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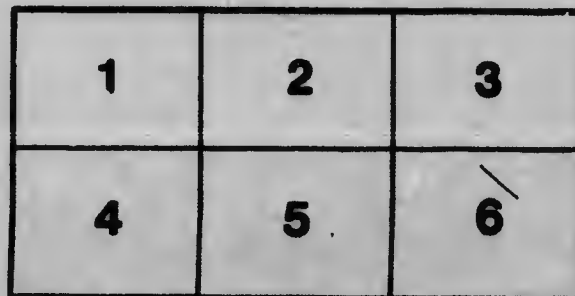
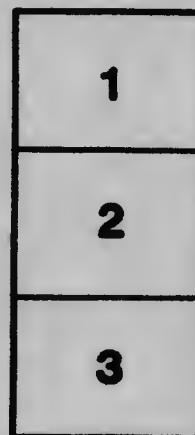
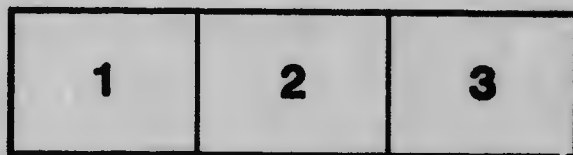
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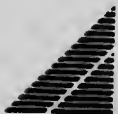
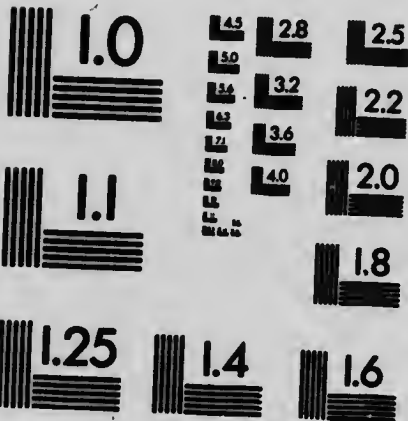
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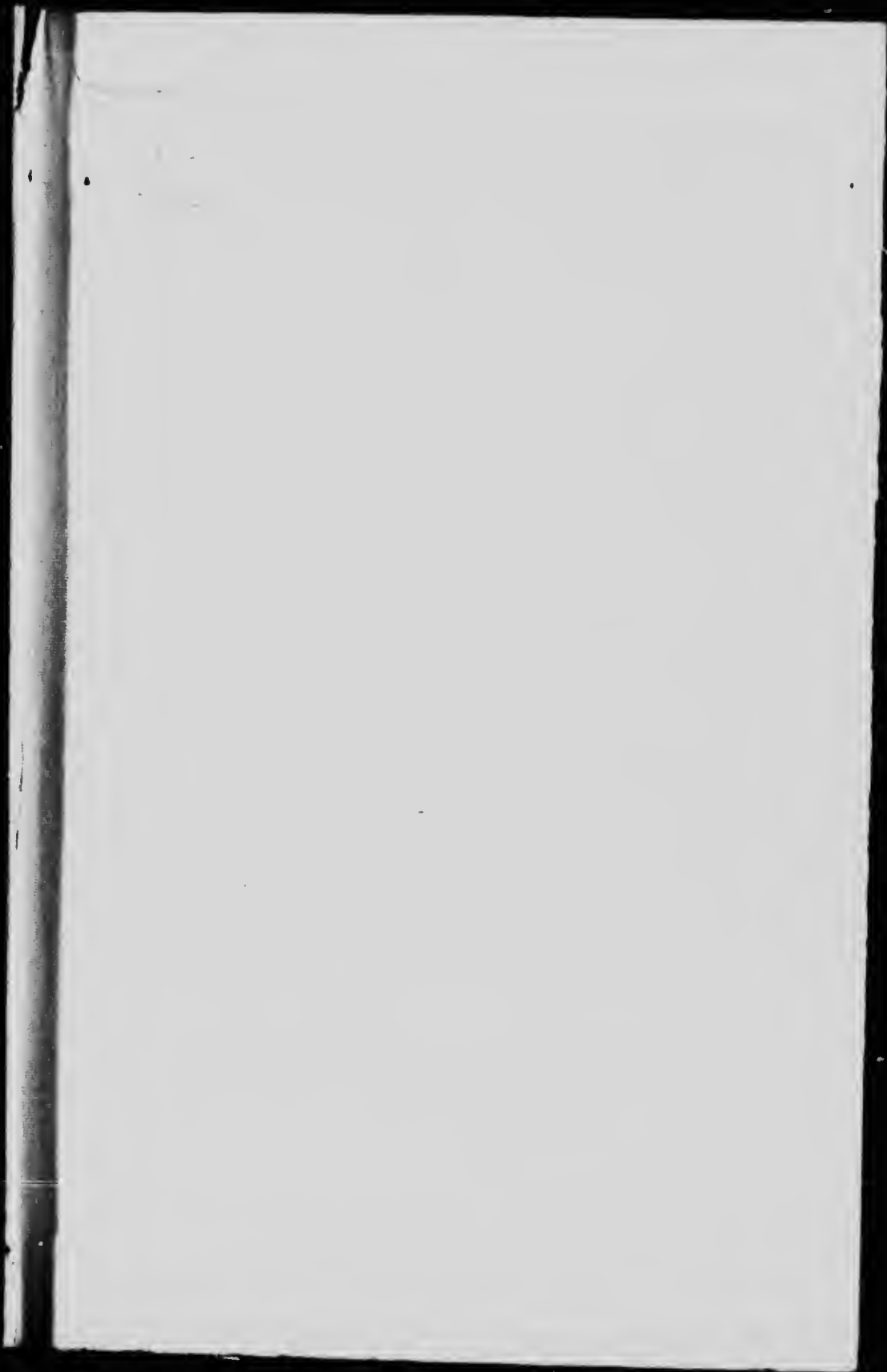
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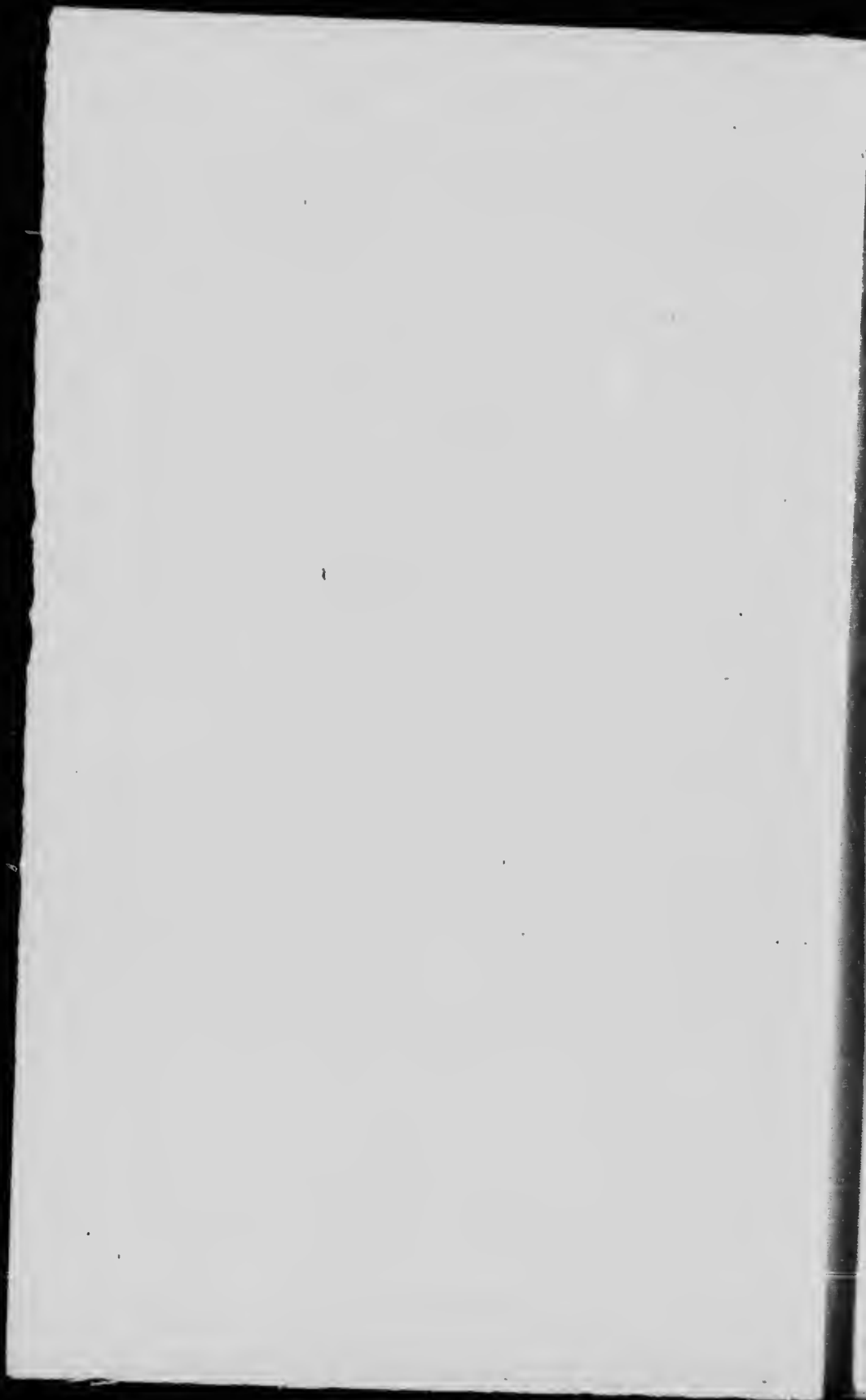
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Religion as Friendship with God

A New Statement of
the Old Doctrine

By
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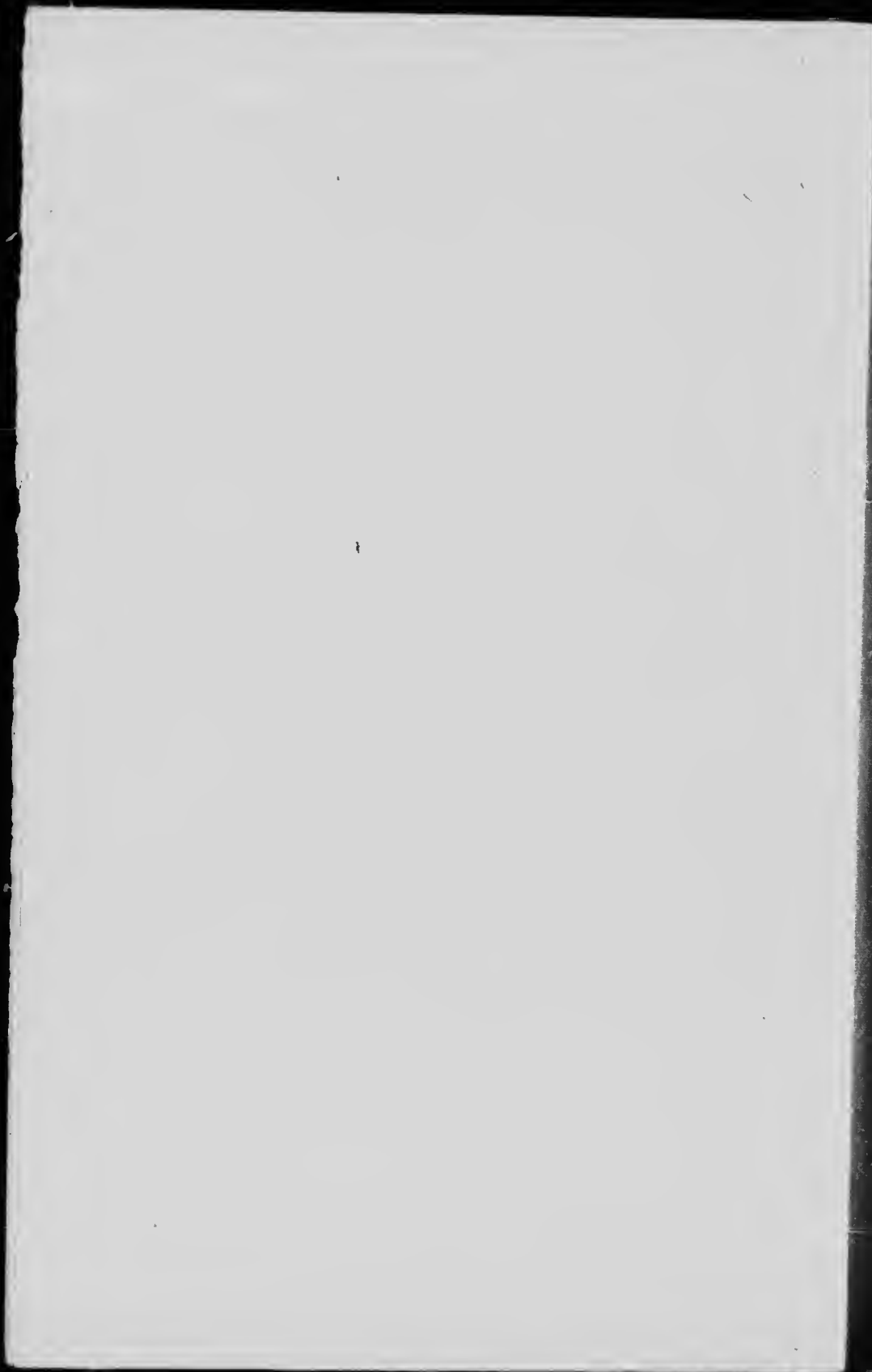
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To
My Congregation
Which has taught me so much
the meaning of
Friendship



P R E F A C E

THE sermons which follow are not meant to raise new doubts about the good old creeds that have served so well the spiritual needs of our fathers. They are an attempt to meet the difficulties met with in a somewhat varied experience as business man, student and pastor. The view of religion here advocated has meant everything to myself, and a man can only preach the things he knows.

Because many others have been helped by it, I have yielded to oft-repeated requests that these sermons should be published, in the hope that still others might find in them the answer to difficulties which have arisen with the old statements of doctrine.

No new statement which is true will ever do away with the old creeds and confessions. All it can do is to unfold in terms of modern thought what was implied or only partially stated in these older forms. They have lived only because they must have been true for their own age.

Some such conception as that here used must

PREFACE

be the organizing principle of any restatement of truth which does justice to all the factors involved. I have used the word "Friendship" because I believe that in its best modern use it better expresses that free spiritual relation, which is the core of religion, than the word "love." As Henry Drummond somewhere says, "On earth no word is more sublime. Friendship is the nearest thing we know to what religion is. God is love. And to make religion akin to Friendship is simply to give it the highest expression conceivable by man."

In twelve sermons delivered to a popular audience, it is impossible to do more than suggest how the thought of Religion as Friendship with God interprets each of the great doctrines of the Church, but those who have been most helped by them found their helpfulness to lie in the suggestions they contain of other ways of looking at old truths. They are therefore given here just as they were preached, with one or two slight changes in the first sermon.

JOHN MACKAY,

*Pastor Crescent St. Presbyterian Church,
Montreal.*

CONTENTS

I. FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF RELIGION . . .	9
II. HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND? . . . Revelation and Inspiration.	27
III. WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND? . . . Atonement.	49
IV. WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS . . . Conversion, Justification.	69
V. THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP . . . Sanctification.	91
VI. THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIEND- SHIP Election and Foreordination.	115
VII. THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP. . . The Perseverance of the Saints.	135
VIII. THE PLACE OF CHRIST IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD The Trinity.	157

CONTENTS

- IX. GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES 179
The Church, the Sacraments, the
Sabbath, the Home.
- X. THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF FRIENDSHIP 195
Christian Liberty.
- XI. THE NEMESIS OF FRIENDSHIP
SCORNED 211
Future Punishment.
- XII. FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD AND THE LAST
THINGS 225
Death, Resurrection and Judgment.

FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF
RELIGION



RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

I.

FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF RELIGION

"Abraham, my friend."—*Isaiah xli. 8.*

ALL human progress has been from details to principles, from the confusion of many seemingly separate things to the wide generalizations which grouped the many into one by new-found relations. Newton, seeing the apple fall to the ground, wondered why it did not fall the other way. Thinking out the problem, he saw that it was in obedience to a law by which every particle in the universe is attracted to every other particle. Like a flash came the answer to a thousand other questions—came the vision of the stars, held in their courses by the wondrous law of gravitation.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

From earliest ages amber rubbed with silk was seen to attract small particles to itself, and sparks of light were produced when bodies thus treated were brought near to each other. But only during the last century did we realize that these separate manifestations were due to the same great force, which we call electricity.

Step by step men gathered the diverse facts of life into ever-widening groups until at last the great evolution hypothesis was enunciated. This pointed out that everything that is works with one common impulse to bring order out of chaos, to bring perfection out of the imperfect and incomplete. What a vision that was! All these myriads of sights and sounds, the sun and the moon and the stars, the sea and the land, the seasons as they pass, the day and the night, life and death, and all that vast complex that makes our lives,—all this was one, turning to one great end. A Universe! A Unity! Is it any wonder men lost their heads, and falling down before that all-embracing law, cried, "Behold your God."

For man himself must rise, if he would see the full meaning of any step in his progress. He must look back upon that step from the

FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF RELIGION

loftier outlook to which it has raised him. For the savage, just beginning to question and to think for himself, the word electricity is an empty sound. He must reach a stage of civilization where electricity becomes his servant, to drive his chariot, to turn his factory wheels and to light his home, before that wondrous force is seen in its true light and its workings can be understood. So the great process of evolution had to do an age-long work with man before he was able to grasp even a little of its meaning. His first thought of it was sure to be out of proportion, and to that extent untrue. But when he let the wondrous vision do its formative work upon his soul and lift him to a view-point from which it could be seen, he realized that the marvellous workings he had called evolution demanded a worker and a thinker. A work with so clear a purpose, a work with so definite a progress, that even he, a part of it, could trace its successive steps toward a final goal, could never be a product of its own blind gropings.

In enunciating the law of evolution, science took the greatest step she has yet made. But a greater still remains to be taken—yes, is now being taken—by the great-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

est scientists and the greatest thinkers of our age. After evolution—what? After evolution, God: for He was before it, and He works through it. The last word of science is not evolution. The last word of science is personality, divinity, God. Evolution demands the God who works by evolution, and the true scientist, the man who thinks deeply and honestly enough, will be led through the multitude of things which crowd our lives by the pathway of law up to the vision of God. As Tennyson sings,

“The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and
the plains,
Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him who
reigns?”

In the light of that vision man goes back and reconstructs his world. When the savage heard the winds blow, or saw the waters burst forth in a full, flowing stream, or saw the lightnings flash, or heard the thunder roll, he ascribed each to a separate god or a separate spirit. When he saw the wonders of nature, he said in every case, “It is a god.” For his theory of life he needed as many gods as there were separate experiences, and

FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF RELIGION

his poor heart was worried and his life spoiled by trying to serve so many masters, But slowly God took the child-man and taught him, as he could bear the separate lessons, until to-day, to him who has a consistent theory of the universe and of life, the springing of leaves, the falling of waters, the flashing of lightning, all speak of God, the ever-present, all-powerful soul of the universe.

To the truly pious heart there has always been a certainty of the reality and the presence of God, but even wise and good men have been sorely troubled to know what to do with science and with life, because of partial views of the meaning of religion. They have looked on it as a means of getting rid of sin, of finding peace of conscience, of being insured against future punishment, of being assured of the bliss and the joy of heaven, and have thought of God as the means by which this was brought about, banishing Him too often from great areas of life, of conduct and of human thought. These partial views all contained some truth, and in the progress of the ages have been grouped into ever wider conceptions, until to-day man stands ready for a

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

new definition of religion, as wide and far sweeping as is the crowning conception of science in its own sphere.

What, then, is religion? Our text gives us the clue. The Lord of Glory calls a merciful man "Abraham, my friend." Two things alone have abiding reality, God and the soul of man. Matter, force, motion, energy, time, space, law, freedom, cause and effect, and the countless other terms which make up the vocabulary of science, are all meaningless, empty sounds apart from the thinking, personal spirit which uses them. Between these two realities, the soul of man and the spirit of God, there must be some relation, and man has been dimly conscious of it from earliest ages. That relation of man and God is religion. But God and man have each been thought of in such an incomplete and partial fashion that religion has failed to mean the full, grand thing it was meant to be. Never till the Christ came and showed what God was and what man might be did religion appear in something of its fulness of joy and power. Then the army of martyrs and saints rose up to dare and to die for the sake of Him who had

GOD

FRIENDSHIP THE COKE OF RELIGION

come to open to them the gates of knowledge, that knowledge of God and man which is eternal life. But here, as elsewhere, man had to be educated before he could grasp in its fulness the wonderful upward step which the race took in Jesus the Christ. Twenty centuries of education have been needed before we are ready to realize in something of its fulness what Christ meant to the world, and what the religious life of which He is the centre means.

In fellowship with God and man in Jesus Christ a great word has slowly gathered content among men; a word which sums up every phase of our relation with God and man as fully and as perfectly as evolution and God sum up the partial conceptions and the disjointed facts of science. That great word is Friendship. In its highest meaning it is the richest, greatest word in human speech. It speaks of the perfect blending of soul with soul, wherein all selfishness and unworthiness are crowded out, and nothing remains but a perfect union of life with life. It is an even greater word than love, for about that word has gathered much that is selfish, much that is merely sentimental.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Friendship is the last, best form of the truest human love.

"Friend is a word of royal tone,
Friend is a *poem* all alone."

Our hearts instinctively turn to Christ when we read, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother," for when He Himself would convey the deepest thought of religion to His disciples, He said, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends," That, then, is the keynote of religion, its meaning and the secret of its power. Friendship with God! How simple it all becomes then, and how great! Edward Young says:

"A friend is worth all hazards we can run,
Poor is the friendless master of a world—
A world in purchase of a friend is gain."

If a true earthly friend can mean so much to us, what may not God, the Eternal One, in whom is centred all the power, the majesty and the beauty, all the tenderness and the sympathy of His universe—what may He not mean?

If, then, religion is Friendship with God, the great thing for us to know is not

FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF RELIGION

a book, not a creed, not a doctrine, but God Himself. All that leads us nearer to Him and gives us a fuller grasp on His nature and His purposes, this we must hold with all the power that is in us. And then, how many of our problems are solved, how many things that looked unreasonable and unreal glow with the divine light of reason and of purpose. When Newton discovered the great law of gravitation, how simple the falling of apples, the springing of waters, the flight of planets and of stars were seen to be. When the great principle of evolution was observed, how many things that seemed mysterious were explained. So in the light of the great thought of religion as friendship with God many dark places in the story of the race become bright and full of significance.

Abraham overshadows every other figure in his influence upon Israel, and even to-day his name is a household word wherever the influence of Israel or the Gospel of Jesus has gone. And why? He is called the friend of God. He entered into the secret of friendship with the Divine, and the heart of man felt that somehow here was the secret of religion; here was the thing his

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

soul needed, though many centuries elapsed before this dim longing became articulate. A saint of our own era has worded it for all time, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."

