



Enthusiasm for the Person of Christ.

Then Paul answered, . . . I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus.—Acts xxi.: 13.

"There were strange soul-depths, restless, vast, and broad,
Unfathomed as the sea;
An infinite craving for some infinite stilling;
But now Thy perfect love is perfect filling!
Lord Jesus, my Lord, my God,
Thou, Thou art enough for me!"

This is a restless age, and people are not content to dream their lives away. It is a great mistake to think that those who make no outward profession of religion are not interested in it and its claims. Though we believe in a professedly Christian country, our faith is on trial for its very existence; it is being tested and examined to see whether it is indeed the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone that can turn everything to gold, and bring brightness and gladness into the darkest life. Plenty of practical, clear-headed men and women are—like the Greeks of old—saying to the disciples of Christ: "Sirs, we would see Jesus." As the Jews looked eagerly for the promised Messiah, so many a man to-day is searching for a divine Leader, a mighty Master, at whose feet he may pour out all his treasures of love and devotion. It has been forcibly pointed out that the restlessness which destroys the peace of one who has lost his hold on faith, is a "sure proof that scepticism is a malady, not a normal state." When doubt and unbelief bring painful restlessness to the soul of man, is it any wonder that he is driven to seek eagerly for some relief?

Christians may disagree about many things, and may often find it necessary to change or modify their cherished opinions before the remorseless facts of science, but—as Van Dyke says—those who in all ages have uplifted souls with mighty power are alike in one thing. Their central message, the core of their preaching, is the piercing, moving, personal gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind. This, in its simplest form; this, in its clearest expression; this presentation of a Person to persons in order that they may first know, and then love and trust and follow Him—this is pre-eminently the gospel for an age of doubt.

Our only hold on things or ideas is through our own personality, but if no one else has had a like experience, we may doubt the truth of our own sensations. That is the reason we find a delight in exchanging ideas with a kindred spirit—we see our own thoughts reflected in his. When person really touches person, when the personal experience of one spirit is also the personal experience of another, there is a new joy in living. And that is the secret bond of union between souls who feel the very life of Christ thrilling in their veins. They know, by personal experience, the joy of communion with Him, a joy which cannot be explained to one who has never felt it, and which need not be explained to one who has. The secret of the Lord is no secret to those who know Him—it is an ever-fresh spring of joy, constraining them to loving service, not a slavish fear of punishment nor a selfish hope of reward. The only reward they really care much about is His smile and approving "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Those who only look on from the outside may think that such a reward is hardly sufficient return for lifelong service, but a very different opinion is held by those

who are drawn irresistibly by the attractive Personality of the Altogether Lovely One. Christ is the Heart and Life of Christianity. From first to last, He preached Himself, and all really helpful Christian preachers have, like S. Paul, proclaimed one central message—Christ crucified, yet alive for evermore. This is the beginning and the end and the heart of their preaching. They cannot help themselves, necessity is laid upon them, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. When the Master speaks, the disciple is constrained to follow, though, like Abraham, he may be forced to leave home and country. Like S. Paul he will press on undauntedly and triumphantly, deliberately turning his back on worldly success if necessary, pressing on towards his Jerusalem though he may feel sure that difficulties and dangers await him there. The attractive power of Christ's Personality which draws him on is as continuous, as invisible and as mighty as the force of gravitation. His friends may think him mad and try hard to prevent him from "throwing his life away," but obstacles only add oil to the fire which burns within him—the fire of undying love for his Lord and Master.

Remove the personal, loving, ever-present Christ from Christianity and all its charm vanishes. It would still teach men to refuse the evil and choose the good, but enthusiasm would die out of the souls of men as the light fades when the sun goes down. Men who only reverence Jesus of Nazareth as a great leader—only one of many great world-teachers—preach that kind of lifeless Christianity. They teach Christ's doctrines, but do not present Him as a living Person who is in constant, quickening contact with each soul. Their writings, interesting though they may be, make one feel sorry for the writers who have missed the only soul-fellowship which can really satisfy a hungry heart. Turn from such moralists to Browning or Tennyson, and you step out at once from shadow into sunlight. Jesus of Nazareth is constantly kindling and keeping alive an enthusiastic personal devotion in the hearts of countless men, women and children who have never seen Him—an enthusiasm which burns on steadily, century after century, with ever-increasing splendor. Let those who deny that He is still alive explain that marvellous fact—if they can! It is unique in the history of our race. Could a man, dead for nearly 2,000 years, rule so royally over the souls and bodies of the noblest and most unselfish of every age? NO! JESUS LIVES! and is ever pressing close to His Heart the heart of each individual disciple, pouring in the strengthening oil of the Holy Spirit and the new wine of a high enthusiasm which must find room for service.

"God Himself is the heart's desire of those who delight in Him; and the blessedness of longing fixed on Him is that it ever fulfils itself. They who want God have Him. . . . The sunshine flows into the opened eye, the breath of life into the expanding lung—so surely, so immediately the fullness of God fills the waiting, wishing soul. To delight in God is to possess our delight. Heart! lift up thy gates; open and raise the narrow, low portals, and the King of Glory will stoop to enter."

I don't believe anyone was ever argued into a belief in Christ. Christianity is love, and you cannot force a man to love God by bringing overwhelming proofs to bear on him. He who will not hear Moses and the prophets would not be convinced though one rose from the dead. Love is alive and must grow, building its body of proof around it as it goes on. The proofs it clings to may not be facts, science may shatter them, but a real Christian has a hold on a Personal Saviour which no scientist or higher critic can shake. He may have to give up his cherished idea that the Bible is an infallible book with no mistakes in it, but love stands as full of life as ever. A real Christian is saturated with Christ, and God is continually breathing into



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