

proceeds. What follows the last words spoken by Nicodemus 'is plainly—at least to my mind—a condensation of our Lord's answers to many questions of Nicodemus. Some have indeed held that the later words of the section are the comment made by the evangelist. But I do not myself feel that. It looks to me as if Nicodemus had attempted argument from the Old Testament records. Our Lord's words about "no man hath ascended up to heaven," and the allusion to Moses and the brazen serpent, which have no very apparent connection with each other, look like His answers to incidents referred to by Nicodemus. And the last verses seem to me like very plain allusions to the secrecy of the visit, and the unwillingness of Nicodemus to say boldly before his fellow-rulers what he believed. "He that believeth not is condemned already" seems to me a clear reference to the hesitation of Nicodemus; and the further allusion to the darkness, and the words, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light," appear to me to be the plainest possible reference to the fact that Nicodemus had chosen to come secretly and by night for his interview, all translated on to a higher plane of thought.'

So we are to think of this interview as taking place by night in some humble lodging in

Jerusalem. Nicodemus leaves his own great house, muffled up so as to avoid observation. He is admitted, perhaps by our Saviour's own hand. And there 'in the bare room, with the winking lamp and its fluttering flame,' the strange tête-à-tête takes place. What did Nicodemus think of it afterwards? Mr. BENSON follows him down the years. 'I think of him as a sorrowful man, wishing that he had acted otherwise, wondering why he could not have followed the truth, perhaps secretly helping the Christians as far as he could; but I do not believe that his anxiety and his belief, such as it was, was forgotten, or his pathetic gift of myrrh and aloes for the tomb. I think he was one of those of whom Christ said lovingly, "He that is not against us is with us"; and I believe that he has long since found the answer to his faint inquiries, and perhaps, too, the courage of his convictions; and is only sorry, with a heavenly sorrow, that he could not have spoken as plainly as he wished, and as perhaps he meant to do, when he made his way through the dark streets, after his long talk, to the great familiar house; and then felt that he could not give up all the comfort and honour of his place in the world, for bare lodgings and the society of outcast and humble folk, even for the sake of One who seemed to him indeed a teacher come from God.'

The Judging or Critical Temper.

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MT 7¹, 'Judge not [*or rather* Cease judging], that ye be not judged,' or as Lk 6³⁷ has it, probably more exactly, 'Cease judging, and you will not be judged.' It will be instructive to read what follows in Matthew. 'For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you. And why beholdest thou the mote (the tiny particle of wood) that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest

¹ Preached in King's College Chapel, University of Aberdeen, June 2nd, 1912.

not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me put out the mote out of thine eye; and lo, the beam is in thine own eye? Hypocrite, put out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to put out the mote out of thy brother's eye.'

Ro 14⁴, 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.'

It was maintained by a well-known writer of the

nineteenth century that the words of Jesus just read had an exclusive reference to the law-courts. In other words, he was of opinion that Jesus forbade the office of court judge. The statement showed a want of perception of the context of the passage. For, whether the verses read be part of a long sermon or not, it is clear that they form a unity, and a careful study of them shows that judgment or criticism in the widest sense, particularly of the character and actions of other people, is what is intended. The Greek implies, too, that the persons addressed made a practice of this; and surely no one could continue to maintain that the words were addressed exclusively to judges. The commands grouped together in the first and third Gospels are addressed to the human spirit, and aimed at particular spiritual states rather than at separate concrete actions.

When one is in doubt as to the exact wording and bearing of the teaching of Jesus on a particular topic—and one may often be in doubt, considering the way in which some of the Gospels have been put together—it is a good rule to turn to the writings of Paul. Whether he had himself listened to Jesus in the flesh, as some scholars of repute think, or was in possession of a written document containing teaching of Jesus—a view for which, not excluding the possibility of the first, I should myself contend—or derived his knowledge orally from the Twelve or in some supernatural way, he had thoroughly mastered the teaching of the Messiah. In him more than any other apostle do we find that apprehension of the teaching of Jesus which is most fitted to bring it home to the Western public.

In the section of the Epistle from which our second text comes, the Apostle is discussing the relation of Christian to Christian, particularly the connexion between those he calls 'weak' and those he calls 'strong'; and indeed especially as regards certain customs of eating, drinking, and the keeping of certain days. A small topic in itself, but he shows, as his Master also so often does, how eternal principles are involved in such small things.

