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The World according to St. John.

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Imagine the instance of any man who has made no great advance in the Christian Pilgrim's Progress. There has been wrought within him a genuine confession of the heart Godwards. He is a penitent; there has been no reserve about the conversion of his sins past. Where satisfaction is possible, he has made amends to his neighbour: he is humbly and thankfully conscious of Divine pardon. Now there lies before him a new life, yet a life still to be spent here in the world,—in a scene of his own personal probation and discipline,—the world of space and time and sense, the world of human occupation and interests and pursuits, the world too often, as St. John's language with an awful precision suggests, of alienation from God, and therefore a world that has no communication with the life that is in His Son. Suppose, further, that such a one has fully faced the fact that the spiritual life within him must, if it be true, grow; and that the development will be under circumstances of grave difficulty, that it is a plant of far more sensitive growth than he had ever dreamt of. He could never have imagined that a slight exposure in this or that direction would be likely to harm it overmuch, but lo, ere he could prevent it, it had been killed to the very root. Change the line of metaphor, and reflect that the chief enemy of the soul has the practised skill of experienced generalship. If the soul's fortress be not yielded up to him one way, he will come out against it several ways. If open attacks meet with resistance, he addresses himself to other and softer methods. He appears in no repulsive form; his approach has nothing dark or hideous about it. What a transformation is this! It is an embassage of good will; how attractive these messages of sweetness and delight! Who shall refuse to listen to the terms of one who speaks so fair? The terms, moreover, are made easy enough for promising traitors. None need break rudely from their former allegiance. It is no coarse nor violent rupture which this angel of light suggests. True that the secret possession of heart and will must be his, but that once surrendered, a little external homage to a Past Master will be an unconsidered trifle to the Present owner. Only keep the standard of such devotion and service low, and the new recruit will soon become an efficient. The first step is the abandonment of all high ideals. The motto on the devil's standard is Μήδεν ἄγαν. The loyalty which the general expects, which he prefers, is one which allows scope for compromise, and there is nothing more laudable than compromise when it is adroit.

By such enticements many a Christian soul has been slowly yet securely won over. Silken threads have led captive when the rough touch of iron bands would have been resisted to the death. The conquest has been none the less certain because the victory has been a bloodless one.

It would be a task at once needless and painful to quote the sufferings of the saints down the ages, who, thus yielding, have again, by Divine mercy, been freed by the Captain of their salvation and enlisted afresh in His service in the holy war against the mischief and madness of sinful powers. In the formularies of Baptism and Confirmation, and in the Catechism, the children of the English Church are taught, not without a wise prevision, that in order to become Christ's faithful soldiers and servants they must make a threefold renunciation. They must forsake sin, the world, and the devil. 'Sin' is regarded in special relation to the lusts of the flesh, the evil principle in so far as it is allowed lodgment within that temple which should be the Spirit's shrine. The 'world' is taken clearly in that Johannine sense hereafter to be set forth. The 'devil' introduces a personal note, and implies a personal agency. It is in no antagonism to St. James's[1] teaching that he is set forth as the instrument to temptation, and the 'world,' rightly understood, is the sphere in which he for a time is permitted to exercise sway. For the young such a division seems pertinent enough; it gives explicitness, provides needful cautions, and helps to heighten the sense of responsibility. But those who have made, or striven to make, advances in spiritual life and experience know full well that the division is not a final or absolute one. It

[1] Ja 1^{14}.

seems impossible to separate with any finality those temptations to sin which come from within and those which assail from without. Again, it seems impossible to dissociate from either kind or aspect of temptation the work of a personal tempter. To most Christian people sin, *i.e.* as the Catechism explains it to the young,—the sinful lusts of the flesh, and the world, with its infinite forms of seduction and allurement, represent two sources or spheres in and through which the power permitted to the Evil One works. The former provides illustrations of the coarser and more awful types of the breaches of the Divine law. Here the individual is seen to break openly with the unchanging, Divine 'law eternal' of morals. The latter includes, under a single startling expression, the sum of all the influences from every source alien from God, and opposed to His kingdom of righteousness, purity, and love. Plainly, then, the 'flesh' and the 'world' do not stand quite in the same relation as touching and affecting the individual soul. A capital distinction may be made between them in this way. The sinful motions of the former are capable of quick, immediate detection. The conscience, the inward monitor of which Butler speaks, if suffered to express itself, does so in no vague and hesitating voice. The conscience does not merely pronounce, 'This is morally right,' 'This is morally wrong,' but is categorical, imperative: 'Thou shalt do this,' 'Thou shalt not do that.' But in regard to that general opposition to the Divine will summed up in the term and conception of the 'world,' there seem loopholes for the conscience, there appear ambiguities, uncertainties. Precise definition is difficult; even descriptions of 'the world' seem inconsistent with one another. The conception of the latter shades off from that which is plainly and notoriously false and evil to that which is partly right and partly wrong; the confines are debatable, there is room for a not unreasonable selection of good from bad.

