The word here is *εσπλαγγνίσθη*: 'he had bowels of mercies.' Compassion is a suffering together with another, the making of his sorrow our own, so that to relieve him is to relieve ourselves. The great

lesson of this parable is often missed: it tells us that there is joy *in the presence of the angels of God*, that is, joy in God Himself, over every sinner that repenteth. The joy of the pardoned penitent is only a by-lesson, wonderful though it is.

Mercy's *foe* stands as the dark background of this glorious picture. His portrait is drawn in full and to the life. He is a sullen and suspicious soul, with no touch of brotherly or filial generosity. One fancies that one hears the very tone of a grumbling child in his words. He is perfectly selfish. In one verse he uses 'I' thrice, and also 'me' and 'my' once. His very heart is laid bare: his father's cause, joy, and friends are not his. The sting is in the tail of his reply. 'As soon as this thy son'—thy precious son, he does not say 'my brother'—'was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots,'—he did not know that to be true; it was only a cruel guess, a barbed and poisoned arrow,—'thou hast killed for him'—not for me, the well-deserving—'the fatted calf.' He comes near blaming the father for treating sin lightly and almost sympathizing with it. He seems to hold the father the greater prodigal of the two. And he is right there; for the father was more prodigal towards his son than the son had ever been against him. The prodigality of mercy surpasses even the prodigality of the sin which it vanquishes.

We can scarcely err in ascribing the following confession to the pardoned prodigal: 'I am mercy's man, a miracle of mercy. I have had millions of miseries, but I brought them all upon myself. But Mercy's eyes waited and watched for me; Mercy's feet ran to meet me; Mercy's lips gave me the kiss of forgiveness, though I did not yield till I was starved into returning; Mercy's hands clothed me; Mercy's merry-making celebrated my home-coming; and Mercy's heart will supply all my needs. "O give thanks unto the God of heaven; for His mercy endureth for ever."'