The church at Rome, like every other, was made up of persons at various stages of spiritual development. Some who had fully apprehended what freedom in Christ meant, how that they were released from all bondage to law as such, and only accountable to *Him*, to live in growing harmony

with His spirit, felt that they were free, for example, to eat meat, if they so chose. Others decided to confine themselves to a diet of herbs. The latter had probably belonged to some strict sect before becoming Christians, and they had felt it helpful to their spiritual life to deny themselves certain things. Now, when there are two such parties, there is danger, on the one hand, that the Christian, conscious of his true freedom, may despise his fellow-Christian, as one still in bondage; on the other hand, there is the risk that the stricter person may judge or even condemn the—as it seems to him—lax person. Paul points out that the service of both is acceptable to God. He commands the strong to welcome the weak unreservedly to their society and friendship, and in even severer tones forbids the weak to judge the strong, forbids that Pharisaic censoriousness which is too often the result of an ascetic attitude.

From the two passages it becomes perfectly clear that Christianity condemns the judgment of one human being by another; and it is on this subject of judging or criticizing that I would seek to offer a few thoughts this morning.

It is always instructive to compare the actions of a man with his statements, and, as a matter of fact, it is what the world, very shrewdly, is always doing. 'Action,' as my old teacher Professor Minto used to love to put it, 'is the test of belief.' Let us first study the action of Jesus in this regard. Two incidents will suffice to illustrate it. One of the crowd on one occasion, we are told, said to Him: 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide my father's inheritance with me.' But He said to him: 'Fellow, who made me a judge over you?' and immediately warned the crowd about greed. Another case is the beautiful story, rescued from some lost Gospel, and found mostly between the seventh and the eighth chapters of St. John, the tale of the adulterous woman. All her accusers slunk away self-condemned, and in the end the Master Himself refused to condemn her. Instances could be multiplied: and if we find that there are cases where He does really judge, these simply go to show that He was no mere man, but had received authority from His Father to judge, when occasion demanded. This being the case, the numerous occasions on which He refrained from giving any judgment whatsoever derive fresh significance. With regard to Paul, we find that he occasionally, with an apostolic authority sanctioned

by his Master, condemns immoral members of his churches; but he never judges another Christian's conscience, and he leaves those outside the Church absolutely to the judgment of God.

The teaching of the Lord being therefore perfectly clear on this point, it becomes us to ask for some reasons for this command. Four may perhaps be given:—

First, we must not judge, because we do not know. Each of us is a product of a large number of tendencies and experiences, which in no two cases are absolutely identical. Even if we take the several children of the same parents, we find that, though they all have the same ancestry, are brought up under the same roof, have the same environment, and attend the same school, when they reach maturity there may be physical resemblances between them, but, as often as not, their natures differ greatly from one another. Their tempers, tastes and ideals, motives and attitudes differ very greatly. If this be so in the circle of one household, what must the totality of difference throughout the world be? We cannot understand the mainsprings of another's conduct. 'No human being knows what is in another human being,' says the Apostle, 'except the nature of that human being itself.' As we cannot know any other person but partially, even if we live a lifetime with him, that is a reason for refraining from judgment. We cannot even know ourselves fully. What we are capable of in the way of action, petty or great, Christlike or devilish, we may never know, till a moment in which we surprise ourselves performing some unusual action. From all these considerations we see also that, as a Creator alone knows all His creations, so He alone is fit to sit in judgment upon them.

Second, if we do judge, the chances are that we shall be really unjust. A certain action is performed by a person. We look at the action purely by itself—supposing we do not suffuse it with the gall of personal dislike—and we express our judgment of the doer at once, without pause or hesitation. And yet, what is behind the action may be as different as possible from what we have imagined. It may seem a poor action from our standard (or the one we choose, unconsciously perhaps, to adopt for the nonce), but in the eyes of the all-seeing God it may be the first step upward in the spiritual life. The person who performs this 'poor' action may have hitherto done little but

what was positively evil. What we see is the putting forth perhaps of the first tentacle to obtain a foothold on a plane a little higher. This modest attempt is made. The timid soul is just gaining courage, when we break in with our rough-shod criticism. What is the effect? In nearly every case it will be to dishearten the person, to make him feel that there is no sympathy in the world, that it is too hard to live a good life, and, finally, that it is not worth while. We shall never know how many people have been driven to despair by an ill-considered judgment thoughtlessly delivered at an unsuitable time. Verily it is an awful load to have on one's conscience that one has discouraged even one soul on the upward journey.