There was much of groping and many partial conceptions before men were ready for this great thought. Look at the sacrifices of the Jewish church. How much difficulty we have had in grasping their significance and in relating them to our own lives. We have often wondered how God could have countenanced such things, and what real religious value they could have had. But looking at religion as friendship with God it all becomes plain. The earliest sacrifices were looked upon as a meal with the gods, in which the worshipper and his God met as friend meets friend in the eating of a meal. When Jehovah set apart Israel for His chosen people He said to them in effect, "I will meet with you as friend with friend, and we will have communion together in this sacrificial meal." What He wanted was not the meal or the sacrifice offered to Him, but the friendship, the heart fellowship of His people. But they erred as

FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF RELIGION

people err to-day. How often do we in calling our friends to a friendly meal think more of the elaborate preparations than of sweetness of spirit and reality of friendship, which alone make such a gathering worth while. So with the children of Israel, they came to look on sacrifice as something demanded by God and having a value in itself. Instead of looking to their hearts and making sure of their fitness for meeting face to face with God in that best nursery of friendship, a common meal, they looked to the value and amount of the sacrifice. They considered religion as a kind of bargain, demanding offerings from them, and compelling gifts from God. How much they missed of sweet fellowship and of living friendship with their God by this misapprehension of His mind and will.

And we who interpret the death of Christ in terms of the old Jewish sacrifices miss just as much. We think too often of sin as a debt owing to God, and of Christ paying that debt in His death, or we think of God as being angry with us and Christ making a sacrifice on Calvary which appeased that anger. These conceptions have in them a great truth, though when

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

pressed too far they have led to fatal errors in our doctrine and our lives. But look at the atonement in the light of a manifestation of friendship, and see how full it is of significance and of power to save and to uplift. God comes to man and claims to be his friend. What proofs does He give? The beauty and the grandeur of the earth, the richness of the fruits it yields for man's comfort and joy, these all speak of His care. But that is not enough. There is the terrible problem of sin and unrest that spoils all these things, and often makes them the means of unhappiness and of soul loss. What has God done to meet it? Christ and Calvary is the answer. Christ was not the victim of the wrath of God. He was God reconciling man to Himself in that wondrous life and death of love. Father Damien, who went among the loathsome lepers and gave his life a victim to that awful malady, had a right to claim for himself the sacred name of "friend of the lepers." How much more has the Maker and Sustainer of the universe, who became man and died the death of the cross, the right to claim that thrice-blessed name. We are saved, not by the cross or the sufferings

FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF RELIGION

of Christ alone, but by the living friendship of the Christ who was God incarnate, showing His friendship for men by taking upon Him the human form and suffering death for them. Calvary was the crowning glory of an age-long friendship of God with men, of which the Bible is the story.

See Jehovah as He goes with the Children of Israel up from Egypt, teaching and disciplining them, bearing with their failings, and forgiving their shortcomings, that they may at last become strong and true and great. See Him taking up His visible abode with them at Jerusalem, inspiring His prophets and His priests to tell those who lacked the spiritual sense in its full intensity of His wondrous love. Look at the laws He gave them. What are they but restrictions to keep them from going where He could not be their friend. "Thou shalt not kill." What does that mean? Not only that human life is sacred, but that God does not want us to do that which would cut us off from His friendship. "Thou shalt not steal." This is not a police regulation to protect property, but a hint from God that He who is righteousness and justice wants His friends to be like Him. "Thou shalt not commit adul-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

tery." What is that but another way of saying, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." But we have been so blind to all this loving wooing of God that we have looked upon Him as a hard taskmaster or an indulgent convenience to step in and deliver us from the pains of hell or the results of sin.

There is much that is stern in the Bible, but so there is in all real friendship. We cannot admit to the sanctity of our friendship a man who is coarse and rude. He will mistake kindness for weakness and sternness for harsh temper. He must be kept at arm's length till his character is such that he can sympathize with and appreciate ours. So with our God. What a long, hard discipline He has had to put us through before we are ready for this sacred opportunity of friendship with Him.

Think of what it means. Friendship with God. With all the closeness of our nearest and dearest earthly friend, God is our friend. If we truly love any one, how we long to have him think well of us, how we bend our every energy to be worthy of his respect and his affection. What an incentive, then, ought this to be to

FRIENDSHIP THE CORE OF RELIGION

holiness, that God is willing to admit us to friendship with Himself, to walk with us, talk with us, live with us, to penetrate the very innermost recesses of our being, and to link His own honor and glory with our lives. O what a privilege! Is it not enough to thrill us with a joy unspeakable, to make all life divine, to make all service sweet with the consciousness of His presence who works His mighty purposes through us?

Hear Him as He speaks to us, "My son, give me thine heart." What does it mean? What but this: "O man, made in mine image, O man with capabilities like mine own, I want thy friendship—yea, the dearest desire of my heart is to win that friendship. See what I have done to win it. The heavens declare my glory. The firmament shows my handiwork, and all these things are yours. More wonderful than aught else in the world is the body in which your spirit dwells. I made that for you. Read the life of Christ, see His wonderful patience and love and kindness, see Him in Gethsemane and on Calvary. That was I, your God, and I did it all for love of you. What more can I do than I have done? I come to you now, seeking your friendship, pointing out to you

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

the way of life, the road to happiness, the secret of peace. My son, give me thine heart." Friendship with God! It may be yours if you will have it. It may be yours now. You may go forth to-day, to be called as Abram was, "Friend of God"; to do as Enoch did, to walk with God, and, learning his secret of life, you may at last walk with God straight into the many mansions, to be with Him for evermore. Amen.

HOW DO WE KNOW THE
FRIEND?



II.

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.

"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."—*2 Peter i. 21.*

No question which has exercised the thought of the Church in recent years has given rise to so many doubts and fears in the minds of earnest Christians as the question of inspiration, and its correlative revelation. Wild statements, by men who have not thought earnestly or read widely, have led some to suppose that modern scholars were leagued together to destroy the Bible, and with it to overthrow the dominion of Christ in the world. Higher Criticism, science, and modern thought have all alike been pronounced anathema, because they dared to question the traditional view of inspiration and the Bible, but each of these has contributed in these latter days untold

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

treasures of light and truth toward a better and fuller view of inspiration and the place of the Bible in the life of the Church.

In the words of our text Peter gives a clue to the only view which will harmonize with the facts of experience and the teachings of the spirit. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Though these words refer especially to prophecy, they are equally applicable to every phase of revelation. How this is so may best be seen by reverting to the thesis we tried to establish last Sunday evening. Religion is friendship with God. It is the living communion of a human soul with the living God, through His spiritual presence in the world. It is as close and intimate a thing as the fellowship of friend with friend, on the street, in the market-place, or in the home. It does not banish God to a far-off Heaven, or shut Him up between the two covers of a book, but knows Him "closer than breathing and nearer than hands and feet." That hallowed relationship is the great revealer. If you want to truly know what a man is you must know him as a friend, for friendship lays bare the inner springs of conduct and of character, reveal-

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

ing a man's soul as nothing else can. It is the one thing that never grows old. He who is really your friend, no matter how humble he may be, is always revealing some fresh, deep, spiritual beauty, always discovering some new opportunity for fuller and richer fellowship of your soul with his. Pomp and grandeur lose their attractiveness, beauty fades and fails, flattery becomes hollow and repulsive, but friendship abides and endures so long as the soul lasts. And it gathers to itself a heritage of precious memories as the days go by. It sanctifies commonplace occasions and places, making them spiritual forces to enrich all the future days.

Every true friendship gathers about itself a literature, whether written on paper or woven into the very fibres of our being. So if religion is friendship with God, we would naturally look for a literature of that friendship, if it only lasted during our own lives; but when His friendship began with the childhood of the race, and has come down through the centuries to our own day, how much fuller and more rich ought we to expect that literature to be. Nor are we disappointed. Out of that friendship of God with man has grown the Bible, the source of

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

every true conception of His dealings with men and the norm of all his fellowship with us to-day.

The words of our text viewed in the light of this conception of religion teach us, *first, that revelation is given not in word alone, but in life and act.*

The word of God is never used in the Bible to mean the writings only, but the living manifestation of God Himself. Friendship is manifested more in what we do than in what we say. The Bible shows us God working out His purposes in the lives of men and thus showing them what He is. It was what He did for and in the men who trusted Him that showed what He was. The prophets spake words from Him at times, but they more often pointed to what He had done, and what He would do in the world. The truth He would teach concerning Himself He worked out in men's lives and in the history of the nations. The fourteenth chapter of Exodus, for instance, gives the story of the deliverance of Israel from bondage. This chapter is not God's revelation of Himself: it is only the story of that revelation. The revelation was the exodus itself, and only as we see Him in the

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

story, and come closer to Him through it, is it a real revelation to us.

If a noble-minded man were to go to a savage tribe and attempt to get its members to understand his character and his motives, he would not be likely to choose one of these savages and dictate to him a set of words which summed up his character. Words, no matter how all-embracing, can never fully express character—action alone will do that—and no word conveys exactly the same thing to any two men. What he must needs do would be to live among these savages, to educate them, to try to get them step by step up to a height where they could comprehend something of the meaning of his character. They would soon begin to talk about him, to tell each other what he had done, to analyze his actions, to try to get at his motives and understand his purposes. Some, more acute and capable of truer friendships than others, would see farther into his nature, would grasp sooner the meaning of his actions, and they would give to the others the benefit of their insight. If he could live a life extending over two or three generations, the fathers would hand down to their sons oral or written impressions of his nature and accounts

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

of his actions. These would serve as guides to their children, but could never take the place of living fellowship with him. As they came to know the man as he really was, they would see that the statements which had come to them about him were of value not for their literal accuracy, nor for their minute agreement one with another, but for the faithful picture they contained of the living person they had come to know, first through them, then through their own experience.

Something like this is what has occurred in the Bible. When God would reveal Himself to men He did not sit down and dictate certain words to them which contained all they ought to or could know about Him. If He had intended to withdraw Himself from them, or feared He would lose the power of living, active fellowship with them at a later day, this would have been the only reason for such a course. What He did was to live among them as friend with friend. It is said of Enoch that he walked with God, and Abraham is called "the Friend of God." To these men He appeared, and by His actions more than by His words, revealed what He was and what He wanted them to

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

be in order to retain His friendship. At last, when the time was ripe, He chose a people with whose history He identified Himself, and in His guidance of them through the desert, up to the Promised Land and into the portions set apart for them, He was slowly teaching them His nature. Every victory they won following His directions taught them of His power. When they suffered defeat because of sin among them, they learned of His abhorrence of evil. As He blessed their legitimate efforts, in accordance with His will, to be pure and true, they learned of His love for holiness. So through all their history. They were making acquaintance with Him as a people. He was showing them His character, seeking to win them to friendship with Him in return.

In those early days they did not understand fully what their own lives meant, the unit of life was not the individual, but the nation, and so God had to reveal Himself to them, not as the friend of each individual, but as the friend of the nation, and only through the nation to the individual. Yet there were certain men even in those early days who were specially gifted of God with the power of entering into fellowship with Him, just

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

as to-day there are men who seem to have a genius for friendship. You know how it is. The first time you meet some men you are attracted to them by an unseen affinity; you seem to feel confidence in them at once. You begin to understand their nature and to be stimulated by their presence to reveal yourself to them. They have been endowed with a genius for friendship, with that rich soul-wealth which sets them apart from other men, and makes you see in them the power of penetrating to the secrets of your life and of revealing the deep things of their lives to you. So it has ever been. In all ages there have been men with this genius for friendship, with an insight into character and a power of self-detachment which made it possible for them to become one with their friends.

When men like these entered into that sacred relation with God, He admitted them to the secret counsels of His presence; they knew and proclaimed the will of the Father for the guidance of other slower and less gifted men. When their hearts were so full of the wonder of this friendship that they broke forth into song they were called psalmists. When they saw that the course

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

of the lives of the people God had chosen was running contrary to the desires of God, or when they saw clearly His purposes and plans for the future, and wanted to proclaim them for the comfort and inspiration of their fellow-men, they were called seers or prophets. When they mediated God to the people through the visible signs and symbols of their faith, they were called His priests. But psalmist and prophet and priest all had the same experience, the deep, sweet joy of friendship with God, and to them He whispered the secret things hidden from all grosser souls.

Their utterances became the literature of the Church of God, not because it was without human failings and limitations, but because the earnest soul recognized in it the utterances of souls so deep in the confidence of God that they had a right to speak for Him, just as the sacred intimacy we have with our friends gives us a right to speak for them. Further, it realized that it, too, might have the same blessed experience, by putting itself into living relations with the God who breathed His purposes through psalmist and prophet and priest who gave themselves up to friendship with Him. The Spirit of God

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

witnesses with our spirit to the divinity of these writings, that those who wrote them had a right to speak in His name.

But at last, as men rejoiced in these partial glimpses of God, they were fitted for a fuller friendship, and He came among them in the form of man that they might speak to Him face to face, might see Him as He was, and thus know the full depths of His friendship for them. In Christ we have the fullest revelation which God has given of Himself, and that revelation culminates in His death on Calvary, because in that death He gave the measure of His love to men, and of the reality of the friendship He came to show by His life and by His death. The Gospels give us the accounts of eye-witnesses of that life, men who were His friends, who belonged to the little company called by Christ himself "My friends." They enjoyed that close fellowship with His earthly life that enabled them to describe it truly to the world, and in the gospels we have from four or more different pens a composite picture of the life and words of our Lord. We know it is true, not because these four accounts are in exact verbal agreement, for they differ in a hundred ways, to an

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

extent which makes an exact harmony of the four impossible. Yet the gospels speak to us with an authority and a spiritual power possessed by no other part of the Bible, because we recognize through them all the one character, the character and the life of the Friend of man, Christ Jesus, pictured for us by those who had the insight of friendship.

It was only after His death, however, that the fullest possibility of friendship with God was realized. Jesus said to His disciples: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you." The Comforter is the spiritual presence of God as He was revealed in Christ, and when He came in all His fulness Pentecost dawned on the world and men rejoiced in the fulness of the new thought that wherever they were, there God was, dwelling in them and acting through them. Paul and Peter and James and John, thrilled by the vision and possessed by the living presence of Christ, entered so fully into His mind that we recognize in what they wrote not their own mind and will, but the mind and will of

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Christ. Paul grasped the blessed privilege of friendship to such an extent that he could say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Being thus penetrated and filled by the presence of Christ and by the glory of friendship with Him, Paul was able to speak for Him, and in his epistles to deliver to man the Master's thoughts and purposes for their salvation. So, too, with the other inspired writers. They give us not stereotyped words, but living touch on the living God. They lived in closest fellowship with Him, and out of that friendship they spoke to the world.

What, then, is inspiration? Just this insight which accompanying with the living God as He acts and speaks gives to the soul of the man who surrenders himself wholly to the influence of the great mystery of friendship with the Divine. It is thus that God reveals Himself, reproducing Himself in His friends, and so filling them with His thoughts and purposes that they must needs speak and utter His thoughts to their fellow-men.

But our text carries us further. Holy men spake as they were moved of God. Holy men in different ages spake under the

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

same impulse. *We would, therefore, naturally look for a progressive unity in the Bible,* and even the most superficial examination makes this unity plain.

Men in different ages and under different conditions possessed the gift of insight into the Divine nature and of fellowship with Him in vastly differing degrees. The psalmists came very close to God, voicing their soul-experiences in those undying songs which will always be among the Church's richest possessions. The evangelists who wrote the gospels had the privilege of personal contact with Jesus, and the writers of the epistles had seen the marvellous outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and throughout the world, following the activities of the missionaries, and their writings, too, will always guide us and fill us with joy because of the fulness with which they convey to us the Divine nature and will. But there are sections of the Bible which all thinking men agree are of very little spiritual value to us to-day. I remember an old man who conducted family worship in my father's home reading the long list of the descendants of Benjamin, as they appear in the eighth chapter of 1st Chronicles. Though only a boy, it

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

struck me as absurd to expect anyone to be edified by a catalogue of names. Yet there was a time not so very far distant when every part of the Bible was looked upon as equally inspired and equally necessary to our spiritual life. Though the long genealogies and other details may have their place as a setting for the rest of the Bible, no one to-day thinks of ascribing to them the same degree of inspiration and the same spiritual value as the psalms or the epistles. So with all the rites and ceremonies of the Old Testament. They had only a limited value, and were meant to pass away as soon as people through them had been brought into fuller communion with God.

The Bible is thus one, not because it is all alike inspired or has all the same spiritual value, but because every part of it was prompted by the same spirit, by the Spirit of God, and was meant to have the same purpose of bringing men into fellowship and friendship with Him. Read in this way, the unity of the sixty-six books that make up the Bible is wonderful. They are one in spirit, one in purpose, one in the picture they give us, becoming clearer as the years go by, of God living and work-

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

ing out His great purposes in the lives of men. Treat the Bible as a group of proof texts, and you can make it prove anything, and it may lead you to the very antipodes of living faith in the living God. To-day, as in the days when Peter wrote his epistles, "ignorant men wrest the scriptures to their own destruction," but even the little child who comes to the Bible seeking to find and know God will be led by it step by step up to a full and glorious fellowship, to a soul-satisfying friendship with the God whose revelation of Himself it preserves for us. Religion is not belief in the Bible, it is belief in and friendship with God. The Bible is a sacred book only because it makes it possible for us to have this belief in and friendship with God. It shows us from Genesis to Revelation the personal presence of God in the affairs of men, and that age-long manifestation of His will and His nature makes it possible for us to know Him.

A letter from a friend is always cherished, not for its own sake, but for what it conveys to us of the heart of the friend. The Bible is God's letter conveyed through His friends to us, and we love it not for its own sake but for His. So when reverent scholars try to

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

find out what the different parts of the Bible were meant to tell us about God, when they were written and under what circumstances, instead of being alarmed we ought to thank God that men so reverence that word as not to be content with what they have been told by others, but are anxious to find out in the fullest possible degree the phase of the Divine nature each part of the book was intended to reveal. What gives it unity is not any view of its different parts which we may hold, but the presence of the living God so clearly manifested in its pages. This unity no amount of criticism or change of viewpoint can ever take from us.

But our text goes further and suggests *that the Bible is not the whole of God's revelation of Himself to us.*

Holy men of God spoke only as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and their power to be moved by that Spirit of God depended upon the degree of their growth in the life of fellowship with God. A man in the time of Noah could not be moved to speak with the same fulness as a man in the time of the Apostle Paul, because he had not yet reached that phase of spiritual life where he was ready for the

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

grea. doctrine of the Trinity, the manifestation of God, not as Jehovah alone, but as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three in one and one in three. So a man who is living to-day has the capability of a wider and fuller grasp of the nature and work of God than a man who lived in the time of St. Paul. God lives in His Church now with all the reality and fulness of His power, and the work of revelation will never be complete so long as there is an infinite God to know and finite men to company with Him, and find out the ever-deepening wonders of His nature. Christ said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the ages." He is with us to reveal to us every morning things which we never knew before. We are the heirs of all the ages in knowledge and in spiritual power, and if we are only true to the sacred intimacy with Christ to which He calls us, He will every day lead us into fuller and fuller glimpses of truth and of His purposes for the world.

But you ask, "If that is so, what is the difference between the Bible and any other book, and why are we not adding to the Bible all the time?" Let me use a very simple illustration to answer th's double

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

question. You have noticed a little child when you asked it to come to you. First of all it looked up to your face, then into your eyes. It listened to your voice, and when it had made up its mind that it could trust you, held out its arms, and came and nestled snugly in them, or on your knee. Then, when it felt entirely at home, it began to notice your clothing, your jewellery, your glasses, in fact, everything about you that caught its fancy. It knew the heart of you, something of your character, before it would trust itself with you, but it still went on to find out more about you in its study of what you wore. The mere showing the child your garments would never have won its confidence; it had to know something about yourself.

So it is with revelation. God calls us to a sweet and beautiful relation of friendship with Himself. But the knowledge of the stars and the soils, of the winds, and the tides, of any of the different phenomena of nature, could never give us that view of God we need to cast ourselves into His arms and rest our soul's destiny upon Him. The proof of this is seen in the pagan religions. They gave their affections not to the God

HOW DO WE KNOW THE FRIEND?

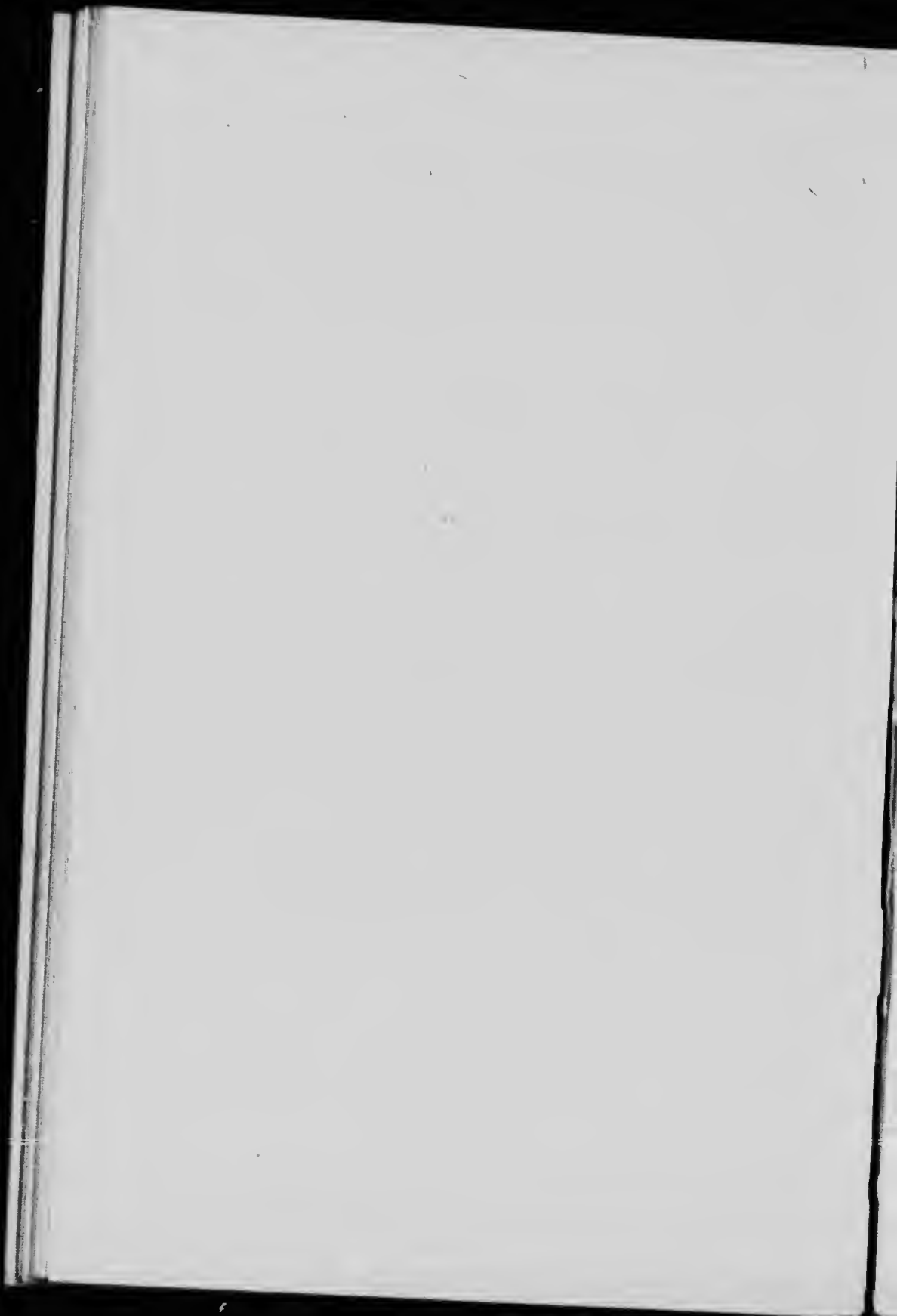
who manifested Himself in all nature, but to a crowd of lesser deities; and even in civilized lands, how many men fail to see God in nature, though filled with a profound admiration for the beauty and order about them. Something more than beauty and order and law is needed to touch the heart and inspire the affections. We must not only see the garments of God, we must see Himself. So He put Himself into personal relation with His chosen people to fit men for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. In Him men saw God as He really is, in all His marvellous winsomeness of character and of life. In Him was wrought out that great sacrifice on Calvary. In Him men found a friend who spoke to the deepest things in their hearts and made them willing to commit their eternal destinies to Him, to nestle into His very heart in the sweet relation of personal friendship to which He admits all those who trust in Him. And the Bible contains the picture of what the Christ meant to the men who saw Him and lived with Him. He will never live again on earth as He did then; He will never die again for the sins of men; so there can never be another Bible, and we do not need

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

to add anything to the present one, for it gives in full that which we need to know of the heart of God to enable us to lay hold upon His love and to rest as a little child in His very arms. Once we are there the whole universe is stretched out before us, with untold wonders, and it all speaks to us of the God, the Friend, in whose bosom we rest secure.

