

# THIS IS OUR FAITH

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## CHAPTER I. GOD

### A. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

*God is Spirit.* Ps. 139: Acts 17: 22-31.

He runs a long, long way who runs from his conscience. The self-seeking son of Isaac found that out long ago (Gen. 28). He tried to cash in on his brother's rights, and had to make his heels his friends. Thoroughly weary and worn out with his own heart's torture, he flung himself down on alien soil well beyond the frontier of his own country. It was a cheerless bed, and the accusing stars looked down upon ridge beyond ridge of flinty rock; but he closed his eyes, and merciful sleep fell gently down. Then the mysterious universe opened its gates, ledges of stone fashioned themselves into a magic stairway, and angels began to flit to and fro. Where the truant had expected blissful forgetfulness there came the sense of a Presence that made even the rocks alive, and out of the darkness came an awesomeness eerie and challenging. What a place of dread and mystery! It was as if another world had touched the cold earth and transmuted its chilly garment into a vesture of glory. "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." So Jacob discovered that God is One who confronts the fleeing spirit wherever he may lay his head. He outpaces our speediest feet, outdistances our swiftest thought. He is the great Spirit whose range is everywhere.

A young princeling turned his back on Egypt and his life's complications one fine morning before the dawn could catch him (Ex. 2: 15). He travelled on till he made friends and made new contacts. He let the years slip by and memories fade into dimness. He became a shepherd leading flocks. But his thoughts kept pursuing him closer than the sheep. Back yonder the slave gangs, the crack of the whip, the bricks drying in the hot sun, the whip cracking again, and the sound of weeping and the sharp cry of

### I. God.

We believe in God, the eternal personal Spirit, Creator and Upholder of all things.

We believe that God, as Sovereign Lord exalted above the world, orders and overrules all things in it to the accomplishment of His holy, wise, and good purposes.

We believe that God made man to love and serve Him; that He cares for him as a righteous and compassionate Father; and that nothing can either quench His love or finally defeat His gracious purpose for man.

So we acknowledge God as Creator, Upholder, and Sovereign Lord of all things, and the righteous and loving Father of men.



pain. He had the training for a leader, and yet he had run away from his suffering countrymen. But one day in the evening glory he stood a man transfixed. The desert bush burned with fire and yet it was not consumed. Only that which God has touched can pass through the furnace and live. Surely this was holy ground. He put off his shoes from his feet. A voice was sounding in his ears, a voice that would not let him go. There where he had turned his back on his people and his people's God, that same God had faced him and made His presence irresistible. So Moses went back to Egypt; for God is Spirit everywhere appearing and always besetting the kindred spirits He has made in His own image.

It was high noon, and a company of weary travellers had paused at a well head, and after a little parley they went into the unfriendly town to see if they could buy bread (John 4). The place seemed deserted; but one remained sitting alone craving the coolness of the spring water below. A woman drew near, empty pitcher upon her shoulder, a woman with a sad and wistful face. She came in the heat, when other women would not be there; she was minded to draw water, water that had a magic value for her because it was from the hallowed well of her great ancestor, the runaway who had found God crashing through his dreams into his waking life. She came then to avoid the taunts, the hints, the suggestive gestures, of those who had not made her grievous mistakes and who knew full well where to hurt. But today one confronted her when she least expected it, and He did not speak to hurt. He talked, and His words, strangely wise, went straight home to the better self she had so long hidden from the world. Seeking water with magic potency in it, she had found it—not in the well of her ancestor, but on the lips of One who convicted her, shamed her, roused a new yearning in her. The woman left her waterpot and hurried away to call others into a presence that had awakened her. "God is a Spirit," He had said, "and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." In the unlikely place He had flashed upon her path, and in the region of the past she had sought to veil, just there, He had discovered to her her real need and His will to forgive and make all things new.

God is spirit. The Hebrew word, like the Greek word, for "spirit" was used for air in motion, suggesting that man found

this mysterious invisible reality all around, entering every corner and cranny of life, always penetrating, always alive, invigorating; sometimes jostling, imperious, compelling, like a tempest blast, sometimes gentle, wooing, caressing, like a summer breeze. God is always and everywhere near to those who seek. He is not far from any one of us. "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17: 27f.). He had prompted the Athenians to build an altar to the Unknown God. They felt an urge they could not define. Israel needed a wise guide who would hear the heavenly voice in tempestuous times; so He mysteriously nourished a mother's hope and Samuel came. The nation was growing rich and drawing to herself corroding influences, foreign gods; so the Spirit came on Elijah, man of one-ideaed devotion to the one true God. The forces of corruption and injustice were crushing the poor; so Amos, a herdsman and a fig-dresser, found his mind filled with a blazing passion for righteousness and alive with words that burned like tongues of flame. The times had been hard, and the nation seemed to have paid double for all her sins; so God touched the soul of Isaiah, making him a great-hearted comforter. From every phase of life, in every kind of circumstance, there was a movement from behind a veil, and people knew that it was a Living One who had broken into their national or into individual concerns, warning, arousing, comforting, as the mood of the moment required.

We humans know the severe limitations of time and space. We are confined by the brevity of our days and the scant reach and resources of our earthly frame. But God is not so restrained. Experience tells us that He is everywhere and always available to His people. Whenever we come to the end of our strength or our folly, He is there. Wherever sin or defeat or death reveals our helplessness, there He appears with healing for our soul's distress. In the beauty and grandeur of the world, even in the terror and the darkness, we are stirred to seek and search beyond ourselves for the Mind that fashioned the loveliness of the rose, for the creative Power that set the stars in the bowl of night and forges the lightning bolt. And in the soul within there is an awareness of right and wrong, a moral demand that arises—how and why we wonder. On every side of our world and in every phase of our nature there is this invading mystery that we come to know as the Spirit of the Living God.



Whither shall I go from thy spirit?  
 or whither shall I flee from thy presence?  
 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:  
 if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there (Ps.  
 139: 7-8).

*God is Personal.* Ps. 63; Is. 1; Jer. 12: 1-6; 20: 7-18; Acts 9: 4-6; 2 Cor. 12: 7-10.

These encounters of a Jacob or a Moses were all personal. "Son of man, stand upon thy feet" (Ezek. 2: 1): the prophet felt himself addressed directly. "Save me, O God: for the waters are come in unto my soul" (Ps. 69: 1): the Psalmist could make appeal to a sure and tried friend. "Come now, and let us reason together . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Is. 1: 18): as if God and people could come together in a heart-to-heart talk. And sometimes it would be an argument: "Let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? . . . How long shall the land mourn?" And the counter thrust would come: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?" (Jer. 12: 1ff.).

