THE RAY AND THE REFLECTION.

BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

"We love him because he first loved us."—I John 4:19.

Very simple words! But they go down into the depths of God, lifting burdens off the heart of humanity, turning duty into delight, and changing the aspect of all things. He who knows that God loved him needs little more for a Gospel. He who loves God back again flies to Him than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. But it is to be observed that the correct reading of my text, as you will find in the Revised Version, makes "him" in the first clause, and simply says "we love," without specifying the object. That is to say, for the moment John's thought is fixed rather on the inward transformation effected from self regard to love—than on considering the object on which the love is expended. When the heart is melted, the streams flow wherever there is a channel. The river, as he goes on to show us, parts into two heads, and love to God and love to man are, in their essence and root principle, one thing. So my text is the summary of all revelation about God, the ultimate word about all our relations to him, and the all inclusive directory as to our conduct to one another. To know that God loves, and to love again—there is a little pocket encyclopædia in two volumes, which contains the smelted down essence of all theology and of all morality. Let us look at th se three points.

I. The ultimate word about God. "He first loved us." Properly and strictly speaking, that "first" only declares the priority of the Divine love towards us, and ours towards him. But we may fairly give it a wider meaning, and say—first of all, ere Creation and Time, away back in the abysmal depths of an everlasting and changeless heart, changeless in the sense that love could have no place within it—first of all things was God's love; last to be discovered because most ancient of all. The foundation is disclosed last when you come to dig, and the essence is grasped last in the process of analysis.

It is no accident that there are but foreglesms of this great thought brightening the words and the thoughts of psalmist and prophet, saint and sage, from the beginning onwards, while the articulate utterance of the simple sentence was first heard from the lips of him who declare t the Father, and stands in the part of the Book which, both in its position there and in its date of composition, is the last of the Apostolic utterances. "God is love"—that is in one aspect the foundation of his being, and another aspect the shining ruby set on the very sky-piercing summit of the completed process of the revelation of the Being to man. "He first loved us." And hence, from that centre and germinal point stream out the whole train of consequences in the Divine activity, and in the Divine self revelation.

Consider for a moment the relation which all the other perfections of the Divine nature have to this central and foundation one. There are all those pompous names, "Omnipresence" and "Omniscience," and the like, which are but the negation of the limitations of humanity and of finite creatures. There are the more spiritual and moral thoughts of wisdom and righteousness and the like. These are but the fringes of the glory. I was going to venture to say that the Divinest thing in God is love. There is the central blaze. The rest is but the brilliant periphery that encloses it. And that infinite love stands to all these other attributes in the relation of being their master and motive spring. They are Love's instrument, and in the Divine nature Love is Lord of all. They give it majesty; it gives them tenderness. We may reverently say, in regard to the Divine nature, what the Apostle says about our humanity, that love is the "bond of perfectness," the girdle which, braced round all the garments, keeps them in their place. For these infinite, innumerable, unnameable and named Divine perfections, that which brings them all into symmetry and keeps them all in harmonious action is Love. He has wisdom, and power, and eternal being. He is Love.

But do not let us forget that, whilst thus my text proclaims the ultimate truth, these other attributes, as they are called, are all smelted down as it were, into, and present in, the love which is their crown. The same Apostle, who has thus the honor of ringing out to the world the good news that God is Love, declares that "this is the message" which he has to tell, that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." So the light of righteousness, as well as the lambent flame of love, burn together on that central fire of the universe. We must not so conceive of the love of God as to darken the radiance of his righteousness, or to obscure the brilliancy of that pure light which tolerates no admixture of darkness.

May I venture a step further, and ask whether we are not warranted in believing that in that which we call the love of God there do abide the same elements as characterize the thing that bears the same name in our human experience. The spectrum has told us that the constituents of the mighty sun in the heavens are the same as the constituents of this little darkened earth. And there are the same lines in the Divine spectrum that there are in ours. And if we can venture to say of him, he is love, do not let us shrink from saying that then, like us, he delights in the companionship of his beloved; that, like us, he infinitely loves desires the good of his beloved, and that, like us, he seeks only for the requital of an answering love. All these things—the joy of the Lord in man, the yielding of the Lord to man, the beneficent desire for the good of man, and the hunger for the response of love from man—all these things are affirmed when that God is love.