So all science, all philosophy, all human progress, and all human achievement are a still further revelation of God, but the heart of it all is the Bible. To it we must ever go to come into living touch with God, to learn the secret of life, and to begin the quest of any real and abiding truth. So long as men live here below it can never pass, and as we know and love God more and more we shall study and cherish with an ever deeper love this sacred book, which has been a lamp to the feet and a light to the path of so many of God's children. Science, philosophy and criticism have each their own part to play, but when they have forever vanished the God made real to us in the Bible shall be ours throughout eternity.

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?



III.

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

ATONEMENT.

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”—*Romans v. 8.*

THESE great words contain the very heart of Paul's gospel. They have in them the vital germ without which any preaching or teaching lacks reality and power. Yet they contain no magic formula for the cure of all human ills, nor did Paul ever mean that the truth he so passionately urged upon men should always be conveyed in the channels formed by his words. The Gospel is too big a thing for any man, or any age, to grasp or express in all its fulness. The letter killeth. It is only the spirit that gives life. To attempt to hark back to the time of Paul, or even to the days of our own forefathers, and to limit our wonderfully com-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

plex lives to the categories which sufficed so fully for them, is to become artificial and unreal, is to say with our lips what our hearts do not feel and what our lives cannot experience. The lament so often heard that the Gospel is not preached in the old way is a good or bad thing, according to what it means. If it means that we do not hear the same set phrases, the same dogmas, expressed in the same words, as of old, then let us thank God that men are honest enough to speak the truth in language that means something to them, and not to hide their spiritual nudity beneath the cast-off garb of a bygone age. But if this lament means that we are getting away from the spirit of the Gospel in our preaching or our thinking, as many thoughtful men and women fear we are, it is time to call a halt, for the end of such a course is inevitable disaster.

Dr. Denney, in his great book on the death of Christ, after a masterly survey of the whole New Testament, says: "It is an immediate inference, then, from all that we have seen in the New Testament, that where there is no atonement there is no Gospel. To preach the love of God out of relation to

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

the death of Christ, is not, if the New Testament is the rule and standard of Christianity, to preach the Gospel at all. We may take it or leave it, but it is idle to attempt to propagate the Christian religion on the basis and with the authority of the New Testament, unless we have welcomed it with our whole heart." All this is profoundly true. But what does it mean for us? What do I mean when I say Christ died for me? What is atonement? What were the realities for which these New Testament writers sought to find expression in the words which they have used? Let us look at our text for the answer.

Notice first, the death of Christ is the proof of the reality of God's friendship for men. "God commended His love or His friendship toward us."

God claims to be the friend of mankind. How does He prove it? There is a great law of friendship. Does He make Himself subject to that law? Let us see. The law of friendship is that each individual makes himself one, for good or ill, with all those who are really his friends. Friendship is in the spiritual world what life is in our bodies. Every organ,

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

yes, every cell, in our bodies has a life, to a certain degree, independent of the other parts of the body, but it only retains that life in all its vigor as it remains in full harmony with the life which pulsates throughout the whole. That part of the body which is linked by the most ties and gives the most of its activity and of the very tissue of its being to all the other parts, is the most important and has the widest and fullest life in itself. A finger connects directly only with the hand. It receives from and gives to the hand alone directly, and you may cut off a finger and leave the rest of the body with comparatively unimpaired life. But the heart sends its life-giving flood to the very tips of the fingers and the toes, through every fibre of the living body. To injure the heart is to cripple or kill the whole body. Yet so vital is the union of all in one, that to injure a finger is to make the whole body suffer. While pain lasts in the finger the heart quickens its throbs, and the whole body rises in its might, seeking to relieve the pain of one of its suffering members. Each lives for all and all for each. Each does its own particular work, but seeks to strengthen and to help all the other parts. So marked is

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

this in many cases that where one organ is injured its neighbor often takes up and discharges its functions until full recovery has taken place. So in the spiritual world. Every human being has a life and a destiny of his own, but that life cannot be lived apart from other men and women, and the living, vital bond of friendship which binds them in one great body. We are not each created by a separate act of the Divine; we are born of the union of human beings and into the life of families, thus being linked in spite of ourselves with the first breath we draw to at least two others of our race. The spiritual life which is normal and healthy will increase and multiply the numbers of lives with which it is related in accordance with the abilities and opportunities which God gives to it. This is what our Lord meant when He said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

The man who is selfish and seeks to keep all that he has and get all that he can reach for himself, slowly starves his soul. The real, healthy life of the soul is one of union with all mankind, and the wider our sympathies and the deeper our fellowship with

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

other men, the more are we alive. Money, position, culture, none of these things make the fulness of life. They are all good in their place, but only as giving opportunity for further friendship, fuller sympathy, and deeper love. Your life is as wide as your sympathies. Each new life taken into that sacred relation of soul-partnership widens and deepens, just as each opportunity missed weakens and limits life. The only real happiness, because the only real life, is found in this sacred relation of friendship, and if we have failed to make for our souls friends and comrades with God and our fellow-men in the busy scenes of this life, we go out into eternity, alone, helpless and without the possibility of life or happiness in the future world. But every life, whether human or divine, with which our life has been linked in heaven-born sympathy here goes with us to surround our spirits with the rich, full conditions of everlasting peace and joy. Such is friendship in its life-sustaining and life-giving power.

But it has another side. To be a friend to any man is to be one with him in more than the joy and brightness of life; it is to be one with him in every experience that

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

comes to him, excepting in his sin, and even there we share the sorrow and the sadness due to sin. He only is a real friend who is our friend in need, who not only rejoices with us when we rejoice, but sorrows with us when we sorrow. So the wider our circle of friends, the greater is the possibility of sorrow and suffering on their behalf, as well as of joy in their rejoicing. Now, if God is really the friend of mankind, how vast are the possibilities for a heart which is big enough to come into sympathetic touch with all the souls of even a single generation! But when that generation is multiplied by all the generations of men from the dawning to the sunset of human history, who but He is sufficient for these things?

Calvary and Gethsemane are the proofs that God has not shrunk from aught which the great law of friendship lays on all who own its sway. The mother whose boy goes astray into evil and unworthy ways cannot give him up, even if she will. Though she does not share his sin in living the life he lives, she bears it in suffering by the divine power of sympathy for every indignity he heaps upon his own manhood. So, too, it is with the Eternal One who gave our spirits

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

being. He shirks no pang which our sins bring to Him. He feels every indignity which men have done to their possibilities of purity and truth in all ages. And when He became incarnate in Jesus the Christ, He had the power to escape the legions of Rome and the hatred of the Jews, but could not do it, for He was one with them in the great bond of undying love, of a friendship so great that it bore as no human friendship can bear, every sin and every sorrow of those He came to befriend. When He lived among men who were slaying their own best manhood by folly and sin, He bore the brunt of that folly and sin to the last dregs. The death of the cross proclaimed His fullest allegiance to the great law of reciprocity in friendship. There are bands stronger than bars of steel, more binding even than any human law, the ties of sympathy and affection, ties which make lives one in the great mystery of friendship. These bound the heart of God to the needs of men, and gave the world its cross of Calvary and its hope of eternal life. He suffered because they were suffering. He died because they were putting to death their own souls. He died that they might know His oneness with them

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

in the battle against their foes, and might have the surety of victory through Him. Surely we may well sing—

“What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear.”

But notice further. *The death of Christ was the measure of the depth of God's friendship for men.* “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

A little man, with stunted, selfish soul, has very limited capabilities for friendship. He has too narrow a range for much harmony with other souls. The number of things that attract is nearly always outnumbered by those that repel, and so his life is kept narrow and restricted. But the big, unselfish nature, the soul that is full of goodness and kindness, of sympathy and affection, finds something in common with himself in many men. Yet even to the greatest of the mere children of men it is hard to overcome the antipathies engendered by custom or by habit. The rich man finds it hard to get into touch with the poor, and the poor man finds it equally hard to sympathize with the rich and privileged classes to such an extent that they can be friends. The man of culture and

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

refinement is repelled by the roughness and lack of grace of the ignorant and the unlettered. The Briton carries all his old race prejudices into his relations with the Frank, or the Russian, or the German; the white races find it hard to be friends with the black, yellow or red men. But the heart of God is big enough and rich enough to find something of good, something akin to Himself, some capability of purity and beauty in the blackest and most unlovely savage, as well as in the favored child of homes of ease. Even before they have learned to know Him, while they are yet sinners, He is willing to pay the very highest penalty of friendship for their sake.

There is a sweet intercourse in a complete friendship which more than repays for all the sacrifices it costs. To see the eyes of some noble man or woman light up at sight of you, to catch the note of sympathy and affection in their voices, to hear their words of loving appreciation, is enough to urge one to loftier effort and more lavish sacrifice for them. Yea, for such a reward death itself has often been counted not too great a price. Paul says, "Peradventure for a good man, some would

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

even dare to die," and what might not the heart affection of countless generations of men mean to the great heart of love of the Divine? But there was no such response in the hearts of men. The story of the fall gives a true picture of the results of sin in estranging and degrading men. They repaid all His kindness with hatred and unworthiness; they defiled the temples in which He enshrined their souls by grossness and sin. But while they were yet sinners He befriended them even to the death. How deep and real and wonderful was such a friendship, a friendship which was willing to purchase responsive affection even at the price of death. It is of such a friendship we speak when we say "Christ died for me."

He who would win friends must show himself a friend, and we instinctively ask of those who seek our friendship, "What are you doing? What have you done to prove that your desire for my friendship is real?" God comes to you, He has been coming all your life, pleading for your friendship, and this is His right, this is the measure of His desire for your friendship, "Christ died for you." To-day the progress of science has

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

shown us that even nature speaks to our souls, wooing us back to God.

“So through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, ‘O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power, nor mayest conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee.’”

And though it speaks to the individual, it is broad enough and deep enough to cover all mankind.

What could sound a deeper depth of devotion and of love than just this, “I died for thee.” We proclaim our devotion to our friends, but when sacrifice and suffering is demanded for their sakes, how seldom do our professions prove their reality in deeds. Yet these lesser sacrifices are as nothing to the great gift of life. These bodies and these souls of ours are so wondrously bound together, the life that pulsates through our veins is so sweet and the possibility of happiness in our mortal lives so great, that “all that a man hath will he give in exchange for his life.” It is only when our bodies are worn out by suffering or old age that we gladly part with them in the knowledge that our disembodied spirits

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

return to the Father. And the higher and holier our spiritual life is, the greater is our enjoyment of this life with all its beauty and its wondrous possibilities. What must it have meant then to the sinless Christ? What must it have meant to look out of eyes undimmed by sin upon the beauty of hill and valley and plain, to see the lovelight in the eyes of those near and dear, with no pang of remorse for duty undone, or unkindness shown, or to look up into the starry heavens with no guilty conscience to mar the perfect fellowship with the God of Heaven? Yet He submitted to death because of the depth and reality of the friendship which He had for men. What a marvel of friendship that was which enabled Him to bear the cruel death of the cross for us. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends, but while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Who can measure the length and breadth and depth and height, and know that love that passeth knowledge?

But last and best of all, *the death of Christ, being the proof of the reality and the measure of the depth of God's friendship for us, becomes our assurance of salvation.*

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

What is salvation? It is not the mere acceptance of some set phrases, not one great act which is done in an instant. Salvation is as long and as great as life. It begins with a decision, but goes on for ever. The assurance of salvation is the assurance that the base and the vile in us is being overcome by the holy and the pure, and the sure knowledge that that process shall go on until life is complete and we stand face to face with God in the glory.

We lose much and bemuddle our thinking by trying to compress all our theology into phrases which had a meaning only to the partial revelation given to the Jews. We say, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin," and "We are saved by His blood." These two statements have in them a great truth, but standing alone they mean little or nothing to us. The blood of Jesus Christ, separated from the living, loving God, cannot and never did mean anything to a human soul. Those who wrote these words meant to tell us that the friendship of God was as vital and living for us as the red heart's blood of Jesus Christ, and it is that friendship which gives us assurance, not the blood as a power in itself.

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

Again we say, "We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son." And by a lot of artificial theology we cut ourselves off from heart contact with the living God. We picture Him as an angry Being needing to be appeased by some ghastly sacrifice, and we make Christ someone separate from God, stepping in to fill the breach and save us from this angry Being. But if we read the Bible as a whole, and not as detached fragments, we should read, too, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Whatever the cross of Christ meant it meant for God Himself. He was there, He suffered there, and no divorce between the cross of Christ and the heart-love of God will ever give us the meaning of either.

How, then, does assurance come? Just as it comes in our earthly friendships. A little child will quake with terror if thrust out alone into the darkness, but if it can take its father's hand it will go with him anywhere and dare anything which he will dare. A weak and discouraged man will rise to newness of hope and of courage if a true friend takes his hand and promises to stay by him, bearing his burdens and sharing his trials with Him.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Human friendship means so little to us because it is so often false, and even when true, fails by its own limitations where we need it most. But when the heart, realizing its own sin and unworthiness, sees that wonderful picture of friendship given to us in the words of our text, sees God proving His friendship up to the very death, and aroused by the sight casts itself upon that great friendship and tries what it can do, there comes out of each new day's experience an assurance which all the powers of earth and hell cannot shake, an assurance that the friend we are trusting is not only willing, but also abundantly able, to enter into our every experience, to give us the purity, the wisdom and the strength we need to make us more than victors over every foe. It is not the cross that saves us, not the Christ even, but the God who was in Christ, on the cross reconciling the world to Himself, for He ever lives to walk with us, to penetrate our very being with His presence, to be to us in all His fulness the tender, sympathetic friend which Jesus showed Him to be in His life and in His death.

God's undying friendship, God's unfailing

WHY CALL GOD OUR FRIEND?

presence, God's Omnipotent power, brought into living touch with our lives through Christ,—that is what saves, that is what gives assurance of ultimate victory. And when the soul wakes up to the awful crime of sin, and sees that it has meant enmity and opposition to One who so loved us, and in its despair knows not whither to turn, then this becomes its ground of hope, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." God is not our friend only while we are His friends, but when we were His enemies He did all that the dearest and best-loved friend could do for one he dearly loved. "Herein is love, not that we loved Him, but that He first loved us."

Roused and touched and softened by that vision and by the living presence of the spirit of God, the soul that casts itself on Him knows that He has forgotten and forgiven the past, and has taken it into that sweet and intimate relation of friendship. And there, despite our shortcomings and our unworthiness, if we abide in Him and seek to be like Him, that we may ever have fellowship with Him, Christ will day by day be formed in us, the hope of glory, and life will become one glad song of assurance and hope and joy, be-

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS



IV.

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS.

CONVERSION, JUSTIFICATION.

"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"
—*Amos iii. 3.*

THE desert, drear, barren, bleak, as it has always seemed to us, has been the world's greatest school of religion. Out of it have come the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. Where its bare hills sweep up against the sky-line each living thing stands out distinct and clear. Even its valleys and its wild, waste fields have no tangled jungle or wealth of leaf and stem to impede the vision or confuse the thought. It is a wide, clear stage, where each actor plays his part with no stage properties to heighten or to mar his work. Every least sound has its significance, every slightest movement is fraught with purpose, and is caught and

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

noted by the watchful eye of shepherd or of wandering Bedawee. Amid its inhospitable wastes Moses was trained to be the world's greatest prophet and lawgiver. To it Saul of Tarsus retired after his vision of the living Christ, to return to the world as Paul the apostle. The words of our text were spoken by a herdsman of Tekoa, who had seen life clearly and seen it whole, in the solitudes and the silences where he had watched his flocks and communed with his God.

In the busy scenes of our crowded lives, and amid the teeming multitudes that throng us every hour, it is possible to so fill the vision and occupy the thought that we may pass from the cradle to the grave without catching a single sane, full view of life as it really is. Only when we reproduce for ourselves something of the desert conditions, sinking out of sight everything but the eternal verities, are we ready to face the problems of life, death and eternity.

Two great facts in our soul-experience have been expressed by those who have gone before us in the words conversion and justification. If we are to go beneath the words to the truths they were intended to convey,

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

we must get as near as possible to the factors which gave rise to them.

In any religious problem there are only two factors that matter, God and man, and for our purpose one individual man may represent the race. Thus we have the same factors which Amos had when he asked his question, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" From a study of his question, from an insight into the relations of two individuals, will come the answer to our question, "What does friendship demand?" or, in the language of the schools, "What is justification?" "What is conversion?"

And first we shall be led to the conclusion that conversion is the surrender of man to friendship with God.

Two men alone out on the desert, with no sounds to divert their attention, with no other living thing in sight to engage their thoughts, into what intimate sympathy they must enter to make such close, unbroken contact endurable. It is hard, at such close quarters, far away from the gloss and conventionalities of life, to disguise one's real self. Every flash of eye, move of lip, turn of hand, shrug of body, is a revealer, and to try to hide a hateful or a sinister thought

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

is to arouse suspicion, to engender distrust, and to bring that solitary walk in the desert to an end. Nothing but the most implicit confidence can make one man trust his life in the keeping of another, far away from any human help, with no eye to witness what may happen. So, if two men are to walk together thus they must know each other, and know each other well.

If there has been estrangement in the past real fellowship cannot begin until that estrangement is healed. The man who has wronged the other will have all that is had in him roused and intensified a thousand-fold. A strange characteristic of human nature is always brought out when one man wrongs another. He who cherishes the bitterest feelings is not the man who has been wronged, but the one who has done the wrong. The reason is plain. Every time we wrong another we outrage our own sense of right, and conscience rises in its might to assert its dominance in the life. So long as we refuse to listen to that voice of conscience, our whole soul is disturbed, peace and harmony vanish, and remorse begins to gnaw at our heart-strings. The sight of him whom we have wronged only

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

serves to recall the wrong done, and to redouble the pleadings of conscience and the gnawings of remorse. To be compelled to walk with him alone, far away from any human being, in the dread silence of the desert, where conscience speaks with the voice of thunder, would be torture unbearable, and would rouse the whole being to a fury of antipathy against the wronged one.

On the other hand, he who has been wronged has no inward voice accusing him. Nothing can disturb the peace of our souls but our own acts. We may be wronged in property, wronged even in our bodies, but the only wrong which can touch our souls must be born within ourselves. No matter how deep our wrong may be, we need not—and, unless we are bad men, we do not—feel hatred against him who has done us wrong. Yet, no man, in justice to his own soul and the eternal right, can ever condone a wrong. We must not and cannot treat one who has wronged us as if that wrong had never been. We may not hate him—nay, we ought to love him, to pray for him, to seek his good in every way—but we cannot and must not throw open the doors of our soul to him, admitting him to the inner sanctity of our

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

lives in the hallowed relation of friendship. Estrangement, once begun, must of necessity by its very nature increase in depth and intensity where two are thrown constantly together, until even murder itself is the outcome, unless one thing happens, unless wronged and wrong-doer be agreed, unless the man who has done the wrong, knowing himself and his victim better, realizes the meaning of his action, and turns from it with regret and hatred for it. Then he is no longer the same man. He was the man who chose and clung to the wrong which he did, making it impossible for all the goodness of the wronged one to reach him. He is a new man, a man who is identified with the resolve to do all he can to right the wrong done. Now it is possible for the wronged man to open wide the doors of his heart and receive into the sanctity of his inner life him who is made new by sorrow for his wrong and his purpose to do right. Thus re-united the walk may go on, friendship may be resumed and deepened at every step of the journey, with even an added touch of sweetness, it sometimes seems, by the thoughtful desire of the wronged one to forget the old, bad past, and of the wrong-

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

doer to compensate in every way for his pitiful unworthiness.

Is this not a very simple, homely picture of what conversion is? What is sin but this estrangement between man and God, an estrangement which has gathered momentum and intensity with the passing of the centuries. The picture of the fall given in the first chapter of Genesis is true to the very letter to the facts of human experience. There you see God and man walking in the garden, communing as friend with friend. But man wrongs God, and fear, suspicion and distrust enter his once happy life. He no longer looks up with fearless confidence into the face of his Almighty Friend, but seeks to escape from His presence. As the days go by this fear and dislike increases, until at last he flies in terror from the garden, the lost paradise of perfect fellowship with the Divine. The angel with the flaming sword personifies his own terror-stricken conscience, driving him away from too close contact with the friend he has wronged. He could no longer walk with God, and live with Him face to face, for they were not agreed. Wrong had caused chaos and anarchy in his own soul, conscience

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

struggled to assert itself against the new powers of evil which had been enthroned, and remorse dug its vulture beak into his very vitals. The only way by which he could come back to friendship with the pure and holy One was to turn from the wrong he had put in God's place in his life and enthrone Him once again. So long as men went on in sin this estrangement became deeper and deeper, until at last they vented their hatred of God in the tragedy of the cross. They hated Him, not because He had wronged them, but because they had wronged Him. The more He loved them, the nearer He got to them, the more unhappy they became and the more intense their hatred grew, so long as they remained estranged. Our lives are so very complex that it is possible to obscure the real issues, but whenever men are brought face to face with God one of two things happens. Either their hatred for the Divine and all that speaks of Him is vastly intensified, or, overcome by the beauty of His character and the vision of His marvellous love, they renounce their past and turn in heartfelt surrender to Him. By the marvellous healing and uplifting power of His friendship, He takes them

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

into the very secret of His presence, forgetting and forgiving the past, and bending all His omnipotence of love and power to draw them back into that perfect blending of natures without which no friendship is real.

This is what we mean by conversion. It is the same in kind as the turning of a man to the friend he has wronged, and it makes him who turns from that time a new man. Though it seems so simple, it is the most tragic of human experiences. There is a blood-red intensity about our lives which makes such a change a veritable miracle. We are so constituted that we back up our past with all the power of our manhood. To cast out from our lives what we have once made ours is like cutting off a limb or plucking out an eye. It is in a very real sense tearing out and casting from us a part of our very selves. And it takes some tragic and tremendous thing to rouse us to such heroic measures. How often we have seen two men reconciled over the dead body of a common friend. How often has a young man whose neglect and cruelty has brought a mother to an untimely tomb, sobered by the awfulness of the deed he has done, given way to uncontrollable grief, and in that

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

grief has renounced forever the past that has brought such dire results. The cross is the ever-living tragedy of estrangement between God and man. To see what it means is to be compelled to cry out, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner"; to turn with loathing from the course of ever-deepening estrangement from God, and, surrendering wholly to His will, to seek for ever-increasing oneness with Him.