We cannot fathom or define the nature of God, how far His being is like or unlike personality as we know it. But He is personal in that He addresses us, comforts us, and is addressed and confronted by us in the direct way of person to person. He is One with whom we can enter into an intimate and reciprocal fellowship. We feel we are not dealing with some vague principle, some blind urge or force unresponsive to our call, some hard and intangible law or necessity in things. Many think of God in that impersonal way; but that is not the testimony of the saints, of Scripture, or of the Christian Church.

"My heart and my flesh crieth out for the *living* God" (Ps. 84: 2). That is the passionate hunger of the Old Testament saint, and that yearning was satisfied. The veneration of Israel was fixed on Jehovah because He had delivered the nation from bondage, and by mighty acts He was ever affirming that *aliveness* and *sensitiveness* to the needs of His people. The Psalms unfold the record of the most intimate communion with that Living One: they are studded with the first and second *personal* pronouns.

The law of the Lord is imperative and precious because it was His *personal* will, the expression of a righteous nature. To the prophets He communicated in words and thoughts, thoughts that were so new and outreaching that they had not arisen from any human brain, but from a mind that was vaster. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Is. 55: 8). The Messianic yearnings after One who would be the shadow of a great rock in a weary land were seen as the sacred promises of a Love that had made tryst with suffering human kind and surely in the end would bring a gladdening consummation. The beauty of the earth was His fashioning; because it was the Eternal who set His glory in the heavens, man, made in His image, could behold and commune with Him. The Sovereign Soul conversed with His creature souls in the language of colour and light.

How does modern man reason? I value above all else truth, honour, righteousness, and how can I conceive these except as first divine creations, expressions of the Eternal Mind? How could the splendours of cloud and sunshine, the starry heavens, the glories of field and flower, speak to me in the accents of beauty if the Divine Artist had not first uttered His soul therein? Surely it is not an accidental concatenation of atoms and colours that thus happens upon loveliness? I see only what the One who made me first saw and gave me the power of seeing after Him.

The Christian does not need to argue: he knows. As he follows the moving story from Nazareth to Olivet, he is constrained to acknowledge that in the man of history it is a mind far-sighted beyond the human who is speaking forth His loftier thoughts. To read the Beatitudes is to experience an elevation of the human soul. It is like passing out of the mists into a clear view of the everlasting hills that seem literally to lift you up to the grandeur of their snowclad tops. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"—so did mean man stiffly hold the balance for his pound of flesh. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you"—at once man owns that Truth in person utters His voice there, transcending all human values. The Christian lives by faith, prayer, love. His faith is not the acceptance of a mass of dogma, but trust in a *Person* who has come seeking him, drawing him with bands of love in Christ Jesus. He prays not to persuade himself, as if he could



pull himself up by his bootstraps. He prays to One whose heart is open to his cry, and he continues praying because he has assuring answers. Above all, what he experiences as the Love of God is the outflow of a *living* Heart whose compassionate tenderness is proven by the mighty acts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Because God is personal the Incarnation was possible. "In Jesus we are in contact with a Divine Moral Self, with a God who takes sides, who stands for right and against wrong, in whom the deepest and constitutive reality is not pure thought or absolute knowledge but Personality constituted by infinite Holy Love." Our supreme need is deliverance from the awful thralldom of sin, and that need can be satisfied by no formal remission or mechanical cancellation. No vague principle within us or without can cleanse our heart. We know the peace of pardon because God comes *personally* to us in Jesus Christ. We know it is real because the cost was paid in a real Person's tears and agony. Christians throughout the ages have gone on affirming that they are in constant touch with that same dynamic, renewing love that was in Jesus. Dr. L. P. Jacks has expressed the reality of the living God in his inimitable way: "There is that in the world, call it what you will, which responds to the confidence of those who trust it, declaring itself, to them, as a fellow-worker in the pursuit of the Eternal Values, meeting their loyalty to it with reciprocal loyalty to them, and coming in at critical moments when the need of its sympathy is greatest; the conclusion being, that wherever there is a soul in darkness, obstruction or misery, there also is a Power which can help, deliver, illuminate and gladden that soul. This is the Helper of men, sharing their business as Creators of Value, nearest at hand when the worst has to be encountered; the companion of the brave, the upholder of the loyal, the friend of the lover, the healer of the broken, the joy of the victorious—the God who is spirit, the God who is love."<sup>1</sup>

*God is Eternal.* Ps. 90; 2 Pet. 3: 8-18.

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33: 27). Man is ever seeking something more dependable than himself. He knows that he is unstable in

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> L. P. Jacks, *Religious Perplexities*, p. 60f.

character, and he yearns for One who can be counted on always. He sees his purposes falter and fade away: a hope like world peace that has fascinated him and called up all his energies slips out of his grasp in the present age, and from the depths of his being springs the longing that there may be One who can bind together the broken purposes of the passing generations. The tides of history sweep on and bear away frail man and all his treasured structures; yet in his heart he knows that with him and his works there pass away ideas and hopes and dreams that all humanity would fain bring to birth, to enrich the life of those who are yet to be. If only there were One who was master of all time, and able and willing to outlast the passing defeats and bring to harvest all the sowings of the years! There are moral and spiritual values continually emerging in the lives of the saints and the poets and the musicians and the scientists. Are these to be wrecked by the hand of death, or stand rebukingly like the ruined doorways and shattered arches of a once great and beautiful cathedral, tragic memorials of a grace and a piety that have been and are no more? Is there no Supreme Genius who bestrides the centuries, who goes on building with invisible stone the sacred fanes where men have toiled and worshipped and prayed their last prayer? Is history an endless series of trials and errors and recurring cycles of failure? Is there not One living above change and decay who sees all things from the beginning, holds His hand on all passing events, and transmutes all frustrations into final victory? Is there not a consistency behind all seeming accidents, a purposiveness that threads its pattern through all mutation to climax in the end?