Third, if we judge, it is really after all ourselves that we are judging, and not the person we think we are judging. There is so much more of ourselves, whom we do in a measure know, than of the judged person, whom we do *not* know, in every judgment we make. Perhaps our Gospel texts are no more than an expression of this truth, and certainly we find it expressed in John: 'He that believeth on the Son is not being judged, but he that does not believe is already judged.' In no way do we betray ourselves to our fellows more than by our judgments of others. It is a curious law of human nature that the very faults we condemn most severely in others are very often the faults of which we ourselves are, consciously or unconsciously, most guilty. A shrewd observer of human nature will, therefore, draw his own conclusions when he hears a judgment of one person by another. Contrariwise, we rarely condemn others for faults of which we are not ourselves guilty, the reason being that we do not understand those faults so well.

Fourth, the habit of criticism develops in us conceit, overbearingness, hardness and cruelty, and makes us perhaps of all mankind the most detested. If we therefore care for the good opinion of our fellows, and most of us do, we shall seek to check this tendency in its earliest stages.

On grounds, then, of the ignorance, injustice and self-exposure involved in it, as well as the evil results which accrue to our character, we ought to refrain from judging.

Silence in such cases has the same tremendous power that it has in some others. The silent member of a party gets credit for superior wisdom, whether he possess it or no. Again, in the matter

of tale-bearing ; by refraining from the repetition of some ill-natured remark about a person, we may save incalculable harm. So, by keeping silence about an action which we inwardly disapprove, we keep our spirits sweeter, and prevent a deal of exaggeration and harm. The judgment we deliver will be made more and more severe as it passes from mouth to mouth, until in the end we shall not be able to recognize our own comparatively charitable remark. And remember it will always be given as ours ; and, in proportion as our position or reputation is high, so much the worse harm will be done. It is, therefore, a good rule, if one cannot honestly say anything good, to say nothing at all. Some would carry this rule even into the sphere of favourable judgments. A couple of generations ago, the classical tutors of Cambridge, it is said, would never give a word of praise to a piece of translation or composition, however much they admired it. The carrying out of a rule like that is no doubt favourable to the development of strong character in individual cases, but the rule, I fancy, should hardly be made absolute. There are natures which cannot develop well except under the sunshine of praise. And a keen observer will know when to refrain from praise and when to give it, with a view to producing the best results.

But, you will say, is there never an occasion on which it is the duty of a human being to judge, or to express a judgment? Remembering that it is the judging or the criticizing spirit that is specially condemned by our Lord, we may perhaps admit that judgment is allowable on occasion, if there be an entire absence of that spirit in the judgment.

Let us take first the case of the law-court judge. What are his antecedents, his circumstances, his attitude? A judge is a man who has had long experience of law-courts, particularly as an advocate, in the sphere of defence. He ought to have acquired a profound knowledge of human nature, and also, such bias as he has is likely to be in the direction of mercy. Before he goes to court, to try his cases, he attends church, and seeks peace with God and a right attitude in facing his duty. He is attended by an armed escort, which at once reminds us, the public, of the august position in which we have placed him, and has a reflex action on his own personality, reminding him of the awful responsibility he has undertaken. He enters court, and carefully obtains all information he can get for or against the prisoner ; he considers all the evi-

dence in the quiet of his own study, and then, after all these preliminary safeguards, he gives his summing up. In a criminal case he does not even give the verdict, but merely advises the peers of the prisoner at the bar, to help *them* to the decision. There is all the difference in the world between such a situation and that of a person with the critical temper. Our judges may go wrong sometimes, being mortal, but it is probably rarely. The position of such a judge is the nearest analogy on earth to a God in heaven who judges us knowing all the facts. That the judges of our country are on the whole worthy of the high confidence placed in them by the public is shown by the excessive rarity of public demonstrations against them. They remain a necessary part of our political and social machinery.

