

XIX.

Jesus Christ

FEBRUARY 17, 1856.

WHEN we reflect upon what we have just done, and recollect what God has given us in His well-beloved Son, we would gladly remain silent, or only add to this solemn service words of thanksgiving and praise. But since the Lord calls upon us also to glorify His Word and bear testimony to the truth, and as in certain situations the opportunities for doing it are so scarce, I shall continue, trusting in the help of God, to explain to you the truth as it is in my heart, till the day comes when the Lord will close my mouth, saying to me, It is enough; thou hast spoken long enough; go now, rest from thy labours in the bosom of thy Saviour.

You know, I like to speak to you here, under the name of what I call a dying Christian's regrets, of the views a Christian who thinks himself near his end and of the use he has made of his life, or the use he would make of it if it were continued, and that he would wish his brethren who have life still before them to make of theirs. But I feel myself called upon in this peculiar position, and especially in the dark and agitated times in which we live, to bear testimony to the convictions to which my Christian experience and my pastoral life have led me; that when God shall call me hence it may be well known in what sentiments I shall fall asleep and rest; that there may be no sort of doubt in the hearts of my friends, of my brethren, or of the Church, as to what now constitutes, and what I hope, from the goodness of God, will become, more and more, the assurance of my soul.

There is one capital point upon which I will not pause now, because it has lately occupied our attention for a considerable time. I know that my little congregation is constantly changing, but I cannot do otherwise than follow a certain order in the ideas I expound to you. The first thing we considered was sin. It is necessary in the first place to have a clear and distinct view of our state of sin before God, not only by the conviction of having transgressed His holy law, but because we have begun to form an estimate of the enormity of sin, of the terrors of God's judgments, and of the depth of the abyss from which we had to be withdrawn. When we are once penetrated with a sense of the bitterness of sin, without any extenuation, without excuse, without any explanation, but saying simply, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," the whole Gospel is summed up for us, my dear friends, and more particularly for me at this moment, in one word, or rather in one name—Jesus Christ—according to what St Paul says, "I determined not to know any-thing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Who is Jesus Christ? What is He? What idea have you of Him? What would you answer to His question, "Whom say ye that I am?" There is the groundwork and the beginning of our faith. (O my God, strengthen my heart and my mouth, to give glory to thee in my affliction. ... )

When we contemplate Jesus Christ, we at first consider Him as a man, but we soon perceive that He is not an ordinary man. We find in Him an infinite fund of love, a benevolence always ready to come to our help, and strength always sufficient to deliver us—a Master and a Redeemer, healing the diseases of the body, to show that He can also heal those of the soul even in its most secret and intense misery. We find unspotted holiness, the holiness of God himself, brought down upon the earth; and finally, in a human body and in a human mind, a Divine essence of truth, of strength, and of love, such as no man ever possessed or even imagined, and which draws us towards Him whom we are instinctively assured can, and can alone, grant us every deliverance that we need. But soon, in listening to the Scriptures, and listening to himself, the mystery begins to be solved, but only to give place to another mystery, still greater. We learn that our Lord Jesus Christ—for such is the man that we have been contemplating—being born in a supernatural manner, is not only the Son of man, but at the same time the Son of God: Son of man, that is to say, man; Son of God, that is to say, God. If there is in Him a Divine grace, power, holiness, and goodness, it is that He is God; He is the image of His person, and the brightness of His glory, and “in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead, bodily.” It is the mystery of godliness—God manifest in flesh—God saying to His disciples, as we have just read, “He that hath seen me hath seen my Father.” This is, my dear friends, according to my deep and increasing conviction, and that of all the faithful from first to last, —the prophets, inasmuch as it was given them to know, the patriarchs, the apostles, the witnesses, the martyrs, the fathers (the faithful fathers of the church), the reformers, the servants and handmaids of the Lord in all ages,—this is properly the key of the Gospel edifice and the basis of the whole Gospel. This is the centre from whence diverge all the acts of faith and obedience to which we may be called; and so entirely does the Christian life rest upon this foundation—Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh—that by the rejection of this truth Jesus Christ is not only dethroned, but also God himself. The living God is no longer living; we have instead the God of the Deists, the God of the Pantheists, the God of the Rationalists,—a God who is but a dead God, who has never either saved, or sanctified, or consoled any one, because the true God is He who reveals himself to us, and not only reveals, but who gives himself to us in Jesus Christ; for, as it has been so well said, in creation God shows us His hand, but in redemption He gives us His heart.

