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Sin may have wrought permanent physical injury, but a change of will has in it the promise of re-birth in character. Not only so, but the life of God in the soul makes available to man the resources of the Infinite. The will of man is energized and made capable of an attainment otherwise impossible. Jesus stated this fact under the allegory of the vine and the branches. 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.' Jesus is the world's Redeemer, for it is through Him that man is drawn away from his sin into union with the eternal. He has taught man to hate sin. He banished the cloud of guilt from the human soul when He said, 'It is not the will of your Father . . . that one of these little ones should perish.' He struck new courage into man's heart when He declared that God is ever labouring and suffering for His wayward children's sake. Through faith in Him souls have gone from darkness to light, from the power of sin and death to the power of the Spirit and life. Dead unto sin, they have become alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

I may not be able to satisfy my understanding concerning the marvels recorded in the Gospels about Jesus, but this I know when I come into His presence I see one who has made God known to me; I see one who reveals to me what a man ought to be; I learn that my life may be lived in union with the Eternal, and that when thus lived it wins a power that enables it to rise above trouble, sorrow, death, and sin. This is enough. I bow before Him and lift up my prayer that He will give me faith to follow Him and grace to become day by day more like Him.¹

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Vine.

'I am the true vine.'—Jn 15¹.

As He approached that Valley of Death which each one of us must at last pass through alone, Jesus had a great desire for one hour of quiet companionship with His friends. From one of His secret followers in Jerusalem He borrowed an upper chamber that He and His disciples might, as a family, take their last meal together undisturbed. He made one final effort to recover

¹ H. B. Williams, *Fundamentals of Faith in the Light of Modern Thought*.

Judas Iscariot from his crime, but in vain, and, unable longer to endure the traitor's presence, bade him go and fulfil his design. Then with characteristic self-devotion He set Himself to prepare His disciples for the tragedy of the morrow. He told them that He was about to die, and used His unflinching courage to impart courage to them. You will leave Me, He said, to face this hour alone; yet I shall not be alone, for the Father will be with Me. I shall seem to leave you alone; yet you will not be alone, for the Father will give you the strength-giving Spirit He has given to Me, and that Spirit will abide with you for ever. You will not see Him, but you will know Him, because He will be in you as He has been in Me. You will think Me dead, but I shall not be dead. I will come to you, and you will share My imperishable life with Me. And My Father will come, and we will dwell with you and bring peace to you. And then He gives in a simple and to them familiar figure His interpretation of the Israel of the future, borrowing the figure from the Hebrew Psalmists, one of whom had, in the Exile, sung of the vine which Jehovah had planted:

Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt:
Thou didst drive out the nations, and plantedst it.

To this cry of the seemingly deserted Israel, Isaiah's use of the same figure furnishes a reply: 'Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.'

In the days preceding the Last Supper, Jesus had recalled to the multitudes in the temple this ancient figure and had compelled from the people their condemnation of the rulers of Israel: 'The Lord of the Vineyard,' they had said, 'will destroy those wicked men and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen who will render him the fruits in their season.' And Jesus had commended their verdict: 'The kingdom of God,' He said, 'shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.' Now, speaking to His disciples to revive their hopes and inspire their courage, He recalled to their minds the familiar Parable of the Vineyard, and gave to it a prophetic interpretation.

This is the fullest description which Jesus has left to the world of His ideal for that Brotherhood to which He has committed the completion of His commission. The members have organized

themselves into different worshipping congregations separated by the variety of their theological opinions, expressed in creeds, and the variety of their tastes and temperaments expressed in rituals. These Christian organizations are sometimes treated in religious writing as though they were one and are called the Church, or the Holy Catholic Church; but the Christian Brotherhood out of which they have all grown is more than the Church or all the Churches combined. It is founded not on agreement in opinion, that is, on a creed; not on agreement in forms of worship, that is, on a ritual; not on agreement in the form of organization, that is, neither on a hereditary priesthood nor on a democratic congregation, nor even on love for a sacred but long since buried Messiah: but on love and loyalty to a living Messiah, for ever incarnate in the hearts and lives of His disciples, in a more intimate companionship and with a far wider and mightier influence than when He trod the earth with the few score of faithful friends whom He gathered about him.

This prophetic parable, giving Christ's interpretation of what the Christian Brotherhood should be, interprets and is interpreted by the history of the Christianity. The little seed has become a great tree. The little band of twelve has grown to such proportion that it is counted by millions. The Brotherhood that had no purse nor scrip, nor even so much as two changes of raiment apiece when they went forth on their travels, is now endowed with a wonderful equipment. There are no edifices in the world more splendid than some of the edifices which this Brotherhood has constructed. There are no schools of learning better than those which this Brotherhood has endowed. It has spread over the globe, so that to-day there is scarcely any language in which the praise of their Leader is not sung; scarcely any community in which His word is not proclaimed; scarcely any spot where men do not gather to honour His name, and to strengthen themselves the better to do His service. The influence from this band overruns its boundaries. Belief in the Leader, belief in a good God who rules the world, is no longer confined to the professed successors of these twelve. It is difficult to tell who are within the Brotherhood and who are without it, because the faith of the Christian Church has become the faith of the Christian community, and the principles of the Christian Church are, in some measure at least,

accepted by those who do not profess to belong to it.