Is there any other case where judgment is allowable? We may admit that there is, if three rules are observed :—

First. If the person judging has the requisite knowledge and is allowed by his peers to have such.

Second. If he is called upon to give judgment, either by earthly authority which he cannot disregard, or by the imperative voice of God within him.

Third. If the faults are condemned in as impersonal a way, and if as little is done to hurt the real feelings of the person judged, as possible.

With such qualifications one may concede the value of literary criticism ; for instance, George Grote, successful man of business and great historian as he was, when he undertook to recommend the best work in a particular department of theology to a friend, was making himself ridiculous in the eyes of the theological expert. But, when a man with the knowledge and literary sense of our own graduate, Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, delivers an opinion on a work of English literature, many thousands are guided and helped by his criticisms. All will allow that he has by an equally profound experience and sympathy earned the right to deliver his judgments.

We will not pursue the subject further in this direction. The Bible, more perhaps than any other religious work, abounds in 'Do not's' and 'Thou shalt not's,' and among them is this rule about judging. But a true religion cannot be merely negative in its demands. A personality that is guided only by negative commands, is like

a bird imprisoned in a cage. It is protected from certain dangers to which it would be exposed outside, but its wings are injured, its health is lowered, and to all sympathetic observers it is a sad sight. It is well that Christianity should indulge in negative commands, because we human beings are so prone to error; but our life is not complete merely if we avoid the pitfalls pointed out for us. That is after all a flaccid kind of existence.

We seek then for some positive antidote to the critical spirit. The development of the introspective habit and of the avoidance of particular sins is not nearly so effective a way of growing in spiritual stature, as energetic effort in the opposite direction. By this latter method the evils we seek to escape insensibly shrivel up and disappear. The antidote to the critical spirit is the spirit of love. Like everything else, this has in most of us to be cultivated. There are those happy natures, beloved of all of us, who almost from their birth breathe forth a spirit of love, kindness, and sympathy; but most of us are not built that way. For many, the attainment of such a grace may be

the result of lifelong prayer and struggle. We are so obsessed by our own point of view that we find it very hard to understand that of another. One way to break down barriers is to cultivate kindly *action*. If our fault is greed, let us freely give something we shall really miss, to some one else. So, if we are inclined to be critical, we should let ourselves go in commendation, when we can honestly do so. That will release some obstruction within us, and our mental attitude will gradually become more charitable and kindly. After all, what we really want is to be conformed more and more to the spirit of our Master. Let us study His life more and more closely, and pray for His Spirit to help us. We shall at last be free from the judging spirit and full of the spirit of love. 'Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.'

The Scape-Goat in Babylonian Religion.

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THE problem as to the existence in Babylonia of the practice of communicating the sins of a people to an animal, which is then driven away into the wilderness, has not been treated thoroughly in any popular or scientific publication.¹ The word *scape-goat*, although based upon an erroneous interpretation of *Azazel* in the Greek and Latin versions of Lv 16,² accurately describes this widely spread act of magical atonement in ancient religions. Since the word came into our language as descriptive of the goat to whom the high priest magically transmitted the sins of the Hebrew people in

¹ Apparently the first to discover this principle in Babylonian texts was Professor John D. Prince, 'Le Bouc Émissaire chez les Babyloniens,' *Journal Asiatique*, 1903, 133-156, a detailed and successful defence of his theory formerly advocated in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. xxi. 1-22 (1900).

² See Benzinger and Cheyne, in *Encyclopedia Biblica*, 395; Kennedy, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, 77.

Lv 16, the idea which the term naturally conveys to us is that of a live goat driven away into the wilderness with the sins of a whole race. As has been often pointed out, a similar idea lies in the ceremony of Lv 14, where a dove is released to carry away the contagion of leprosy. In the latter case the taint of disease and uncleanness, primarily evidence of sin in any aspect, is that of an individual, and the transmission of the uncleanness is through a second dove whose blood had been sprinkled upon the patient and upon the scape-goat bird.

It is true that no certain traces of the scape-goat condemned to bear the sins of a people can be detected in the many ceremonies of purification and atonement extant in Babylonian religion. We have to do here invariably with the atonement of individuals, and so far as our sources give us clear evidence, only with a scape-goat which is slain, and