

Christ's Confidence in His Perpetual Presence.

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WHAT is most originaive in the Christian faith is that it is faith in a living and present Saviour. The weight of our faith is thrown not on the death of Christ by itself, but on His death and resurrection. 'It is Christ that died, *yea rather* that is risen again, who ever liveth!' We believe in a Saviour who died for us, *but is not dead*. 'His resurrection,' says Canon Scott Holland, 'was needed to give the momentum required for the origination of a new religion. A vision of unutterable beauty indeed the life would have been, but a vision that came and passed and vanished, before men's bewildered eyes had had time to receive it, or their hearts to apprehend what was there for a flashing moment in their midst.'

Had Christ the confidence that His death would not affect His presence with His people, save indeed in the way of making it closer and more powerful? That He had this confidence, He showed in every possible way.

No one can dispute that He believed that *His cause* would have a great future. As little can it be questioned that He believed that the fortunes of the Church were bound up with His own—that they would stand or fall together. In His teaching in regard to the relationship between Himself and His people there is one idea that is always present—namely, inseparableness. It was like that between the shepherd and the sheep, between the tree and the branches, between the head and the members of the body. In fact, their life was *just His life in them*. 'Because I live,' He said, 'ye shall live also.'

In the promises with which He consoled the disciples, on the eve of His departure, He assured them of His return. He said, 'I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.' His last word to them was, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

These are promises of His perpetual presence.

It is quite inadequate to interpret them otherwise. It is quite inadequate to interpret them as only meaning that He would always *live in the remembrance of the Church*, that the recollection of His life would never be lost, that He would leave an enduring memory. Even had He not meant

more than this, it would have disclosed a wonderful confidence in Himself. How was it possible, we may well ask ourselves, for one whose life was so brief, who played His part in the world in two or three years at the longest, and on so obscure a stage, and with so few and such negligible witnesses? How could He expect to live in the remembrance of men, and 'to their ears and tongues be theme and hearing ever'? He had but a poor scaffold in the world's eyes on which to rear such an edifice of hope—but a slight foundation on which to build such 'imaginary puissance.' Does it not, of itself, show His consciousness that on a stage so inconspicuous, and in a work day so contracted, He had rendered a vast, a profound, an inexhaustible service to mankind? The conviction that His life had in it a force which would project itself so far into history, proves how strong was His sense of His alliance with the Spirit of the Eternal.

But if Christ meant more than this, what was the more? Did He mean that *His work would live* in its effects on succeeding generations, that the spiritual ideas and inspirations He originated would pass into the moral life of the world, that the Divine movement He began would progress till its end was realized, and the Kingdom of God established on the earth? There is a sense in which every good life, every noble life, endures. It 'leaves its fibre in the work of the world; by so much evermore the strength of the race has gained.' Every beneficent movement it has initiated or supported spreads and grows. 'There is no great and noble idea once promulgated that does not triumph in the end, although it may traverse centuries of obstacles. There is no holy aspiration which, starting with a handful of believers, is not certain to increase in the number of its adherents.'

'The word unto the prophet spoken

Was writ in letters yet unbroken.

One accent of the Holy Ghost

The heedless world hath never lost.'

All this is supremely true of Christ and His influence. He lived to do the will of God, and so He abideth for ever.

But there is more than this—more than His confidence that His memory and work would

endure, that the influence of His life would persist, that faith in Him would pass, by contagion, from one soul to another, and from one generation to another, that His name would always keep its charm, and His life its freshness and fragrance, that His footsteps would never be obliterated but continue to guide men in the way of life, that He would inspire a devotion to His Person which would appear as unfailingly as the flowers of spring with each new age. What He promised was that He *would keep in living touch* with His people by the power of His eternal Spirit. We do not exhaust the causes which account for the persistence of our faith, we do not arrive at that which secures the operation of all the others, and without which they would fail, till we come to this cause. The Church lives on in the world only because Christ lives on in the Church. It is the breath of His Spirit that renews faith from age to age, that preserves and builds up the Church and spreads His Kingdom. It is by the insistence of His Spirit that the Kingdom makes its way into new generations, into new provinces of human activity, into new forms and developments of human society, into new regions of thought and feeling. Can the stream flow on, cut off from the spring? Can the branches bear fruit severed from the tree? Can the members of the body survive separated from the head? As little can the Church live apart from the living Christ.

This is what Christ meant by His promises to the disciples. He was still to be at their head to inspire and guide and strengthen them. He had not merely given them an original impulse which they were left to carry out themselves. No! They were still to be dependent on His presence with them. They were still to be in contact, in correspondence, in communication with the Captain of their Salvation.

The perpetual presence of Christ has always been the very nerve of the Church's confidence. It was so to the disciples. We know the effect which the promise of it had on them. It was such a consolation as turned His departure into an occasion of gladness. After He had departed from them they returned to Jerusalem 'with great joy.' Never was there a more unnatural, a more impossible joy, had they not believed that in the most real sense He would still be with them. From that day they became new men, as courageous, as hopeful, as, immediately before, they had been

timid and despairing. His leaving them might rather have been His return to them. So indeed it was.

