SELF-DENIAL AND SELF-COMMITTAL.

THERE are several practical difficulties which embarrass not only Christian learners but Christian teachers in connexion with the "following of Christ." Some of these, it is thought, might disappear, and others be eased, by such considerations as are here offered about what Christ Himself meant by the phrase—especially as He was understood to mean it by those who heard it first, and who were acted upon most mightily by Him. I have called my subject Self-denial and Self-committal. I might have called it Following Christ and Trusting Christ.

Two things should be remembered about Christ's precepts, and especially those concerning self-denial. They were never the results of His mere observation or meditation on moral problems. They were not part of a new doctrine of morals, nor the results of any ethical theory at all.

(1) They were transcripts from His own personal experience. He Himself had left everything, and turned His back on the world and its wages for the Father. We can go far in constructing the inner life of Christ by remembering this, that all His person was involved in every word He said. He was all of a piece. It was the Christ with the Cross latent in Him that was able to speak the parable of the Prodigal or depict the Last Judgment. We cannot indeed reconstruct His most personal religion, His immediate dealings with God How can we conceive the inmost relation to God of the Son whom no man knoweth but only the Father? Or of one who knew Himself sent from God to be all men's king, and therefore no man's peer? We have neither the data nor the courage to rebuild one of His prayers, even to surmise it. But we can get much insight into His consciousness in relation to His work and His entourage by remembering that all

He said and did was minted from His own personal experience. We can follow His psychology, the pragmatism of His thought, so far at least.

(2) These precepts were also parts and aspects of His grand central call of His public to repentance and change of life. They were not only a part of His personality, but also of His vocation and preaching; and His preaching, His gospel, was one long and varied call upon the world for the faith that works by repentance or newness of life. "Deny thyself" was but another form of saying "repent." Self-denial, even in its now current sense, is but breaking with our natural self and its past in detail.

Two corrections are required of our current ideas in connexion with such passages, for instance as "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

I. As to following Him, Christianity is not sectary.

II. As to self-denial, Christianity is not merely altruistic.

I. Did He expect all, who believed in Him, to follow Him? Surely, no. There were some whom He did not allow to follow Him; and some, like the family of Bethany, were never asked. The followers or disciples, therefore, were a group within the believers, who left all, at a special call, for a special mode of life. All were called to believe, to "deny self," but few chosen to be apostles, to "follow." All were called to trust Christ, confess Him, live in Him; but few to imitate His homeless way of life. It is well to be sure that we believe in Christ before we offer to be His conspicuous followers and take up His cross. Some try His cross without Himself. To-day many good men follow in the hope of believing; but *then* they believed with the possible result of following.

We may note also that the gathering of the disciples was not the founding of the Church—which came only by the

Spirit when He was glorified. We of the Church are now confessors rather than disciples. We are learning the Cross indeed, but only because it has made us. We are learning *in* it, not *of* it. We are seekers of what we have found. These words were said originally not to the Church, but to the future Apostolate and ministry of the Church—to the spiritual aristocracy selected and ennobled by Christ as His gift to the Church next in value to the Spirit. If Christ's demands on His "*followers*" were for all *believers*, His Church could only obey Him by entire separation from the world; which would be mere imitation rather than appropriation of Christ.

In this matter of imitation we may note: (1) The Apostles, through imitating Christ in leaving natural ties, never show signs of imitating His behaviour as the essence of their religion. They leave all in obedience rather than imitation. They give no sign of copying His example, or of doing as He would do in their place. He would not be Christ if He were in their place. They could not imitate Him, they were absolutely dependent on Him—as dependent on Him as on God. And He could be in the place of no mere individual; nor could any such be in His. The question, what Christ would do in my place, is an absurd and impossible one. The Christian lives in Christ, rather than like Christ. Not a word of the Gospels has this note of copying Christ, or of the casuistry that goes with the effort. To follow Christ is to be in His closer communion, not in His footsteps. None can tread in His steps. His work was absolutely unique. We cannot imitate our Redeemer, only worship Him. It was the Christ, not the Jesus, that the Apostles had in their eye. But if we take that redeeming Christ of the Cross out of the story, we cannot explain why they did not copy Him in the small things instead of worshipping Him for the great.

(2) The Apostles do not even imitate each other. Faith

was a new life which expressed itself according to each man's idiosyncrasy. Common faith is the best soil of individual liberty. Jesus made His disciples independent of each other because all were equally dependent on Him. Only not in an isolated dependence ; but in such a social and complementary way that questions about relative greatness should not arise. There are many religious types awakened by Him both in character and belief, and all are given their true and native life by faith. It is not as if Christ carefully and deliberately made it His chief task to adapt His methods to character, like a great educator (though, of course, we cannot say He never did) ; but His person acted upon each according to his kind, apart from design of His. What He gave them was not so much treatment as life—the common life of repentance and faith. His pastorate (like all God's providence) was founded in His redemption of them.