We are creatures compacted of emotion and desire. We have had our Bethel and our Peniel in life's journeyings, and we look at our children and bethink ourselves of the evil world where they must pass their days. Our prayer goes out that the goodness and the mercy that have followed us may meet and protect our children likewise. Our God must needs be the unfailing friend of every age and time. As He has set love in our heart, we crave eternity in His faithfulness. Such is the divinely implanted thought behind man's cry to the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Is. 54: 10). Thus the hunger for the



Eternal points towards a Kingdom where God's purposes have their consummation. Ultimately reason cries out to God's love to bind together the flying terms with bands of gold.

*Sovereign Lord Exalted . . . holy.* Is. 6: 1-8; 37: 15; Ps. 89: 1-18; Ps. 93; Rev. 4.

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts:  
the whole earth is full of his glory.

Such was the revelation that came to Isaiah when the burden of an earthly disillusionment bore heavily upon his soul. What patriot had not been proud of King Uzziah's reign, long, glorious, and prosperous? Then suddenly fell the blow inexplicable. "The Lord smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house" (2 Kings 15: 5; cf. 2 Chron. 26: 16ff.). Wealth and luxury had mounted during a long reign, so that the blessing of God seemed to rest with king and people. Then came the tragedy that tore the king from his people and made him, for all his greatness, an outcast, unclean, shut off from the house of God and the society of man. How terrifying a judgment! By one stroke court and people stood forth as rebuked and smitten by the unseen Hand. The Majesty on high had been offended, and so the proud nation was rudely awakened to a Power beyond princes, a Will sensitive as it was inscrutable. Here was One who lay beyond the limits of the human intellect. The Jew was deeply conscious of this dark side to the greatness of God that would brook no irreverence or transgression. Abraham had a human pity for the doomed people of Sodom, yet hardly dared to plead for them: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18: 27). Moses turned aside with a very natural curiosity to see the burning bush: "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet" (Ex. 3: 5). Job was proud in his conviction of innocence, bold in the face of men, and clamorous to appear before his Vindicator; but when confronted by the Presence he confessed: "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42: 6). "He is the living God . . . at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation." Thus the most tender and spiritual of all the prophets (Jer. 10: 10). The New Testament continues to sound that note. "It is a fearful thing to fall

into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10: 31). "Our God is a consuming fire" (12: 29). Paul sees in history a very real wrath of God, and he interprets the hateful lusts and the vile passions of paganism as the purposeful sufferance of an outraged God who lets sin mount to a crisis point at once to enlighten and to punish men: He "gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1: 28). The author of the Apocalypse pictures the vials of the divine anger overflowing, and in the very chapter where the Evangelist proclaims a God who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son there is the awful penalty suspended above the man who rejects the offer: "the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3: 16, 36).

It is hardly adequate to explain away this dread element in Scripture as simply gross human misunderstanding of the Divine. Familiar with the capricious Eastern potentate of unchecked power, the writers of the Old Testament may sometimes ascribe unworthy passions to the Almighty and so reduce God to our human likeness. It is true that gradually they became more clearly aware of the *moral* grandeur of their God. But there is an overplus here that cannot be so explained, a profound sense of One overwhelmingly magnificent and transcending all imagination, endowed with a will and nature that cannot but be terrible and implacable in a world of unrighteousness, One of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, One who is of another sort than we humans can know, One who in the radiance and splendour of His being outdazzles us men and all our seeing. He is the Creator: we are but creatures. Language clumsily calls Him "the wholly other." "Holy" does not initially describe His moral perfection, but rather His Separateness and Aloneness.

Have we overlooked this elevated awesomeness in the Gracious God of the New Testament? Did not Jesus set that majesty in the forefront of our thought when we pray "Our Father who art in heaven, *hallowed* be Thy name"? Proof of the reality of this "otherness" appeared in the Jesus who revealed Him. Yet we have so read the Gospels after our own liking that we have missed the majesty that glows alongside of the gentleness. But turn to the opening chapter of the first and freshest picture of Jesus (Mark 1). Note how, when He appears in Galilee, He, their familiar friend, the carpenter they knew, unveils a *commandingness* among His fellows that is superlatively amazing. At His



word they forsook their vocation (1: 18), the livelihood we men naturally cling to; they forsook their parents (1: 20), and how strong was the family bond among the Jews; they forsook their religious leaders (1: 22); they prepared even to forsake the devil's chains (1: 24), and how strong is that hold. "The Holy One of God," He is acclaimed. A cityful gathers at His door; but before dawn He is up and away even while men seek for Him: He is possessed by other standards and values than men can understand. He has a Kingdom to preach (1: 38); He belongs to another universe that is breaking into our earth. There must have been something manifestly otherworldly or numinous in the man about whom they could testify that even the winds and waves obeyed Him, and death itself gave back its captives. Obedient to a heavenly commission, He goes on and ever on to Jerusalem, while fascinated men walk after Him *afraid* (10: 32). He clears the Temple courts at a word, and holds men spellbound (11: 18). His very silence before His judges makes the accusers the accused, and even on the criminal's cross from the midst of its pain and horror He stands out to a gruff soldier's frank surprise the One who is truly the Son of God (15: 39).

Yet when Jesus has done His work there is a new appraisal of this God of power and mystery. The author of Hebrews who terms God a consuming fire yet assures his readers that they come no longer to a mount of dread (12: 18ff.), but to a God who is judge of all *and* to Jesus the Mediator of a New Covenant. One who has learned to pray in the name of Jesus has not the hesitation of Abraham when he would plead for sinful men. When we feel ourselves in the Divine Presence, we are not like Job, silenced by the mysteries of the natural world, the eagle, the ostrich, the wild ass, but we are constrained to bow before a grander mystery, the love that seeks and finds us in the Cross of Jesus. God is still the unsearchable, baffling human reason. But the focal point of Revelation is no longer His undefined sublimity and power; it is to His moral grandeur that men turn their eyes in wondering awe. He has declared Himself above all as mighty to save.

It is because of this "otherness" of God that we have failed to understand His ways. In one of his sermons Professor H. R. Mackintosh pictured our unlikeness to God as "an obscuring screen impeding our view" so that we see such a mystery as the Atonement "through the frosted glass of our own lovelessness."

"It is because we are such strangers to sacrifice that God's sacrifice leaves us bewildered. It is because we love so little that His love is mysterious. We have never forgiven anybody at such a cost as His."

*Righteous and Loving: His Wise and Good Purposes.* Ps. 145: Is. 45: 18-25; Amos 4; Hosea 11; Mark 10: 17-27; Rev. 5.