Paul says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." And we truly follow Paul when we say that to thus believe is to be converted. But when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe that in all He was and did He was God. We believe that every red drop of blood that trickled from His hands and His feet, from His head and His side, measured the intensity and the reality of God's love to us. We believe that our estrangement from God, deepening into hatred, nailed Him to that cruel tree, and crowned His head with piercing thorns. Sobered by the horror of the thing we have been making our own, we turn our eyes upon that spectacle of God's faithfulness to us, and overcome by the vision, surrender to

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

Him, giving up the past and laying hold on the full, sweet life of unbroken fellowship with our never-changing, ever-loving Friend. It is a new life. Old things are passed away. All things are made new, and the soul, out of the fulness of its joy, prays and sings as it prays :

“O Love Divine, how sweet thou art !
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up by thee ?
I thirst, I faint, I die to prove
The greatness of redeeming love,
The love of God to me.”

But this simple analogy suggested by *the question of our text carries us still farther and shows what justification is.*

It is just God's acceptance of the soul which surrenders to Him into friendship with Himself, with all that implies of peace and joy. So long as we did not realize the meaning of our own natures and see what was implied in our relations with other persons, we must needs express these relations in simple and partial ways. So our estrangement from God is often in the Bible compared to a crime, for which we are brought before God as judge. The work of Christ

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

is then to bear our punishment, so that the judge may acquit us, for His sake. When acquitted we are said to be justified. This is a beautiful thought, and countless souls have thus been able to come into living fellowship with God and to rejoice in singing—

“Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe,
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.”

But the conception is an imperfect one, and is full of difficulties to a thoughtful mind. If man is only a criminal, and is related to God as any criminal is related to his judge, where is the need of the atonement and all that tragic history that groups about the cross. If God is the judge, and He wants to pardon the criminal, why does He not do it at once? Many attempts have been made to answer these questions, but all have failed, because the conception itself does not do full justice to what we now know of ourselves and God. Sin is not merely a breach of law, a crime against a code, it is personal wrong done to a personal Being. And that Being cannot and must not receive the sinner into the inner sanctuary of His own life

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

until he has turned from his sin and sought forgiveness. "'Gainst thee, thee only, have I sinned," has been the heart confession of every soul awakened to the meaning of its sin.

Religion is just that close, intimate walk with God which Amos had in his eye when he asked his question, and that walk cannot go on so long as man clings to his sin. But the moment he realizes its nature and turns from it, with sorrow for the pain he has given his Friend, and a longing desire to atone for that wrong in the future, then he finds that atonement has been made already, that the love of God, manifested in the cross of Calvary, is so great that He forgets all about the past and throws around the sinner His own great arms of love to lift him out of the habits and the weaknesses of the old life and to clothe him with the very righteousness of Christ. This is justification, and it is an intensely personal thing. It takes place once for all when a sinner turns to his God, but how often does it need to be repeated in the wayward life of the foolish children of men?

We have to do not with a dead code, not with a judge bound down by that code, but

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

with the living heart of a loving God, and so long as we long to company with Him, His love is great enough and His patience is strong enough to bring us again and again back to that full intercourse with Him, which our folly or our ignorance has interrupted. O what a marvellous thing it all is! What a friend God has shown Himself to be!

When we wrong our earthly friends, they expect us to restore the things we have taken from them, to make up to them for the loss they have sustained through us, but there is nothing we can give back to God for all we have robbed Him of, nothing we can give Him for the loss of glory and honor, of affection and joy He has suffered through us. But when we come to Him longing to be taken back into His confidence, how graciously He receives us. When we mourn because there is nothing we can give to Him, He turns back to Calvary, and says to us: "The very thing that brought you here was my love, my longing to win you back to myself. See what I did to show that love. I was in Christ on the cruel cross, doing all that for you and men like you. By His blood you are saved from yourself and brought

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

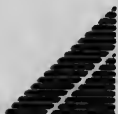
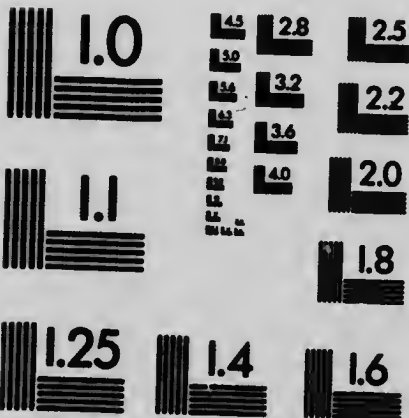
back to me. What more need you do to please me? The greatest pleasure you can give me is to let me lavish my love on you, to let me fill your life with my life, to find your life in friendship with me, and let me abide evermore within you." And this is justification. Paul says, "We are justified by faith," and by faith he means just this surrender of self to God which makes it possible for Him to be our friend in all that sweet intimacy which alone gives life its charm.

Let no dead creed, let no machinery of courts come between you and this simple, all-embracing fact. If you are justified you are agreed with God, and you know it in every fibre of your being. Can two walk together except they be agreed? No! a thousand times no! and unless you are agreed with God in His nature and His purposes, all your talk about religion and its experiences is an empty sham. Let nothing deceive you. God is here, God is everywhere, and unless His Spirit is your spirit, unless His will is your will you are not converted, you are not justified, you are not agreed with Him, you cannot be admitted into the sacred intimacy of His friendship. I would that I might



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RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

bring home this great thought in all its intensity to every soul. To-day, as never before, we need to have this clear, clean-cut vision of the prophet Amos; we need to see that the only two factors that matter in life are God and our own souls, and unless we are agreed with God, we cannot walk with Him, we cannot have eternal life.

There are two great regions in our modern life which religion has scarcely touched as yet, business and what we call society. Both of these are frankly, brutally pagan in many of their ideals and their practices. Now either of two things is true. Either the business world and society belong to the devil or they belong to God. If they belong to the powers of evil, then no man can be a Christian and have anything to do with either of them. You cannot walk with God and walk with the devil at the same time. You cannot be agreed with God and be agreed with the Evil One at one and the same moment. But if business and society are realms which God wants for His own, then we must take Him with us into business and into society. We must walk with Him into every place we go,

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

and we must do nothing which Christ the God-man would not do if He were here to-day.

I believe that business is the arena where more than any place else in the world, not even excepting the Church, a man is called to be a religious man, to think and to act under the guidance of God's spirit. If every man connected with our churches were thus agreed in all things with God, what a different story we would have to tell about the business world. If a man is really converted, is really justified, his business methods are converted too, and he would rather lose everything he has than dishonor or grieve the Friend who abides, not with him, but in him.

And I believe that society, the intercourse of men and women of wealth and leisure, was meant of God to be a great power for spiritual uplift and for social betterment. But is it so? Is it not true to-day that the more men and women have to do with society the less they want to have to do with God and His Church? Is it not true that when we want missionaries, or preachers of the Gospel, or men who will deny themselves for the sake of God and their fellow-men in

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

any sphere of life, we look in vain to society to furnish them? Is it not a pitiful sight to see all enthusiasm for the Church and for God die out as soon as men and women begin to be interested in society and its doings? What is the reason? Just this. Men forget that to be a Christian is to walk with God, to take Him with them wherever they go, to do nothing He would not do, to cherish no spirit He would not cherish, and to find their highest joy in the things he loves. We cannot please God and the Evil One at the same time, and when we allow our ideals to be set for us by men and women who know not God and care naught for Him, we part company there and then with our dearest Friend, with the God who has done so much for us.

“The Lord thy God is a jealous God.” He will have no rival in your heart’s affection for Him. He must have all your heart and all your life, or nothing. His friends must be your friends, His ideals your ideals, His very nature must become your nature, or you and He cannot be agreed, you and He cannot walk together, you cannot know everlasting life, but must take the

WHAT FRIENDSHIP DEMANDS

things you have chosen in His place, and with them eternal death.

What does friendship demand? It demands everything. But it gives everything in return. If you are converted, if you are justified, you are rich beyond your wildest dreams, for "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and you are Christ's and Christ is God's."

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THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP



V.

THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP.

SANCTIFICATION.

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”—*2 Cor. iii. 18.*

OR better, “We all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.”

The greatest question which the human heart can ask is, “How can I become a better man?” For the man who has not known the transforming power of the love of God, we answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Surrender wholly to the wondrous saving power of that love which went to the cross for you, and it will redeem you from all your

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

evil past and give you a new start in a life of love and purity.

But when that has been done, what then? It would seem the most natural and easy thing in the world that the life thus begun should go on to the loftiest heights of fellowship and of service. Yet the story of our lives and the experience of our churches show that the greatest need of our time is a clearer conception of what is needed for a continued growth in the Christian life. We have so many short cuts to holiness, so many cure-all prescriptions for spiritual ills, we are so content to fritter away our time and our energies in these imperfect or false ways, that for the real business of a Christian life no time is left. Holiness conferences, vast evangelistic campaigns, short and easy devotional literature, all are eagerly sought after, and all alike have shown their comparative worthlessness. Our churches are weak and inefficient, and our lives are poor illustrations of the character of the Christian, because we have been seeking for a short and easy method where there is no such method. The Christian religion is God's method of making character, and character is the hard-won product of a

THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

life of deadly earnestness. It is not a something added to life. It is life itself, woven into the very warp and woof of all we think and feel and do. There is no magic formula for the achievement of righteousness, no sect or school of men who hold the key to the mystery; it is free to all and the simplest child is as able to find and follow it as the greatest sage. The very simplicity of the way of holiness, and the childlike spirit which it demands, have become a stumbling block to many. Only the man who is willing to give up his own hobbies and to face the far-reaching consequences of an entire revolution in character and in habit can ever reach the heights of consecration to which God has called us.

Paul the Pharisee, proud of his Jewish lineage, proud of his education, proud even of his character, found the way to a beauty and strength of nature that made him the Apostle to the Gentiles, and one of the world's greatest teachers and examples of holiness. It was a hard struggle to give up all that had filled his life, but the vision of the Christ changed all that, and Saul, the hard, imperious Pharisee, became the writer of that wonderful psalm of love, the thir-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

teenth chapter of 1st Corinthians and the stern persecutor became the gentle, kindly, old man, who could speak of himself as "such an one as Paul the aged." How did it all happen? What was the secret of the change? We have this answer in our text.

And first it is this, "*We are changed.*" *In friendship with God a continuous change is unconsciously wrought within us.*

Paul compares our soul to a mirror which reflects all that is thrown upon it. There is a trite and commonplace expression of the same thought, "A man is known by the company he keeps." We keep company in our life with more than men and women. The thoughts we think, the ideals we cherish, the books we read, the sights we see, the deeds we do, all these are the company of our souls and they are mirrored in the soul of the man who has the eye to see and the sense to read what he sees. When we look into the faces of those about us, we read not alone their present state, but the story of their lives. How quickly we detect whether a man comes from Scotland, England or Ireland. Each country's peculiarity of language and expression has been mirrored in his soul and is reflected

THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

there for us. A Frenchman may speak English with perfect intonation, but some shrug of shoulder, or flash of eye, or turn of hand will betray his nativity. So, too, the life story of men comes out in their faces and their lives. The drunkard very soon reflects his muddled soul in the lines of his face. Vileness looks out of the eyes of the libertine and the true man has an unseen architect ever carving lines of beauty and of power in his countenance in response to each noble thing that dwells within his soul. No amount of face make-up can hide an ugly nature, but the commonest face may glow with an indescribable beauty if it reveals a truly noble soul.

All this is true, because our souls are mirrors and something more. They are sensitive plates, marvellously susceptible to the smallest influences that play upon them. "God shall bring every idle thought into judgment" seems like a hard saying, but it is profoundly true, for the judgment is written at the very moment, in face and form and feature. When our Lord would fit a group of men for the great task of founding His kingdom on the earth, He said to them, "Follow Me." Years after even

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

their enemies said, "They have been with Jesus." How did they know? Because they reflected the glory of Jesus. What does the glory of Jesus or the glory of God mean? Turn up your Bible dictionary and there you find that one of its commonest and greatest meanings is just what we call character. They reflected the character of Jesus because in friendship with Him that character had slowly wrought itself into their souls and they were not now as in those early days, for the very character of Jesus, caught and held by that wondrous absorptive power of the soul, was written in every line of their faces, in every movement of their bodies.

Yet there was in that little company one man who had been with Jesus through all those years, a man who went and hanged himself, a man whose face has come down the centuries as a very nightmare of baseness and despair. What made the difference? The others beheld Jesus with unveiled face. He looked at Him through a thick veil of false ambition, of grasping greed, of overweening pride, and went away and sold Him for thirty pieces of silver. Poor, poor Judas! what an opportunity he

THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

had, and how dreadfully he failed! He would not let the blessed character of Jesus play, like sweetening, life-giving sunshine, upon his soul unless it came to him in the line of his ambition for power and wealth and earthly grandeur, and the Evil One claimed him for his own. How deadly serious life is when out of the very company of the disciples, from the very presence of the Son of God, a man lost his immortal soul.

To catch and keep the character of Christ demands a spirit which looks up into His face with no preconceived notions of what He should look like, and no hard and fast lines along which He may come to us. "God moves in a mysterious way," and nowhere more mysteriously than in this wondrous process of character-building. He says to our hearts, "Be still and know that I am God." And in the stillness and the awe which His presence breeds within our souls we see Him face to face and are transformed into His image. If theology and dogma and creeds lead us to Christ they are good, but if they become a veil to hide His face from us they are the deadly enemies of our souls. Only in the open vision of His

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

glorious countenance, only in the secret of His presence is our soul laid bare for the wonderful alchemy of influence to do its work. As the plant opens its leaves to the light, and through a thousand open doors the life and light pour in, transforming the leaf into ever fuller perfection, so is it with the soul. In His presence the light of His countenance streams upon the sensitive plate of our souls and stamps there forever the continually deepening and brightening impress of the character of Jesus. The photographer only needs to expose the sensitive plate to the sun and it stamps the image there. To try to see how fast it is growing or how it grows is only to stop the process. And in the great process of absorbing Christ-like character to be continually worrying about our growth is to stop the growing. Only as we submit wholly to the blessed vision does He imprint His own gracious character upon our souls.

It requires infinite faith to thus leave ourselves in God's hands and continue day by day just patiently and adoringly looking into the face of Jesus, and being made by that vision into His likeness. The change does not take place in a day, nor in a year.

THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

Nor can it be otherwise. A mushroom matures in a single night, but an oak takes centuries to come to a perfect growth. An ape looks after itself a few hours after its birth, but a child is dependent upon its parents for many years. The higher a thing is in the scale of being, the longer it takes to mature. Greater than any other product of the Divine working is character, and shall we grudge the time He takes to work His will in us?

Too much of our so-called church life and Christian activity is an attempt to foster by artificial means that which can only come from God. Anything which turns our eyes from the ever-present vision of the Christ, no matter what its name or how much attention it claims, is a hindrance to growth in likeness to Christ. The gospels give us that wondrous picture of the life and death of Jesus, and the epistles interpret for us what that life meant to those who saw it. They show us that Calvary, instead of terminating, really began its influence and power. He Himself has promised His continued presence with us in the sacred relation of friendship. That promise is being fulfilled this moment. He is

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

here now in a beauty and glory far transcending that which met the loving gaze of His disciples. Just to behold Him, just to look in fond adoration up into His face, just to sit at His feet and let Him look upon us and speak to us, that is to be sanctified, that is to be transformed into His image.

It is a strange, mysterious thing, and yet we see it every day about us. We see it where two human souls are bound together by real love or friendship. Each becomes like the other, until, as the years go by, the one expresses the very thoughts of the other before they can find utterance in words. If the soul takes on the character of the men and women whom it beholds with open face, how much more will the rapturous vision of the peerless man Christ Jesus transform us into the same image, from character to character. Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, after years of service, had his life revolutionized by the sudden realization of the fact that Jesus is alive again and lives in and with us. And thousands of others rejoice in the same great fact to-day. Character is contagious. It stamps itself wherever there is a receptive soul, wherever the unveiled face is turned toward its radiant glory. And in the won-

THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

derful mystery of friendship with the living, present Christ it is possible so to take on His nature that gradually the very thoughts and intents of our hearts are prompted by Him, and we can truly say with Paul, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

While it is true that we are changed, it must never be forgotten that *we have a part to play in that change.*

Viewed from one side, sanctification is all of God, but viewed from the other side it is equally all of man. In the growth of our bodies, while no man can add a cubit to his stature, it is equally true that no man can grow unless he partakes of food and fulfils the laws of growth. No man can make the grass grow, but unless he prepares the soil and casts in the seed, there will be no growth. The Bible insists that salvation is of God, yet it equally insists that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Just here is the crux of the whole problem. What can we do, what ought we to do, to become better and truer than we are now? Remembering that religion is friendship with God, our text indicates the two things which we can and must do, if we are to realize in ourselves the glorious character of the Christ.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

And first, we must take away the veils from before our faces.

No matter how thin a veil you hang over your face, it impedes the action of the light, it mars your vision. What frightful caricatures of God men have seen through the veils they wore in the past. The monks of the Inquisition said they did their deeds of blood in obedience to His leading; the Covenanters were shot down like dogs by men who claimed to be acting for God. And have we quite freed ourselves from these veils which caricature the Divine? How can we account for the bitter animosities, the harsh judgments, the repulsive unkindness of many so-called Christian lives, unless it be that they see the loving, tender, sympathetic face of the Christ of God through a veil which distorts it to the kind of thing they themselves are.

The most persistent and most difficult of these veils to detect and discard is that of ignorance. The world has been slowly taught and trained by the Divine to ever fuller and truer views of truth and of God, but only He who is in touch by careful study with the experience of all the ages is able to estimate aright the things that come

THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

to him in his daily life. All men cannot spend their lives in this work of training the mind that it may be freed from the distortion of ignorance, but the great Church to which we belong owes much of her marvellous influence upon the world to the fact that she has always insisted upon the highest scholarship in the men who are to be her leaders in thought. So, though we cannot all be scholars, we can avail ourselves of the results of scholarship, we can correct our own distorted views and remove the veil of ignorance from our own eyes by the results of the labors of others. For while God teaches us by His Holy Spirit, that Spirit uses the reason, the intellect and the imagination which He has given us to reveal Himself to us. The man who refuses to avail Himself of the results of such training wilfully retains a veil over His eyes; he sees the truth in a false and distorted manner, and can never attain to the perfect vision of the Christ which alone transforms and sanctifies the life. Worst of all, the very presence of that veil makes him oblivious to his own faults, yet keenly alive to all the faults of others, faults too often born of his own distorted vision.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Knowledge is power in every walk of life, and nowhere is it so great a power as in the realm of the highest truth, the very presence of the glory of God. Ignorance is weakness, and nowhere is it so deadly as when coupled with the possession and use of the mere phraseology of Scripture. He who would see Christ clearly must seek to rid his vision in every God-given way of the blurring veil of ignorance. The best of human science, the best of human literature, the highest of human art, is none too great or none too good for the man who would attain to the full perfection of sainthood. To glorify ignorance is to stultify our own manhood and dishonor God. We honor the Holy Spirit only when we use in His service every talent and every endowment He has given us.

Not is ignorance the only veil which obscures our vision and hinders our full sanctification. We need each of us to be ever on our guard against prejudice and pride and every careless folly. We need constantly to be in touch with the fullest wisdom of the ages, to measure up our standards with the standards of the best and highest experience of men, to be sure that

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THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

we are not being led astray and given a false or distorted image of the Christ, for if we do not see Him as He is, how can we take on His blessed image?

But there is a second thing which we can do in working out our own salvation. "Beholding" is an active verb. We must keep on beholding Christ.

It is a law of psychology that no two things can occupy the whole thought at the same time. If we are to see Christ so that He may mean anything to us, we must fill our vision with Him. But we cannot think of Christ if we are overpowered by the image of some selfish indulgence. That for the time fills our vision and imprints itself upon our souls. Paul knew what this meant, and says, "I buffet my body," that is, he disciplined his physical nature, so that its passions might not fill his imagination and exclude the sanctifying vision of the Christ.

There is a strange property of colors which illustrates this thought. If you take a large red surface and insert in its centre a little disk of green, its complementary color, you may fasten your attention upon the disk of green, and still remain fully conscious of the red about it. Or if you insert a pure white

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

disk at the centre, and look steadily at the whole surface, the white disk will assume a green tint, in sympathy with the red around it; but insert the smallest disk of an antagonistic color, and at once your attention is either rivetted on it or upon the red about it; you cannot be fully conscious of them both at once. So it is in the Christian experience. If our gaze is filled with the Christ, we can take into the very centre of that vision of the Christ, whatever is like Him, and it gains added glory by the vision that surrounds it, or we can take in what is morally indifferent, and it will be sanctified by contact with Him, but the moment we allow our gaze to rest with approval upon anything which is antagonistic to His Spirit, that moment the vision ceases, Christ fades out of our gaze, and we see only the thing we have put in His place. The common tasks He has assigned us, the little deeds of kindness and love, the work of life in church and state, whatever is beautiful and pure and good, this may come into our lives and be irradiated and beautified by the vision of the Christ, yea, may become a part of the vision, which is slowly shaping our lives into His image. Every beautiful work

THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

of art, every noble bit of poetry, everything in life that is lovely or of good report, is a part of His revelation of Himself to us?

“The Lord is in His holy place—
 In all things, near and far ;
 Shekinah of the snowflake He,
 And glory of the star,
 And secret of the April land
 That stirs the field to flowers,
 Whose little tabernacles rise
 To hold Him through the hours.

“He hides Himself within the love
 Of those that we love best ;
 The smiles and tones that make our homes
 Are shrines by Him possessed.”

But it is by no effortless dreaming that the mind is filled with the beautiful and the good. If, on the one hand, the progress of the soul in holiness is a sweet passivity, a thing of still and sacred adoration, on the other hand it is an intense activity, a thing of agonizing effort, of prayers and tears. Passion is so intense, sin is so deadly, habit's chain is so strong, that it demands all the intensity of our being to keep the veil off the face and the mirror bright from every sully-ing breath. The artist who would get a perfect picture must have his lenses focussed

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

and his whole instrument in perfect adjustment, and the soul that would get a true vision of the Christ must be adjusted by self-knowledge and self-discipline, by hard earnest study of God's word, and heartfelt prayer, to each successive day's vision of the Christ. Every new day in the sanctified life reaches a higher plane than the last, and each new height requires a new adjustment. We need to give constant heed to our Saviour's own command, "Watch and pray." Watch that no carelessness of your life, no false pride or foolish sentiment, has turned the mirror of your soul upon the things of earth, upon anything lower and less holy than the very face of Christ Himself, and pray for strength to ever centre all your soul on Him. "This one thing do," must be the watchword of all who would see the King in His beauty, who would be transformed into His image. "Keep my soul focussed on the vision of the Christ."

But mystic adoration and agonizing struggle are fused into a higher unity in the sacred flame that burns on the altar of friendship.

There is a place where "I" and "thou"

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THE GROWTH OF FRIENDSHIP

are lost in "we," where "mine" and "thine" vanish to give place to "ours." All that we have and are belongs to those we love, and all that they have and are is ours. So when the soul finds rest in God, all that He has and is, is ours, and all that we have and are, are His. While it is true that we must yearn and agonize and struggle, we have the blessed assurance that in all our struggles He is present, in all our trials He is tried, in all our efforts after righteousness His Spirit is with us and in us, to give us the victory.