II. Here we have the ultimate word as to our religion. "We love him because he first loved us." There is a bridge wanted between these two, and the bridge is supplied abundantly in this letter. So we come to this, that a simple trust in the love of God as manifested in Jesus Christ our Lord is the only thing which will so deal with man's natural self-regard and desire to make himself his own object and centre, as to substitute for that the victorious love to God. You cannot love God unless you believe that he loves you. You will never be absolutely sure of that unless you have learned it from the Cross of Christ. You will not respond with the love that he desires, but there will be a film between your ice and the fire that could melt it, until that is swept away by the single act of confidence in God manifested to you in Jesus Christ. This is Christianity; this, nothing less, is Religion—to love God because I believe in Jesus Christ that God has loved me.

And that is the only thing that he desires or accepts. The Religion of Jesus; what is it? "Thou wert an austere man . . . and I was afraid." Yes! and what did you do when you were afraid? "I hid my talent in the ground, and was utterly idle." Here rise, on either side of the valley, two mountains—Ebal and Gerizim. From the one were thundered the curses, from the other broke the benediction of the blessings; the one is barren, the other is verdant, which thing is an allegory. The Religion of Fear does nothing, the Religion of Love does all. The Religion of Self-interest is narrow, poor, mostly inoperative of any lofty enthusiasm or high nobleness of character. The Religion of Duty: "I ought to worship, I am bidden to do this, that, or the other thing, which I do not a bit like to do. I am forbidden to do this, that, and the other thing, which I should very much like to do, if I durst." That religion is the religion of a slave: and there are hosts of us that know nothing better. And so our Christianity is a feeble and an uncomfortable thing; and there is little joy and little subjection of the will, and little leaping up of the heart in glad obedience in it. I was talking to a good aged man not long ago, whose religion was of a very gloomy type. He said to me, "As to love, I know next to nothing about it." Ah! brethren, I am afraid that is true of a good many of us that call ourselves Christians.

Then let me say, too, that if we love him, it will be the motive power and spring of all manner of obediences and glad services. It is the mother tincture, so to speak, which you can color, and to which you can add in various ways, and produce variously tinted and tasted and perfumed commixtures. Love lies at the foundation of all Christian goodness. It will lead to the subjection of the will. And that is the thing which is most of all needed to make a man righteous and pure. So St. Augustine's paradox, rightly understood, is a magnificent truth. "Love! and do what you will." For then you will be sure to will what God wills, and you ought.

If this be the summing-up of all religion, a practical conclusion follows. When we feel ourselves defective in the glory and operative driving power of love to God, what is the right thing to do? When a man is cold he will not warm himself by putting a clinical thermometer into his mouth and taking his temperature, will he? Let him go into the sunshine and he will be warmed up. You can pound ice in a mortar, and except for the little heat generated by the impact of the pestle, it will keep ice, still. But float the iceberg down into the tropics, and what has become of it? It has all run down into the sweet warm water, and mingled with the warm ocean that has dissolved it. So do not think about yourselves, and your own loveless hearts so much, but think about God and the infinite welling up of love in his heart to you a great deal more. "We love him because he first loved us." Therefore, to love him more, we must feel more that he does love us.

III. Lastly, here is the ultimate word about our conduct to men. I said that John, by leaving out any specification of the object of love, as well as by the verses that immediately follow, shows that he regards the motion as one, though its direction be two-fold. That last comes to the plain truth, that the only victorious antagonist to the self regarding temperament of average men, and the only power which will change philanthropy from a sentiment into a self-denying and active principle of conduct, is to be found in the belief of the love of God in Jesus Christ, and answering love to him.