God stands at the beginning of all history; He continues with us to the end of the story. "The prophet's faith is that the whole ongoing process of nature and human life is in God's control. His hand is on it all every moment, all His creatures are in His care. Confusion and terror abroad may be too much for us; it is not too much for Him." This prophetic conviction was verified and sealed by the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ to crown the destiny of His world. Throughout all the hurrying centuries God has been for ever initiating, overturning to build better, a Doer who worketh up to this hour. And all that creative energy is but the outflow of a character that grows ever more clear in successive flashes of revelation. Because He is the Living One at the heart of things, nature and history are full of meaning and mystery. He is "a just God and therefore a Saviour."

To the mind of man came ever broken lights: the fullness of the Everlasting Light was there, but only gradually could it be received. In the struggle for land and liberty a Moses or a Joshua or a Saul found Him as the mighty Doer; an Elijah in a day of debasing contacts recognized Him as a jealous God with a will to break the servitude of His people to all that was false and corrupt. His love and His righteousness, *never contradictory, but two sides of one nature*, glowed ever more clear before the eyes of His servants. Amos, the shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees, would not have known Him as One who "let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (5: 24) had he not also confessed Him as concerned in love that the needy were sold for a pair of shoes. Hosea could not have plumbed the depths of His love had he not experienced in his own soul the divine abhorrence for the wickedness of unfaithfulness in a wife: he could measure the exhaustless patience of love only by knowing how much he hated the evil of the disloyalty he struggled to forgive. Isaiah was

\* Richard Davidson, *A Faith to Live by*, p. 3.



fondly proud of his king and his compatriots before he came to be appalled by the tragedy of unrighteousness, of dwelling among a people of unclean lips: the all-holy majestic God who was high and lifted up had a tenderness towards His thoughtless people who did not consider. "To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God": so Micah (6: 8) saw mercy and righteousness commingled in the God who spoke to him. Jonah pictures a God who was at once inflexible, inescapable, and yet ready to spare alien Nineveh with her thousands of helpless innocents. Joel knew what dread visitation it meant when the Day of the Lord was at hand, but he knew likewise the gracious promise: "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten" (2: 25). What other nation so set before all eyes the demands of the God of Sinai and yet knew equally the exultant cry: "Who is a God like unto thee who pardoneth iniquity?" So were the lines laid for that supreme unveiling of the divine nature in Jesus of Nazareth, the Word incarnate of His righteous judgment *and* His unsearchable love. And the master purpose running like a golden thread throughout the centuries of conflict and suffering came at last to completion in the grand design whereby the Cross, the Resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit finally spread the glory of His Kingdom before mankind. That Kingdom was a rainbow of hope overarching human history. There His love *and* righteousness were to reach their perfect expression. Paul as he hastened from city to city, adding group after group to the bright believing band, was God's instrument in creating the holy fellowship of the Church, the heirs of that Kingdom. That ever-expanding community afire with love and righteousness was to leaven the whole lump of human kind and so create that perfect society wherein His Holy Spirit uttered forth the ultimate meaning of the universe. There at last in the larger incarnation of the Church of Christ was bodied forth the God of the Infinite Righteousness and Graciousness, manifest as the Redeemer and Lord of all mankind.

*Creator and Upholder.* Gen. 1-2: 3; Ps. 8, Ps. 19; Is. 40: 25-31; Col. 1: 16-17; John 1: 1-18.

"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth" (Is. 40: 26). The prophet is very sure

of the limitless grandeur of the divine power; and for him that means that there is available for frail man a God of gracious purpose who has not made the wonder of heaven for no end; He who has created is ever willing and able to recreate: "he giveth power to the faint . . . they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (29 ff.). The interest of Scripture in the fashioning of earth and all the starry firmament lies not in the "how" of creation, but in the "why." Whether the process was long and gradual, whether it came by one dramatic whirl of natural forces or by a series of sudden leaps, whether it happened by divine fiat or evolutionary development—these are marginal questions. What matters is the fact that *God willed it all* and that everything came into being for His high and gracious purposes. Thus the narrative of creation in Genesis reaches up to the climax in v. 26: "And God said, Let us make man. . . ." The fair world has arisen out of the void; but why? That man might step forth, made in His own likeness, with power to think and feel and will, and so be able to enter into fellowship with the Creator of all. The story goes on to recount the first Sabbath day—the day set apart for intercourse between the creatures of earth and the Maker of the heavens. The amphitheatre of things—the fair green earth and the star-strewn skies, the clouds above and the waters stretching to the far horizon—these are but the scenery, the stage for the actors; the play begins when God addresses man, when Spirit communes with spirit.

The narrative in Genesis needs a supplement. It is like a palimpsest, an ancient manuscript which thrusts before the eye an obvious text, but which carries underneath the faint lines of a deeper and richer story. That further illumination is given in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel (John 1: 1-18). There the real culmination of the creation story comes to light: on the scene of earth the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. The Son of Man reveals at last the true image in which Adam was made. And His coming to redeem fallen, undeserving man sheds glory upon the name of the Creator, showing Him as the *Father* whose will it is to call many sons of earth into glory. Thus we learn that "there is a world because the will and wisdom of God called it into being." Love reached out to find those whom it could love, and so there came into being the world

\* John Macleod, in *Expository Times*, Jan., 1940.



and man. The world was made for spiritual ends by the Word of God. When the early fathers spoke of creation out of nothing, a phrase not used in Scripture, they were claiming that God did not merely re-shape material that already existed, as the Gnostic heretics believed. What lies behind their contention is something richer—that there is nothing beyond the range of God's initiative. He made all things, and therefore, as everything is His framing, it must fulfil His purpose and depend on His activity alone, and that activity is for spiritual ends. A God of love and purpose surely did not fashion us and our world to be a plaything for an hour and then fling us back into the void. He has continued His spiritual work all through the ages. "My Father has been working up to this very hour, and I too continually am at work" (John 5: 17). There can be no cessation of the divine interest in the objects of His creation. As we came "from His hand," we remain "in His hand." The potter is for ever at work fashioning and refashioning for use or beauty, for service or delight. He "upholds" what He has created.

