

The Tragic Schism: Has it been Healed?

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IT is the legitimate boast of the literature of to-day that never before have the intricacies of the human soul received so subtle and so thorough an investigation. None of the spiritual lights and shadows, none of the great emotions and crises of the soul are thought to have escaped its searching pen. Yet in the case of the experience of forgiveness literary analysis has largely failed. It has failed to understand, or fully to evaluate, the moral passion which true forgiveness demands of the forgiving heart. We have had many moving pictures of the passion of a soul repentant, but few of the passion of a soul forgiving. There is a pathos about the failure. Because we are human we understand something of what it means to repent. Because we are human we have seldom guessed what it costs to forgive. And this, in spite of the fact that the sincerity of a real repentance refuses to be satisfied with an unreal forgiveness—the cold forgiveness that has issued from a soul unshaken.

It is self-interest, pride, concern for personal dignity, self-esteem which make the business of forgiving most irksome to men. And the broken-hearted penitent has usually to be content with the human forgiveness that has meant the breaking with these things. Nevertheless this scarcely touches the central problem of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a summons to love. The moral energy and effort required in forgiving is the greatest drain that can be made upon the passion of love. And it is true love—love without fleck or stain of self—that understands this best. But perfect love exists only in the absolutely pure in heart;—in God. It is holiness—the very ground of love, the sense of the awful difference between right and wrong—which makes forgiveness God's most arduous task. Holiness cannot stoop to condone a violation of its life and law,—that would be to undo Creation's bands. And forgiveness is Holy Love somehow taking to do with sin.

Yet this task, which well-nigh exhausts the limits of Divine possibility, is precisely that which God cannot help doing. Self-sacrifice, the ideal goal of all human morality, must be the very inmost essence of all the Divine activity. And Forgiveness is the supreme opportunity for self-sacrifice.

For Forgiveness is what heals the broken peace and concord of that society of souls which is to become the Kingdom of God. Holy Love alone can know the cost of this. But Holy Love does not count the cost. It *pays* the cost. It was in the breaking of a holy heart that God in Christ tasted death for every man.

I.

Modern literature has sometimes come within sight of this ultimate problem, usually, alas! to declare it insoluble. 'Yes, I forgive you,' a capable author makes one of his characters declare; 'but if I cared for you, forgiveness would be impossible.' Forgiveness, that is to say, is a transaction which indifference may find possible: for love it is impossible. But the forgiveness which the cold heart finds easy to offer is no forgiveness. Therefore real forgiveness is impossible.

The same result has been reached from another direction. A few years ago Mr. Bernard Shaw declared that he could not believe in a God who forgave. Nature, and the pitiless law of righteousness which pervades nature, seem utterly unforgiving. Forgiveness, he argued, must be meaningless to a perfect being.

There is an element of moral truth in both points of view. The forgiveness of the easy, genial, mild-mannered man whom we familiarly call 'a lump of good nature' is just about as unreal as the forgiveness of cold indifference. But love is not mere good nature, soft-heartedness. The glory of love lies in the moral fibres of truth, and trust, and loyalty out of which it is woven. Forgiveness cannot come lightly from injured love. Only an expenditure of moral passion, amounting sometimes to heart-break, can heal the broken moral fibres which are the strength of love. God is Love. It must cost Him an infinite agony to forgive.

Again, holiness is not cold impassive justice, it is not an impersonal pitiless natural law, it is not a stern and rigid Puritanism of character, harsh, uncompromising, and uncharitable in its judgments of men. But it is something more awesome still. It is Conscience: it is Justice throbbing with all the sensitiveness of personality.

It is the obverse side of Love. God is Holy Love. And therefore intercourse between the perfectly Pure Being and the soul that has done a repulsive deed can be restored only at a tremendous cost of moral passion.

An illustration will help to give point to the argument. Tennyson, in his 'Idylls of the King,' makes Prince Arthur come to see his faithless queen in the convent whither she has fled to hide herself. We see the wretched lady grovelling, 'with her face against the floor':

There with her milk white arms and shadowy hair
She made her face a darkness from the King:
And in the darkness heard his arm'd feet
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,
Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's,
Denouncing judgment.

On and on goes this cold sad purity recounting all the terrible consequences of the sin. And then we hear him say:

'Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives.'