See that long train of cars, standing on the siding. The engine pants and strains, but the train stands still, till the engineer throws open the valve, when the great burden speeds on its way. It was a little thing he did, yet without it the train could never have been moved. In the Christian life "whosoever will" is the lever, and the power is the omnipotence of God. Whenever we earnestly desire to be like Him, to continue with open face to gaze upon the Christ, He turns on all the resources of Divinity in obedience to our will, giving us the victory over habit and weakness, over vice and sin. He works through us and in us, linking His own

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

omnipotence of love and power to our weakness and our imperfection. Who can despair with such a Friend! O the riches of the friendship of God, that personal Presence that sees our faintest longings before we can shape them in words, that responds to the weakest throbbings of our hearts after righteousness and true holiness, and becomes wholly one with us in our upward movement towards the Christ.

Every new impression of the Christ we receive upon our souls fits for closer communion and dearer sympathy with Him, and that communion opens our eyes to ever fuller beauties yet to be realized in us. It is a daily growth from character to character, and as we grow we rise to ever truer fellowship with the Friend that is being made one with us. Whatever hinders this perfect blending of spirit with spirit, this perfect union of man and God, must be taken away, and oftentimes He takes from us the things that rend our very hearts, because He loves us so, and wants to be everything to us, that we may respond with an ever fuller love. Our earthly friends make mistakes, but He cannot err. Thus trusting Him, thus conscious ever of His presence, thus resting in

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RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

His might, friendship grows, and by its sacred power we are daily changed, until at last we are wholly one with Him.

The image of Christ that is forming within us, the friendship with Christ it is making possible, that is life's one great charge. All else must stand aside, all else to this is nothing. Is the infinite task begun in us? If not, when and how are we to be different? Struggle will not change us, life will not change us, death itself will not change us in this way. Only Christ can change us, wherefore make Christ your friend, and do it now. Then, as sure as the day succeeds the dawn, as sure as the seasons roll, as sure as God's great purposes are sure, you will be transformed into His image, from character to character, into the perfect man.

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S
FRIENDSHIP



VI.

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP.

ELECTION AND FOREORDINATION.

"Before Abraham was I am."—*John viii. 58.*

THIS was a stupendous statement for any man to make. The Jews prided themselves on their ancestry. Abraham was to them the very acme of perfection in faith and conduct. Descent from him was enough to fill them with intolerant pride. For this young Nazarene to hint that He was greater than Abraham was the worst of sacrilege. But that there might be no mistaking his claims, He says, "Before Abraham was, I am." He owns to the full the greatness of Abraham. But if he was great, who long centuries ago vanished from the earth and now lived here only as a memory in the hearts of his descendants, what must one be who was before Abraham, and now stands

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

speaking to them. Little wonder they opened their eyes wide at the seeming madness of Jesus.

But history has shown us that His words were profoundly true, for in that meek and lowly Man of Nazareth we recognize the Christ of God. In Him there is but one tense, the unchanging present, the everlasting now. How easy it is to repeat these words, but how hard to realize what they mean for comfort and for salvation. Science tells us that the nearest fixed star is so far away that light takes four and one-quarter years to reach us from it, and that there are stars in our system whose light reaches us only after a lapse of three thousand years. If we could imagine one stationed at the nearest star, who could see what transpires on our earth, he would just now be seeing what happened four and one-quarter years ago, while if he were on the farthest star, he would just be finding out what happened on our earth three thousand years ago, or almost a thousand years before these words were spoken by our Lord. We believe that our Lord is present everywhere, and from this fact of science it is plain that to His all-embracing consciousness all the history

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

of our race is forever present. For Him there is no here nor there, for He is everywhere; no past nor present, for He is eternal.

See what this means for us to-day. Our fathers, grasping something of the significance of this unceasing presence of our Lord at the heart of human life and human history, expressed it in the great doctrine of election. That doctrine, though often caricatured and often abused, has been a tower of strength to all who have seen its real significance. At the core of it, as the secret of its power, is the thought of our text.

And first, notice that *our friendship with God began with Him, not with us.*

The Jews, looking down the centuries, were proud of the story of Abraham, proud that he was called the friend of God, yet forgot that the basis of that friendship was God's condescending grace to Abraham. Before Abraham came into being, God was there, shaping the forces and moulding the lives which at last culminated in his life. Before him countless men had lived their lives and done their tasks upon the earth, and in the midst of these crowded scenes God had

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

moved, His Spirit had controlled, His wisdom had guided all.

Abraham's life began, his career was wrought out, not in a new world which he himself must create, but in a world and amid an environment created for him by the wisdom and the guidance of God. When he came by faith to know and see God, he gave all the honor for what he was to the Divine Friend, who had been before him and was now revealing Himself to his soul. Humbled by this thought, and committing himself to the wisdom of the All Wise One, Abraham became great by the greatness of his Divine Friend.

The very fact that his descendants prided themselves on being his children, yet failed to recognize Christ, who had made him great, showed the hollowness of their religion and the blindness of their spirits. Abraham filled their gaze, his greatness was the thing which appealed to them. To their thought it was almost as if he had honored God by choosing Him as he did. Yet, if they had had his spirit, they would have known how his heart thrilled with love at the mere thought of being permitted this close, intimate fellowship with the Divine.

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

He was willing to make any sacrifice, to endure any hardship, that he might show his gratitude for all God's goodness to him. He left his own home, the dear, familiar scenes of his youth, to obey the will of God, to be better able to have fellowship with Him. Through all his life he was content to be a wanderer, without a country and without a home, that God's purposes might be wrought out in him. It was such a marvel to his adoring heart that the constant refrain of his prayers was, "Lord, if I have found favor in thy sight." Abraham was the friend of God, and just because of that friendship he was filled with wonder that he had been permitted that sacred intimacy with One who day by day was seen to be more and more glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, and wonderful in His works. At the very heart of friendship is reverence, is adoring wonder. In the simplest human spirit there is something inexpressibly great and mysterious, something which the eye of friendship and of love alone can see. And when that friendship links our spirit to the eternal God, He who was before time was, in whom dwells all power and glory, all that makes the universe great and beautiful and

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

true, how our hearts thrill with the wonder of it, and how we long to show our gratitude for all that He has permitted us to be and to know in this heart-contact with Himself. Abraham felt this, and his whole life was an ever-increasing sacrifice of faith and trust in God, so that he has come down to us as "the father of the faithful." His relation to God was a call to duty, an inspiration to joyous service. So it is ever. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," is God's word to every man who has accepted Him as his friend. "Herein is love, not that we loved Him, but that He first loved us," is the joyous confession of every faithful heart.

Giving our hearts to Him, we discover that the very impulse to that self-surrender came from Him, not from us; that long, long years before we were born He was shaping the life and forming the characters of men and women to co-operate with Him in the great mystery of parentage; yes, from the day when the first pair were created by His sovereign power He was there using every opportunity, swaying every impulse of the souls that would yield to Him, to make us what we are. "Before Abraham was, I

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

am," means that your life is not measured by the few years you have spent on earth, but by the age of the race. Your life is one with the lives of all the men and women who have ever lived, and has been presided over, has been shaped and controlled by the ever-present friend, Jesus Christ, our incarnate Lord. The very impulse to seek Him, while it seems the product of a moment, is the ripe fruition of the struggles and the victories of men and women back to the first pair who tasted the mystery of life and death in the dim dawns of human history.

How dreadful, then, is an impulse to turn to God! It is not a fleeting, passing thing, here this moment and away the next. It is the product of the anxious thought and the age-long love of the friend of our souls, God Himself. To trifle with it is to commit the most deadly sacrilege; to resist it is to fight against God, to crucify afresh the Christ who died to make that impulse possible in you, to give it ripe fruition in a surrendered will and a purified life. With an eternal foresight He has been fashioning our wills, and when we come to ourselves, He puts that beautiful product of His thought, His care and His love into our hands with the

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

perilous gift of freedom. To make it easy for us to use it aright, He surrounds us with all the sweet and sacred relations that can mediate His nature to our souls. He woos us with the wonder of His love, recalling to us Calvary and Gethsemane, and all that miracle of devotion to the children of men. He gives us the omnipotence of heaven to make our weak wills victorious over the dread inertia of sin and age-old habit. It is the tragic element of life, this freedom of our wills, but the hope of the race is the word of Jesus, spoken with the unbroken serenity of the all-wise and all-powerful God, "Before Abraham was, I am." Where He is, nothing good can ever be lost, nothing evil can ever finally triumph. Nor does His presence in the life of men make us mere machines, controlled for good or ill by a power without ourselves. Rather does it assure to human freedom the triumph of its own exercise by giving us the power to achieve the goal we have chosen! How good, how beautiful is life, born of the age-long power and purpose of Almighty God, wooed back to Him by all that depth of love that speaks from out the cross, and reinforced in every upward

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

impulse toward the pure and good by His omnipotence. Where is the room for foolish pride or idle boasting, when all that we have and are of goodness, truth or greatness is thus a gift of God's love, into which we are born anew when we take Him for our all?

Who can measure a love like that, a love that in all the checkered centuries of man's sin-marred career has never faltered for a moment? To resist it is to tear out the very roots of our nature, roots deep sunk in the hoary past. To yield to it is to thrill in every fibre of our being with the joy of discovery; is to find ourselves, to know that we are not fleeting shadows, blown about by every breath of time and sense, but are part of that long chain of human life that began with our first parents, and will only end when the perfect man has been realized, a chain which God Himself has made as good and noble and great as the folly and the sin of men would permit His love to make it. That love made Abraham great, and it can give to the meanest life an unearthly beauty, a glory like His own. Surely it was almost a touch of inspiration that led our fathers to put at the forefront of our Catechism,

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” For to glorify God, to yield to His love, is to enter into the fulness of life, to taste the real joy of living, a joy unspeakable, that lasts forever, and grows with the growth of life.

But notice, further, our text brings us the assurance that *nothing in life happens by chance*.

“Before Abraham was, I am” is the unruffled declaration of One to whom nothing can be a surprise. We know so little of the great mystery of life that we are continually being confronted by new problems, continually doing things in the wrong way, only learning a little of the meaning of it all when life’s day is done, its opportunities ended. But think of what it would mean, if even we could have lived and seen life from the dawn of human history.

We live by days, and we measure all things by the standards of a day. But how differently all things must appear to one who has seen them for ages. And when that experience is joined to omniscient foresight, how clearly the issues of life are defined. God admits us to friendship with Himself that we may come to see life as He sees it.

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

No man out of his own little human experience can know the meaning of life, but in the secret of His presence, in the intimacy of His friendship, He teaches us to look on life through His eyes. He said to the Jews in this same interview, "I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness," and to those who are His friends He gives the light of His wisdom, the benefit of His age-long experience with the hearts and lives of men. If we only remember this, how much of the mystery of life begins to be explained. The hearts of righteous men have often been troubled by the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the good. They have even questioned the wisdom and love of the God who could let these things be. If this life is all, if the words of Jesus are the idle words of a dreamer of dreams, then life is a horrid nightmare, an unmeaning round of purposeless, meaningless movements hither and thither, coming from whence we know not, and going we know not whither. But if Christ's words are true, as every fibre of our being rejoices to know they are, then these questions are not unanswerable and faith is justified by the results of life.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

We can read the lessons of history better than those of life, and to history let us go. It seemed a dreadful thing to the Children of Israel that Pharaoh should oppress them and seek their destruction, but out of that very oppression they learned the lesson of their need of God. Casting themselves wholly upon Him, they found even the wrath of Pharaoh and his cruel purposes made to praise God and bless them. It seemed a hard thing for the Covenanters of Scotland to be hunted upon the hills like wild beasts, but in those hours of peril God was with them, raising them to heights of holiness and influence upon their fellow-men which they could have won in no other way. They and their persecutors are alike turned to dust, but their memory lives as an inspiration in our lives, their spirits rejoice in the full glory of the presence of God. Who would not die a martyr to win a martyr's influence, to wear a martyr's crown? But where are the men who lived at ease and wreaked their cruel purposes upon these servants of God? Their very dust is trodden under foot, their memory forgotten, or only recalled as a thing of shame.

Good men in every age have had to

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

suffer because of their very goodness. Is this just? Remember, "Before Abraham was, I am." "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways." The wicked flourish to-day as ever, and many men who are little better than sneak thieves roll in luxury and shine in the eyes of the world. Has God forgotten? Has something gone wrong with His world that He is unable to meet? No, God is in His world, and righteousness is still being rewarded with His choicest gifts. He can look back to Egypt, to Assyria, to Greece and Rome and Carthage, and even to Israel, and see the countless rich men who chose the glare and glitter of earth that last for a day, instead of the abiding riches of righteousness and true holiness, and where are they to-day? Their wealth and grandeur is a thing of dust and ashes, and their lost souls wander the dreary wastes of a hopeless eternity alone and uncomforted, while the poor men, the despised and forsaken ones, who trusted in God and waited for His revelation, find their fullest needs more than satisfied in the glory of His presence. Let not your heart be troubled. No mistakes are made in the bookkeeping of heaven.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

"The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small."

To him who is a friend of God in Jesus Christ, the standard of values is made in heaven and he is content to wait, knowing that however hard it may be to understand now, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." This he knows, because God is in His world working His sovereign purposes there.

But notice, thirdly, *any doctrine of election which is of God is both an assurance of blessing and a call to sacrifice and service.*

"Before Abraham was, I am" are the words of an intelligent, thinking, acting being. In all these ages, since man's life on earth began, and countless æons before, He has been working out His sovereign purposes in His universe. Intelligence ever works directed by purpose, and purpose is always in accordance with character. God's purposes, the plans He has been working out through the long centuries, are purposes of love and holiness and good to all mankind. No man is made by Him for reprobation or for eternal loss. He shapes all the forces

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

and moulds all the influences that play on the lives of men, to make it easy for them to fall in with His purposes, to take their place in the forward movement towards the perfection of all things. When a man yields to the pleadings of Divine love, he discovers he has been elected in the age-old councils of God for the great destiny he sees before him; he knows that all he has and is are the ripe fruit of God's eternal love. But if he turns a deaf ear to the pleadings of Divine love, the bitterness of his soul, the horror of the lot to which he consigns himself comes from knowing that the very love and tenderness of God has been compelled in self-defence to inflict upon him eternal loss. The Old Testament tells us that God raised up Pharaoh to show forth His glory upon Him, and it also says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Both of these statements are true, and yet it is not true to say that God elected Pharaoh to be lost in the end. Pharaoh had the opportunity for greatness of service to God. Had he done the right as it was revealed to him, he might have been an instrument in God's hand, honored forever by his service to the race. But Pharaoh chose his own will rather than the right.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

And every choice of ill means hardening of heart and increasing difficulty to do right. God does harden our hearts, but it is only in obedience to our own choice. No man is compelled of God to let his heart harden; on the contrary, all the wealth of Divine love is lavished on us to soften our hearts and make our natures responsive. Every time we yield to the promptings of His Spirit, seeking to do right, He softens our natures and makes it easier for us to do the right again; but every time we choose the evil, God cannot help Himself, He must harden us, or take away the gift of freedom which He gave. Freedom of the will implies choosing the good and its results in sweetening and sanctifying our lives, or choosing the evil with all that evil brings.

We cannot choose right and not reap goodness of character, nor can we choose wrong and escape hardening of heart. Judas might have been a real follower of Christ, but resisting the right and choosing the wrong habitually so hardened his nature that the very things in him which were formed by the loving plan of God to bless him and make him a blessing were turned into causes of bitterness and despair, and he

THE TIMELESSNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

went away and hanged himself. God wants to elect all men to eternal life and happiness, but that very desire of His, when thwarted by our wilfulness or sin, becomes the means of our reprobation. There is nothing mechanical or arbitrary about it. Election is true to the best psychology and the best science of our age. Everything that is has some significance for God's great plan. To be electe^d to enjoy His gracious favor, means that we have been fitted to play some part in His purposes for the world. The Jews thought they were chosen of God out of mere caprice, that they might do what they liked and the election would still be theirs. Nor has that old folly quite died out. How hard it is for us to see that He who was before Abraham has admitted us to His love, not that we may dwell there in selfish ease and false security, but that, made one with Him in His life, we may be one with Him in His work. Election is not for privilege alone, it is first and foremost for sacrifice and service. Christ was elected to receive the homage of all mankind, but He won that homage by the way of the cross. If we are elected to wear a crown of

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

glory, we are elected to bear the cross of sacrifice and pain.

And who would have it otherwise? What greatness or beauty or joy ever came out of luxury and selfishness and self-indulgence? Life is real and tragic. Its fruits of joy are won not by those who dally on its lotus isles, but by its hero souls who dare and do for God and truth and right. How great is our life with such a view before and behind us! O man, tempted to be careless or cynical, think of what you are throwing away. Think of how rare and rich a jewel this life of ours is. Far down the ages before Abraham was, God was planning for it and shaping the forces that have made it what it is. He has chosen you for partnership with Himself in banishing sin and bringing in the perfect man. Think of being chosen for such a task, and think, too, of the age-long influence you may wield on those who come after you, for God, who was before Abraham, will forever guide the destinies of men, and bring to thousand-fold fruition every lofty aim and Christlike desire of your heart. "Before Abraham was, I am," says Christ. What does He mean to you? What are you doing for Him?

THE KEEPING POWER OF
FRIENDSHIP



VII.

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP.

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—*John xvi. 33.*

WHO has not had to face a crisis somewhat like that which met the disciples as they looked forward to separation from Jesus, so far as earthly vision went. For three years they had been with Him in all the changing scenes of that short but wondrously full life. They began by admiring Him, by listening to His call to leave their old life and cast in their lot with Him. They ended by feeling that without Him they could not live. His presence, His wonderful wisdom, His unchanging love, had become their very breath of life. And now tenderly and lovingly, yet clearly and unmis-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

takably, He has told them of His departure, to return to the Father from whom He came forth. It is a crushing disappointment, after all their high hopes and glowing anticipations of an earthly kingdom in which He, who has been despised thus far of men, may come to His own and raise them with Him. With that Divine insight which reads men's hearts, He sees their thoughts and with exquisite tenderness shows them how He is related to the Father, how He will be present with them by His Spirit, until, under the magic spell of His presence and His words, peace comes, and they are nerved to face the future.

Earnest souls in all ages have had to face just this problem, and have met it in one way, a way that is still open to us. The makers of our confession spoke of this way as the perseverance of the saints, and they rejoiced in the faith that God would perfect what He had begun in the life. But their method of statement and our manner of apprehending the truth about God and His relation to men has made many difficulties which the early disciples did not feel. Too often the gracious words of our Lord to His disciples seem very far away

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

from us, and when dark days come, when all the past seems slipping away and the future seems dark before us, our hearts sink and we are filled with fear lest we lose our hold on the comfort that has come to us. A faith that is based on texts or creeds, or even on the sacred Scriptures themselves, alone, too often makes the Christ seem so very far away from us that we need to get beneath these things to the living fellowship which He gives us with Himself. The one proof which we have of the uniqueness of the Bible is the results it produces in men's lives, when the Christ it presents is accepted by them. Year after year we know that life has not left the earth by the returning miracle of reviving nature, of springing grass and budding tree and blooming flower. And generation after generation the Bible has proved its inspiration by the reviving spiritual life of men and women brought to Christ through it. So, though we cannot hear with the ear the voice of Jesus, speaking as He spoke to His disciples, the heart that listens for His words in the sweet stillness of the mystery of friendship, knows that He is present with us to-day, just as really and just as lovingly as He was with His disciples

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

so long ago. The words of our text are not separated from us by intervening centuries, but are spoken now by the ever-living, ever-loving Friend of those who trust Him. He is not alone the Christ of Jerusalem and Galilee, the Christ of twenty centuries ago, but the Christ of the here and the now. His words are not reported to us by the Bible, but conveyed by it from His heart to our hearts. Remembering this, yea, knowing it with every fibre of your being, hear Him speak as He spoke to His disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

These words give us first the outstanding characteristics of the Christian life. *It is a life of peace, found in Christ. In me—peace.*

The longing desire of all men is for peace, for rest for their souls. The worldling pursues the fleeting things of time because they have promised to give him peace; the earnest soul is troubled by doubts and fears, and too often seeks it knows not what in answer to its inborn longing for peace. How troubled and tossed are the lives of

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

the men and women about us. Pride makes its victim believe that neither God nor man has realized how great is the consideration due him, embittering life with the thought of universal injustice. What but this foolish pride can account for all the senseless struggle to be seen and heard about that marks our day, all the heartaches and the jealousies that attend our modern scramble for wealth and social prominence. And sin in its myriad forms fills the soul with unrest and uncertainty. If there were nothing else to disturb us but the thought of an eternity all unprovided for, an outraged conscience ever revenging itself upon our spirits, it would be enough to fill us with unrest, but sin has a thousand emissaries within and without, each clamoring for satisfaction, and leading us deeper and deeper into the meshes of habit and of vice. But deepest and worst of all is the feeling of disobedience to the omniscient and omnipresent God. Whether we can think it clearly or not, the soul knows in its deepest being that all the universe is moral and of God, that in doing wrong it is setting itself not only against the unseen God, but against the universe that is seen.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

The conscience of man tells him that the very winds and the waves are against him who does wrong. The deeper the degradation of any people, the more terror nature and its workings inspire in them. And the passing of the years only intensifies this dread soul-unrest. Memory keeps alive the mistakes and the failures, the shortcomings and the wilful misdoings of the past, and hangs them like a millstone about the neck; unrest, disappointment, dissatisfaction, mark all life's journey to the man who has not found the secret of peace.

The eleven men of that little company had found what their souls sought, that deep, sweet peace that passeth all understanding. They had found it in Christ. Laying hold upon Him, surrendering their wills to His will, they were taken into the holy place of His heart's affection, they were made one with Him, and in that union had found peace. So it has ever been. To know Him is to conquer pride, to be rid of sin, to rob memory of its sting, and fill it with sweetness and blessing; is to know in all its fullness the peace of God, the rest our souls seek. Forgiven, reconciled, accepted, even the winds and the waves speak peace and sing

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

of rest in the friendship of Christ, and the heart knows, in the depth of its content, that "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose."

"And 'tis as if, beside some cool, clear rill,
Through shadowy stillness rose an evening psalm,
And all the noise of life were hushed away,
And tranquil gladness reigned, with gently soothing sway."

But notice, second, *the peace of the Christian's soul is threatened by the nature of his surroundings.*

Even Christ Himself, in His last hour of agony, cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That bitter cry was wrung from His heart, not because God had forsaken Him, but because the weakness of His human nature made it impossible, in the midst of His awful sufferings, to realize that presence with Him. And it was just this danger He foresaw for His disciples and for you and me. It was easy for them to have peace and to feel content while He was with them and when no special danger was near. But when danger came, when He was crucified, every one of them fled in terror,

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

and was sorely troubled. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." They were to spend the rest of their lives in the world, and being there, trouble was in store for them. So, too, with us. Though our lives are lived in friendship with Christ, we are still in the world, and the spirit of the world has always been hostile to the spirit of Christ. So long as you float down the stream, or drift before the wind, you are unconscious of their strength, but turn about and try to make headway the other way, and the full force of stream and wind are enlisted against you. This is the experience of the Christian. So long as he goes with the world he does not know its power to fight against him. The spirit of Christ is pushing back, overcoming the spirit of the world, and if we are in Christ, we feel the full brunt of the conflict upon our spirits.