What I have said of the first disciples is true of all who have succeeded them. His presence has been the nerve of their confidence in all the struggles of the spiritual life, and in all their effort to extend His Kingdom. It is not so much *back* to Christ as *up* to Christ they have looked for their power. They have sought it by prayer for His presence, and a fresh reinforcement from His Spirit. His memory, His example, His teaching His life and work on earth—all have needed the touch of His own Spirit to make them effective. His servants have had more than the faith that Christ is living—they have had the faith that He is *living in them*, and that His hand is in contact with all their environment, to adjust His help to their need.

It is those who have done most and dared most for His Kingdom who have made most of the promise of His presence. As they have measured all their resources against the work they have been called to do they have felt that they were inadequate without it—without the working of His own Spirit with them. Like the disciples in the miracles in which Christ employed them, there was a part which they could do, but there was also a part that was beyond them. The disciples could bring the loaves and fishes and place them in Christ's hands; they could fill the waterpots with water and carry them into His presence; they could cast their nets upon the lake: but there they stopped: to the miraculous result they could but contribute their faith in their Master. And so in all their work for Christ His servants have found that after they had exhausted all their own power they came to a point of impossibility, which needed the intervention of power from above, and where they had to wait in faith for its descent. There is not a page of missionary history, for example, which does not illustrate this truth. There is nothing more miraculous than the entrance which the missionaries of the Church have obtained into their fields of labour. They have gone to the most hostile peoples—they have gone with no external influence behind them—they have gone with nothing in their hands to barter for their spiritual opportunity—they have gone with a simple trust in their own beneficent purpose, and in Him who put it into their hearts, and the door has

opened for them unaccountably, mysteriously, as by the touch of an invisible hand.

It was a stupendous task which he laid on His disciples in the missionary commandment with which the promise of His presence was coupled. The commission and the promise were well joined together. For an enterprise so measureless in its scope, and in the time through which it would have to be sustained—an enterprise wide as humanity and unending as the generations of men, that sought its conquests in the spiritual life of the world, and has to be renewed with a fresh zeal in every new age, there was needed the abiding inspiration, direction, and energy of its divine originator. So Christ gave this promise before His departure. So far from leaving His followers He would be nearer them and more with them than before. And it is only because He has kept His promise that the Kingdom which He inaugurated has endured and retained an inexhaustible newness of life.

The confidence which Christ had in Himself and in His destiny is the most wonderful thing in history. To feel this we have but to put ourselves in the place of His contemporaries. We are, let us say, His neighbours in the little town of Galilee, in which He was brought up. On its streets we meet a young man as he goes to and from his day's work, with his tools slung over his shoulder, or as he bends over the bench in his workshop. On whom are we looking? On one whose name will spread through all the world and through all time. His memory will become men's most sacred possession, his words their most precious treasure. He will wield a power in comparison of which that of

the mightiest monarch will be insignificant. The kings of the earth will seek for their investiture the sanction of his name, the countenance of his servants, the benediction of his spirit. Nations and peoples will be stable in the measure in which they own his authority, and are assimilated to his spirit. He will create the greatest personalities of the future, to whom it will be an immeasurable honour that he employs them in his service. From him human genius in all its kinds will derive its richest inspirations, and its noblest employment. His power will penetrate where no mortal authority can reach; he will reign in the dispositions and thoughts of the heart. He will be a new conscience to humanity. Whenever he finds a place at all it will come to be the highest place. He will be more to those who receive him than father or mother or brother or sister. He will be the only one of whom mothers will be glad that their children love him more than they love themselves. He will make immortal the name of every one who has appeared in his company; he will hallow for ever in the eyes of men whatever he has touched. Labour will be sweeter to men because he has laboured. The valley of death will be less lonely and the star of hope will shine upon it because he has passed through it. How incredible! How impossible! But it is what has happened. All this consciousness of His destiny Jesus carried in His own heart. He knew that His name would be above every name, and that He had inaugurated a divine movement in the world—a movement so in accord with the Eternal Mind that all after-history would but be the record of its struggles and of its ultimate and universal triumph.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

I.

September

THE REAPERS.

'One soweth and another reapeth.'—In 4th.

JESUS loved the country. The Gospels are full of pictures from Nature; the bright coloured field flowers, the green grass, the singing birds, the rustling corn, and the reapers.

They all spoke to Him; and in His parables He caught up what they said, and taught men how God, even when His workings were difficult to understand, was caring for them all the time. Most of you know something of the harvest fields. You feel that harvest is a very happy time. Its stripped garden trees mean barrelled apples. There is stubble in the field, but soon there will be a dusty miller making meal for the porridge. Some of you may even have played among the stacks; then you wished that sunny harvest days would