That is a lesson for many sorts of people today. What they call altruism is no discovery of Christianity, but its practice is. I freely admit that there is much honest and self sacrificing beneficence and benevolence which are not connected, in the men that practice them, with faith in Jesus Christ. But I question very much whether these would have existed if the story of the Cross had been unknown. And sure I am that the history of non Christian attempts to promote the brotherhood of man, and to diffuse a wide and operative love of mankind, teaches us, on the one side, that the emotion is not strong enough to last and to work, unless it is based on God's love in Jesus Christ. And the history of Christianity, on the other side, though with many defects and things to be ashamed of, teaches us, conversely, that wherever there is a genuine love of God, its exterior form, so to say, the outside of it which is presented to the world, will be true love to man.

One last word. "We love him because he first loved us." Do you? Or is it rather true of you, "I do not love God though he has loved me?" I saw, not long since, upon a flank of a mountain, an obstinate patch of snow that had frowned, in unmelted cold, months of the summer sun. There are some of us who lift a broad shield of thick-ribbed ice between ourselves and the radiance of the warm heart of God. Oh, brother! do not shut that love out of your heart, for love to you do you shut out peace and goodness, and shut in all manner of poisonous creatures and doleful shapes whose companionship will be misery and death.—Commonwealth.

Gentleness Toward the Weak.

With a tender regret for lost opportunities, who has not sometimes seen a mature woman timid, self-conscious, handicapped from youth to gray hairs, simply because she was a "backward" child once, and therefore was snubbed and ridiculed and pushed into the background, while her sisters and brothers bore off the honors and were the objects of universal estimation? A wrong for life was done to the little daughter, and her daughter may perhaps suffer from the same old mistake, for wrongs are far-reaching. Be pitiful and just to the backward child in your home.—Margaret E. Sangster.

Helped by Being Hindered.

There is nothing we have more cause to be grateful for than hindrances and obstacles. Having an easy time is having a hard time. If we are slipping or sliding, we are not going up hill; yet going up hill is essential to an outlook from a lofty summit. Mountain climbing is better than hammock swinging for him who would gain strength and develop his muscles; but it requires energy and effort to resist hindrances and overcome obstacles. It goes against nature; and that is one reason why it is better for a man. If a young man has to work for a living, he is more likely to succeed than if he has everything he wants. If his studies are not in the line of his inclinations, he can gain more from them than if they were all in the direction of his tastes and fancies. Even when he is interrupted in his studies, and is compelled by the state of his health or the needs of others to turn aside from his chosen pursuit, he may be the gainer beyond his highest anticipations; for his best self is called out in the meeting or the enduring of unlooked for burdens and trials. A moral and mental gymnasium is sure to be furnished with appliances for exercising the muscles and testing and taxing the strength. Rocking chairs and lounges have no place there.—Sunday-school Times.

The Christ of To-Day.

Jesus of Nazareth is something more than the Christ of history—a blessed memory; or the Corist of prophecy—a sublime hope; he is the Christ of to-day, and of every day, a living reality in our lives, a very present help in time of need. Faith lays hold upon him as One who is ever with us in the church, in the household, and in the world. He is the close companion of our daily lives. We walk the hard hill roads of life with burning hearts because he bears us company. We pass through valleys or death shade with fearless step, led by his invisible hand. In the glory of his presence toil and pain are transfigured. There is no break in our trustful intimacy. No shadow of possible change mars our joyful fellowship.—James M. Campbell.

We can shape our present, and thereby create a future. We can cry to God for the touch of a new life in our present. What we refuse to do in each today as it comes, will never be done by us in the future. And so the question comes to us, at the opening of a new year: What are we doing with ourselves? How are we spending the present? One of two things must be done. We must continue in the same course, or change. To refuse to forsake evil becomes a deliberate resolution to choose evil. We cannot remain neutral. In matters relating to time indecision is decision. Some discouraged soul may exclaim: "Ah, I have no future! The Almighty hath hedged me about. Lover and friend he has removed. I sit solitary. I am weary. I am weak, and have no strength nor courage for struggles." And yet there is a noble resolution such can make, and that is to keep on with patience and faith. Though you are discouraged, God is not. . . . Do not dwell on the past, and take its dried joys and steep them into a cup of bitterness, and make that your daily draught. There is no tonic in such a decoction. Do not sigh: "Oh! that I were as in days past." Do not preserve these faded flowers, but think of the growing plants. Bloom is ever coming on, if you will seek for it. Opportunities for usefulness will confront us all along the coming days. Let us not neglect them as too often we have done during the past year. . . . Let us resolve to make the new year the best year of our lives. The Christ Spirit is not yet in us in its completeness, but let us strive earnestly for its increasing possessions. And with this purpose in our hearts, let each say with Charlotte Elliott:—

"I take my pilgrim staff anew,
Life's path, untrodden, to pursue,
Thy guiding eye, my Lord, I view;
My times are in Thy hand.

