

Our Contributors.

THE CAPTAIN OF SALVATION.

The following is the discourse on Hebrews ii. 10, preached by Rev. John Smith, of Broughton Place Church, Edinburgh, in St. James Square Church, on the evening of Sabbath week:—

The joy that sustained our Lord in the troubled days before His death was twofold. As we can see from His words His soul rested both on an earthly and on a heavenly stay—sometimes on the fore vision of His triumph in the world, oftener on the blissful thought of having through His work glorified the Father's name. Sweet though it was to think of unnumbered millions gathering round the Crucified, yet to Him the Son, who did nothing by Himself, it was even sweeter to know that by His filial service His Father should be crowned with a brighter glory in the eye of all intelligent being. That was the joy that made Calvary easy to be borne. "Father, glorify Thy name." That was the prayer in which the Son's heart rose above all weakness and became nerved even for the agony of forsakenness. The Father is glorified in the Son. Then let Judas betray, and rulers rage and Satan arm, all is well! And last of all as descending to assured victory He lifts His soul to the Father ere the darkness intervene. His anticipated joy of conquest is breathed in these words: "I have glorified Thee on the earth."

It is to this aspect so dear to the Redeemer, to the cross as manifesting the glory of God that I would now direct your thoughts. Of this the writer gives us a sublime view in our text. Soaring to an exalted view of God as at once the Author and End not merely of this world and race, but of all worlds and orders of being in the universe, conceiving the infinitude of His might as the Creator of them all, His ineffable dignity, for whose glory they all are planned and are, He puts to Himself this question. Taking all this into account, God's infinite greatness and glory as the supreme end of all being and His governing relations to all being as their life and their law was it a fit and becoming thing in such a Deity so circumstanced to take the method He did in the salvation of man? And what is the answer? It did become Him. It was fit working of the Author of all, glorifying to the end of all that God should perfect in suffering Him by whom He would lead men to Himself.

The leading idea then is—the Gospel method of bringing many sons into glory was a fit plan—in all respects and taking all interests into account the method becoming God to take. Now in establishing this fitness three things must be looked at. Suppose you had some end to effect and that something had suggested itself to you as a possibly suitable means. In what way would you decide regarding its fitness or unfitness? Your first question, I believe, would be—even before asking is it suited to secure the end—is it fit for me, such as I consistently with my character can use? Then you will enquire, "Is it fit for the end that I have in view?" And finally, in order to save from error on the other side, you will ask: "May it not be too good for the end I have in view?" Accordingly our three topics are as follows:—

1. Was this a measure worthy of God?
2. As a means to an end was it worthy of God?
3. Was the end worthy of the means?

1. Was this a measure worthy of God? As we have already said this measure adopted by God for redeeming man was to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering. Now before enquiring into its fitness as an instrument or putting any other question regarding it, we must ask, Was this in itself a measure worthy of God? Taking the widest view of His nature, power and purposes, was this a work becoming Him? For we may rest certain that if it had lacked this intrinsic fitness and been in any way beneath the dignity or aside from the main purpose of God, no other consideration as its fitness for the end in view could ever have moved the unchanging will to adopt it. Was this then a fit measure for God to take?

To know this we must ask what is the true end of the measure? Who is the Captain of salvation? What is meant by making Him perfect through suffering? The precise meaning of this phrase will come out better at a later stage. Let it suffice at present to give a general explanation of it from a passage further on in the same epistle. The Captain of salvation is none other than the Eternal Son and His perfection through suffering, just that obedience to death in which He became the Author of eternal salvation.

Here, then, was the method adopted by God in the salvation of man, the abasement of His own Son, to humanity, to sin-bearing, to death as the substitute of sinners. Now of the fitness of this as a means to an end and of such glory as may accrue from that adaptation we do not at present speak. Our eyes are fixed upon the deed itself, and we ask was such an awful degradation of His own essential Deity worthy of God? Did it consort with His infinite might as the Author of all, His ineffable glory as the End of all, and was it in harmony with His eternal plan and purpose in the government of all?