And what does Paul mean when he declares that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"? "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8: 22). Divine sonship is to be realized in humanity at last, and that consummation is one towards which nature strains forward with "absorbed, persistent expectation—waiting, as it were, with uplifted head." For that great spiritual end "the whole frame of creation, all its parts together, *unite* in sighing and in pain." Jesus came among men preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God and He died for the cause of that Kingdom. Upon the blood- and tear-stained earth where had risen and fallen so many empires of man's shaping, in the place where hopes had so often been dimmed, and the utmost striving of humanity had raised but perishing structures of frustrated zeal, there God has laid out the lines of a new foundation, a spiritual Kingdom, a temple not made with hands. The Rejected One was the chosen cornerstone, the Apostles were the pillars, men and women were the living stones being built daily into the sensitive frame. Men had looked for God's Presence in houses of stone and lime; now they would find that Presence in the living society of the Church. That is the "poem" of God, as the author of

\* James Denney, *Expositor's Greek Testament*

Ephesians sees it: He completes the work of earth with its far-flung beauty and its over-arching glory of the heavens by crowning it with a cathedral of living flaming souls aglow with His grace and His love. So creation is revealed finally as the theatre of the glory of God, the scene of the spiritual order He had designed and brought to consummation. The artist is gladdened when after travail and toil he has set upon the canvas the lines and colours of a thing of beauty. But God had to satisfy a deeper nature, a profounder purpose. He fashions that which will satisfy not merely the eye or a single sense, but the whole nature of man. Here is something so rich and rare that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man."

John Keats called this world a vale of soul-making. He voiced a truth. Here through the testing and refining, the tempting and the scourging, the toiling and moiling, character is formed, and the glory and grandeur of man's nature appear. But the soul has a greater glory to reflect: *the face of God* has to shine from the faces of men. The end of life is not to discover ourselves: that is but the first step that leads the prodigal back to discover the Father. The end of creation's story is not that the Word became flesh, nor that to those who believed He gave the power to become the sons of God, but that from that living flesh the grace and truth of the Father at last appeared (John 1: 18). The spiritual temple is not an end in itself: it radiates forth the saving Presence of the Living God. "Fatherhood is at the world's great core."

Yet this very recreating of His in the womb of time pushes to finer issues still. Do we fulfil our destiny within time and space, or may we reach further into the enlarging universe of our spiritual desires? What lies beyond this bank and shoal of time? For what end has God touched us with His glory? If creation leads to a new creation, to what does redemption open out? Do watchers see the outlines of a new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven?

## B. THE DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE

### *God Overrules.*

How far, and in what way, is God in touch with the world in which we live? Is He just a struggling God, striving to unwind the tangled ball of things? Is He a prisoner in His own world, a



spirit diffused through nature and permeating our being, but never above us or beyond us? Or is He the master clock-maker who has conceived and set agoing the whirling, interlocking mass of cyclic motion, leaving it to run slowly down in the end of time?

There are times when the encompassing universe seems uncaring, unfeeling, and man is strangely deserted and alone. Frustrated and defeated, the sensitive soul has often looked around in vain for understanding and sympathy.

Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon,  
How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair?  
How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
And I sae weary, fu' o' care?

Not only is nature callous, but the whole course of human life seems to tumble precipitately down past rocks and shallows, over narrows and through dark defiles, with disaster and capsizal always threatening and no arm ready to save. The realist novelist tortures and benumbs us as he describes the immortals pursuing relentlessly, and finally finishing their sport with Tess. Over the gaiety and glamour of modern civilization hangs a pall of despair. The march of history is seen as no triumphal progress, but rather like the pitiful recession to the sensuous and bestial laws of the dark jungle.

But Scripture knows nothing of such defeatism. The saints of the Old Testament passed on to mankind the assurance that our God is a transcendent God neither external to and aloof from His world nor chained and limited within it. He is the great sovereign overlord who has called the world out of the void and can always call it back again, an Almighty One constricted by no sinister arbitrary chain of fate, but who holds in His sure hands all events, One moreover who is a hearer and an answerer of prayer, able and always willing to respond to the call of man. The Hebrews knew that the Shekinah, the eternal Presence, was ever in the midst, where God's folk could freely resort: His people were never under the mercy of some malign star. God might be often invisible, holding off for long, leaving the world, it would seem, to the free play of evil powers; but in the end He would assert His overlordship and out of the seeming struggle and defeat snatch victory and vindication for His own. But that faith did not come

to its splendour all at once. Let us hear the Psalmists and the saints thinking their thoughts aloud about the ways of God.

Pss. 37, 49, 73, 91, 147; Amos 1-2: 3; Hab. 1, 2; Ezek. 18; Jer. 18; Job 38, 39.

1. There is no evading of the hard facts of life. "Truly God is good to Israel. . . . But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped" (Ps. 73: 1-2). In words like these we see that beneath the piety there is a questioning. The facts of life are against faith. It was the wicked who prospered: they were not in trouble as other men. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency" (Ps. 73: 13). "Is it for the dead thou wilt do wonders?" asks another Psalmist, turning cynic (Ps. 88: 10). There were times when the mind turned to bitterness: "My sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted" (Ps. 77: 2). The people of God were not sheltered or spared. They lived on a land that knew continual invasion; the shock and the cruelty of war and death were commonplace (Is. 5: 26-29; Hab. 1: 6ff.). They knew the horrors of plague and pestilence. A land flowing with milk and honey was the shining place of promise; but where can we find a picture of locust-invasion more realistic and dramatic than in Joel (ch. 2)? Life, they were told, had opened in the idyllic Garden of Eden; but what were the drab consequences throughout the centuries? Toil and sweat for man, and for the woman travail and pain, and for all time, barring both from the life that might have been, a flaming sword which turned every way (Gen. 3). Yet amid the hardship God was ever leading them out in revealing thought and vision.

2. There was the lesson to be drawn from the long view of history, solemnizing in the range and depth of the national experience, fascinating in the turning of individual fortunes into the grand pattern of His Providence. "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. . . . I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High" (Ps. 77: 5, 10). Memory loved to linger on the dreamer Joseph, set upon by his own brethren and callously sold—thus to be a link in the saving of his people; on Moses, so marvellously preserved and trained for the historic hour; on Saul, called from seeking his father's asses; on David



summoned from the sheepcotes. Moreover, by terrible acts in righteousness God had redeemed His people. Egypt knew it, and Babylon and Syria: the hosts of Sennacherib had melted mysteriously away from the very gates of the holy city. The conquering tyrants had come sweeping their helpless victims like fish into their net; but a Habakkuk could always mount his watch-tower and from a vantage point of revelation see the meaning of all the tumult and the wreckage: the vision might tarry, but the heirs of such a history could surely wait for it with confidence.