Our Saviour meant by the world, not all the customs and habits, laws and influences about Him, but the things in that life that were opposed to His spirit. The spirit of the world is the spirit that was in Esau, the spirit of bondage to the present. Esau knew that he was heir to his father's

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

blessing, which would in time mean much to himself and his children. But he came in from the field tired, and smelling the rich odor of savory meat prepared by Jacob, sold all the wealth of the future for a momentary pleasure. Esau's spirit is the spirit of childhood. It can be overlooked in little children, but is fraught with disaster in the lives of men and women. How much of the uncleanness, of the sorrow and the wrong of life, is due to this setting of the moments against the centuries. And it is such an easy way. Men fall into it with so little difficulty that they treat as enemies those who will not join with them, those who oppose this thoughtless, childish living for the moment, crowding life in the tickling of a sense or the gorging of an appetite. The Christian lives in Christ, whose life is eternal, a life which began before time was and shall be forevermore. His pleasures are eternal pleasures, his rewards are eternal too. So wherever the Christian goes he must do battle with the Esau spirit; he must face the enmity of the men whose childishness he rebukes, whose folly his ideals condemn. But the worldly spirit is not always one of such momentary folly.

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Sometimes it looks forward and plans for the future. The spirit Jacob showed was no whit less worldly than that of Esau. The rich man in the New Testament parable who spent his days and nights planning bigger barns and more roomy storehouses, while his soul starved, he was controlled by the spirit of the world. Houses and lands, stocks and bonds, wealth and influence, how real they seem and how near, and how easy it is to think yourself wise, when you devote all your energies to winning them. But he who would win life, who would retain the peace of God, must seek for something better, something deeper and more lasting than these. He must face this temper of the world and differ from it in a thousand ways. He must enthrone in his heart the love and the spirit of Jesus Christ, and for that spirit sacrifice all else. And this is not easy to do, for even his nearest friends may turn against and misunderstand him. The world to-day respects and seeks after successful men and women, asking no questions as to character, or the means by which success has been won, and he must be strong indeed who denies himself the favor of the world.

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THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

To attain the highest things in life, we must seek one thing, and one thing only, must measure men not by position or wealth or lineage, but by likeness to Christ and conformity to His will. It always requires courage to differ from those about you, but when that difference is a tacit rebuke to their whole course of life and the ideals that underly it, the difficulty is vastly greater. No man or woman can live a Christlike life and move in modern society without knowing tribulation, tribulation sometimes the harder to bear, because it must be borne in silence and alone, because it arises from countless little things, too small to meet with hero strength. The spirit of the world shows itself in a thousand different ways, but always it is that same old, insolent, self-seeking, time-serving thing, content to live for to-day, and take gambler's chances on character and destiny. Day after day men are borne past our eyes to the grave, day after day the voices of history and of experience testify to the folly of the world spirit, but day after day men go on seeking the fleeting shadows, singing the mad, old refrain, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." The

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Christian is a kind of death's head in the midst of this feast of madness, a kill-joy, ever standing for something other than those about him, and reaping the reward of his position in petty persecution, in the gibes and the sneers of thoughtless men and women, yes, and sometimes in suffering and death, inflicted on him by those who cannot stand the rebuke of Christlikeness. With such a spirit all about them, appealing to the weakness of their own natures, browbeating them into compliance with itself, is it any wonder that Christ should have said to his disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation."

Only a few days after these words were spoken, the spirit of the world had wreaked its revenge upon the one perfect life ever lived in the midst of men. Calvary and Gethsemane measured the intensity of fury which that life stirred up in the hearts of the worldlings who were rebuked by it. And His disciples shared in that hatred. The world took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus, and hated them accordingly. They were imprisoned, were scourged, were driven from city to city, and most of them were put to a violent

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

death. So long as the spirit of the world is not conquered by the Christ spirit, so long will it mean tribulation for any one who lives the Christ life truly and well.

And then the nature of the bodies in which our spirits dwell brings upon us all the mystery of pain, of death and of sorrow. Human suffering is never so intense as in the nature refined and beautified by the Spirit of Christ. Human love is never so strong as when it binds together hearts that have been redeemed by His love, and human sorrow is never so deep as when death severs such sacred bonds. There is no deception in Christ's promises. The upward path, the Christlike life, is always the way of the cross. Holiness is ever won in the fires of renunciation, of suffering and of tribulation. He who preaches the Christian life as a primrose path, preaches a lie and misleads men. "If any man will follow me," says our Lord, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." The Christian life is like the life of Christ himself, a life of constant sacrifice, of constant self-denial, of constant tribulation.

Who, then, is sufficient for these things? Where is the spirit brave enough, strong

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

enough, and true enough to face unceasing tribulation, to bear the cross of self-denial and self-sacrifice to the very end? Where is he who does not need to pray—

“Teach me to live! 'Tis easier far to die,
Gently and silently to pass away,
On earth's long night to close the heavy eye
And waken in the glorious realm of day.

“Teach me that harder lesson, how to live,
To serve thee in the darkest paths of life;
Arm me for conflict now, fresh vigor give,
And make me more than conqueror in the strife.

And God answers the prayer—grandly and triumphantly answers it, turning the threnody of pain and suffering into the song of victory, for our text has still another thought, “*I have overcome the world.*”

The peace we have in Christ, is not the false security of an untried refuge. It is the peace of Christ Himself, a peace which comes from having tried His strength with every earthly foe, and come off more than conqueror over all.

They tempted and tried Him, and His character grew in strength and sweetness under all their trials. They nailed those delicate hands to the cruel cross, and that

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

symbol of shame and infamy became a throne of majesty from which He rules the myriads of those who love Him. They laid Him in the tomb, and that chill abode of the dead became His chamber of glory, wherein He donned the radiant robes of everlasting life. In the world he had tribulation, but each new tribulation only added new glory to His character, only gave new splendor to His immortal beauty. Every attempt of the world was defeated and turned into a means of ever higher honor to Him against whom they raged. Standing there, facing the last great scene of His suffering and death, He calmly told His disciples, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." These are His words to us to-night, and in those words is our guarantee of ultimate victory, our assurance of eternal life. When we are received into His friendship, all that He has is shared with us. Every grace and every power that He himself possesses, He gives to us. Our peace may be clouded by our own weakness and shortcomings, but nothing can take us out of His keeping. The world and all the powers of evil have assailed Him with all their might, but have been shamefully routed. Before they can

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

overcome us, they must first vanquish our Friend who has made Himself one with us.

When we cast ourselves upon Christ, and were accepted by Him into His friendship, we found our true nature. We are made for righteousness and true holiness. In coming to Christ we were only coming back to our own real nature. Everywhere we find that things tend to find and keep their true nature. The tree grows upward, unless hindered by something stronger than itself in its upward course; the young lion develops in form and nature the character of his kind, and the soul of man, once freed from the bondage of sin, tends to grow into ever-increasing likeness to its author and archetype, Christ Jesus, our Lord. And this natural tendency is multiplied a thousand fold by the living presence in it of our ever-living friend, Jesus Christ the Lord. We may be surprised into sin and base denial by the weakness of the flesh, as Peter was, but the moment we realize what we have done, we will return to Him, with Peter's broken-hearted confession, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love Thee." We may even be so won, for a moment, to the spirit of the world, that our

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

lives may dishonor our dear Friend, but the moment this is done our peace vanishes, our souls are troubled, and we are driven back to Him in whom our peace is found. Or we may be misled, and thoughtlessly bring dishonor upon Him, but we cannot go far without missing His presence, without hearing His voice calling us back again to that sweet peace we have lost by our unwitting sin. "All that my Father giveth me are mine," says Christ, "and no man can pluck them out of my hand." Once accept the friendship of Christ, and though you may err often, and wrong Him often, His love never gives you up, but wins you again and again back to Himself, until at last you are perfected from every taint of sin and stand face to face with Him in the glory.

"Whatsoever is born of God," says John, "cannot sin habitually." And John was right. The keeping power of God's friendship, His love of purity and right, will not let the soul that trusts in Him get far away from the secret of His presence. So that, if we are living in habitual sin, and are content far away from Him, we ought to fear lest we have never really known Him at all. Let no man deceive himself. Whosoever

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

has entered into this sacred relation with Christ is slowly transformed into His image, the world sees that transformation and knows that he has the peace of God which passeth all understanding; but if our lives are habitually marked by any sin, no matter how small it may seem, we cannot be the friends of Christ. He will have none of us till we give up the sin and turn to Him. Then to the weakest, least godlike son of man, the Son of God gives all His own wondrous power and love, and assures him victory over every tribulation. "I have overcome the world, and ye shall triumph through me."

In the world ye shall have tribulation. Does it seem a hard fate? Hear the other half, "In me ye have peace." In the world tribulation, in me peace, at one and the same time, and my peace no tribulation can take from you. The worldling has his tribulations, too, deeper and harder to bear than ours. How often he gives it all up in sheer soul weariness, or spends his days and his nights in a mad round of folly to keep from thinking or realizing the emptiness and the sadness of his life. His laughter is hollow and unreal, his joy

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THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

languid and half-hearted, because he has no peace, no unchanging friend in this life, and no hope for the next.

To every man who has found the sweetness of friendship with God in Jesus Christ the message comes, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Face life, not grudgingly, nor with shrinking, fearful heart, but with radiant face and cheerful spirit, for Christ is yours and you are His, and He has overcome the world. His victory is your victory, His joy is your joy, His peace may be the abiding and unbroken atmosphere of your life through all the coming days, and you can sing with Whittier—

"And so, beside the silent sea,
I wait the muffled oar ;
I know no harm can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

"I know not where His islands lift
Their froned palms in air ;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

THE PLACE OF CHRIST IN FRIEND-
SHIP WITH GOD



VIII.

THE PLACE OF CHRIST IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD.

THE TRINITY.

“Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”—*1 Cor. i. 30.*

WE are so constituted that when any phase of truth is accepted, it becomes a part of our very being. This is well, so long as we do not cling to it to the exclusion of the fuller vision, to which every truth grasped is bound in its very nature to lead. The views of truth which our fathers held began with them in far simpler and less comprehensive conceptions than those they have handed down to us in the creeds we have received from them. They lived in the expanding fulness of these great thoughts of the Divine, and embodied them in language which expressed to them something of the unfolding mysteries brought to their

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

hearts day by day by the Holy Spirit. The truths they handed down to us are the germs which, implanted in our souls, are destined to grow in some measure commensurate with the fulness of the experience of our age. No statement of truth which has brought comfort and uplift to any human heart can ever pass away. Our Lord said, "I am come, not to destroy, but to fulfil." All the partial revelations of truth held by the Jews to their soul's enrichment were to find their fruition in the fuller, richer revelation of the truth in Him who was the Truth. So it must ever be. Every age, if it is a living age, in touch with the living truth, must see clearer and know more than any preceding age, but must conserve all that was true in the past. Far from dishonoring that which has gone before, in superseding it by something wider and fuller, we are giving it the highest honor, in bringing to perfection what it held in promise. We do not honor a pansy seed by locking it up and keeping it forever a seed, but by casting it into the soil and allowing it to grow into the rich beauty of the lovely Heartsease of our summer gardens. So with the statements of doctrine that have come to us—the highest

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CHRIST, IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

honor we can do them is not to put them away somewhere in our heads and never think of them, but to cast them into the rich soil of daily life, and by living them and thinking about them, allow them to grow into the soul-transforming, world-uplifting things they were intended to be.

No progress that is real progress has done away with anything that was true in the past, but has taken it up and expanded it into the fuller life of the present. Any truth which satisfies fully the needs of your soul, lifting it into living fellowship with God, raising no questionings in your mind, is to be clung to and rested in. Questionings are God's method of leading us out into ever fuller and fuller views of the truth, and into nearer and more dear relations with Himself. It is the glory of the Church of God that it is like a great tree, with its roots in the past and its branches spreading out into wider and wider reaches of truth incarnate in human life. The philosophy and the science of to-day is more and more confirming and strengthening the truths revealed in partial manner to our fathers in the past. Any new statements that are true to-day are not destroying but fulfilling these partial

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

truths in a fuller and more adequate view of what they contained.

This is nowhere truer than in reference to Christ Himself, the incarnate Truth. The old theology was filled with insistence of the facts about Christ, and its very fidelity to that great source and centre of our religious life has brought to us the task of insisting yet more fully upon His place in life and conduct. "What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?" are vital and real questions to-day. And the words of our text help us to answer for our own souls the question of our Lord.

Paul makes four statements about Christ. And the first of these is, "Christ is made unto us wisdom."

How profoundly true that statement is, and how much there is in it we are only just beginning to find out in the light of history and experience. How little we know about God Himself apart from Christ! What pathetic gropings marked the faith of the Jewish Church, though it was called on to be the precursor of the coming Lord. And in what other faith or system of philosophy do we get any conception of God upon which the heart can rest and

CHRIST, IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

find eternal life? We talk glibly about the unknown and unseen one, about the infinite, eternal and unchangeable One, about His omniscience and omnipotence, but what do all these words mean to us? Only vague abstractions that leave the heart hungry and the soul unsatisfied in the midst of the crowding perplexities of life. But Christ came, and what a difference! He took that little company of disciples and lived a life before their eyes. They saw Him in every phase of life, eating and drinking, toiling, rejoicing and sorrowing, sleeping and waking, and everywhere were impressed by His matchless beauty of character and of conduct. On the Sea of Galilee they learned of His dominion over nature, by the tomb of Lazarus they saw His power over death, in a thousand acts of healing and of comfort, and in that last great tragedy on Calvary, they saw deep down into the depths of His great-hearted love and sympathy with men. After something of His matchless beauty and measureless power had dawned on them He taught them the great truth, "I and my Father are one." He had to speak in terms they could understand, and so used this relation of father and son

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

to express the great truth that He was God. However we may conceive it, the truth remains that when we come in contact with Christ we are coming into contact with God. Christ was God appearing in the finite limitations which we could see and grasp. That beautiful character, that man whom even the rough soldiers had to confess spake as never man spake, He was God, very man and very God. God with us—Immanuel. When we sing

“ Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high ;”

we are calling upon God by the name which brings Him nearest to our weak, human hearts. Infinity in Him is seen to be not something far removed from man, but accomplishing, in and through Him, His eternal purposes. In Christ and in Christ alone we see God. In Him and in Him alone have we full knowledge of the Divine One. The Unitarians claim to worship God direct, apart from Christ, treating Him as a mere man who helped to reveal the Divine. But even Martineau, the greatest and best of

CHRIST, IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

them, confesses that the attributes of the God they believe in which make Him really an object of worship are all of them derived from our general knowledge of Christ. Comte claimed to worship humanity, but his glorified man derived all his power for good from what he borrowed of the character of Christ. Christ is made unto us wisdom, because in Him and in Him only we have the final revelation of God, we have God manifest in the flesh.

But He is also made unto us wisdom because in Him we have our only full revelation of man. We seldom stop to think how much of the knowledge we have of ourselves, we owe to Christ. That knowledge seems so simple and so direct that all ought to grasp it at a glance. Yet in the highest teaching of the greatest philosophies of Greece our character is vaguely grasped. It taught that some men were mere machines, while women were nature's failures in its attempt to make men. In China, with a philosophic system older by far than the earliest pages of the Bible, even yet vast numbers of men are considered little better than cattle, and female children are frequently put to death so little are they valued. Nowhere, out-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

side of Christ and the truth that has come to us in Him, do we find a true knowledge of man. In Him we know that every weakest child of humanity has on his soul the stamp of the Divine; that no man is made to be the prey of priest or the slave of king or boss. That each alike has a right to a free and full enjoyment of all the riches of God's grace, and that every man is of infinite value in the sight of the Maker of us all. Wherever Christ is known there man is known; there men reverence their own nature and rejoice in the freedom wherewith Christ makes us free from ignorance and superstition.

There, too, man's life is projected into eternity. Apart from the Christ, the world beyond the tomb is a dreary abode of shades or a hopeless unknown region. But in Him the best of man's life is seen to be, not the here and the now, but the region beyond the tomb. He tasted death and broke its power. He rose from the tomb and showed us that it could not retain Him; that in Him we have the victory over death and the grave. The countries on the other side of the world mean little to us, but let a loved one go there to take up his abode, and that strange,

CHRIST, IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

unknown land becomes to us full of interest, and we long to go there. Till Christ came, eternity was peopled with nothing certain and attractive to our souls, but now He who has redeemed us from our sins, who has come to mean all things to our hearts, He is there, and eternity becomes a real and sacred part of our destiny. So long as this life seems the only real and great thing, so long does man seem a creature of the dust and of a day, but when eternity is added, how vast and how noble a thing life is seen to be! Christ is to us wisdom in revealing our own real character and destiny and pointing us to God, whom He has shown us in Himself.

But Paul goes on to say, "Christ is made unto us righteousness."

It requires more than wisdom to see God and know Him. Facts about Him are not enough. Christ was God incarnate, yet so little did men know Him that they crucified Him, that they put Him to open shame. God is righteousness. In Him is nothing that defiles or degrades. In Him is the reality of which we are but the possibility. In Him is all that is beautiful and pure and good, and yet man is so warped by sin, that instead of seeing and

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

knowing Him as He truly is, he sees God only to hate Him and to look upon Him as a hard taskmaster or a dreadful tyrant. To know the righteous God we must be righteous.

The story of the nations, the long, hard experience of earnest men and women, is the sad confession of man's inability to make himself righteous, to become like God. Buddhism has its fasts and its penances, but it knows not God, because it has never developed righteousness in men. China has its Confucianism, but it, too, has no real grasp on the eternal One, because it has not known the meaning of that absolute justice and goodness and purity we call righteousness. The Old Testament even, had an imperfect view of God, because of the imperfect righteousness which its saints were able to achieve through sacrifice and rite and symbol. But when Christ came He was righteousness and in Him men were made able to know God and know themselves freed from the imperfections of sin. However wickedly men have lived, they have always felt that righteousness was the real end of life. How many careless or even wicked men have prayed, "Let me die the

CHRIST, IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his." This because they knew no other ending could be happy and secure of the future.

When we look upon a beautiful flower we are filled with wonder at the wealth of color it displays, but our wonder would be greatly intensified did we realize that the colors are not in the flower at all, but come directly from the sun. The surfaces of the flower leaves are so arranged as to take certain rays from the light and reflect them back to our eyes, giving us the colors we behold and ascribe to the flower itself. If we shut off the sun, or change the texture of the leaves, the colors vanish or change, too. And men who have attained righteousness of character have always felt that it was not in them, but came direct from the presence of Christ. All they had to do was to be receptive to the rays of Divine righteousness and the world would see in them not their own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ. We are great reflectors, giving back what comes to us from the Sun of righteousness itself. When the bud of a flower first opens, it has very little color, but as it spreads its leaves out to

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

the light it develops greater depth and beauty until it stands one of God's most beautiful things, to sweeten and beautify our lives. And when man first begins his career in the service and fellowship of Christ he has very little in him that is different from the men and the women about him; he has little of the beauty of holiness and true righteousness, but as he spreads his life to the light of the presence of Christ and yields to His influence day by day he takes on new beauty, hour by hour he becomes more like Christ. Earth has no fairer flower, the world has no sight which thrills the soul and uplifts the heart like an aged saint, glowing in the full glory of the righteousness of Christ, with all the little earthly failings slowly falling away and the unearthly beauty of His righteousness shining forth from the face and lighting up the eye. We cannot bear to look with naked eye into the glowing face of the sun, but we can joy to see His glory reflected in the heart of the rose or the violet. Who can doubt the existence of the source of light when His glory beams up at us from the beauty of the flowers, and who can doubt the presence of the Christ when His

CHRIST, IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

glory is reflected from the faces of His saints? How many tired hearts have been cheered, how many doubting souls have had their faces turned to God, simply by seeing His glory reflected by a saintly face? We are all called to the dignity of sainthood in Jesus Christ, to show to the world so fair and sweet a life that it must needs long for the secret we possess. And that secret is revealed in another word of Paul's about Christ.

"Christ Jesus is made unto us redemption."

Under the Jewish dispensation our Lord's revelation of Himself was in terms of law, and even the great moral principles had to be embodied in definite statements of law to make men realize their meaning. When they came to understand the deep spiritual principles underlying this law, they saw how hopeless it was to try to meet all the requirements of even the formal law with their imperfect lives alone. So, daily the feeling grew, in even the best of men's lives, of commandments unfulfilled, of law broken, of God wronged. To meet this sense of broken law they made sacrifices, they gave of the things God had given them, and yet

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

even with these gifts there was a feeling of obligation, of a debt so deep that nothing they could do could ever repay it, and their fellowship with God could only continue by His forgiveness and grace. When Christ came, by His life and by His death He took upon Himself this great obligation that rested upon His brother man by becoming one with him. He fulfilled every requirement of the law in His own life, and over and above that perfect fulfilment He made the sacrifice of His very life that others might be set free from the demands of the law. Thus, if we state our relation to God in terms of law, we see that Christ has become to us redemption. Every requirement of the law has been satisfied in Him, and my debt paid to the uttermost farthing. Interpret it however we will, the Christian consciousness, when confronted by the weight of sin and the condemnation of the law, has always turned to the work of Christ and the mystery of Calvary, knowing that there we have the bonds of the law forever broken and that every soul that comes to the Christ of Calvary is redeemed from sin and from the condemnation of the law.

The same great fact stated in terms of

CHRIST, IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

friendship means just this, that though we are marred by sin and because of it cannot know either God or our own souls as we ought, Christ has come into the world and so identified Himself with humanity that He suffered for its sin and now gives the strength and saving influence of all that He has and is to each soul that trusts in Him, that enters into the mystery of His friendship. He is a poor friend who sees his friend in need and does not share with him his last crust. We are in need of every spiritual thing; sin is too strong for us, habit has too great a hold upon us, yet He is righteousness, and that righteousness He gives to those who surrender themselves to friendship with Him, so that He thus becomes redemption to every man who realizes the weakness of His own will and trusts for strength to Him. Christ has become redemption to every Christian man. He has broken the bonds of habit and of sin, He has taken away the perversion of nature wrought by that sin, so that we are enabled to know God as He is, and by that knowledge to be changed into His image.

And Paul goes on to add, "Christ has become to us sanctification."

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

To be put right for a moment and then left to our own devices, forsaken of the almighty power that has given us a momentary gleam of greatness, and then be allowed to slip back again into the old way—this would be a poor gift, indeed. But all God's gifts have a God-like greatness and depth of loving-kindness. He begins nothing which is not carried to a glorious completeness, and the task of making man like Himself in righteousness never stops at the moment when we know our sins forgiven and ourselves made one in friendship with Him, but goes on until we stand complete in His presence. By the mystery of redemption, by that marvellous love of Christ, the taint of sin is cured, our wills are made one with His will, and we are ready then for the life-long task of sanctification, of being made like Himself in true holiness. The bud that just opens has no deformity, no inherited tendency, which keeps it from laying hold of the rays of light it needs; and so, in keeping with its very nature, as it opens wider it takes hold more and more of the wonderful rays of the source of light and gives back its beautiful color to make bright the fields and gladden the heart of man. But man has, from his

CHRIST, IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

inheritance of imperfection and his own sin, a trend of nature which keeps him from viewing with open face the Sun of righteousness and being beautified by that vision. This taint, this perversion, is done away when we enter into friendship with Christ, and then, just as the bud opens to the sunlight and takes on new beauty as it opens, so the soul spreads forth to the gracious warmth and light of Christ's loving presence and takes on the beauty of His righteousness as it expands. To live day by day with Christ, to know Him in that sweet and familiar fellowship to which He admits us, is to be made like Him, is to make His character ours, is to become Christlike in the thoughts of our heart, in the words of our lips, in the very glances of our eyes. It is to put on His righteousness, making it wholly ours. What is Christ in our friendship with God? He is everything. Without Him we cannot know God; without Him we cannot be saved from our sin and the bondage of a perverted will; without Him we cannot be made righteous and fit for fellowship with God.