Therefore, as the disciples did not imitate each other, any more than they imitated Jesus, we are not bound to imitate them ; whose *faith* it is we follow, and their inspiration, rather than their example.

II. As to Self-denial, that was a demand upon all.

Theological Liberalism does not grasp the Evangelical idea of faith in Christ, therefore it preaches self-sacrifice as Christianity, the imitation of Christ's manner, or the cultivation of Christ's spirit of life. It would be a valuable thing if we could have a perfectly frank account, from candid and experienced ministers who have followed this line, as to its effect on their people. Has the world really been renounced and overcome by it ? It is an ethic (and in so far a self-salvation) ; and a religion which is only ethical ends for the generations in illusion or in despair. In the middle passage it is sadness or regret. Has the note been one of joyful victory or one of subdued service and shy goodness ? Has the self-sacrifice been produced in satisfactory

amount? Has it lasted? What has been its effect on the religion, on the spiritual note, of the community—crucifixion to the world or genial benevolence? Is it not often a self-regarding ethic? Is our eye not too often on our moral profit? Is the work really done, does it tend to be done, out of self-forgetful love of Christ and His souls?

Christ did not think of life as an ethical chain, a series of small sacrifices. The apostles did not. The New Testament did not. Faith was for them a life-disposal—one act as large as life itself, answering an act of love as large and eternal as God. It was the self-committal of the whole soul and person to the whole Christ. It was the decisive act, swift or long, which gave a man to Christ, placed him in Christ, and then let the Spirit of the new creation shape the precise form which the new life should take. Some have instructions to remain in their place in life ("study to be quiet, and do your own business"), only taking care that business do not blot out Christ, or blind them to the near kingdom. To the simple believer, the babe in Christ, the words under discussion mean this: So live in the world and its egoisms that they shall not capture and enslave you. So live in Christ there that, when the call comes to a great and reasoned decision, you let the world go for Christ, business for the kingdom, economics for ethics, ethics for faith. But others are called to come out of the current of natural life and its prizes, and to devote themselves to what brings no worldly reward; they may even set the world against them. Such is the idea of the ministry. But in any case we are not to be fidgetty devotees of self-denial, we are not to fuss about unselfishness. To cease to live to self is for the Christian much more than the negative thing, unselfishness. That is a mere formal and ethical definition. It needs a real content and goal of good. We cease living *to self* because we live *to God—because*, not *that we may*, live to

God. To cease living to self is not to take up unselfishness as a profession. That might be an attempt to make an eternal living, so to say, rather than laying hold of eternal life. The sin we must shun is something more than selfishness. There are people who become more concerned about being unselfish than about being of real use. Their unselfishness really has an eye on self and its excellence. It is egoistic unselfishness. It is self-seeking self-sacrifice. It is moral subjectivism. It is the work of people who are trying harder to be good than to be right and do their duty. Or it may be the rarefied self-interest of craving morbidly for the higher spiritual life, or the cult of their own personality. But the essential thing is so to live in Christ that we become just as selfless as He makes us. No man who is really living in Christ will be without guidance as to his course.

"Deny yourself," in Christ's mouth, was a religious call, and not an ethical precept. It concerned more the disposal of the soul than of the conduct. And it is only half the idea, and the negative half: the positive is, "Follow me." And even when that meant, "Come into my wandering company," it did not mean, "Come into my calling, take up my vocation." It meant attachment, devotion, to Him, disposing of the soul to Him. Read in the commentary of the spirit, it means, "Come *into* me, and thereby reach the true renunciation of the world." The idea rises through the three stages: (1) Deny yourself, go back on yourself, round on yourself, your instinctive, natural self, (2) as thoroughly as a man sentenced to death, (3) by dying for good unto the world and into Me. The Christian ideal is thus not following Christ by taking up the odd and homeless life of wandering saints, or peculiar people; but, in the full light of the Christian revelation and Gospel, it means first communion with Christ. We cannot have that without denying ourselves to the world, and such self-denial means much more than setting