3. There was the confirming evidence of a Divine Purpose in the course of revelation within Israel. "The Lord took me as I followed the flock," said Amos. "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord," proclaimed Isaiah. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee": so came the word to Jeremiah. And expressly it came to Ezekiel and to many others, each chosen in his season to utter forth truth, and the whole constituting an insight and penetration into the mysteries of the divine counsel such as had been given to no other people. Contrasted with the surrounding nations who had the same or even higher levels of culture, and disciplined by war and death and desolation not dissimilar, Israel experienced a movement of soul, a deepening understanding of the character of God, that was altogether unique. By what uncharted movement of the Spirit was it achieved that under the revealing words of this succession of prophets and seers God stood forth in His Holiness, Justice, and Mercy as the covenant God of this one peculiar people? Whence came that sense of separateness and high destiny that out of her should go forth the divine law for all the earth? "Thou didst lead thy people like a flock" (Ps. 77: 20). There was a mystery about this guiding. God's way was in the sea, His path in the great waters, and His footsteps were not known.

4. There was the personal reconciliation with God that came to the individual mystic. Envious at the prosperity of the wicked, plagued and chastened with each new day, the rebel of Psalm 73 went into the sanctuary of God, and there came to appreciate the issue of things, the desolation in front of the wicked, and for himself the joy of the eternal Presence. "Nevertheless I am continually with thee. God is . . . my portion for ever." It is a sort of anticipation of that word spoken later to the grumbling elder

brother: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Luke 15: 31).

The book of Job offers the classical example of this personal triumph. Sorrow is piled upon sorrow, disease upon affliction, and by the accepted standards he stands before his fellows a man under punishment for his sins. He cuts through the web of arguments that his friends address to him and holds on to his innocency and his hope of a vindicator. That he can suffer so much without cause and *still* trust in God is a proof that God had not created the human species in vain. But even to Job is not vouchsafed a clarification of the ways of Providence. He gains a deeper realization of God's wisdom and power as seen in nature: "Thou doest all things. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee" (42: 2-6). He is like a man looking through a telescope for the first time. He sees a larger and grander universe, a more intricate and stupendously ordered world. The mind reels before the wonder and majesty of it. In the presence of One so far transcending all human thought one may well say: "He who is wise enough to fashion this mystery can surely be trusted to have set a meaning in my little circle of experience. It is for me simply to accept and have faith." Yet how much has he come to know of God? His Creator still remains in the dim shadow of impenetrable mystery. There is a splendour in God's ways that human eyes cannot penetrate. Here is something to carry on with: God has not left His creature unanswered. He has spoken, lifted the veil of His majesty enough to let the glory through. It is only a glimpse from Mount Nebo, but it gives sweet content to know the God of all the promises has acknowledged His servant. It is as if in the story of the blind man in John 9 we heard the utterance: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him"—and the narrative stopped there, with no account of what the Christ did to sightless eyes.

5. There was a glimmering of light to come in the prophetic portrayal of the Suffering Servant of God (Is. 53). That suffering might not be due to one's own misdeeds, but might be heaped upon the innocent one to awaken the unthinking guilty ones to see "it is for *our* sin he suffers, the chastisement of *our* peace is upon him"—that was a new and strange light to cast on the mysterious ways of God. When a dissolute son comes home and sees how his



follies have set upon the face of a mother the indelible marks of suffering, he awakens to a fact of life, to a way that Providence has used to break a hard and callous heart. When Czechoslovakia began to suffer dismemberment and the unplumbed sorrows that followed, there came upon the mind of many the sense of shame and guilt that it was by policies they had supported that this agony had come upon the defenceless. To detect this thin red line of unmerited suffering running through the pattern of history is to have foretaste of the truth and tragedy of the Cross of Christ.

6. There are hints of a Beyond that will compensate for the ills of life and adjust the balance. "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil?" asks the Psalmist (49: 5). "The fool and the brutish man perish . . . their beauty shall consume in the grave. . . . But the Lord will redeem my soul from the clutch of Sheol" (10-14, 15). Belief in an after life is slow to come distinctly into view; but there is the feeling that the Living God can quicken a valley of dry bones. Judgment is looming up on the far horizon: the Day of the Lord rises afar off in grim colours, but after the upheaval there will be a new day for the righteous. The assurance deepens that as the Lord is just so also is He merciful. "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12: 2-3).

Matt. 6: 24-34; Luke 13: 1-5; John 9: 1-5; John 11: 6-10; Luke 12: 54-56; Matt. 4: 14-16; Matt. 11: 3-6; Matt. 23: 34-35; Rom. 8: 18-39; 1 Pet. 4: 12-14; James 1: 2-17; Eph. 1: 3-14; Rev. 21: 1-8.

To pass to the New Testament is to find that "all the trumpets of the spring are sounding." God has come down among men and taken upon Himself the weight of that sin and suffering that make the burden of this unintelligible world. Jesus steps out upon the human scene with a power that gives Him mastery. He puts our human heritage to the test and carries it back undimmed and unashamed. He accepts the limitations and the frustrations of the earthly portion, and yet leaves life aglow with the glory of

\* D. S. Cairns, *The Riddle of the World*.

God. He vindicates Providence by accepting the darkest road and holding the unseen Hand to the end. What can we learn from Him?

1. Jesus sees the world as fashioned and preserved by a Father's hand. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10: 29-30). Thus pointedly and picturesquely Jesus declares His faith in an overruling Providence. The meanest of His creatures are followed by His care: how much more does grace precede the noblest of His creatures in all his undertakings! The lilies of the field, the common grass we cast upon the fire, have received their glory from Him, passing though it may be. Faith is the air that Jesus breathes. Are there not twelve hours in the day? All that is appointed to us to do can be done with the assurance that there will be time enough even though death has laid hold upon Lazarus and great distances divide us from his side (John 11). This is the Father's world. As the Lord's Prayer teaches us, we can simply turn to Him with the affectionate trust of a child, whether it is but daily bread we need or the grander gift of forgiveness.

