

OPERA FORIS ;

OR, MATERIALS FOR THE PREACHER.

*Second Series.—II.*

Ps. xlii. 4 and 6 :—*These things I remember, how I went with the throng, and led them to the house of God. . . O my God, my soul is cast down within me : therefore do I remember Thee.*

The two memories : *these things I remember . . . I remember Thee.* One a memory full of regret for religious privileges which have been temporarily interrupted ;<sup>1</sup> the other, the deeper memory of God's presence, which is really not a memory at all, but a recollection of what survives through all the outward changes of life. The one is "Sorrow's crown of sorrow," i.e. remembering happier things. The other is sorrow's cure, faith's reminder of the living and changeless God.

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Proverbs xv. 8-9 :

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord :  
But the prayer of the upright is His delight.*

*The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord :  
But He loveth him that followeth after righteousness.*

The two sayings refer to the worship and the work of life. The Lord loathes the formal worship of those who are bad at heart, and also their practices outside the place of worship. The former does not atone for the latter. When such people are "religious" they are more objectionable than ever. Similarly, the condition of offering acceptable prayer is an upright life which in things secular adheres

<sup>1</sup> "Remember : I remember ; hast not thou  
Hours in the past more living than all now ?"

to the moral and religious principles implied in worship. Dr. Toy suggests that "the contrast of *sacrifice* and *prayer* is doubly significant: it intimates that the former is an outward service easily performed by a bad man, while the latter is an inward service appropriate to the sincerely pious; and it suggests that, in a certain circle, a movement had begun which, by laying stress on communion of heart with God, tended to bring about the abolition of the sacrificial ritual." But *prayer* may be taken as a parallel to sacrifice; formal prayer was just as possible as sincere prayer (cf. Matt. vi. 5 f.).

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Luke xvii. 5 :—*And the apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith.*

It is usual to abandon any attempt to find a connexion between this saying and its context. The passage (xvii. 1-10) is generally regarded as another collection of scattered logia, which Luke has thrown together without any thread of logical sequence. A nexus between not only what precedes but what follows was suggested by Schleiermacher, however, and it has been recently elaborated by B. Weiss in his *Quellen der Lukasevangeliums* (1907), pp. 253 f.

Jesus has just been speaking about the duty of forgiving a brother, even after repeated offences. The apostles are taken aback by His uncompromising demand for such a charitable temper. They feel it is beyond the reach of human nature, and ask: *Add faith to us* (πρόσθες ἡμῖν πίστιν), i.e., confer on us the miraculous gift of such faith, endow us with a supernatural power of generous grace which is equal to this difficult miracle of forgiveness. Jesus replies (verse 6) that, instead of praying with apparent piety for some fresh spiritual gift, they need only exercise the faith which they already possess as His disciples, who believe in a Father. They have faith already, faith enough,

if they will only exert themselves to put it into practice. Even the least faith will enable them to root out malice and coldness of heart. What seems to men a natural impossibility is practicable for those who are Christian brethren, i.e., the magnanimous treatment of the erring. It is not an extra achievement, of which only exceptionally gifted believers are capable: it is the commonplace of the faith, which does not require any special stimulus or incentive. *If you have any faith at all . . . you would order this tree to be transplanted, and your orders would be obeyed.*

This heroic doctrine is still further applied in verses 7–10 (especially when, with the Sinaitic Syriac version, *unprofitable* is omitted from ver. 10). Forgiveness is not such a wonderfully meritorious action as to deserve either a unique endowment or a special recognition from God. *When you have done all you are commanded to do, say, we are simply servants: we have only done our duty.* This tallies with the thought of Matthew v. 47 (τὶ περισσὸν ποιείτε). Luke's point is that, according to the teaching of Jesus, the genuine disciple must realise that he cannot parade his generosity nor plume himself upon having won any distinguished position by forgiving his penitent brother. Hard as that pardon may often be, it is all in the day's work; heroic magnanimity is more than can be expected perhaps from outsiders, but it is the common duty of all who enter the Christian service and who understand what the Christian faith implies. It is *περισσὸν τι*, as compared with the practice and aims of ordinary life outside the Church; inside the Church, it is simply *ὁ φείλομεν ποιῆσαι*.

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John i. 14 :—*And we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.*

For this conception of true glory, as consisting in the

inward character of Jesus Christ, and as intelligible only to a sensitive faith, the Fourth Gospel owes nothing, Dr. E. A. Abbott points out, to the great Book of Enoch. It is an original and distinctive note of Christianity. "In Enoch, 'glory' is of the nature of a theatrical red fire and has nothing to do with love. In the Synoptic Gospels it is implied—and in the Johannine gospel it is stated—that the glory is 'glory as of the only-begotten from the Father.' To 'know' this glory is to 'be known' by the Father, and to be admitted into the circle of His family, and to share in its eternal life. But of all this Enoch knows nothing. How can he? He has twenty-nine titles for God, and 'Father' is not one of them" (*The Son of Man*, p. 641). In the *Hibbert Journal* supplement, entitled *Jesus or Christ?* there is a fine testimony to the truth of this passage from Dr. James Drummond. "It is curious," he says (p. 194), "to find the old Gnostic idea revived in modern times, and with this curious disadvantage, that not only is Jesus reduced to the level of a very indifferent, and indeed a very mischievous teacher, but the Christ, who was a real being to the Gnostics, is frittered away into an abstract ideal, which, I suppose, never melted a sinful heart or satisfied a longing love." Whereas, he continues (p. 195), "there are those who have, through the medium of the New Testament and the traditional life of the purest Christendom, looked into the face of Jesus, and seen there an ideal, a glory which they have felt to be the glory of God, a thought of Divine sonship, which has changed their whole conception of human nature, and the whole aim of their life; and no criticisms, and no shortcomings can alter that supreme fact of human experience."

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Acts v. 19-20:—*An angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them out, and said,*

*Go ye, and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life.*

(a) Rescue and relief from hindrances are meant to send us back to duty. Any experience of unexpected deliverance should issue in a fresh courage for the old tasks of life. (b) The gospel has to be preached to people as they are. *Speak in the temple.* The new message may have much to alter and supersede, but it must come into touch with the religious state of men, their traditions and instincts, as already present. There is a continuity in life; God has prepared in men something for the preacher to act upon. (c) The gospel is a word of life. In calling it *this Life* Luke means something larger than what we commonly call *this life* (with the emphasis on *this*). It is a revelation of the true life, very different from what the Sadducees thought (ver. 17), or even from what the Pharisees expected, a word of eternal life which alone explains the significance and lays bare the possibilities of present existence.

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