Christ is all to our hearts or He is nothing. He is very God and very man, or

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

He has no power to uplift and to save. The Holy Spirit speaks not of Himself. He takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us. He is the final form in which God in Christ comes home to our hearts, and when we see that He is God then how sweet our fellowship becomes. It is friendship with Him who walked the hills of Palestine, who talked with men and touched their lives with that loving sympathetic touch which healed all sorrow and drove away all disease. It is friendship, daily, hourly contact with Him who so loved us as to enter into the very depths of the sorrow and the sin of earth, and to die on Calvary because of the depths of that love. But it is fellowship with Him in all the plenitude of power and wisdom of God Himself, clothed and mediated to us by that simple, loving, manly man, Jesus of Nazareth.

So, when in our mortal need we breathe the name of Jesus, we are speaking home to the heart of God, we are using our prerogative of calling our Friend by the name which brings Him closest to our earthly need and our earthly life, we are asking God to be to us, in His friendship with us, as near and real and human as Jesus

THE KEEPING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

was to those who sought His love. Christ speaks to us of the humanity of God, and makes Him real to us in the one way in which our poor, weak, human hearts and our limited human intellects can know Him. We are likest God when we seek to be in spirit and in life what Jesus was, when we keep closest to Him and let the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus stream upon our lives. If God is our Friend, if we have been redeemed and sanctified and admitted into His living friendship, we may well sing with all our hearts—

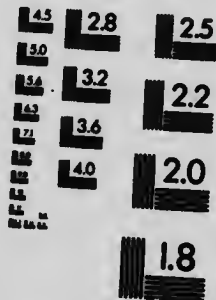
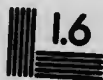
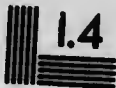
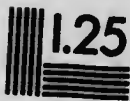
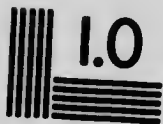
“Christ, of all my hopes the ground ;
Christ, the spring of all my joy.”

GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES



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IX.

GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES.

THE CHURCH, THE SACRAMENTS, THE SABBATH,
THE HOME.

“Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you.”—*James iv. 8.*

At the beginning of all friendship lies the willingness to be friendly. And what is true of human friendships is still more true of that greatest of all relationships, friendship with God. In the words of our text James gives the essential condition of all true experiences of religion. It is coming near in spirit to the Father of our spirits that He may come near to us and show us the riches of His grace as friend opens his heart to friend.

Each year the Christian world thrills with happiness when the day comes round which recalls the birth of our Saviour, for in that Babe who came to Bethlehem God drew

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

near to men. For long centuries they had been seeking Him, longing for that soul-fellowship which alone gives rest and peace, and ever as they were willing to receive it, He had given them more and more of His confidence, had come closer and closer to them, until at last, veiling His glory, He came as a little child, that parent hearts might know the touch of His helpfulness, and through it learn the gentleness of His almighty power. By His youth and manhood He lived the life we live, making its lowliest experience a thing divine, so that in the humblest drudgery, as in the loftiest service, we have fellowship with Him who went before us and is with us wherever we are called to go or to be. How near He came to men as He lived His child-life, as He disciplined His youth by the carpenter's bench, as He carried on His ministry of healing and of blessing that began at Cana and ended on Calvary. So near was He in His heart's inmost affection that for the sins of men He bore that cruel cross and wore the crown of thorns. Up to the very fullest extent He bore the burdens of His friends, yes, while we were yet sinners He died for us, that we, too, might draw nigh to Him.

GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES

What a drawing near of God that was which the Christmastide each year commemorates. Well might the angel choirs sing, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will to men," for that life which began with Bethlehem, was glorified by death on Calvary, and is alive forevermore, is God Himself drawing near to men and drawing them by the wondrous winsomeness of His love into ever fuller oneness with His own unbroken peace.

But the voices of time and sense are so insistent, the power of habit and the drag of sin so great, that we need constantly to have special reminders of God's friendship for us and of our need of Him. So in His wisdom He has appointed trysting-places where our souls may be specially drawn out to Him and He may approach to us in fuller measure than is possible amid the busy scenes of life, with its crowding cares and thronging duties.

The first of these is the Christian Church. Not the ecclesiastical machinery or the buildings which we call churches, but the gathering of His friends together in His name in groups of such size as can best feel their oneness with one another and

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

with Him, their common Friend. Our Saviour promised His disciples, ere He returned to the Father, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And the one unailing mark of the Church of Christ has ever been the gathering together of men and women who worthily bore His name. Friendship one for another, born of living friendship with God, this can make a church out of even the twos and the threes, while all the pomp and glory of many a so-called church has not fitted it to bear the name of Christ.

Roman Catholicism has always erred in putting the Church first and the soul's fellowship with God second in its thought. For it no man can have fellowship with the Divine but by means of the sacraments, and these can only be administered by the priests. Thus there stands an impassable barrier between God and man, making anything like real, immediate communion impossible. Protestantism owes its strength to its insistence on direct, immediate fellowship between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God. For it, the Church is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It

GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES

is embodying in organization and building the inward spiritual thing, friendship with the Divine. It is the banding together of the friends of Christ for fellowship one with another and with Him.

The Church is thus a sacred thing, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the soul-fellowship of Christ and His loved ones. The place where we meet and commune with our loved ones becomes sacred, and the building set apart for the meeting of the friends of Christ in His name and with Himself becomes the most sacred of all earth's meeting-places. There, with the world shut out and all that is within us roused to draw nigh unto Him, He comes very near, and "in the secret of His presence there is joy." That joy is the joy of the soul's birth out of darkness into light, the joy of renewed forgiveness, the joy of comfort in the face of sorrow and of trial, the joy of full soul rest in Him who can satisfy every longing of our hearts which hunger for a perfect friendship. When to the peace and joy of the hour of worship is added the memory of months and years of constantly-renewed intercourse with Christ among His loved

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

ones, and when that is multiplied by twenty centuries of Christian communion with each other and the Christ, what a sacred thing the Church becomes, and how great is the reverence with which we should approach its courts and take part in its services. Made one by living fellowship with Him and with one another, how strong even the weakest Christians become, supported by the prayers, the struggles and the achievements of the innumerable company of saints who have gone before, by the strength of the whole life of prayer and communion of the Church in the world to-day and by the living presence of the Christ of God.

No episcopal benediction nor mechanical sanctity is needed to set apart the organization and the building which enables the soul to know this communion and feel this strength. Holiness is its very nature, for if friendship that is real is the soul's most sacred experience, sanctifying all it touches, how much more the place and the occasion of its highest exercise. In accordance with the purity and the intensity of this sanctifying principle is the strength of the Church. When it has been most intense the Church has been a great focal centre, drawing men

GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES

to itself by the sheer winsomeness and beauty of the life of perfect harmony and loving fellowship they saw in it. For the conquest of the world there is needed a greater and greater measure of utter abandon to the all-conquering power of love to Christ, with its natural result of love to men.

This can only come by a fuller devotion to that sacred trysting-place, the Christian Church, and all that it stands for. We have lost much of the unthinking reverence of the past, a reverence bordering on superstition, but with it has gone much of that soul-homage to holy things without which life can hold nothing lofty or noble. To win it back, we must come with bared, bowed head into God's trysting-place, the Church, and realize that it is not an organization or a set of buildings where we spend a pleasant time on certain set days, but where the soul meets face to face and heart to heart with the Friend of our spirits, Jesus Christ the Lord.

In that communion with the Christ His ministers, mere men though they be, take on something of the sanctity of the service in which they engage, and should be enshrined in our affections, upheld and sanc-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

tified by our prayers and our loving sympathies. For upon them devolves the duty of making real the two great sacraments of the Church, baptism and the Lord's Supper. By these solemn rites the truths for which the Church stands, the truth of God's longing for men, and men's need of God, the truth of men's sinfulness, and of the wonderful redemptive work of Christ on the cross and its power to lead men back into fellowship with Himself, are vividly portrayed.

By baptism the new-born soul or the new-born babe is admitted into the visible company of those who are His friends, and only by their own unfaithfulness to the sacred vows taken by or for them they can ever again leave that fellowship or cut themselves off from its ennobling influence. With what strong bonds do the vows we made to our boyhood or our college friends bind our hearts to theirs, and how these bonds are strengthened by the remembrance of our vows. Our hearts ought to leap up in renewed affection and consecration to Christ, as these vows are recalled to us by the ever-recurring administration of the baptismal rite. And who can put in words the love that should fill our hearts as we sit down about

GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES

the table of the Lord with all that it brings to our thoughts of the depth of friendship of Jesus Christ our Lord. In a little New England town an old man still goes up to the cemetery and lays a wreath of fresh flowers every year upon a grave made nearly half a century ago. It is not the grave of father or mother, of sister or brother, of wife or child, but the grave of a friend who proved his friendship by going to the war as his substitute and dying for him. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This is the love, this is the depth of the friendship, which it is ours to recall, and which we need this acted symbol to recall for our sluggish imaginations and our cold, forgetful hearts.

But God has provided another great trysting-place, or rather trysting-time, for men, the Sabbath day. There is a periodicity in all our earthly experiences. We need food and rest at regular intervals, or our bodies give out and our lives are unrealized. So, too, in the busy round of our daily duties we need at regular recurring

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

intervals to put in the forefront of our lives the things of the spirit, lest they be crowded out and forgotten by the insistence of the ever-present things of earth and the flesh.

Out of His great wisdom our Heavenly Friend has set apart one day in every seven, given wholly up to the quest of the highest, to fellowship and friendship with Himself. On it the soul may find its own true atmosphere, the unbroken, undisturbed contemplation of the presence and the friendship of God. He calls to us with the dawning of each Sabbath morning, "Draw nigh unto me and I will draw nigh unto you." And how sorely His heart is grieved when we slight His loving invitation, when we put first our own earth-born interests, refusing to give Him the joy of entire surrender to His Spirit.

If our best-loved friend makes a tryst with us, setting aside a time and place for keeping it, how unworthy of the name of friend would we be did we slight the opportunity for any selfish purpose. Yet we often think very little of filling the hours of God's holy day with thoughts of the cares or the pleasures of the world. To neglect friendship, to despise love, is to die, for he who has lost the

GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES

capacity for loving has lost the secret of life, and though he may walk about in the body, is dead while he liveth. And every neglect of God's sacred trysting-place, the Sabbath, robs the soul of its just due. weakens all the noblest and best things in us, no matter what specious excuse we may give ourselves for our neglect. Scotland owes the wonderful influence she has exerted on the world to her almost superstitious reverence for God's holy day, and if we are going to turn back the tide of materialism and money and pleasure seeking that threatens to engulf our civilization, we must put in the forefront of the institutions to be guarded with our very lives the holy Sabbath Day.

But oldest and greatest and holiest of all God's trysting-places is the home. It lies at the very foundations of human life, it is the cradle and the nursery of faith in God and love to Him. He calls Himself our Father. From Him we have derived our very being, and yet in the sacred mystery of parentage He has given to men and women a relation to the children of the race in some way like His own. In the tender love and care of parents the child first learns what it means

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

to call God Father, and what is implied in the great words, love and friendship. The love of husband and wife, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, is the purest and most godlike thing this earth knows. If it is deep and true and strong, everything that is lovely and of good report will find a congenial resting-place in the home, and the Spirit of God, with all the riches of His grace, will rejoice to dwell in His most holy temple, a human home. The Church is strong and the state is great just in proportion as the home and all that it stands for is exalted and honored.

In the true home life religion is as natural as the love which binds parents and children one to another, and the greatest teachers of religion are the fathers and mothers who show in their own lives the truths they teach their children, and lead their young hearts, through love of Christ-likeness in them, to the love of Christ, the source of all the beauty and sweetness of home. God loves to dwell in the homes of men, and children should be taught to think of His presence as just as natural and just as real as the presence of father and mother, or of sisters and brothers. Coming to know and love Him

GOD'S TRYSTING PLACES

there, His presence will go with them out into the world, binding every sacred thing to their lives by the thought of His presence and His love in the world.

Our civilization is becoming more and more complex with the passing of the years, but if we are to go on to higher and better things we must return with reiterated insistence to the fundamental sanctities of life, to God's trysting-places, to the home, the Sabbath and the Church. Guard these safely, draw nigh to Him through them, and He will draw nigh unto us, lifting our civilization above the sins that have sunk all other civilizations and leading the whole race into that full, rich, eternal life of friendship with Himself for which we are made.



**THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF
FRIENDSHIP**

X.

THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF FRIENDSHIP.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

"What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God; and ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."—*1 Cor. vi. 19.*

WE need to be constantly reminded of the glorious freedom wherewith Christ makes us free. We seldom thank God for the gift of the air we breathe, yet were its normal action suspended for one moment our lives would cease with it. Our fathers talked much of the liberty of the saints. They were willing to lay down their lives that neither king nor priest should interfere with their freedom as children of God. But the liberty for which they died has been our possession so long, it is so fully embodied in the very air of our civilization, that we cease

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

to think of it, cease to notice how vital it is for our happiness, yea, for the very life of our spirits. But go to Russia and you find men and women dragged from their homes, imprisoned and executed or sent to Siberia, for daring to assert their right to think and act according to the dictates of conscience. Go to any pagan country and you will find men living together in little communities, because they dare not live the free, safe, independent home life we Christians enjoy for fear of outrage and death at the hands of lawless men; you find energy repressed, thought stifled, individuality crushed, and a dead-level, hopeless mediocrity reigning everywhere, because the souls of men are robbed of the very breath of life, the breath of liberty, of freedom to be and to do what God intended for them.

The epistle from which our text is taken was written to a Church living in the midst of one of the most corrupt communities in the most decadent period of Roman history. Lofty ideals were hardly known, chastity was scoffed at, human life was held cheap, and every form of vice and brutal orgy openly practised and encouraged. Yet out of that corrupt community the glad tidings

THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF FRIENDSHIP

of salvation through Jesus Christ had won a little company of men and women, who were seeking to live the Christlike life amid the moral miasma which surrounded them. It was a hard task. Again and again the old habits and old tendencies reasserted themselves, and terrible sins disgraced the little company. But Paul does not despair. He knows the boundless power which is at work in their lives. Nor does he seek to bind them down with narrowing restrictions; rather does he turn their gaze upon the boundless liberty which is theirs in Jesus Christ, knowing that the surest cure for license is a true appreciation of liberty. And the message which saved the Church in Corinth is the message for us to-day. The moral dynamic of the friendship, of the living presence of God, is the one power strong enough and full enough to lift the soul above the drag of sin, and to break the thrall of habit.

Paul points out first, *that God makes us free by the constant guidance which His presence gives.* "The Holy Ghost is in you."

Buddhism thinks of the Supreme as an impersonal all-pervading abstraction, absorp-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

tion into which is the goal of existence. For such a thought of God the highest wisdom is the crucifixion of all the desires, the hopes and aspirations which fill our lives. And so the devotee gives up all human relationships, denies himself all bodily gratification, that by slow self-immolation he may at last attain Nirvana. The cult of Confucius teaches the worship of ancestors, and advocates the denial of self that a host of spirits may be appeased. The Roman Catholic Church binds the soul with a multitude of rites and ceremonies and makes its access to God depend upon the intervention of a priest. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Paul preached it, proclaims that God is our friend, that He is near to us always, yes, that He dwells within us, speaking to the very innermost core of our soul at all times; giving us sure guidance at every turn in our lives.

How boundlessly free such a relation makes the soul. Commandments were necessary while men thought of God as far off. They indicated what He would have us do under certain conditions. But life is so great and complex that they failed oftentimes to give guidance when that guidance was needed most of all. Yet when we remember that

THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF FRIENDSHIP

God is ever with us, how different it all becomes. When difficulties confront us, when we are beset by doubts and fears, we have only to look up to Him, asking in reverent faith, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" And quick as the question is asked the answer comes back, prompted by His Spirit, or if He sometimes leaves us without the desired direction it is that we may see in fuller perspective the meaning of what we ask, and win its answer out of life.

It is like the mother teaching her child to walk. Every faltering step is watched over and helped by her wisdom, her strength and love. The child's freedom is hindered by its inexperience and its fear, but under her tender watchfulness it learns the lessons of life, rejoicing more and more in its new-found powers. No hard, dead restrictions fetter its movements; it is watched over and kept and led by unfaltering love and unceasing kindness.

The citizen of a free country does not feel himself hampered by its laws. He loves the state and in that love fulfils its mandates better than he could if he were always thinking of the mere letter of the law. The law is no restriction to his freedom, it is his

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

guide to an even fuller liberty. And this is the freedom of which Paul tells us. It is the liberty born of love. If God is ever-present with us and we give ourselves wholly to friendship with Him, our highest joy will be to yield to the slightest hint He gives for our guidance, and in that freedom we realize what is best in ourselves. We are made in His image, and obedience to Him is obedience to the law of our own lives. Every desire, every ambition, every emotion, is given us for some wise purpose, but we only know their reason, we only use them rightly, in the insight which His presence gives. Under His guidance all our impulses, all our emotions, all our ambitions, work in beautiful harmony, subserving one great, divine purpose, and leading on to the fulness of perfect manhood in Jesus Christ.

But notice, further, *the freedom of the children of God is secured by His trust in us.* "Ye are the temples of the Holy Ghost."

Some years ago the cry went out over Britain: "We have lost the old virility which characterized our sires. Luxury and prosperity have sapped the foundations of our heroic virtues." But the call came for

THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF FRIENDSHIP

volunteers to defend the Empire in South Africa, and despite the mismanagement that characterized that war, and the distrust in many minds of the motives which inspired it, thousands of young men from the very best families joined with those of humbler origin to defend the flag. The Empire trusted her sons, and, colonial and home-born, they gave their all for her. The appeal to the best always receives the best in response. And confidence and trust speaks home to the best in every heart. The watchword of John Knox was "Trust the people," and the history of Scotland is the justification of his wisdom. Russia has distrusted the people for centuries, and to-day she is reaping the reward in bloodshed and horror upon horror.

Paul's message that sounded like a trumpet-note to the tempted church at Corinth was, "God trusts you." And how great that trust was, when he could truly say, "Ye are the temples of the Holy Ghost." To-day in China men have to live in little village communities for mutual protection, but the temples are out in the open fields, where they can be easily reached by a number of communities. These temples often become the refuge

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

of the worst class in the district, the cut-throats and outlaws from the different villages, and the honor of the god is tarnished by the associations of his temple. This is Paul's thought in his message to Corinth. The living God is present everywhere in the lives of those who yield themselves to Him. He abides within them and they become His temples. As His temples are, so is the honor which He receives.

And this great message went home to the heart of the Corinthian Church, lifting it out of the degrading atmosphere in which it was born to be one of the bright centres of Christian light and leading. These Christians felt they were free to do what they would, but the love of God constrained them, because He had put His honor in their keeping, and for His sake they denied themselves even to the death. Do we need this message less than they? True, the average morality of our day is vastly in advance of that of Corinth, but have we yet reached the place where no follower of the Christ needs to hear this trumpet-call. The very prevalence of a traditional respectability often makes us careless of the honor of our Friend who has

THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF FRIENDSHIP

made Himself one with us in the closest of all unions.

There is so much that is called Christian in our civilization that we are tempted to think it matters little what the mere individual does; yet God is honored or His glory tarnished not by the mass, but by the individuals of which that mass is composed. The young man who goes out for the first time into the fascinating pantomime of the world is tempted to think that it matters very little to the sum of things if he has his fling in sensual gratification, if he sows a few wild oats, if he does as those about him do. But every such falling away from the best and highest is a shame to his manhood, for it means a betrayal of trust, of the greatest trust that was ever reposed in a human being, the keeping untarnished the escutcheon of Jesus, the Friend who has made of him His abiding place, the very citadel of His honor. And when, amid the busy marts of trade, the world's standards tempt us to do as the world does for paltry gain, we need this trumpet-call of Paul, "What! know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost which is in you."

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

What earthly gain can compensate for that thrilling sense of duty done, even at the expense of loss, of trust kept up to the death. Earth's heroes and martyrs live and command the world's admiration because the human heart feels, "These men have kept their trust," and the godlike in us always bows to the hero souls who have proved true. There are martyrdoms to-day, harder to bear than those of old, because they are the martyrdoms of the commonplace, unseen and unheralded by the world, yet no less marked and honored by the hero of Calvary, the Christ of God.

When Togo manœuvred his conquering fleet into action in the battle of the Sea of Japan, he used again Nelson's great watchword applied to his own nation, "Japan expects every man to do his duty." And thrilled by this sacred trust those gallant sea-dogs of the Orient swept the boasted might of Russia from the broad Pacific. To-day the Captain of our salvation is manœuvring His armies into line against the powers of darkness, against uncleanness and selfishness in private life, against corruption in politics and in business, against ignorance and superstition among the nations of the world, and put

THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF FRIENDSHIP

into modern phraseology Paul's charge to the Corinthians and to us means, "Christ expects that every Christian will do his duty." We are under no bonds to serve Him, no bonds but the bonds of honor and of love. We are free to skulk behind the warring host, free to parley with the enemy, free to squander on ourselves the stores He has committed to our care to carry on His warfare, but who of us will be base enough to do it. Shall we not rally to His standard, respond to the trust reposed in us, and never rest till He reigns King of earth, as He is King of Heaven, till our freedom is made perfect in a life of perfect love.

But notice, lastly, *that God secures our freedom by taking possession of us. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price."*

Not your own and yet free, bought with a price and not slaves. It is the paradox of love. The wife who has given herself in love to her husband is no longer her own; her life is linked, for better, for worse, with his life. Treason to him is treason to herself. Nothing can ever separate them, not even death itself, and leave them as they were. Sin may do it, but the price of sin is

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

death, death to all that is worth having in life, yes, death eternal. So it is with love always. The soul that has made friends with Christ knows that it is no longer its own, and knows, too, that that eternal Friend is no longer all His own. That is the price Christ paid for the love of men. He died that they might be made one with Him in the life of friendship and of love, and in that perfect union each belongs to the other. Yet that very union is the one guarantee of the soul's freedom, for only in Christ is the soul made free from sin, does it find its own perfect life. To sin is to mar this union, to separate us from perfect fellowship with Christ. To seek to respond to His love is to know the freedom wherewith Christ makes us free, is to know the life of perfect joy and peace revealed unto us and secured for us by His death on the cross. We are bought with a price, a price so great that it staggered the heavens, and made the sun veil its face in horrified wonder—the heart's blood of the Son of God. Who can measure such a love, and where can we stop in our adoring service to a Friend who has done and is doing so much for us. To serve Him, if we realize what that price was, becomes

THE MORAL DYNAMIC OF FRIENDSHIP

the joyous atmosphere of our souls, the very breath of our life, and we would not, if we could, do aught else.

The liberty of the Christian is the liberty born of love, of perfect friendship, of adoring gratitude, and in its genial sunshine all that is within us of beauty and of holiness takes on an ever fuller life, until we stand complete at last in His presence. And the moral dynamic that frees us from the power of habit and the taint of sin, that impels us at every stage in our lives, is the constant friendship, the unceasing love, of Him to whom our bodies and our souls belong, who has bought us with a price, even the precious blood of Christ.

"There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea ;
There's a kindness in His justice
That is more than liberty."



**THE NEMESIS OF FRIENDSHIP
SCORNED**

XI.