Do we realize how much it means that Jesus accepted the conditions of common life? He had to grow as a child grows and toil as a man toils. The effort, the struggle, the weariness, the hope deferred—He knew them all. He would not make stones into bread: He accepted the law laid down for all. What Genesis regarded as the human *curse*, to toil with the sweat of the brow, He deliberately prefers as better than the easy way. When He calls men to share in the wonder of the Kingdom, it is fishermen and tax-gatherers and common folk that He names. Evidently He rejoiced in the rugged character of a Peter, the fierce intensity of the sons of Zebedee, and He had patience with a doubting Thomas, and even a Judas was worth pleading for to the end. A world that calls for the exercise of faith, hope, courage, patience, is essentially a good world. How if, with all its pathos and tragedy, it is the only kind of world that can produce heroic human souls, the faith that can remove mountains, the love that never faileth, the hope that maketh not ashamed? A rigorous existence with toil and travail and tears in it is a world in which

<sup>1</sup> D. S. Cairns, *The Riddle of the World*, p. 265.



man *must* reach out for a Father's hand and so live as to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.

2. Jesus makes it clear that fatherliness does not mean favouritism. He would demand no special providences for Himself. Again and again asked for a sign, a demonstration of a power to disrupt the natural order, He refused. The temptation to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple was an invitation to defy the appointed laws of God's world, and He would not. Galileans even in the holy act of sacrificing must not count on special protection from the sword of Pilate's soldiers. When a tower in Siloam collapses, the ordinary laws will hold for good and bad alike (Luke 13: 1-5). God sends His rain upon the just and the unjust (Matt. 5: 45).

There is no thought here like the modern scientist's with his jealous eye for the unerring laws of the natural world. Trained in that school, we moderns must seek what light we can by viewing nature in the large and seeing catastrophes as balanced by the good. Earthquakes, flood, hurricane, and volcanic disturbance, shocking in their mass destruction of life, must be seen as the occasional explosions of essentially benign forces working within the universe to make possible animal and vegetable life, forces without which human existence would not be possible at all.<sup>\*</sup> The pitiless desert must not be classed as a flaw in the divine craftsman's handiwork, as we know how much may be due to man's improvident use of the soil—*e.g.*, in the dustbowl of the United States and Canada. What we regard as pests have their uses in nature. The sandfly that makes life unendurable for the white men on the hot desert plains is the agent that fertilizes the date palm, and so ministers to the production of one of earth's delicacies. The wasp, unwanted visitor to our fruit trees, is nine-tenths beneficent when we reckon how many enemies of growth he has devoured. Famine and pestilence, once passively accepted as divine visitations, are challenges to be overcome by sharing, planning, and increased medical knowledge.

But Jesus here confronts us with a new view of God in relation to His world. God's sun rising on the wicked and His rain falling on their fields is, Rabbi Klausner claims,<sup>†</sup> an act of unfairness: it is not absolute righteousness. This is a disruption of the

<sup>\*</sup> Weatherhead, *Why Men Suffer*.

<sup>†</sup> Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 379-380.

moral order and thus also of the natural order. This world with its fixed laws of sun, moon, and tide ought to perish as it did in the Flood. To Jesus, however, there is a largeness in the divine purposes. He views us, not as driven slaves, but as persons with mind and imagination and a moral grandeur above a nicely calculated exact-to-the-inch justice. He cheerfully accepts a universe where there are heavy odds, and teaches a spirit that is victor over these odds. How smug we would be if we had but to pull the lever of goodness and, lo! in our hands the elixir of immunity! Workers in God's vineyard may bear the heat and burden of the day and yet have no priority rights over late-comers (Matt. 20: 1-16). Prodigals are honoured at banquet tables: that gives their brothers no ground for complaint—His whole universe is still ours (Luke 15: 11-32). Jesus assumes a lack of equality in talents and circumstances; the one to be condemned is the small-minded man who refuses the rough seas of commerce (Matt. 25: 14-30; Luke 19: 12-27). Jesus saw a depth of design in God's disposition of things: the human field is not for the self-regarding, the seekers after a guaranteed safety. "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests," but the Son of Man enjoys no cloistered security.

3. Jesus saw in freedom the only way of life for man. In the Third Temptation He refused to have the kingdoms of the world by one dramatic gift: He would be king only by the free choice of men. It was His own way: it was of His own will that He had taken up life and by His own will He was to lay it down (John 10). "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear": so He left His appeal open to man's free choice. His sadness over Jerusalem and His tears were because His own people had the chance and would not. The strongest of all His condemnations fell on the Pharisees because they neither went into the Kingdom themselves nor would give freedom to others to enter. The favourite picture of God in the parables is as Father: that best expresses the free relationship in which He stood to His children: He lets even the foolish son have his way (Luke 15) and accepts the rebuff of the churlish one (Matt. 21: 29). And when God is pictured as a king, He goes away to a far country and leaves the servants as free agents. Here is a God who deliberately delegates His powers, limits His authority. Constraint is so foreign to the divine mind that even Judas is suffered to make his choice and



Caiaphas to lay his schemes unchecked. That means foolish choices, sin, tragedy, death. But evidently that is the only atmosphere in which spiritual beings can come to know themselves, their weakness and their Father's exhaustless love. Then we come back to be *voluntary* bond slaves.

That very freedom throws upon us an enormous responsibility. God is always opening our eyes and giving us glimpses that should lead us on. And God is justified by the fact that it is in the free countries of the world that there have come the greatest social advances. It is to free countries that we can look for finer social services, wiser industrial legislation, extension of medical and scientific research, and above all it is to a free association of the peoples of the earth that we must look for an order of world peace. But that freedom can find its dynamic only in a religious sense, a knowledge of the debt we owe to a Father's generosity, a Father who has spared nothing that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

4. Yet Jesus sees our freedom fit into a divine over-ruling: all human history is but a grand pledge of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jesus believed, as did the prophets, that the footsteps of God could be detected in national history: it was possible to read the signs of the times, and guilt lay heavily on those who refused to see (Luke 12: 56). He does not elaborate a philosophy of history as Paul does (Rom. 9, 10); but His woe over Jerusalem (Luke 19: 41-44; cf. Matt. 23: 37-39) and His sense of urgency show His awareness of a God whose purposes brooked no delay. He saw His own coming as an intervention of the divine into history: His Messiahship was a culminating point of human destiny. His message to His people, especially in the later days when rejection seemed imminent, was weighted with a sense of His nation's doom (Matt. 23).