our face against self-indulgence. It is really another form of Christ's great and standing call to repent—to change our attitude not only to our past but to the natural world. It is a strong and pointed expression of Christ's for that new life of repentance and faith in Himself which He was always preaching. To deny self is to make the sweeping, compendious, final, and permanent repentance. It means turning our back in principle and motive (whatever the form of practice) upon the natural man, on the universal ways of the world, on the decent goodness of society, it might be, no less than on the selfishness of individuals. It means rupture *in principle* with the natural man and the natural order—conversion, therefore, rather than what we mean by self-sacrifice. It implies a totally changed current and colour of life; not simply a new principle applied to life, but life in a new movement, a new direction, a new note. It means living in another world, to the oblivion often of this; turning thoroughly and permanently, in tone and principle, from the world of Egoism, however lawful and respectable; becoming, at the central point or the last dread pinch, a stranger to the natural self and the very friends round us, as Christ did to His family; living to unseen reality as the nearest and absorbing thing. Look at the man condemned to death and carrying his cross through the street, said Christ; or, as we should say, in the condemned cell[1]; or, as we might farther say, look at the man told by his doctor that his heart gives him but a few weeks to live. He moves to his end as in a dream. He no more belongs to the things around him. The jeers of foes or the surprise of friends he hardly notes. He is loose to one life, and dazed with the

[1] Taking up the Cross is not an act of self-denial, any more than the culprit's procession to the scaffold is. It is the badge of a life done with, branded and ear-marked for a doom, staked out for another owner and purpose.

dawn of another. He is in a distrait and unearthly frame of mind. Such a man is not practising self-denial in the poor and common sense that we give to Christ's phrase ; he is not practising the laborious, scrupulous type of religion we often associate with it. But he turns his soul's back upon all the natural order of things. His heart at least is no longer wedded to it—bravely as he may do his duty in it. He is already living in the precincts, the shadow, the spell of a life beyond. That is the idea—not careful and laborious self-sacrifice, but detachment from the world—even while obeying its law, doing its duties, loving its loves, and making due provision for them when we are gone—detachment from one world and absorption in another. Taking up the Cross does not mean doing devoted and disagreeable things in conscientious detail, nor even applying a great moral principle to life's behaviour—that would be reducing the Cross to a new legalism—but, putting our shoulders in a love passion under the Cross, having on us the mystic badge and seal of the unworldly Christ, becoming as a weaned child, bearing about a deep death to the world. It is the true other-worldliness. It is the inner-worldliness. Denying self does not mean the spiting of this or that desire, or the mortifying of this or that passion, or even the doing of this or that service. Our self is more fontal than all its thoughts, interests, passions, actions, or sacrifices. It is our whole personality, our soul, our egotism and all its connexions with a world of egotists. That self is to be denied by a new assignment of it for life and eternity. Yet it is not to be killed or eradicated, but subdued to its place—as we deny ourselves to the call of an obtrusive bore who would concuss and manage us, and whom we must not indulge ourselves so far as to kill. The egoist self is such a shameless bore. And this denial is done by the assertion of Christ in the self, His possession of it, by a self-assignment to Him and to the principles of His world, which turn the natural world upside down.

This is the badge of that inmost circle into which all believers have slowly, but not equally, to move. 'If any man drawn to me is to join my chosen, my ministry, my apostolate, my inner circle,' says Christ, 'let him lose to Me his egoism and his egotist interests; as a man loses them who is done with the world, and has the mark of death on him and the doom of greatness. Let him die unto Me. He can then be no self-seeker. He will totally change his attitude to self and self's world.' That is repentance in man or nation. It is more than a grand refusal; it is the grand reversal. It is not misery about sin, but a new principle of life, and of goodness as a life. "We cannot." No, we cannot, not till the kingdom seize us, not till we are lost in Him. *Christianity is not unselfishness, but faith with its implicates of devotion. It is not our sacrifice but Christ's cross. Our Christianity is not the sacrifice we make but the sacrifice we trust.* It is not losing self in service of the brethren, but losing self to Christ, and to the service of a Master who makes us brethren. Which man makes the deeper impression even on this world? He who is doing a multitude of detached, laborious, and manufactured services to men, or he who is palpably so living in Christ that his faith overflows on each occasion of helping, saving love? Self-devotion is, first, faith, and then service by a moral necessity; first our soul, then our sacrifice. All self-sacrifice is not good; some is quite bad. As Christians we are what our Master makes us, not what our efforts make us. Paul's great words show how deeply he understood Christ, "Through whom I am crucified unto the world, and the world unto me." And this while he was playing a very active part in the world. The perfect in Christianity does not mean the sinless, but those who are in right relation to God with all their sin, as in Judaism it meant relation to the law, and its blamelessness.