"Throughout the year, my heavenly Friend,
On Thy blest guidance I depend;
From its commencement to its end
My times are in Thy hand.

"Thy smile alone makes moments bright,
Thy smile turns darkness into light;
This thought will soothe grief's saddest night,
My times are in Thy hand."

—GEORGE S. MOTT, in *N. Y. Observer.*

We may still retain that hope of, nay, that sure belief in, a new heaven and a new earth in the eternity which is to be. But now, at the beginning of this new year, the question is, whether it need be a hope only. . . . Is it wholly impossible for us, here and now, to spread over our heads some of the azure of that new heaven, and to make the new earth begin at least to blossom as the rose? . . . Yes, it is possible; it is in our power, if through the over arching azure we can gaze into clear openings of the empyrean, and there by the eye of faith see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. . . . Yes, it is possible to the sincere, the humble, and the faithful; to all who feel and have experienced that love and duty can make a little heaven even on this sad earth.—Canon Farrar.

Altogether too few wives realize that novelty and variety are as attractive to a man after marriage as before. The same gown evening after evening, perhaps, the same coiffure year in and year out, may not exactly pall upon the taste of a devoted husband, but he soon ceases to look at his wife with the same interest as heretofore. After a while she will miss the fond little compliments that are so pleasant to receive, and one of the most potent of her womanly weapons grows rusty from disuse.

The folly of prejudice is frequently shown by people who prefer to suffer for years rather than try an advertised remedy. The millions who have no such notions, take Ayer's Sarsaparilla for blood diseases, and are cured. So much for common sense.

We must lose self if we would be found in Christ.

If you can hear God's message, it is for you.

AN EARLY POEM.

The Boston *Transcript* says that the following poem, never before published, was found in one of Phillips Brooks' early note-books in which he jotted down thoughts and memoranda:

Along the noisy city ways
And in this rattling city car;
On this the dreariest of days,
Perplexed with business fret and jar,

When suddenly a young, sweet face
Looked on my peculance and pain
And lent it something of its grace
And charmed it into peace again.

The day was just as bleak without,
My neighbors just as cold within,
And truth was just as full of doubt,
The world was just as full of sin.

But in the light of that young smile
The world grew pure, the heart grew warm,
And sunshine gleamed a little while
Across the darkness of the storm.

I did not care to seek her name,
I only said, "God bless thy life,
Thy sweet young grace be still the same,
Or happy maid or happy wife."

1858. Phillips Brooks.

There are some people whose life year by year is only a going around and around in the old beaten paths, with no onward movement. They are like men who walk in a circular course for a prize, covering a thousand miles, perhaps, but ending just where they began. Rather, our daily walk should be like one whose path goes about a mountain, but climbs a little higher with each circuit, until at last he gains the clear summit, and looks into the face of God. While we must do in a measure the same things every day, we should do them a little better with each repetition. One writes:—

"Speak a shade more kindly than the year before;
Pray a little oftener; love a little more;
Cling a little closer to the Father's love;
Thus life below shall liker grow to life above."

J. R. Miller, D. D.

We pause beside this door:
Thy year, O God, how shall we enter in?
. . . . . .
The footsteps of a Child
Sound close beside us. Listen, He will speak!
His birthday bells have hardly rung a week,
Yet has He trod the world's press undefiled.
"Enter through Me," He saith, "nor wander more;
For lo! I am the Door."

—Lucy Larcom.

Hood's Sarsaparilla, taken at this season, will make you feel strong and vigorous and keep you from sickness later on.