Yet He did not see that doom as inexorable. In the parable of the Fig Tree He makes it plain that He has prayed to a God who could stay judgment, and He encouraged His hearers to lean heavily on the effect of importunity (Luke 13: 6; 18: 1). To Him penitence and limitless faith have power beyond all calculation. As Paul later prayed that the thorn in the flesh might be taken away, so Jesus in Gethsemane sought that the cup might pass from Him. He does not upbraid the heavens when the answer

is in the negative: He continues to look to the unanswering sky and say "Father" (Mark 14: 36).

5. Jesus looked on suffering as a call to action or to faith. He had more than eyes of compassion: He had hands that were stretched forth readily to heal and to help. He had no complacency towards the ills of the body, but rather showed a will to break the bondage of the unfortunate. In His eyes it was Satan who had bound in physical pain many of the children of Israel, and that was a reign to be broken. He had nothing of pious Eastern passivity towards affliction, but rather approached it as an evil to be crusaded against.

Our scientific age regards pain as a sign of life, a mark of that sensitivity without which we could not have the feeling of our delicate organisms: our pain is often a danger signal and a salutary warning. That constitutes no problem. But where a man has been thirty-and-eight years in his infirmity, or where a child is at death's door to the anguish of a father's heart—that is the kind of situation where faith is tried, and there it is that Jesus is moved. There is a suffering that seems excessive and undeserved. His quick sense of reality diagnoses sin as at the root of a case like the paralytic, and he deals with that unerringly. But there are cases that do not fall under the catalogue of human responsibility: "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9: 2). The answer must have been startling: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." There is often a deep mystery about suffering. It is the cruel portion that can drive man nigh to madness, but it is equally the crucible that transmutes man into sainthood.

My vision Thou hast dimmed that I may see  
Thyself, Thyself alone.

So said Milton; and many another can add his testimony. "A world without a contingency or an agony could have no hero and no saint and enable no son of man to discover that he is a son of God."<sup>8</sup> If men had not walked in darkness, they had never discovered the stars. The maimed and crippled life, meaningless to the human eye, may be caught up into the inscrutable purposes of God. The one inexplicable thing is really our own blind-

<sup>8</sup> Martineau, in a sermon on "The Uncertainties of Life."



ness. Jesus saw in His own bitter experience not the hand of Satan, but the hand of God. "Jesus," writes Otto, "did not believe that he was Messiah although he had to suffer, but because he had to suffer." To the very human mind of Peter—and here Peter reflects the average thought of the commonplace man—suffering was an impossible intrusion into the lot of God's chosen ones: but that showed how far off Peter was from the thought of God. Suffering is an instrument of redemption. By that very fact it is removed from the denials of God's Providence and is set among the proofs of His livingness among men and His purposiveness. The singer of the Suffering Servant songs had seen vicarious suffering as an instrument in God's hands for the spiritual awakening of cruel and callous men. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth until now," says Paul; but the travail is just the sign that God is there, achieving the redemption of His sons. If suffering is that without which Christ could not have done for men His work of salvation, then we can expect that it is the threshing floor on which the flail of His judgment will separate the finest of the wheat. By the alchemy of suffering He prepares many sons for glory.

Jesus saw farther than our seeing. It would be a dull and adventureless world where all things were plain to the human understanding. Prematurely proud of a little knowledge, we lose the child's eye of wonder; driving our concrete roads through forest glades, we lose the songs of the birds and the Never Never Land. Who has shared the intimate home life of a crippled invalid without awakening to another world of values? Bereft of our power of commonplace speech or facile mental life, the children of sorrow create their own world of fancy, croon their own songs, and let thoughts go roving into altitudes that are beyond us. They have their own intercourse with the unseen, and reap a harvest of happiness that we cannot estimate. With their own gifts and genius they teach us our limitations. And if their condition is often pathetic and helpless, do they not work a miracle in the souls of their rough brothers and gay sisters, evoking in them a gentleness and considerateness and a sensitivity of heart that will contribute richly to the society where they later mingle as men and women? Where do men learn the beauty of uncomplaining patience, the radiance of undefeated courage, the power of mind over body, if not from those who have made

the bed of pain the place of victory? The interlacing of our destinies to unreckoned good is past all calculation.

The sexton tolling his bell at noon  
Deems not that great Napoleon  
Stops his horse and lists with delight  
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height:  
Nor knowest thou what argument  
Thy life to thy neighbour's creed has lent."

6. Jesus recognized in sin the deepest evil in life, the source of our most tragic woe and hopelessness. He takes His first public stand among penitents who have come to John seeking baptism, and He dies by sin's intrigue and for sinners. In the prayer He taught His disciples forgiveness stands out beside bread as the need of all, and His dying prayer is for those who had sinned against Him. The prayer that, in a matchless parable, He held up for approval was the simple cry: "God be merciful to me a sinner." The other evils that beset men—disease, hurricane, idiocy, war—have their reign and terror in this life and cease to be. But sin is that which the soul carries before the judgment-seat of God. Other afflictions cut us off from health, happiness, human friendship; but sin administers the supreme deprivation: it shuts out the face of God. Made in the image of God, we can know life at its highest only in fellowship with Him. Sin robs us of our present joy and our hope of the life to come. So it is for the lifting of this burden from mankind that Jesus set His face towards Jerusalem, took the bitter cup in Gethsemane, and gave Himself up on Calvary.

But Calvary had its consummation in the Resurrection morn. Through the darkness of the Cross the Son of Man was ushered into light. So to those who have faced life's hard and cruel blows there is given not a mere human hope of immortality, but the certainty that the Resurrection provides that evil is finally overcome by good. This is our sign and surety that "nothing can either quench His love or finally defeat His gracious purpose for man." Meantime we can experience foretaste of victory. God has let down a ladder to us where we are in the place of testing, the ladder upon which His angels ascend and descend. There is the ever open gateway of prayer through which the soul can pass

"R. W. Emerson, "Each and All."



immediately into the presence of the Eternal. It was before the staggering weight of the Cross was finally thrust on His shoulders that Jesus had resort to the Mount of Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane. Under the hallowing contact of prayer His face was transfigured before His disciples, and in the strength of that experience He was able to set His face to Jerusalem. In the Garden the prayer was not granted; but there He found that the lips did not falter as they closed on the familiar name: "Father." And later, when the blackness of darkness enveloped His destiny on the Cross, when the world's coldest cruelties were heaped upon His head and there appeared no light at all breaking through the cloud, He had still a hold of the intimate name: "*My God, my God.*"