Jesus Christ God, and yet Jesus Christ man, really and truly man, really and truly God, seems to many a doctrine for speculation rather than a doctrine for practice; (My God, strengthen my feeble voice and my languishing soul!)—but this is not the case; and far from being a speculative doctrine, it is the basis of the practical Christian life. St. Paul, while he calls it a mystery, calls it a mystery of godliness: “Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness.” There is no Christian life, no Christian consolation, no Christian strength, no Christian death, without this doctrine; it is the basis of all the rest, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ shed abroad in our hearts is our only strength, as it is our only hope.

For this reason I wish you to know, and I confess that I see in Jesus Christ my God, before whom, with Thomas, I prostrate myself, saying, "My Lord and my God;" and to whom, with St. John, I bear witness that "this is the true God and eternal life;" or with St. Paul, "He is over all, God blessed for ever." I honour Him as I honour the Father, and I know that the Father, so jealous of His glory, far from being jealous of the glory I give to Jesus Christ, approves it as a glory given to himself, because He wills "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father;" and I strive to live in the communion of Jesus Christ—in the peace of Jesus Christ—praying to Him, waiting for Him, speaking to Him, hearing Him, and, in a word, constantly bearing witness to Him day and night: all which would be idolatry if He were not God, and God in the highest sense of the word, the highest that the human mind is capable of giving to that sublime name. Jesus Christ is "He that is; I am; I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am that I am; Jehovah; the Lord God Almighty." This is what Jesus Christ is—this is what He is for me. And if in the last moments of my life I should be prevented by suffering from rendering Him this testimony, I wish it to be known that I bear this witness here, and in bearing it I have no thought of ever withdrawing it from Him! for the little faith, the little consolation, the little holiness, and the little love that I have, and that I pray God to increase, I have only acquired, since, having changed my first opinions, I have learned to adore Jesus Christ as my Saviour and my God.

After having given Him all honour as my God, I find at the same time in Jesus Christ my brother, my equal, my friend—one that is near me, with me, and, according to that beautiful expression of the eighty-fourth Psalm, "My sun and shield;" my sun, that is to say, my protection from afar; my shield, that is to say, my protection close at hand. Between this sun of the divinity and me there are so many things—a space so immense (of which I leave man to calculate the material distance, though he can never determine its spiritual length)—that I want the Lord to be near me, like a shield, covering me all over—whose heart presses my heart, whose arms are continually around me, and to whom I can say, when no mortal can hear me, "I am thine, and thou art mine; I know who thou art—my God and my brother; and thou knowest who I am—thy child and thy servant; who, notwithstanding all his infirmities, believes in thee, and who sighs only that his faith is so weak, and who aspires to believe till he can glorify thee in the bitterest trials." Jesus Christ is then my brother. Oh! what a blessing to have God for a brother, and to have a brother for God. I would never even try to explain the deep combination—the tender mystery in this union of God with man. This is what Jesus Christ is for me.

I cannot say more now, but you see what my thoughts are respecting the Lord, which I am ready to confess before His tribunal if He called me to it, knowing that he will not gainsay me, and that nothing is wanting to these sentiments but what is wanting in my adoration and my gratitude, and that I am infinitely behind in the debt of love and adoration that I owe Him.

My friends, this is what Jesus Christ has become to me, this is what God in His mercy has made Him for me, after having used in succession such various means as education, example, practice, books, preaching—employing these

instruments under various degrees of light, and in divers manners, and thus building me up in His grace for eternity. I know that He was preparing me then in order to fit me to bear what He sends me today; and what He sends me today will be the crowning, if it is to be the crowning (which we cannot yet affirm), of all His dispensations towards me.

I conjure you to ask yourselves and surely ascertain whether Jesus Christ is for you what He is for the universal faithful church? what He is—I repeat it—for the patriarchs, the prophets—for the apostles, the martyrs, the fathers, the reformers, and for all the saints in all ages; what He is according to His Word, what He is according to His own declaration, what He is according to the testimony of the Father. You may rest then, but not till then; for no one ought to rest until he has learned to rest at the foot of the cross of his Saviour God, though he should be driven there by tempestuous winds, and fall down exhausted on that hallowed spot which he resolves never again to leave.