

Standing where we do to-day, we have neither reason to complain nor to be discouraged at the progress of our faith, measured I mean by the true standard, measured by the actual increase of moral power among men. Certainly the Mediterranean civilization of Greece and Rome had quite as much intellect and quite as much energy as the civilization of Northern and Western Europe. Had the problem of social life been soluble to such elements they would have been solved two thousand years ago. Only the grandeur of a system depends not more upon the impulses generated among its units than upon their co-ordination and correlation. The solar system is not strong because of the appalling swiftness with which Jupiter or Mars spins forward in its tremendous curve, but because of that invisible and subtle energy which, beginning its influence upon each single atom, holds easily the mightiest planet to its appointed path. There was neither cohesion nor attraction in the ancient civilization strong enough to admit of permanent life. What little there was, was contributed by such religion as it had, and when this yielded to the searching analysis of the growing philosophy the old structures dropped to ruin and to dust. It was a mad attempt to fill this void that led to the apotheosis of the Roman emperors satirized in Vespasian's dying jest: "Well, well! I must be growing to a God, I think." But it is just such harmonizing and regulative forces that Christianity supplies, for no better summary of its spiritual contents will ever be found than that made by the great Apostle of the Gentiles: "Now abideth these three—faith, hope, and charity—but the greatest of these is charity." These forces were either absent altogether from ancient life, or were present only under such limitations as to render them powerless for any protracted period, and hence the impulsive and transitory character of all great social movements in antiquity. Faith, for instance, was diffused among a throng of countless beings, and even if centred in one higher than the rest, centred in a conception of persistent and triumphant physical force, unilluminated by wisdom made dreadful by consuming passion and glorified by no exalted conception.

Contrast the story of Prometheus, in which the constructive power of the Greek religious imagination reached its highest achievement with the simple but overwhelming grandeur of the cross. Prometheus is a god and a friend of man, yet his behaviour is not only resented but punished with all the terrors at Jove's command. This helper of mankind, fastened to the bare and bloomless cliff, is scarred and seared with lightning blasts and tortured by the fire-beaked vulture that eats away his ever-growing heart. But Jesus, the Saviour of men, is the Son of the everliving God who so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. Prometheus, amid screams of superhuman agony, still hurls defiance at the omnipotent brutality that shatters itself to shreds upon a will that no terrors can alarm and no lightnings scorch, while Jesus utters that triumphant cry of joy that rallies the whole human race in its upward climb toward God. "In the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I come to do Thy will, O God." The Christian conception of God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself excludes all strife and all variance of purpose in the Divine nature, and in it the grandeur of condescension is as overwhelming as the exhaustless plentitude of power. It not only transcends all previous conceptions but it is utterly unlike all others, and men must rise to attitudes of spiritual grandeur as yet unknown before they penetrate the outer brightness of this great globe of splendour. We must be like Him before we see Him as He is. But once fairly in the world this conception can never pass away, can never by any possibility outgrow its meaning. It alone is intense enough to become the centre of a universal faith, it alone is strong enough to hold together all men in a single family, community of speech being but a rope of sand compared with community of thought and faith. It alone can hope to defy the power of victorious analysis, and compel it either to climb upwards to its own