But was it forgiveness? Apart altogether from the fact that the magnanimity is too conscious of itself to have any kinship with the Divine, was the king's deed a genuine forgiveness? Listen to him further speaking to his queen:

'I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine,
But Lancelot's: nay, they never were the King's.
I cannot take thy hand: that too is flesh,
And in the flesh thou hast sinn'd; and mine own flesh,
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries
"I loathe thee."'

Was that forgiveness? Is that how you conceive 'Eternal God forgives'? Yet, in its very failure we can catch a glimpse of the tragic import of a real forgiveness to Holy Love. All the agony of the offence must be suffered and borne in true forgiveness. And in order that we may have the full problem before us we must again remind ourselves that true repentance is an attempt to see our sin through the eyes of the holy injured God. Because of the stain and blur of sin that is impossible for the wrong-doer in his own strength alone. The question, therefore, is, Has God accomplished Forgiveness? Has God forgiven us with a forgiveness so wide and so deep that it can take our poor puny broken penitence up into itself, and make it perfect for us? Has God given us such an assurance of forgiveness, as contains in it the full and tragic avowal of the agony sin causes

in His holy heart, and the unspeakably bitter confession, *for us*, of the infinite heinousness of sin? The answer is the Crucified Christ.

II.

We need not linger long over the false distinction sometimes drawn between the outward event and the moral significance of the event. We have not stated the *fact* until we have stated the spiritual content and implications of the fact. It is not just the wooden Cross on the hill Calvary, and the blood that dropped there from His mortal flesh, that constitutes God's forgiveness. The world has seen thousands of crucifixions. Some were mere malefactor's gibbets—the legal penalty of a crime. Some were the result of a sad mistake—a blind miscarriage of justice, exciting only pity. Some were tragic—a good man misunderstood, the clash of opposing rights, a loving heart impaled to save another. These evoke admiration for the heroism of the sufferer: there is only one Cross in all the world's history that constrains us to adoration and awe. Why? Because of the Person who was crucified. Not a criminal—it was the criminals who did the deed—but the one perfectly holy and loving Man. In Him all the love and holiness of God flowed out into human life without restriction and without alloy.

It is not merely to the death, but to the moral meaning of the life that ended thus, we have to look. And it is not we alone, who, now that it is past, see its significance: it is Christ Himself that *exhibited* its significance to us. The outward facts of the Passion are nothing apart from the significance He saw, and felt, and lived out in them; His dying nothing apart from His willing to die. Through the insight which belongs only to perfect purity and love, He alone in the world of men achieved an unbroken communion with God which shaped itself into the unique experience of Sonship. And He felt and responded to the urge and summons of this experience to bring the God He knew and realized within His own spirit down into the lives of men. He alone apprehended with every power and faculty of His being the supreme purpose of God in History. He alone could and did surrender His will in all its unblemished freedom and integrity to be the instrument through which the Divine Will could perfectly operate to that end—the end, namely, of lifting a kingdom of souls into perfect communion with

God. It was because He deliberately and in utter humility identified His life's work with that Purpose, as His vocation in a sinful world, that the Cross became for Him a moral and at the same time a Divine necessity. And the vicarious shame which laid its ever-deepening burden on His pure soul, the pity and bleeding compassion which filled His heart of love to overflowing, as He faced the misery of mankind, were really and actually at last within the limits of humanity the Agony of the Holy Love of God. This Passion of His was more; it was the completion of that Agony,—the necessary deed in Time, the climax in the forthcoming energy of the Divine Forgiveness.

Gethsemane is therefore the key to the Cross. And it was Christ's response to the call of God in His soul—His deliberate dedication of Himself to the cause of Humanity for His Father's sake—that led inevitably to Gethsemane. And that solemn self-consecration was the first act of His ministry—the submitting to Baptism. *Christ's whole life was the Crucifixion.* Every event, every experience that came to Him was a thorn, or a nail, or a spear of human sin driven into His quivering, sinless soul. The Cross was scored on the very door by which He entered our humanity,—born, like a waif, beneath the thatch of an outhouse beside some cattle beasts. His whole life long He was impaled on the world's hate and shame. Ending at last in one awful hour of horror and darkness, it was simply the unfolding of what the touch of sin means to a being of perfect holiness and love. 'In the death of great men the completion of their lives often lies. . . . So it is in a yet deeper sense with the life of Jesus. . . . It was the culmination in a scene in which past, present, and future were gathered into one that was the truth of that life. Not in the mere temporal succession of the events, . . . but in action in which duration in time became of merely secondary importance, existed for (Him) and for us the culminating instant which became eternity.'¹

III.