It is because of this capital difference between the ideas of 'sin' and the 'world' that the latter provides the Evil One with his most fruitful sphere of temptation. The 'world' is thus in his hands the most usual as well as the most effective instrument for the withdrawal of Christ's soldiers and servants from their holy allegiance. The world is thus, when the coarser temptations of the flesh are out of the way, still the most insidious source of peril to the life of the soul; it threatens the soul's frailty, shakes its stability, and saps its fidelity.

Christian people are bitterly conscious of this even while the words 'world' and 'worldliness' pass their lips with an infinite variety of meaning and application. Some, in defiance of our Lord's explicit teaching, have seen no other way of escape from its corrupting influence but entire withdrawal. This in different ages of the Church is the justification of the hermit life, of the stricter type of monasticism, of the extravagances of Puritanism. Their exponents and apologists have preferred the Old Testament warnings against pagan pollution: 'Come out,' 'Be separate,' 'Touch not,' to the burden of the Saviour's intercession: 'I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest deliver them from the Evil (One).' The result of such action has been incalculable loss of working power to the Church in any and every epoch of her history.

It would seem to be one of the special debts which the Church owes to the Apostle St. John that he makes clear to her members down the ages the dangers of the world to the life of the individual soul. That he has no manner of doubt about it is shown by his own language, clear, startling, almost fierce in its denunciation—

'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof.'[1]

Here, then, lies, in words of truth and soberness, in words which recall many of the Master's utterances, solemn and tremendous warning against the world, and by implication, against the worldly spirit, against worldliness. The very choice of the expression ὁ κόσμος marks the definiteness of that which is referred to. It is something real and sensible, with an order, arrangement, and symmetry of its own. The precision of the caution answers to the precision of the concept. None can evade responsibility by the pretence that the world, according to St. John, here or elsewhere in his writings, is a vague and shadowy idea.

It is worth while to clear away some misconceptions which have gathered round the meaning of

[1] Jn 2^{15-17}.

the term, misconceptions which, as Frederick W. Robertson pointed out fifty years ago, have been a fruitful source of distress to sensitive souls.

1. When St. John explicitly forbids the love of he world, it is impossible to suppose he forbids the love of nature. God made the world of nature too fair not to be loved. By His eternal fiat all that He created was pronounced very good. Narrow down His creation from the starry world above us, to this beautiful planet, to which the life of man, in so far as is known, is circumscribed, with its alternations of day and night, of seasons and years, its sunshine and sweet rain, its hills and vales and rolling plains, its woods and groves, its streams and lakes, its seas, now calm, now tossed in the passion of the storm. Surely man is the better for the love of these, and may look up through nature to nature's God.

2. Nor, again, can the world, according to St. John's teaching, be the sphere of any man's duty and service in life. If it be lawful, it will indeed form part and parcel of his religion. 'God placed man at the first,' says Lord Bacon, 'in a garden to work.' Work is the symbol of health and the safeguard of happiness. All true work has a sacred character about it; and as such, a real devotion to work is as much a mark of the God-fearing as of men of affairs. It is plain that it is not in this sense that the apostle sternly forbids the love of the world.

3. Equally impossible is it to suppose that he means by the world the men who live in it, or that little fringe of humanity which we affect, or are affected by, in common intercourse. The love of mankind was not St. John's forbidden love. He who leant upon his Master's breast had surely drunk in too much of his Master's spirit for this. Rather let a man love father, mother, brethren and sisters, and his friends with all the intensity of his heart's affection, and it will be the better for him; he will be so much nearer the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of love. To forbid the love of the world in this sense would be a contradiction of St. John's own teaching; for love of the brethren is one of the signs of the indwelling presence of God in the heart of man.

Since, then, in these letters there cannot be found any condemnation either of the love of nature or of the love of work, or of the love of one's fellow-men, and since there is also no definition furnished of 'the world' by the apostle, one turns again to his pages with some measure of anxiety as to his meaning. Yet as one turns, the issue is seen to lie, not in a mere word study, however devout and careful. The profound simplicity of St. John's teaching can only be truly appropriated through the tragic experiences of the Christian soul. It is while some of its more bitter passages are made that the Christian begins to understand the meaning of the world according to St. John better than if he ransacked the libraries of East and West to determine its sense. To say so much is not to ignore learning or to depreciate scholarship, but to insist that into the interpretation of Scripture the heart as well as the mind of man must enter.