And so indeed it was with all the Apostles. How do we

find they denied themselves in following Him? Not by practising assiduous or ascetic self-denial, but by renouncing the whole world they were reared in—relatives, friends, interests, ideas; by learning a new tongue which almost made these sound like a foreign one; "hating father, mother, brother, sister"—even while loving them; leaving the faith they had been trained in; giving themselves to Christ as their ancestral God; losing the sense of fatherland and patriotism, and everything that before made life worth living. And for what? For communion with Christ, for His kingdom, for the Gospel, for the citizenship and realities of another and subversive order of things. Not for the life of sacrifice, but for life in Christ, with such sacrifice as that prescribed; for a life which repudiated the past rather than completed it, a life of repentance and not mere progress, of faith which makes sacrifice, and not sacrifice which replaces faith.

All Christian ethic is the practical expression of such repentance. This will seem a strained thing to those who associate repentance only, or chiefly, with remorseful lamentation and woe, or with passing moods, or with a temperament, or with the first beginnings of the Christian life, before the Gospel has taken over the victim of the law. But it will not so seem to those who recall that it is the standing obverse of faith as a life, that it is based both by the Baptist and by Jesus on the great, constant, and final hope of the near kingdom, that in the Old Testament, as in the New, this hope is a saving judgment, and inseparable from the remembrance of God's changeless holiness, especially in the Cross. The Christian life created there is as surely repentance as it is faith. Such was Christ's opening note; and it is the saint's dying confession, who says that youth hardly knows what repentance means. The place here given to repentance will not seem strange if we

remember that its supreme and positive form, as the abjuring of egoism, is the acceptance of Christ as our *alter ego*, who is God's holy law no less than His holy grace. The acceptance or the rejection of Christ is what John's call to repent historically culminated in for the nation. To have taken Christ for Messiah would have been the grand act of national repentance. His rejection was the height of their deeply religious, reputable and popular impenitence—the confirmed devoted egotism of a people deeply, falsely religious. The self-denial, the martyrdom, of the earnest Pharisee for God's sake but deepened the perdition.

A constant repentance, as our movement to God, and a constant forgiveness, as His movement to us, thus underlie the constant faith and ethic of the Gospel. And self-denial is but one aspect, or sequel, of the genetic, manifold and continual self-committal to Christ which is so much more than self-reference to Him, either as ideal or example, and is the very being of the new life.

It is an extraordinary literalism which besets liberalism in its frequent objection that Christ never spoke of theological subtleties like Atonement or Regeneration. It betrays in some a singular bondage to words, or ineptitude for ideas, when Jesus is thus set in conflict with Paul. Surely these ideas are in the Synoptics and in their Christ, even if the theological terms are not. And our discussion offers a case in point. Jesus never spoke of regeneration in the Synoptics at least; yet is His speech of self-denial anything else? Regeneration is something much more than an ethical change, however thorough. It is not an ascending procession of acts of self-renunciation. Ethical, after all, is a formal idea. What is the content that fills it? Surely the positive good *for* which the man is now moulded, not the negative *from* which he turns away. To be regenerate is not to cease living *for self*, it is to be living *for God*, and not only so but *in*

communion with God. It is not living unselfishly but living to God. It is not in the first place a life of sacrifice (for martyrdom can be, and now often is, quite unholy); it is a life of communion, with such sacrifice as that may entail for the only end that hallows all its means.

P. T. FORSYTH.

THE HEBREW FEASTS IN LEVITICUS XXIII.

ONE of the main points in pentateuchal criticism is the festal calendar appearing in Exodus xxiii. 10–19, xxxiv. 17–26, Leviticus xxiii., Numbers xxviii. and xxix., and Deuteronomy xvi. A comparison between these lists seems exceedingly instructive for showing the date of the various "strata" which the dominating school of higher criticism assumes. I have dealt with some of these feasts, the Days of the Unleavened Bread, the Passover and the Day of Atonement in the EXPOSITOR for November, 1909, and June, 1911, and tried to explain the original character of these feasts.

The question remains to be discussed whether the calendar of feasts in the so-called Priestly Code may be assigned to the pre-exilic period or not. It is generally accepted that the Priestly Code is of no value for our knowledge of the real nature of the Hebrew feasts, as it transformed the feasts from nature-festivals into festivals of religious history.

Those who assume that the ancestors of the Israelites were nomads are compelled to suppose that the three annual feasts, the days of the unleavened bread, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles were adopted by the Israelites from the Canaanite population of Palestine, for it is beyond doubt that these feasts are agricultural festivals. If we must admit that this Nomad-theory is not supported by