If we here recall an old controversy, it is only that we may use it to help in the unfolding of our argument. A generation or two ago this was the question that troubled religious thought: Is it merely we who need to be reconciled to God,

¹ Haldane, *Pathway to Reality*.

or does God also need to be reconciled to us? In the ultra-Calvinistic view, it was God that needed to be reconciled to us. In its extreme form God appears as a kind of Moloch of well-nigh implacable wrath, requiring and demanding the butchery of a sacrifice of pure and spotless innocence, ere His thirst for vengeance could be slaked; holding His pitiless hand with reluctance from thrusting men down to the fires of hell, and only because His own Son spilt out His blood before Him, to pay down to the uttermost farthing all that His wrath demanded of the helpless sinner. It was this grotesque travesty of 'the mystery of Godliness' that George Macdonald preached against in all his books with such fiery and rebellious energy. The old grandmother, in one of his stories, prays to God that her laddie's soul might be saved from the everlasting fire: 'O God, I wad burn in hell for him masel' gin ye wad let him aff.' It is a touching picture of a heart that is almost Divine staggering blindly under the cruel weight of this iron dogma—that God's heart is an eternal wrath which only an infinite sacrifice will satisfy. God is not visible in the woman's *creed*: God is visible in her blinded heart that would burn to save a soul. The life of Religion has often been injured by the abstractions and distinctions of theology. And this is one of the saddest instances—the habit of thinking of God as a far-off, passive, severe, cold Justice; and of Christ as hanging on the Cross enduring the penalty for man's sin, offering a sacrifice to appease Divine Wrath, acting out a tragic spectacle to wring the heart of God into relenting. The one fact we must firmly grasp, and never let go, is that God is in the whole transaction from beginning to end. We might almost say that there are not three parties concerned, in this matter of Divine reconciliation. It is not Christ reconciling another, namely, God, to a third party, man. There are only two parties concerned in the transaction,—the holy and loving Father, *God in Christ*, reconciling *us*—to Himself. Altered to agree with that old and cruel view, the Golden Text would run: 'God so *hated* the world that the Son had to be killed,'—no! it is too horrible to go any further. All the Agony of God was there in the Sufferer on the Cross; 'God so *loved* the world.' It cost God as much to give as it cost Christ to die. Nay, it was God in Christ that tasted death for us.

Swung away to the opposite pole of thought,

the mind then asks, where was the need for this transcendent Agony? If it was only rebellious man that needed to be reconciled to the Eternal Heart of Holy Love, why did God not choose to offer His pardon to men, standing at an infinite distance? Why did God not simply declare His forgiveness, and leave the rest to man? It is just here that the view we have offered of the experience of forgiving comes to its own. To say that it is not God who needs to be reconciled to us, but only we who need to be reconciled to God, is to be labouring still within a false distinction. It is no doubt true that God, who is Holy Love, has ever maintained an unchanging attitude of reconciliation and forgiveness towards men. From the beginning of history He has been bending over the sinner, and saying, 'Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?' But it was always wounded Love that uttered the cry. This eternal attitude of God's Spirit has ever cost Him infinite pain, agony, sacrifice. The sinner would never turn, would only ignore God's call, if he thought that God was just a great mass of mere good nature, whose one desire was to make everybody comfortable, and who simply doled out His effortless forgiveness, wherever He got the least opportunity, no matter though the Universe were reduced to a perfect chaos, where all trace of the difference between right and wrong was lost. The forgiveness of indifference and of mere good nature is no forgiveness. But surely that is not the reconciliation that exists for ever in idea and in longing in the heart of God. God's forgiveness is the attitude of a heart full of the most poignant and tragic moral perception; of One to whom every thread of the web of life and history, so terribly tangled by sin, is one shuddering mass of living pain; of One who knows and is ready to experience—blessed be His name! who *has* experienced—the full cost of spiritual Agony which the situation demands, in order that right may be done by it.