It is true that the prosperity and progress of the Church has been its peril. While it has been pushing its influence out into the world, the world has been pushing its influence into the Church. Deeds of avarice and cruelty have been strangely interwoven in the fabric of its history with deeds of unselfish devotion and self-sacrificing love. It has been both narrow-minded and large-hearted; both divided into petty sects quarrelling over forms of words and united in world-wide service by love for its Master. Whenever it has lost that love; whenever it has substituted an admiration of beauty for a reverence of goodness, emotional enjoyment for self-denying service, regulation of conduct for inspiration of the spirit, belief in a creed for faith in a Person, whatever its wealth, its political power, its prestige, whatever the beauty of its services, the regularity of its order, or the soundness of its theology, it has ceased to be a living Church, and has had pronounced against it the condemnation uttered nineteen centuries ago against its prototype: 'Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.'

Nevertheless, no organization has been so enduring, so world-wide in its influence, so beneficent in its service, so deathless in its vitality as the Christian Church. And wherever it has gone it has sown the seeds out of which have grown hospitals for the sick, asylums for the poor, schools for the ignorant, liberty supplanting despotism, a reverence of love supplanting the reverence of fear, and, growing clearer with the passing of time, divine ideals of courage, chivalry, charity, and brotherhood unknown before. It has been attacked by ruthless persecution from without, and by feuds and factions not less ruthless from within. Again and again its usefulness has seemed to come to an end, and it has seemed to die a death from which there could be no resurrection; again and again it has been entombed, the rock door of its tomb has been sealed and its enemies have declared its power ended; and again and again it has risen from the dead, cast off its grave clothes, and entered upon a new life.

In the first century Nero thought that he had killed the infant child, and three centuries later

the successor of Nero proclaimed Rome a Christian empire. In the Middle Ages the Christian Church had adopted not only the outer form but the persecuting spirit of pagan Rome, and the splendid cathedrals became its tomb and the jewelled robes of its priests became its grave clothes; yet all the while its deathless life inspired the Preaching Friars laying in England the foundations of England's future liberty, and the self-denying sisters of mercy and charity precursors of the Red Cross of the then distant future. In the eighteenth century the Protestant Church seemed dead in England. The cross was on the spires of the cathedral but not in the lives of the clergy; the preaching was an ethic as uninspiring as that of Confucius; the religion of Dean Swift was no more Christian than the infidelity of Bolingbroke; the most famous moral teacher of his time, Archdeacon Paley, defined virtue as 'doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God and for the sake of everlasting happiness.' And yet out of this decadent Church issued the enthusiasm of Wesleyanism in England and of Moravianism on the Continent. The nineteenth century saw dogmatism within the Church, and agnosticism without unconsciously joining their forces to destroy the Church which was the only confessed defender of the truth and of the vitality of spiritual experience, and the century was called by friend and foe alike the 'age of scepticism.' And yet it is in this age of scepticism that the Christian Church has given birth to the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Salvation Army, and the Red Cross, and their work has furnished the most luminous illustration the world has ever seen of the spirit of Him who laid down His life for us that we might lay down our lives for the brethren.¹

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Ownership.

'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.'—
Ps 24¹.

This was the postulate that underlay all Jewish conceptions of property. Theories that used to obtain in Judea might not meet all the detailed requirements of our own times and civilization. Still our confidence in the structural principles of the Hebrew economy is such as to assure us that

¹ L. Abbott, *What Christianity means to me.*

no system of social or political ethics out of consonance with them merits regard, or can permanently obtain. There is in ethics, as in physics, but one perpendicular. Plumb-lines are cosmic. Your little house will stand only as it is set in a true vertical with everlasting foundations. A valid administration of social and civil equity is a short line, but it is the little, hither end of the line which, in its infinite reach, makes out all the righteousness of God.

It is only of God, then, that ownership in its absolute sense is predicable. Everything else so designated can be approximation only, and imitation. God owns the world. After that it is only by accommodation of terms that I can say I own my house or my library. Unable to own things as against God, there is still opportunity for us to own them as against each other. Granted. But at the same time the absoluteness of divine ownership does break the back of all human ownership. We are not sure any more as to how much it actually means to own things as against each other; or whether it means anything. John owned his marbles as against Charles, but not as against his father; but that latter qualification took all the stiffening out of his ownership as against Charles. An idea that is absolute becomes nothing more than a caricature so soon as the attempt is made to work it under conditions. The features may some of them be preserved, but with the sacrifice of the identity.

1. The underlying postulate of Judaism, that the earth was in an absolute sense the Lord's, worked determinatively in all the dealings of the Jews with other people. Without originary title to Palestine they conceived that it became theirs by His arbitrary bestowment. God owned it, and made them His heirs. Whether there was any narrowness in their view of the case or not, it gave an assurance and an intensity to their operations that made them irresistible, and carried everything before them. The mere fact that they were settlers in Palestine constituted Hittites, Hivites, and Jebusites aggressors; and to drive them out or exterminate them was, consistently with their view of the case, a simple assertion of vested rights.

It is easy to appreciate this sentiment; easy also, perhaps, to feel some measure of sympathy with it. The remnants of that idea still lurk in