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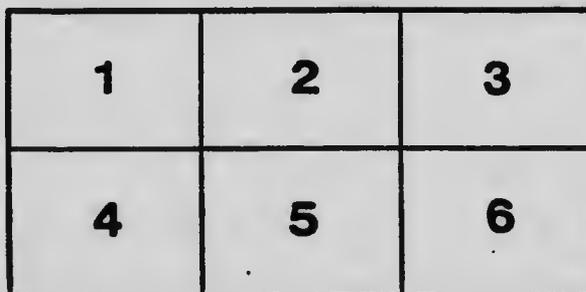
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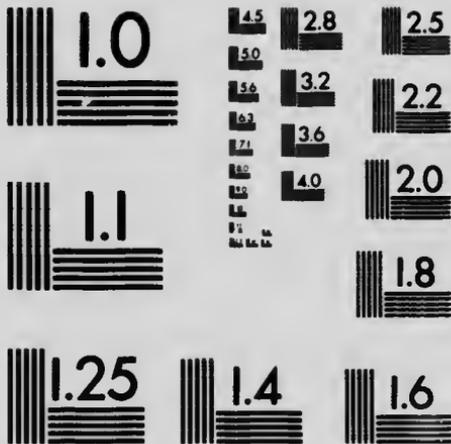
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RICHARD ROBERTS

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15, Devonshire Street, E.C.
1902

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NATURALLY the first, but certainly the least thing we say about the Cross is that it happened at a certain place on a certain day. The background of the Cross is not Jerusalem but the whole world; its date is not a certain day but all time. I remember hearing Dr. Fairbairn many years ago say that "Calvary is an epitome of the world." It is even more than that. It is an epitome of two worlds, an epitome of God and of man. It is the whole truth of life, human and divine, focussed down to one intense point of light. Dr. Forsyth uses of the cross an epithet which I think is profoundly true. He speaks of it as being "superhistoric." There is a certain quality of timelessness and immediacy in it for every man who looks understandingly upon it; and it becomes to us, as it has been to every age, the clue to the inter-

pretation of history and of our own personal lives.

The Cross is the convergence of two great movements, of God to man and of man to God ; God in the person of Jesus Christ offering to man the gift of perfect reconciliation ; man in the person of Jesus Christ, offering to God the gift of perfect obedience. God at His divinest, man at his manliest, meet in one and the same act. The Cross comes therefore to us bringing the supreme gift of reconciliation to God and all that that carries with it ; it also comes with a supreme demand—the demand for a full surrender. The gift and the demand always go together. We cannot pick and choose. We have to accept both. Indeed, we cannot accept the gift fully and understandingly without realising that we have to make the surrender ; and we shall never be able to make the surrender until we have fully and understandingly appropriated the gift.

I

Let us then speak of the gift. The assumption that ever y religion in the world

starts out with is that there is something wrong with the world. They do not all diagnose the trouble in the same way; they give different explanations of it; but they all agree that, as they look out upon the world, they see what Newman described as "a heart-piercing, reason-bewildering spectacle." The Christian interpretation of this is that it is the consequence of Sin.

I suppose that there are none of us but have to realise, as we scrutinise our own hearts, that we have frequently suffered moral defeat and failure. We have to acknowledge that, as we test ourselves even in the light of the ordinary conventional standard by which the average man lives, we have been defeated and have failed again and again. But I wonder how many of us have stopped to ask ourselves what the real test is by which we should measure our failure. This, it seems to me, is the first point at which the Cross touches us. What is the Cross? The Cross is the Perfect Man in the perfect act; it is the great ethical high-water mark. And, just because it is the moral achievement of our own flesh and blood it becomes the moral criterion for all

of us. It is a concrete statement, in terms which you and I cannot fail to understand, of our total moral liability, of God's demand upon us. When you and I begin to scrutinise our record in the light of the moral achievement of Jesus Christ, there is not one of us but has to confess that we are totally and irreparably bankrupt, and that we are involved in utter moral insolvency. That is a very serious state of affairs; yet it is not the worst thing to be said about us. We have to know something even more than that before we recognise the real quality of sin. Shall I take an analogy from the Gospels in order to illustrate what I mean? You remember that Jesus once asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" The answer was, "John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." This was a perfectly sound judgment, so far as it went; but, observe, it was the judgment of the natural faculty. Then Jesus asked the disciples what their judgment was, and Peter said, "Thou art the Messiah of God"; and Jesus went on to say, "Flesh and blood" (that is, the natural faculty)

“hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” By the light of the natural faculty it was seen that Jesus was a prophet ; but it was only a revelation that could show the whole truth. I believe that the same thing applies to sin. In the light of the natural faculty we may see ourselves to be utter moral failures, and morally insolvent ; but it requires the light of revelation for us to see ourselves to be sinners. We may by our own faculties know that we have come short of our duty ; but it is in the light of the Holy Spirit that we understand that we have come short of the glory of God. The real difference that the revelation of sin makes to us is just this: when a man finds that he is a moral failure (I speak with some knowledge, because in all this I am simply telling my own story), he does not find it difficult to forgive himself. The real trouble in the moral life of so many of us to-day is that we find it so easy to forgive ourselves. But when once a man has, in the light of the Spirit of God, seen the true character of his sin, he knows that the only hope for him is to be forgiven by God. The essence of sin, as it appears in that

revelation, is this. When a man looks upon Jesus Christ and realises what His love was, and what a difference that love has made in his relation to God, he realises that the very essence of sin is something which Paul calls "enmity against God"; it is personal self-assertion as against God : alienation from God. Sin, on whatever plane you deal with it, must at last be recognised as an affair between persons. It is the rupture of a personal relationship : and we are responsible for it.