Devotion is no substitute for delay.

Pale sickly children should use Mother Graves' Worm Exterminator. Worms are one of the principal causes of suffering in children and should be expelled from the system.

"The age may be in the past, but the golden opportunity in which we are immediately interested is in the present."

No other remedy for Pulmonary troubles combines so many good qualities, nor proves so generally efficacious as Puttner's Emulsion. For sale by all medicine dealers, only 50 cents for a large bottle.

It is the fruit of good works, and not the mere blossom of good thoughts and good feelings, which God requires.—Peter Young.

Severe colds are easily cured by the use of Bickle's Anti Consumptive Syrup, a medicine of extraordinary penetrating and healing properties. It is acknowledged by those who have used it as being the best medicine sold for coughs, colds, inflammation of the lungs, and all affections of the throat and chest. Its agreeableness to the taste makes it a favorite with ladies and children.

Last winter a sage announced that he had discovered a way to double his income. He cut down his wants by half. This is, after all, the secret of contentment in worldly matters.

In his Vegetable Pills, Dr. Parmelee has given to the world the fruits of long scientific research in the whole realm of medical science, combined with new and valuable discoveries never before known to man. For Delicate and Debilitated Constitutions Parmelee's Pills act like a charm. Taken in small doses, the effect is both a tonic and a stimulant, mildly exciting the secretions of the body, giving tone and vigor.

Edward Everett Hale once said to a friend, "Never bare more than one kind of trouble at a time," and added: "Some people bear three kinds—all they have had, all they have now, and all they expect to have."

Parmelee's Pills possess the power of acting specifically upon the diseased organs, stimulating to action the dormant energies of the system, thereby removing disease. In fact, so great is the power of this medicine to cleanse and purify, that disease of almost every name and nature are driven from the body. Mr. D. Carswell, Carswell, P. Q., Ont., writes "I have tried Parmelee's Pills and find them an excellent medicine, and one that will sell well."

Fidelity in trifles and an earnest seeking to please God in little matters is a test of real devotion and love. Let your aim be to please our dear Lord perfectly in little things, and to attain a spirit of childlike simplicity and dependence.—Jean Nicolas Grou.

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If you would resist pneumonia, bronchitis, typhoid fever, and persistent coughs and colds. These ills attack the weak and run down system. They can find no foothold where the blood is kept pure, rich and full of vitality, the appetite good and digestion vigorous, with Hood's Sarsaparilla, the one true blood purifier.

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YOU OR I.

If we could know
Which of us would be first to go,
Who would be first to breast the swelling tide,
And step alone upon the other side—
If we could know!

If it were you,
Should I walk softly, keeping death in view?
Should I my love to you more oft express?
Or should I grieve you, darling, any less
If it were you?

If it were I,
Should I improve the moments slipping by
Should I more closely follow God's great plan
Be filled with a sweeter charity to man—
If it were I?

If we could know!
We can not, darling, and 'tis better so.
I should forget, just as I do today,
And walk along the same old stumbling way—
If I could know.

I would not know
Which of us, darling, will be first to go.
I only wish the space may not be long
Between the parting and the greeting song;
But when, or where, or how, we're called to go—
I would not know.

—Selected.

Literary Note.

The editor of the *Review of Reviews*, in the January number of that international journal, ventures a brief forecast of the new year's developments in which he predicts the settlement of the Cuban, Turkish and Chinese problems of nationality and government, the rapid industrial advancement of Japan, the still greater progress of European enterprise in Africa, the unprecedented hastening of railway-building in northern Asia, the laying of two Pacific cables, the practical use of horseless carriages in Europe, the replacing of steam by electricity on some important lines of railway, and valuable discoveries in medical and sanitary science. On the whole, the *Review* looks forward to "a hopeful and interesting new year."

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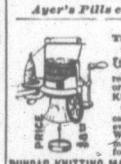

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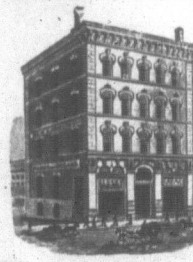

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