Is not an approach, then, made to the meaning of the word when the recollection of the Christian turns upon that ordered and symmetrical group of his past occupations and associations, his past relaxations, and indulgences which formed for him the attractiveness of life, in which he was once wholly engrossed, for which he may still retain, not without a touch of bitterness, a lingering fancy? This certainly comes very near to the significance of the world according to St. John. The same conclusion is arrived at by the other method, the patient investigation of the term, in classical literature, in the Septuagint, in the Fathers, in the contributions made by the apostle to the Canon of the New Testament. Thus, as Bishop Westcott has pointed out, the world is all created being, and one may add all the influences flowing therefrom, considered as apart from God, as separate from God, and therefore in the last resort opposed to God.[1] Hence it is all that which by nature, character, and essence serves to draw a man away from God by opposing itself as a barrier between the soul's full communion with God. Hence, instead of finding St. John upon this issue a dreamy speculative teacher, he is seen to be the surest, safest, most practical of guides.

Take him upon one of the most burning questions round which the idea of worldliness can turn. In more than one age of the Church men have sought, in or out of Holy Scripture, to frame a list of forbidden pleasures. The search is wholly superfluous if the Johannine principle is once admitted and acted upon. Do such pursuits, companionships, and delights in which Christian men permit themselves interfere with devotion to God

[1] Bishop Westcott, *Commentary on St. John's Epp., in locis.*

and His will and service? Do these leave them less fitted for prayer and praise, less faithful as Christ's servants, less brave as His soldiers? Do they make love less warm, and faith less clear? Do they make that less possible which is the very root and marrow of the spiritual life, the communion of the soul with the God who gave it? Then, according to St. John, these things in their entirety are for us 'the world,' and with this world we must break on peril to the spiritual life.

Both caution and comfort flow from these considerations.

The warning is this. The world has a voice, and in this, its outward expression, it is perhaps most dangerous to average Christian experience. The world expresses itself in a low standard of public opinion. The follower of Christ has to face public opinion, that common stock of thought and sentiment which is the outcome of the society in which he is thrown. For every one, good and bad alike, help to form such an opinion. While, then, he recognizes truths in it, he has to learn to distrust it when it travels out of its own sphere and invades the sphere of faith. The life of many a promising saint indicates what public opinion may do for a man who listens to it and takes it for his guide. It takes the heart out of his religion, and leaves him with the husk and shell, which is bare worldliness, for it is then something apart from God.

The comfort proceeds from the apostle's sublime suggestion with which this passage closes. Neither here nor elsewhere is his teaching merely negative. The apostle takes it for granted that all men must love. If not in them the love of the Father, then the love of the world; there will be either the love rightly placed, or the love misplaced. Some object there will be to draw man's highest affections. He emphasizes a broad truth of natural law and of philosophy, as of the spiritual experience, when he implies that there is within the human heart a pent-up energy, potent either for good or evil. Hence the noble and inspiriting idea with which he presents his readers. He tells them what becomes of the man who loves the world. The world, and even the passion for it, pass away. But the new love, the love of the Father, like every high affection, has an expulsive power, casting out that which offends. What becomes of him who loves the Father? He loves; and because he loves, he works: and love and service are by nature linked to an eternity of happiness.

'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

ANOTHER volume has been issued of 'The International Theological Library,' and again its author is an American. Thus out of the first seven volumes of this great series five have come from the *other* nation—Smyth's *Christian Ethics*, Fisher's *History of Christian Doctrine*, McGiffert's *History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age*, Allen's *Christian Institutions*, and Washington Gladden's *Christian Pastor*; and only two from this nation—Driver's *Introduction* and Bruce's *Apologetics*. Well, the American books are good. McGiffert certainly is forward enough, but McGiffert's scholarship is above suspicion and his motive beyond reproach, and all the rest are volumes of the very first order of faith and learning—indispensable additions to our theological equipment. But they are American, and there is just a something in that. And so the proportion seems unreasonable.

The new volume is Washington Gladden's *The Christian Pastor* (T. & T. Clark, post 8vo, pp. xiv, 485, 10s. 6d.). It we do not grudge to America. For from England and by Dr. John Watson, we are by and by to have *The Christian Preacher*. The two will fit together. And if Dr. Watson discovers an acquaintance with the inner things of his subject as Dr. Washington Gladden does here with his, the two books will furnish the most satisfactory and scientific account of the ministerial office in the language. Dr. Gladden has an exalted conception of the pastoral office, and he impresses that conception upon us; but he insists upon this, that the successful pastor is the man who, having that exalted conception,