*THE NEMESIS OF FRIENDSHIP
SCORNED.*

"If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there."
—*Ps. cxxxix. 8.*

While we rejoice in the tenderness and gentleness of God's friendship toward us, there is a dark and tragic side to that friendship which must never be forgotten. It is true that "God is Love." But our God is a consuming fire. Love and consuming fire each have a place in all true friendship. Nay, love itself may become a consuming fire. Every lofty character protects itself from desecration by that flaming assertion of its inviolability which we call anger. The wrath of God is not the fleeting ebullition, too often colored and embittered by sin, called anger in men. It is an infinitely more terrible thing. Springing from undying love and unsullied holiness it withers everything that withstands it. We know, even in our little

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

human lives, how dreadful a thing the wrath of a perfectly fair, just and good man is, what a bitter punishment to a sensitive soul it may become. God's love is infinitely tender and He pleads with passionate longing for our love in return, but the very tenderness of His love makes the approach to its sacred sanctuary an awful thing, dooming to sorer punishment irreverence, and carelessness and sin. Friendship is gentle and simple and loving, but it is the greatest, most terrible word in human speech. To profane it is to be lost.

"A Friend,—it is another name for God,
Whose love inspires all love, is all in all.
Profane it not, lest lowest shame befall;
Worship no idol, whether stone or clod."

But because men do profane the most sacred thing in the world, because they do worship idols, we have the sad fact and bitter reality of hell. Friendship profaned becomes the soul's Nemesis, and it is only as we consider future punishment in the light of the love and friendship of God that we realize its dread necessity and its awful spiritual meaning. It is the constant presence of the unsullied holiness and the un-

THE NEMESIS OF FRIENDSHIP SCORNED

ceasing love of God which make the joy of heaven and the sorrow of hell. The only difference is in the human heart. We know not all it may mean, but we do know that the friends of God are not here as His foes, we do know that death has no power to reverse the laws of spirit and make good as evil and evil as good. We do know that the future life is of the spirit, and its bliss and its woe must be of the spirit, too. The great Father of us all has told us little of that tragic climax of sin, and it behoves us to touch with sorrowful love all that pertains to the dreadful thought of future punishment, knowing that in speaking of it we would be speaking of our own future but for the grace of God. Yet our text, viewed in the light of Scripture and human experience, indicates some of the elements of the woe of those who have not found the blessed secret of friendship with God.

And first, *the friendship of God becomes the Nemesis of the souls that scorn it here by its constant reminder of what might have been.*

The one hundred and thirty-ninth psalm is the great hymn of God's omnipresence. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." Nowhere is there the smallest spot where God is not, where the soul can hide secure from Him.

In our life here it is easy to forget this great fact. We may be so occupied with the things of earth as to forget all about His being. In a great city the noises of traffic and of business may be so loud and so insistent as to drown the voices of the church bells ringing to prayer and meditation, but the bells ring on and the wise hear and pause and pray, while the thoughtless go on in life's busy, thronging round. The future life is a life of spirit, where the siren voices of time and sense are forever still, or speak in soul music and not in tones that are born of earth. Then all men must face the real

THE NEMESIS OF FRIENDSHIP SCORNE

facts of life, and the realest fact of all, yea the one ultimate reality, is God, the ever-present, all-seeing Spirit.

There, there will be no escaping Him, no forgetting His presence, no avoiding His all-seeing eye, and to those who have failed to learn the meaning of life, that presence will ever speak of what might have been. We are made in the image of God. Christ came to earth to show us that humanity is divine, that divinity is human. He came to show us that we each have within us the germ of divinity, which may grow to all eternity, to put our feet on the first rounds of a ladder leading step by step to the fullness of the Divine life. It was in time that God took on His perfect humanity, and it is in time and, so far as we know, in time alone that we can begin that upward ascent. To miss the straight and narrow gate in time is to be shut out from eternal life. Every moment of that long eternity will be spent in the very presence of the Divine, the Divine revealed to us in Jesus Christ. And that unceasing vision of Him will never let us forget the glorious destiny for which we were made. Christ was, fully realized, what we are each in germ. All eternity

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

will be required to unfold what we may be, but to stand face to face with what we might have been and know it to be forever unattainable, this would in itself be a worm that never dies, this would be enough to make a hell for any human soul. The vision of Christ opens to our eyes such an endless vista of soul-growth and soul-enrichment that to be forever haunted by its glory and know ourselves shut out from it by our own fault, would be to make the task of Sisyphus a joyous relief.

“Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these ‘It might have been.’”

And who can sound the sadness of an eternal
“might have been.”

But friendship profaned or scorned has another element that makes its constant presence a punishment almost too great to think about: *its power to stir up the worst in us.*

Strange to say, it is not the vicious who suffer most from vice in this world, but the virtuous. Barabbas, the robber and murderer, goes free, while the Christ, whose every thought breathed love and compassion, goes to the cross. Florence lets Savonarola burn, while an army of base, degraded monks drag the fair name of the Christ in the mire and

THE NEMESIS OF FRIENDSHIP SCORNED

vice in most flagrant forms flourishes on every hand. Why should this be so? Because a good man becomes a conscience to bad men, and there is nothing they fear and hate like conscience. To get away from it, to silence its voice, they will plunge into fresh excesses, will commit any crime and dare any penalty. When we do wrong, the peace and harmony of our souls is at once broken, the voice of conscience is raised, never to be silenced, till restitution is made. It may be drowned by other voices, it may even be lulled to sleep by the narcotics of the world, but the moment a good man is heard to speak it awakes with redoubled power to insist upon a hearing. And he who will not hear its voice is roused to fury against him who has awakened the sleeping giant. When Ahab was confronted by Elijah after the murder of Naboth, he cried, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Ahab hated and feared him, not because Elijah had ever wronged him, but because he was a continual reminder of a better life, an unfailing rebuke to his sins, because Elijah stood on the side of his own outraged conscience. Life is full of such instances of the bitterest hate, stirred up by the highest

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

living, just because it is high and pure and holy. If the soul that will not respond to the voice of God is thus disturbed by anything which makes it face conscience and listen to that voice even for a little while, what will it be to have to listen forever with no place in all the wide universe where escape can be had from it, and nothing which will fill life and drown its insistence. Conscience, once opportunity is lost beyond recall, becomes remorse, the worm which dieth not and the fire which is not quenched.

And that remorse is greater because God is so near and so real. Whenever, even in this life, one man wrongs another and refuses to make reparation for the wrong, he is filled with bitter hatred to his victim because the victim is on the side of his own conscience. The nobler and better that victim is and the baser the wrong done him, the more intense will be the hatred. Each sight of him stirs up anew the memory of his wrong and adds a fresh disquiet to the troubled soul. To be shut up forever with one thus wronged would be the chiefest torment to the unrepentant heart, and no crime would be too great to rid the sight of that constant monitor of conscience. But when the wrong has been done

THE NEMESIS OF FRIENDSHIP SCORNED

to God Himself, and the measure of that wrong is nothing less than the cross of Calvary, who can estimate the inward turmoil of the soul which day by day and year by year, with no escape, is shut up to His unceasing presence. Helpless to do Him harm, goaded to ever deeper intensity of hate by the very greatness of His love, such a state, if repentance is forever impossible, would make a hell too dreadful for us to contemplate. God cannot be under such conditions aught but self-defending wrath, and who can withstand the wrath of the Holy God.

But there is still another element in the faith of the impenitent, its *dreadful sense of emptiness and soul hunger in the presence of what was meant to be its all-sufficient satisfaction.*

“Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” If he soweth to the flesh, he shall of the flesh reap corruption. He who has despised the love and profaned the friendship of God has chosen in their place the flesh, with its appetites and its desires, and for their satisfaction he has spent his life. The earthly passion or ambition he has lived to pander has been roused to an intensity nothing can appease, and in that other

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

world, where all is spirit, these appetites and ambitions become whips of scorpions, torturing him with their raging intensity. As Frederick Robertson puts it, "He is the slave of passions that burn and appetites that crave when the power of enjoyment is gone. He reaps the harvest of disappointment, the harvest of bitter, useless remorse." And this remorse owes much of its sting to the clearer vision of the love of God which the spirit life gives and the realization of what it would have done to satisfy and enrich the soul had it been yielded to. The starved soul, hungering for that which love alone can give, sees love, unable to enter it in blessing, because of what it is and has been; sees God, who would have been the loving, soul-filling friend, transformed into a consuming fire, guarding the tree of life, where grow the only fruits that feed and satisfy the soul. To realize the tragic folly of sin when it is too late is itself a vision of despair, but to realize that all that folly and all that vileness has been against an infinite love, who can measure the remorse of such a vision? Dives in his despair still retains enough of the elements of divinity to realize his awful loss and to long to save others

THE NEMESIS OF FRIENDSHIP SCORNE

from it, yet he sees a great gulf fixed, and fixed by his own decision, between himself and what his soul burns as with consuming fire to make its own. Could the soul forget, were all these longings after realization forever stilled, that empty world might be endured. But to see, with all the clearness of the spirit world, the lost Eden forever before the hungry heart, and feel that there is that within ourselves which shuts us forever out and away from it. This is to taste the very bitterness of hell.

But is there no ray of hope? Sadly we turn away and leave it all with Him who so loved us as to give the dear Christ for us. He is there, and if in all the wealth of His love there remains some way by which the impenitent will may be at last transformed, He will find and He will use that way. But even if such were possible the loss would still be an infinite one, for all life's opportunities are lost and lost forever, and what can compensate for these blessed days of ever-deepening fellowship with Him, of ever fuller experiences of His cleansing and saving love.

Yet why should we dwell on this dread picture? No one who reads these words

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

need ever know its bitter reality. We only dwell on the dread abyss that fronts the stormy sea that we may turn our faces inland to the broad continents where the green fields smile and the peaceful rivers flow, where we may follow on to know the safety and the peace of the broad uplands. And we only dwell on this dark scene that we may realize the dread reality of life and the eternal issues of its momentary choices; that with deeper passion of earnestness we may seek to know Him whom to know is life eternal. We are each a potential citizen of heaven, and all the wealth of God's love may be ours to bring us there. Turn your eyes away from that black abyss up to yon radiant hill-top, where the cross of Christ sheds the light of heaven over all the world, and in its un-failing light realize your manhood and know yourself a friend of God. Then for you there is no hell. He who gave the cross its glory conquered death and vanquished hell and gives us life eternal here and now.

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FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD AND
THE LAST THINGS



XII.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD AND THE LAST THINGS

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. DEATH AND THE FUTURE LIFE.

“For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—*Romans viii. 38, 39.*

THAT magnificent pæan of the Christian religion from which our text is taken begins with the triumph note, “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” gains volume and sweep as it thrills onward and upward through promise after promise, through glorious outlook after glorious outlook, pauses for a moment to dwell on one overpowering chord, “We know that all

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose," then swells out and up to the stupendous climax of our text, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nowhere else has Paul risen to such sublime heights of spiritual insight and beauty of poetic diction; nowhere else in the Pauline epistles does the tired, troubled, tempted soul rest with deeper peace and joy than on the sun-kissed mountain tops to which these great words bear it up. And the keynote of it all is "In Christ Jesus." All things are sure to the soul that rests in friendship with Him. Indwelt by the Spirit, supported by God Himself, who ordains all things, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Life is so complex, its problems so many, and its experiences so varied, that no mere set of words, no hard-and-fast plan for the future can meet all the experiences and satisfy all the longings of our souls. The

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAST THINGS

man whose life is one long struggle to maintain his very existence, sighs for rest, but to him who is strong and healthy and hopeful, struggle and achievement is the very breath of life. The suffering, sorrowing ones crave comfort and consolation, but these terms are meaningless to the happy, healthy child. Yet the Gospel is wide enough to meet the deepest needs of every one of them. It is a gospel of friendship, of constant companionship with the Divine Himself in Jesus Christ, and that ever-present, loving Friend is always ready to meet and satisfy each need just as it arises. It is thus the Gospel for all ages and all conditions of men, for the prosperous, the well and the free, as for the struggling, suffering, care-laden children of men. As Paul states it, it has two elements, present reality and future certainty.

We too often picture the fruits of faith in Christ as wholly in the future, as fitting us to meet the unknown world, but having little to do with the busy present. Not so Paul. The Christ he knew had met him on the way to Damascus, had shown him that whatever he did in this life was done for or against Him. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

thou me?" was the question which opened Paul's eyes to the essential spirituality of life, to the fact of the presence everywhere and always of the living Christ. "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," made all life for him the very presence of the Christ. Henceforth he could say, and say truly, "For me to live is Christ." The benefits of religion were real and present. "There is therefore now no condemnation." Not "there shall be," but "there is" no condemnation. Religion is a matter of the present tense, of present assurance and joy and peace—in one word, a matter of living friendship with the living, ever-present Christ. It is out of this present reality, out of this new life in Christ, that all certainty for the future arises. He only can sing the last chord of Paul's great song of triumph, "I am persuaded," who has made his own the key to the opening strain, "In Christ Jesus." He who is "in Christ Jesus" is sure of the future because he is sure of the present. "I know whom I have believed" must be the first half of the confession which ends, "and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAST THINGS

The second coming of Christ, death and the future life, are three great last things which have occupied the minds of the Church since the day when our Lord ascended to the Father, leaving His promise to return. The last two have been subjects of the most intense and vital interest to men in all ages, and they have received a new meaning from the work of our Lord.

The expression "second coming" is not a scripture term, but is the outgrowth of later theology. The word used in the New Testament is "parousia," which literally signifies "presence," so that the presence of Christ, as well as His coming, is included in the word. There are references in the New Testament to many comings of our Lord: a physical coming in His resurrection, a spiritual coming, when the Paraclete should appear, a coming to the disciples at their death to receive them into the many mansions which He had gone to prepare for them, a coming for judgment, taking place at different periods of the history of the Church, as well as a fuller coming whenever a great spiritual movement began in the world, and a final coming at the end of the age, to judge the world, to destroy

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

evil, to reward the saints, and to establish His Kingdom. The New Testament does not draw any hard-and-fast lines between these various comings. They are all different aspects of the great oncoming of the Kingdom of Christ in the world, in its bearing on the whole Church and on individuals.

There are passages in the Book of Revelation, paralleled by some others in the Book of Daniel, which have led many to suppose that the New Testament doctrine of the parousia indicated a coming of our Lord to earth, to be followed by a millenium of a thousand years. But it must not be forgotten that the passages on which such an idea are based are all of them apocalyptic in their origin, and therefore must not be interpreted too literally. It is a significant fact that while all thoughtful men have admitted the difficulty of fully explaining many of these passages, no great Church has ever accepted as part of its confession the doctrine of a pre-millennial coming of our Lord. And when there is so much that is sure and clear, why should we seek to build our faith on what is uncertain and apocalyptic? The parousia is not a single event, but a whole dispensation, which began with the resur-

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAST THINGS

rection and ascension of Christ, and will only culminate when He comes in full power and glory, when the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and His Christ. In it each separate coming is but a stage leading on to the one great consummation, the final triumph of Him whose right it is to reign.

At the heart of it all is the great spiritual thought that the presence of Christ is the essential thing in the life of the Christian, and that to be ready for each and all of His comings is the task set for us who have named His name. We know how easy it is to miss the uplift of any great movement by sloth and indifference. This is to fail to be ready for the coming of Christ. He comes in the trials and troubles of life; He comes in its triumphs and its joys; He comes in every opportunity for loving service, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"; He comes where two or three are gathered together in the stillness of the prayer hour; He comes in richer measure in every great spiritual awakening which sweeps over the world; He comes in the great national crises which

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

every nation is called on to pass through, and to fail to see Him clearer in each of these comings and to be lifted into fuller fellowship with Him through it, is to jeopardize our own souls, to miss God's greatest means of soul culture and progress in the knowledge of His Son.

We are assured that He will finally come in glory to rule the world by what has taken place in our own souls. Each human heart is in itself a little world. All the forces that ever come to sight in the world are at work in greater or less degree in each of us, and the Christian who has had his soul transformed from an abode of darkness and sin to the very temple of the Spirit of God knows that He who has wrought this change in Him is at work in the world, and must in His own good time work this same change there, either by the destruction of the evil and those who ally themselves with it, or by the gradual conquest of the hearts of all men by the power which has subdued his heart. What does it matter how we express it, whether in the stupendous figures of apocalypse or in the simple language of every-day life. It is the same great truth. He who has made a clean, pure man of me, the chief

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAST THINGS

of sinners, has the will and the power to make this world His own and to reign without a rival in the affairs of men. Christ is here now to every soul which has been saved by His grace, though the weaknesses of the flesh, the old, sinful tendencies, hide Him too often from our view. He comes to us in a thousand ways every day we live, making of life's commonplaces the avenues of approach to our hearts, bringing upon us great and startling experiences that we may be the better weaned from the allurements of earth and ever holding before us the vision of His final triumph and glorious reign among men, a triumph and a reign begun already in so far as our hearts are pure and our souls are alert for the slightest leading of His spirit, in so far as "Even so, come Lord Jesus," is our constant prayer.

Whatever view we hold of His coming, we must not project it all into the future and miss the countless avenues of experience and of service along which He seeks to come to us every day, or we lose the very heart of the parousia. But if day by day we rejoice in His living presence with us and in us, and long for its coming in ever fuller measure, whatever the ultimate form

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

of that coming may be, we shall be ready for it and shall be led by it into the very secret of His presence, to dwell with Him forevermore.

One of the last things which Christ has touched into newness of meaning is death. How the grim monster has brooded like a spectre over the race from the day when the first human being shut his eyes on the beauty of earth and went out into the great unknown. He has been the grinning skeleton at every feast, the haunting presence that cast his withering shadow over everything sweet and fair this old world holds. Paganism met him with the atheism of sensuality, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die"; philosophy with the atheism of fate. "Nerve yourself to meet like a man that which every man must meet"; even Judaism faced with heavy heart the grim inevitable, "There is no work, nor knowledge, nor device, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." It remained for the Christian to look him in the face, and say, "O death, where is thy sting?" Christ died and rose again, and forever after death lost his terror to those that are in Christ. He came back from that

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAST THINGS

last experience of earth untouched by its power, and He lives to-day the same loving Jesus who spoke home with such winning words to the hearts of those who companied on earth with Him. "Because I live," he says, "ye shall live also," thus assuring us of the victory He won for each individual Christian heart. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." This is the Christian's joyous knowledge even now.

But not only did Christ come back from the experience we call death unharmed by it, He went into it as Jesus of Nazareth, the despised and rejected one, He returned from it as the Christ of God, the Saviour of the world. Death, instead of harming Him, proved to be God's own servant to place the crown on His brows, to enthrone Him forever as the Saviour and the King of men. The death of Christ has become the sweetest note in all the songs of His Church, the love-born tie that binds the hearts of men in undying allegiance to Him. The last enemy has been made the chiefest friend. So, too, for the Christian, death is no longer the dark messenger of doom, but the white-winged angel of God, sent to bring our spirits from the trials and the half-joys of earth to the

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

unbroken vision of the Christ in glory. So great is its power to enrich us, that Paul could truly say, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."

What a transformation! From black darkness to radiant light, from a nightmare of horror to a bright vision of glory. Out of the experience of the Church in all ages has gone the triumph song:

"Take comfort, Christians, when your friends
In Jesus fall asleep ;
Their better being never ends,
Why, then, dejected weep?
Why inconsolable as those
To whom no hope is given?
Death is the messenger of peace,
And calls the soul to Heaven."

Death has lost its terror because of what it leads us to, because of the future life assured the Christian in Christ.

So long as God was thought of as a far-off being, and the only supremely real things were the things of this life, then death was a dreadful thing, for it rooted up our lives out of this beautiful world of love and comradeship and beauty and physical delights to transport them into endless

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAST THINGS

nothingness and annihilation or into an unknown world of peeping, muttering shades, where there was no wisdom nor device nor knowledge, and where life was a mere attenuated shadow of the life on earth.

But in Jesus Christ all this is changed. "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you," locates the unseen world, the abode of our spirits, not in the future and the far-away, but in the here and the now. Heaven begins for us the moment we are made one with God in Jesus Christ, and death is neither the beginning nor the end of life; it is only an incident, a change from a state where the seen and the physical is the most insistent and seemingly the most real, into a state where the unseen and the spiritual is the joyously and completely real.

"It is appointed unto all men once to die and after death the judgment," is a dreadful or a joyous truth according to our relation to Christ.

If we have entered the mystery of friendship with Him, and are kept by His power through faith unto salvation, we know already what judgment will mean for us. We are trusting not in our own imper-

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

fect life, but in His perfect work and His all-redeeming power. Death will only usher us into a still more complete union with Him who has made us one with Himself. The judgment by which we are tried will be on His character and His work, for that becomes ours when we are made one with Him, and that character and that work has already been abundantly vindicated of the Father. "Beloved," says John, "if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." Every man here has a foretaste of His judgment. If our hearts condemn us not, if we have made our peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, if we have become His friend and let Him become ours, then judgment can hold no terrors for us, for Christ Himself is Judge. He has accepted us already, and in the judgment will only assign us to fuller fellowship, to more real friendship with Himself.

But if this life is all to us, if we have despised and rejected the love and the friendship of the Lord of glory, then death is the end of all that has been real and pleasing to us, and our condemnation is already sealed, for the one real thing in eternity is the presence and the love of God in Jesus Christ.

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAST THINGS

Neglecting and despising that has cut us off from all that makes eternal life real and glorious, and has left the Judge no choice but to send us away into eternal death. O that men were wise to see the eternal issues of earth's simple, momentary choices, to realize that they are writing their own judgment every day they live by their attitude to Christ the Judge. If you rejoice in His friendship here and count it your greatest joy, then judgment to you will be glad tidings of great joy, for it gives you in infinite measure the thing your soul desires above all else. But if you hate Him or despise Him here and find your satisfaction in the things of earth, then judgment will be the dreadful voice of doom to you, for heaven has nothing else to give, save His friendship and His love, and that will be to you the greatest torment.

So, for our spirits the last things are no longer unknown. In Christ we meet and know one who was dead and is alive again. The life which we live in Him day by day knows itself even deepened and enriched by the very things that our natural man fears and suffers from, the most. Pain borne for Him and in Him becomes gain, grief

RELIGION AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

becomes gladness, loss of substance becomes increase of grace, and all these successive gains tell us as nothing else can that the last change of all our earthly experiences, the mystery of death, will do for us what it did for Him, will usher us into the fulness of life that never ends. In Him we live a life in which time and space are but modes of being, a life wider and greater than they, which will go on to ever larger fulness when they shall be no more.

If friendship with God in Christ is your joy in this life, the thought of the future life ought to thrill you with joy unspeakable, for

“Christ, He is the fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love ;
The streams on earth I've tasted,
More deep I'll drink above :
There to an ocean fulness
His mercy doth expand,
And glory—glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.”

What does it matter what the scenery of heaven may be, or what the environment in which our souls exist! The thing which meets and satisfies every true longing of our hearts here is friendship with Christ, is the sense of His dwelling with us and in us, and

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LAST THINGS

He is all the glory of that last state of the soul in the heavenly places. Well may the Apostle to the Gentiles write: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Every day His grace and His love become more precious to us here; every morning we thrill with deeper joy at the thought of what He is to us even in our limited, sin-warped lives here below; but when we see Him as He is, when we know as we are known, who can voice forth in human speech the fulness of the life that shall be ours?

"O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God's elect;
O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect.
Jesus, in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest,
Who art, with God the Father
And Spirit ever blest."

