

## PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

### THE BIBLE ANSWER TO THE GREAT QUESTION.

"Now, look here; I am doing my best as a son, as a brother, as a student; I am doing my duty; ask any who know me; and I want to do it in a still better way. What more do you want?"

It is easy to fancy a young man in college putting this question, after prayer-meeting, to a companion who has "made a profession," and is trying to "deal with" his outside friend. It is the old historic question, "What lack I yet?"

To get an answer to this question it is idle to go to Reason. We do not pretend that Christians have a monopoly of reason, nor deny the gift to millions of early pagans or modern heathen. But Reason did not unfold to them any way of life that is satisfactory to us—even to our inquiring student. He smiles at ancient superstitions, though embalmed in classic poetry, and at modern fetichism, though not without its interest and its romance. "The world by wisdom knew not God."

Nor will it avail to listen to the gospel of Nature, however eloquently it may be uttered in our ears. How prettily it can be described, in the smiling spring, in the laughing summer, in the mellow autumn, in the sullen winter, whispered in the breeze, written on the ground as it brought forth plentifully, shouted in the tempest. But, my dear friend, men—red, white and black—have had all this for sixty centuries, and what did they learn from it, in India, Japan, China, Burmah, Central Africa? Why, explain it as you will, where Nature's voice and aspect are the sweetest and her gospel is the plainest, men know the least about the very thing we need. The most they have learned, even in the best of times, has been "the eternal power and Godhead"—enough to make them without excuse. Yet it does not follow from this that Reason is ignored or dishonoured by the alternative we propose. To Reason, evidences make their appeal. "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." Reason can approve, receive, appreciate what she could not have discovered; just as you and I value the telescope, telegraph, telephone and other fine arrangements, though, alas! we did not produce them.

Nor is Nature belittled by denying her the power to reveal mercy and moral truth that will quiet conscience and save life. Whoever saw the great engine in the Philadelphia Exhibition knows something of the maker's mechanical talent. But to find out whether he is a just, affectionate, pure man, one must go to other sources of information. Nature does her own work. Let us not expect more from her.

Then what remains? Revelation—which you and I accept, so that one need not here discuss evidences. It begins where Nature stops, and takes Reason as its pupil. It declares two sets of truths—one as to you and me; one as to God. Let them be dwelt on a moment.

The first is, that we are not what we ought to be, as before God. We condemn ourselves, do we not? Why? We did wrong. What made the wrong, as distinct from right? Until you set up a claim for an absolutely perfect life, for no part of which you ever blamed yourself—and I do not deem you such a fool—we may as well count and call you a transgressor, a sinner. And the tendency, whatever it is, that made you sin once will do it again, more and more, the longer the worse. We shall not dispute as to whether that tendency is to be called pride, or self-will, or corruption, or an evil heart; nor is it vital to our question to know how much of it is in you. You have heard badly if you do not remember a hundred statements in Revelation laying sin and guilt on each of us. It is of no account that A, B, C, and D have theories that explain or modify or deny this fact. Men, as a whole, have admitted it in a hundred ways. Witness their altars, priests and sacrifices.

The second thing Revelation sets forth is, that there is pitying love in God. Recall your texts again. That love is made out to be prior to our merit, "from everlasting," free, strong personal and holy. It does no wrong. A man who opens a prison because he is fond of a thief confined therein, does wrong. The strength of his love is no defence for disregard of others' rights. So this love of God comes to us in a way that respects all interests, as we might expect in an all-seeing, all-knowing God. Here—to take a rude illustration—

is a city with a hundred thousand people in need of a supply of water. And yonder, sleeping among the hills, is a soft, clear lake, whose springs keep it ever full. But how to get it? It might conceivably come in a flood, and like the rivers by some European cities lately, drown the people. Or a canal might be cut to let it flow, and catch all impurities as it comes. But, better still, engineering power makes an aqueduct, builds reservoirs, lays pipes, sends it into street and dwelling and chamber, with the least possible evil and the largest amount of comfort to all. So it is here in the matter of our wants and the channels through which divine love supplies them; for in Christ the Saviour are "hid"—but we shall yet see them—all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Good men see God's character in it—that he is holy and pitiful, for this Son of His suffers for us, and makes good our defaults. So they know Him. Angels make a study of Him in a new character "through the church." They and we find out what Reason did not whisper nor nature disclose—that "God is in Christ," reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto us our trespasses.

Now, what more do you want? Why, that you should approach God as he has arranged, accept the water of life which He brings, drink, and live forever. He calls this "believing" the reversal of Adam's first folly and crime—and "obeying" the gospel—what Adam and we failed hitherto to do. He calls it "faith." He says that when we have this faith we are received into His family, made sons of God, heirs of heaven. He pledges himself that if we will receive this, His Representative, Revealer, Ambassador, Peacemaker, Mediator, or what else you call Him, He will be at peace with us, cast our sins behind His back and give us a new heart and a right spirit.

Yet He will do all this without ignoring our reason, or blotting out our will, or making us machines, or trampling on any one of the laws He imposed on our being at the beginning.