Now here we come upon a real difficulty—a difficulty which all earnest minds have faced—a difficulty, let me say, which appears to grow only more and more insuperable as we realize the power and glory of Him for whom and by whom all things are. So far as man's judgment can go, the humiliation of Deity to humanity, and, much more, to Calvary, is utterly unbecoming in God—utterly beneath Him as

the Almighty—in utter contradiction to the universal purpose of His government as the end of all. Lift up your eyes on high and think of Him through whom is all. Look on these countless worlds of space. Think of what revelation tells of those vast orders of being encircling in rank above rank the eternal throne. And then when your mind has ventured to take in some adequate conception of the boundless universe, think of that power that sustains it all, of that vision that knows it all, of that judgment which overrules it all. Can we conceive of that limitless energy which fills all shut up within limits so straight as those of a human frame and actually exercising itself through the feeble organs of a human body. And more astounding than that, for there was a season—in a past eternity—when so far as creation and created beings, power slumbered an unused potentiality even as after in Christ, can we conceive that vast intelligence which in one rapt vision beholds from eternity to eternity thinking through a human mind and looking through human eyes on the creatures and the universe itself had made? And more remarkable still—for however strange, these are but limitations of God's being, and in an infinite being we must expect an infinite power to master itself, while this is the subversion of His essential function in the universe, can we conceive the Ruler of all, the Servant of all, the Lawgiver thrall to His own law, and more, the Holy Judge of all standing a sipner at His own bar, suffering His own awful penalties against transgression? Can we conceive this? Is not the whole utterly beneath His majesty and foreign to His nature as the Almighty agent of all?

But it is when we consider God as the end of all that the seeming inconsistency of this measure appears most bold and striking—rising in the eye of reason to an apparent contradiction of His eternal nature and unchanging purpose. Bear with me, I am drawing out these discords that you may hear it in its entrancing power, the higher reconciling harmony of faith. We have spoken of God as the Almighty Agent of all. But there is a truth in strict sequence earlier than that. God is the Author of all as a means to bring the end of all. His glory is the end for which things have been called into being—the one reason of creation's existence. It was to glorify His wisdom that His omniscient mind conceived the vast plan of creation. It was to glorify His infinite might that He called it thus conceived into existence by the word of His power. And when all His works before Him stood it was to glorify His justice that He placed all orders of free intelligence under the wide-reaching sway of law. All worlds of space, all races of intelligent being—man among the others—exist for the supreme end of revealing the glory of God, exist to body forth an ever-widening revelation of His perfections, so that He may command an ever deepening homage from ever broadening ranks of created being circling His throne rejoicing.

Now, my brethren, look at that God, the end of all, creating all things for His own glory, setting up His own glory as the one thing which every existence and energy in the universe must advance. And then come out to Calvary and look on that Eternal Son. See Him for whose glory all things are, forsaken and condemned of all; Him, whom all created intelligences—and man the least of them in respect of origin—were made to serve, Himself serving man. The end for whom all things were created sinking to be a means in His own creation that He might snatch some of His feeblest creatures from merited ruin. How can you reconcile these things? Do they not seem to reason utterly inconsistent, the humiliation of the Eternal Son, contradicting the very end of God in the creation of all?

But let us not close the question here. Many pairs of fundamental truths run up into antinomies or contradictions, and in each case we hold them both because they are verified in experience, believing that one day these apparent contradictions will be resolved in a bright harmony. But we have in this book a higher harmony reconciling this seeming contradiction even now.

We have come then to this. To reveal the glory of the Divine Being is the one end of His activity. All things are by Him as being for Him. Well, we have seen in what ways God has been revealing His glory hitherto. He has been glorifying His wisdom by manifesting it in the conception of creation. His power by actually calling it into existence. His justice by His overrule. But now we ask is that all? Is God's glory exhausted when the magnificence of these attributes as seen in His works is displayed? No! Power is not God, but only the arm of God. Wisdom is not God, but, so to speak, the eye of God. Justice even is not God, but an utterance of God in certain specific relations. God Himself, then, is as yet hidden from view, and His essential glory unrevealed. Now what is God? I must here for convenience anticipate what I am about to show so far as to answer that question out of God's Word. John gives us the answer in two terms inclusive one of the other. Light, love. God is light, bright centre of all perfection. And not a self-imprisoned centre. It is the essence of this light to impart Himself to change all into His own likeness. This light is love, then, and both are one. Now of these twin elements of His essential being creation gives no full or express revelation. But if God is ever to be known they must be revealed. And will not this be the grandest revelation of all? Well, would you believe that God has found His opportunity for this revelation in the sin of man, and that in what we have been regarding as an intolerable degradation God has overtopping creation overtopping all

His other revelations, given the crowning display of His glory. Oh the depths of the riches, etc.