II

Now, what is to be done with sin ? How should God deal with it ? The great fact that we have to remember in this connection is that we are dealing with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that He could only do with it what love would do ; and love would forgive. One of the most difficult things in the world is to forgive. You know the process that goes on in you when you really forgive. When an offence has been committed against you there is immediately a reaction in yourself. If you are going to

forgive you have to check that reaction. Of course, that is only the beginning of forgiveness. I confess that one of the most costly things that I ever have to do is when I am struck to hold myself back and not strike in return. It really means self-negation, self-surrender, self-denial, self-repression. It means this—that I bear the offence with its entire consequences within my own person, as it were. I bear the offence and also the shock of its reaction within myself. I do not visit it on the offender. You cannot forgive an offence without bearing it. There is no forgiveness of sin except at the price of bearing sin. It is always a perilous thing to argue from man to God; but it does seem to me that the same thing applies to Him, and that He cannot forgive sin without bearing it. And here again the Cross comes in. If the Cross means anything at all, it is a revelation to us of God bearing sin—your sin and mine. There is a story told of John Brown of Harper's Ferry, which I should like to repeat. His son had violated one of the household laws, and it was necessary to punish him. John Brown took him into one of the out-houses

of the farm, and the lad waited in fear and trembling while his father went for the strap or the whip. When he came back with it, to the lad's astonishment he took off his own coat and bared his back. Then he put the strap into the boy's hand and said, "Lay it on me." The lad demurred and would not do it at first, but the old man compelled him to lay the strap on his back. That lad never sinned in the same way again. That is what God did on the Cross. He shows us what our sin means to Him—what the recoil of it upon Himself, the shock of enduring it in Himself, means to Him. The Cross is the revelation of God bearing our sin in order that He might forgive us and restore us to Himself. You remember that when the woman came into the house of Simon the Pharisee and broke the alabaster box of ointment upon the Master's feet, He spoke a parable to Simon, the meaning of which is that sin is to be regarded as a bad debt, and the forgiveness of it as the writing off of a bad debt. But one cannot write off a debt without paying it oneself. When a creditor writes off a bad debt he takes it upon himself.

That is what God has done with our sin : He has taken it upon Himself. Somewhere in that cycle is the interpretation of those deep mysterious words of St. Paul: "He hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." In some deep, inscrutable way, through some processes in the inner life of God which are translated for us into the idiom of history in the Cross, the barrier between man and God is swept away, the "new and living way" is opened for man to the bosom of the Father, and the Father draws him with cords of love. This is the great gift that God offers and that we all need, because it contains all other gifts in itself. It is the gift of salvation—if you like to call it so. If we give its full content to the word, salvation means not merely the negative thing of saving us from ruin, but the whole process by which we are brought at last to Christlikeness. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" We have security, sufficiency, and abundance of life. "The free gift of

God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." In the Cross we have the great, comprehensive, free gift, given to the world "without money and without price," unmerited, unrequitable, royally given, the gift of God's redeeming grace. We need a fresh realisation of the greatness and the abundance of the freedom of the gift of God to us. He reconciles us to Himself freely in Jesus Christ and multiplies upon us all that we need, the Cross ever being our assurance that He will withhold from us nothing that we are willing to receive.

III

As I think of the Cross and of its two sides, I realise that, on the one side, there is something in it which is complete. I like the old phrase "the finished work." As a gift of God it is something which was given once for all and never needs to be repeated. But, from the point of view of the obedience of man, it is something which has to be perpetuated and repeated throughout all history; and that sense of debtorship which the acceptance of God's gifts implies, as I understand

it, is the dynamic which drives us to that obedience by and through which the world's redemption is to be completed. We need therefore to gain a true sense of the magnitude, the freedom, and the grace of God's gift. When this has become a reality in our experience, we shall inevitably go forth to render an obedience which will mean in very truth the making up of what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ. For the measure and the direction of this obedience is fixed for us by the Cross. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . . who was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."

And it is in such an obedience that the true predestined way of man lies. Broadly speaking, there are two possible moralities open to man. The one is the ethic of self-regard; the other is the ethic of obedience. The former is the burden of Nietzsche—the religion of self-affirmation, the will to power. The other is the way of Jesus, the way of self-renunciation, of sacrifice, the will to obey. The one is the morality of the superman; the other is the ethic of the Son of Man. For, said Jesus, "the Son of Man came not to

be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." And in saying this, and more by doing this, Jesus fixed for ever the true philosophy of human life. No less than He revealed God did He reveal man in the Cross ; and it follows that, since God and man were revealed in the same act, the deepest truth of the heart of God is to become the deepest truth of the life of man. It has been said that the Cross is "the ground plan of the Universe." At least it tells us that sacrifice is the deepest principle of the life of God and the ultimate law of the life of man. The Cross rules out entirely a self-regarding ethic. It proclaims plainly that the way of a man is the way of willing and loving obedience.

Thus it was that God intervened redemptively in the affairs of mankind. The Cross is the centre of that intervention, the point at which the redeeming love of God impinged in all its power upon history ; and the intervention was redemptive because, first of all, it declared that man was freely reconciled to God and forgiven ; and then it sent forth man, forgiven and redeemed, upon an

errand of reconciliation to the world. "God hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and hath committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation." And so the redeeming purpose of God is being accomplished in the world. In our penitence, we turn to God to be forgiven and restored ; and then, in the harmony of an obedient will, we seek the return of the whole world to the peace of God.

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