Now, what more would I have of you? This faith. It will carry all in its train. See the Christ of the Scriptures, and have faith in Him. Your sin will be put away, and you will know it in proportion as you come near Him. See God in Christ, and you will love Him, and wish to know Him better. Study this trusted Christ, and you will find He has something to say to you of holiness, and of a Spirit that makes holy. This meets your craving for more God-likeness. Study this Christ in the Revelation, and you will find this world a great arena, in which He is warring against no contemptible foes; never mind how the foes—sin, death, devils and what not—came there. Their existence is no more unlikely than yours. Bad spirits are no more incredible than bad men. There they are, and he is bruising them under his feet. Why, you say, as your eyes are opened, that is my Saviour, the Captain of my salvation! Why should I not enlist under Him? Would he let me help Him? I cannot strike hard, but I can strike for Him. Now you are a Christian, a sinner pardoned, a son of God, a Christian worker, and it all comes through believing in Jesus.

"But what about regeneration?" Well children in being born, do not think much about it. It is afterwards that they inquire about it. And so it is here, as you may remember in the verses which your mother, perhaps, made you read so early, in John, first chapter: "As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed in His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but of God." What did they do? Receive, believe Him. What happened to them? They were born of the will of God—born again, regenerated. When they knew it they followed Jesus, "joined the church," and in the degree in which they knew and loved His will, were happy in doing it till they died, and then, their sorrows ended and their discipline endured, they went home to Him forever. This is what you lack, my dear friend. The scientific thinkers about religious truths, of course, must use scientific language, and will call some of these things "Justification by Faith;" "Regeneration by the Holy Ghost;" "Growth in Grace," etc.; and some will, without thinking of the meaning of the words, very reproachfully call all this "dogma;" but you need not be troubled thereby. The thing is that you live a life of faith. And the basis of religious faith is God's Word, and the great object held out to you, by whom you come to the Father, is Christ, and with faith in Him

comes love, and love makes obedience cheerful, and you learn to repeat, after one of the noblest Christians the world ever saw—"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me;" and the "life in the flesh"—that is, here in the body—will be of a piece with that hereafter. Living or dying, you are the Lord's. Absent from the body you are present with Him. And so Paul and John agree, for "Pauline," and "Johannean," and "Petrine" Gospels are German and barbaric names for parts of our glorious, harmonious whole, in which God is the gracious Giver and man the grateful receiver, whose praises go up, as God's gifts come down, "though our Lord Jesus Christ."—*Dr. John Hall.*

### THE WORRY OF LITTLE THINGS.

We stood in the church-porch after all the congregation had gone out, and were talking for a few moments in the line of the sermon. It had been about the cultivation of our spiritual nature, and how the mass of men forget and neglect it, and live largely and often as if there were no such thing belonging to them. Said my friend, as a tear glistened in her eye: "Does it not seem strange that so much of our life should be wasted in the perpetual thought of little things, while we have no time or strength to give to the larger ones? How many are toil-worn, their life one long struggle barely to live, the one supreme and necessary endeavour being to get enough to eat and be clothed with, or to feed or cover those dependent upon them! And then how this perpetual pursuit and occupation with small things sometimes seems to make us grow small."

"Yes," I replied, "it does appear so at times. To be watching the pennies, to be calculating whether you can afford to spend or not this quarter of a dollar, does, at first glance, seem as if it would make us grow little in soul. But look at it all around.

"Life is made up of little things—small breaths and short heart-beats. Food and drink are necessary, and morsels make them. Yet it has often grieved me to spend on a piece of beef large enough to feed the family what would have been sufficient to buy a book full of noble thoughts—the one to vanish from human sight, the other to live forever. But the book cannot be eaten and the beef must be bought: so I have put the grief aside, paid the price of the dinner, and seen the great thoughts all lost in the merry chat of the table from which the beef has disappeared.

"But who shall say, after all, this is not best? Dealing with larger interests does not make one grow large. A man who is in the habit of dealing with tens of thousands, and has no need to watch a penny, often does watch it with keener interest than even you or I ever regard it. Somehow, the large dealings have not made him large; he even seems to have shrunk as he touches them.

"And freedom from these little things of life, and leisure to give one's self entirely to higher things, do not practically tend to form nobler characters nor more beautiful lives. Look at monks or nuns. They have no care for what they shall eat or what they shall drink; the prior or abbot will take care of all that. They do not even have to think of what they shall wear; their clothes are provided for, and the fashion never changes. They have plenty of time to give to religious things, and yet how small they grow? Very much smaller than are we who are thrust out into the small worries of life.

"Nor does contact with these little things dwarf us. All is in the way we handle them. I think that I have seen greater things through my microscope than I have through a telescope.

"The little things, after all, have a lifting power. They are very small, but they are many a time so heavy that all we can do is to totter with them to God. They come so frequently that we have to carry them often, and so we are often brought near to Him. They have brought us. Surely this is something. And we would not have this experience so often if it were not for the little things. To be brought near to God is not to be made small but great.

"So I think that it is just as well as it is. Let the small things come, but let them beckon or even force us toward our Father in heaven. They are perpetual, and so they will make us perpetually near. We shall in that all-blessed contact expand; we shall not contract as we are concerned with them."

"God give us grace for that," my friend said as we left the church porch.—*Rev. W. Aikman, D.D.*