That is the significance of the cross as a work of God. It is the sublime display of these essential perfections of the divine nature. It is the revelation which completes all other revelations, giving us our highest exhibition of God. All other revelations are of mere attributes, this of essential being. And further, all other revelations are fragmentary and finite revelations of mere attributes. But this of His essential being is in the nature of things final and infinite. In His creation God has glorified His wisdom and power by showing what they can do. But in the cross He has glorified His holiness and love by a practical proof of what they can achieve. Look at that poor bleeding Man nailed to that cross of wood, groaning in the death agony. Think of it! That is God, infinite, self-existent, eternal, the Author of all, the adorable end of all. I mean very God is in eternal union with a human nature in the person of Him who suffers. And He has condescended to this in love for man. Oh friend, you speak of the sweep of God's power out in creation. But that is tame as a sparrow's flight when we compare it with the descent of love from the throne of self-existence downward to this. O soul, do you not see your mistake now? The depth of that descent is the measure of the fulness of God's love, and every circumstance of humiliation but augments its grandeur, just as every discovery further into space adds to our conception of divine power. In this aspect the cross glory is unutterable. I said it was infinite, and so it is, for not only did He become man (that need not be infinite), but He was made sin. See Him who is light, whose whole infinitude rises in utter hatred of evil, sinking to bear the guilt and curse that we might get free. And still more not only have we the descent to the accursed death of the cross i.e., divine love in infinite renunciation, but we have an ascent back to the divine glory the very holiness of God revealed in the obedience unto death in the form of a servant by the Divine Son. Here, then, is the sign of the cross. The infinite revelation of God's essential glory. Who can say that that is other than most worthy of Him?

And now 2. As a means to an end was this method worthy of God? In itself, then, viewed simply as a revealing act of the great Author and end of all, this method was eminently becoming. But now a further question ensues. Was it worthy of a plan for a certain definite purpose? Did it exhibit such depth of invention, skill of contrivance and exquisitely perfect adaptation to its end as manifestly to betray a divine Architect and form a worthy monument of His infinite wisdom. We wish to speak with all sobriety, yet this is true that so far as we know it is the most superb device of the infinite mind, profound, far-reaching, many-sided, solving the vastest and most complex problem, yet intensely simple in its nature and plain to the comprehension of a child.

Now that is a bold assertion. For nature gleams with glorious evidence of the profundity of the divine thought. Think for a moment of those worlds of our planetary system as they roll through the deep heavens. To stay all these in their orbits, to fit them for their various functions in the universe how manifold the agencies required. They need a mighty power to sustain them; a ruling influence to guide them, light to illumine them, heat to raise them to a temperature fitted for life, chemic forces acting and reacting so as to make them minister to life and innumerable other requirements for their stability and development which we have not skill enough to express. What a vast array of separate agencies must be required to fit these worlds for their place. So do we imagine. But that is only because we see in parts. God simply set a Sun in the centre of them all. And lo! all is done—all ends are met, all needs are satisfied, the problem of this vast system is solved.

What an exhibition of far-reaching wisdom? Yes, but it must yield to the grander display given in redemption. The problem here is one of creation, but in a far nobler sphere—the sphere of moral freedom. And further as rendering the task vastly more complex it is not simply a problem of creation, but of re-creation—the disentangling of innumerable millions from the direct and indirect consequences of sin, and raising them to the heights of moral perfection. Look at it how you will, this problem transcends every other both for difficulty and range. In the starry world matter is passive and divine power moves unfettered to its goal. But here are individual wills, and thus far limiting His power God must in all His acts respect the liberty which He has given. Then still further complicating the problem these wills have received through their own misdirected action a powerful and, so far as men's ability is concerned, an irreversible set to evil. And through thousands of years generations upon generations of men have been acting under this evil bent, creating thus an immense efflorescence of sinful thoughts and words and deeds, each with its own power of suggestion or reproduction, till life becomes like that great African forest of which we have been reading, choked with rank growths in endless and most rapid succession shadowed with world-old superstitions and wrongs crossed and re-crossed at every possible angle with evil influences. Then this could not have gone on without His own divine justice recognizing the fact and pronouncing its judgment on all sin, without His putting a mark of opprobrium on a spirit so utterly opposite to His own. And His judgment must be maintained, for to do else would give the victory to evil. What barriers are in the way, what an array of difficulties have to be removed. The claims of a just and holy God