The Godhead is neither a mass of indifference, nor a mass of sentiment, nor a mass of cold, pitiless justice. The Divine Heart is Holy Love. He neither ignores sin, nor condones it, nor sentences it *ab extra*. He *bears* it. He judges men, only by bearing sin. Christ died for the difference between right and wrong. In Him God pronounced final judgment on sin by enduring the last extremity of its agony. Christ took that agony into His pure, kind heart in order that He

might say to us, I am God's forgiveness to you. That is the only forgiveness that will satisfy my sinful heart. The crucified Christ is my assurance of reconciliation; He is the pledge of the Divine Condescension, the cost of the Divine Forgiveness, the certainty of Love's eternal agony. It is as though God's heart had broken over a lost world, and in that deed of history which culminated on Calvary, the veil were lifted for a little from off the face of the Infinite Sorrow, and sinful men were given an awesome glimpse at this eternal tragedy.

IV.

How does it all spell out into reconciliation for each of us? The passion of repentance and the passion of forgiveness that meet and mingle in the bitter-sweetness of a reconciliation are, it may with truth be said, not two experiences, but one. The more perfect the restoration, the more completely is all the spiritual commotion of pain and joy involved a single experience. Love has been defined as the heart finding itself in another. Repentance is just love finding itself in the reproach that speaks in the heart of the injured friend. Forgiveness is simply love finding itself in all the broken sorrow of the offender. These are not really two experiences but one, in the moment of reconciliation. The symbolical action of embracing is an attempt of flesh and blood to express, what we cannot well express in words, that there are no longer two estranged lives, at such a supreme moment, but that 'the two souls like two dew-drops have rushed into one.' It is in the unutterable depths of such an experience that there is at-one-ment. Christ is our Symbol in the healing of the tragic schism between the sinful soul and God. He is God's embrace of us. His Cross is the mystic meeting-place of the injured God and the offending human soul. The old word runs: 'To err is human, to forgive Divine.' We may be allowed to alter it slightly: 'To repent is human, to forgive Divine.' What we mean is that though repentance and forgiveness are the two sides of the one experience, yet when the matter is between man and God, repentance is only a finite and broken and far-off reflexion of what is experienced in forgiving. Forgiveness is the great Divine reality, in which alone all the agony of the offence is known, which alone contains in all its fulness the true sorrow for sin. Within God's forgiveness there is wrought out for

us everything that is lacking in our repentance ;—nay, it is God's forgiveness which, in the first instance, makes us forgivable by making us repentant.

Thus, while Christ's Passion is the Holy God pronouncing judgment on, by bearing, sin, Christ's Passion is at the same time the sorrow of the sinner's confession, the perfect Amen (as Dr. M'Leod Campbell calls it) out of the heart of humanity to the reproach that speaks in God's injured Holy Love. Even as the hot tears of a mother over her wayward child, while they are a symbol of the cost she had to pay in the act of reconciliation, are a pathetic confession also—to her own love, but for her child's sake—of *his* sin. The case is not unknown, indeed, of mothers who, when the call came to them to forgive, actually responded to it with such passion and intensity, that they for the moment fancied it was they who had to *be forgiven!* So completely had their love set them in the room and stead of their child. The case of Pendennis and his mother comes to mind,—surely one of the most exquisite instances of reconciliation in secular literature.

“Yes, my child, I have wronged you,—thank God,—I have wronged you! . . . Come away, Arthur,—not here. I want to ask my child to forgive me,—and—and my God to forgive me ; and to bless you, and love you, my son.” He led her, tottering, into the room and closed the door. . . . Ever after, ever after, the tender accents of that voice faltering sweetly at his ear,—the look of the sacred eyes, beaming with an affection unutterable,—the quiver of the fond lips, smiling mournfully,—were remembered by the young man. And at his best moments, and at his hours of trial and grief, and at his times of success or well-doing, the mother's face looked down upon him, and blessed him with its gaze of pity and purity, as he saw it in that night when she yet lingered with him ; and when she seemed, ere she quite left him, an angel transfigured and glorified with love—for which love, as for the greatest of the bounties and wonders of God's provision for us, let us kneel and thank Our Father. . . . He told her the story, the mistake regarding which had caused her so much pain. . . . Never again would he wound his own honour or his mother's pure heart. . . . But she said it was she who had been proud and culpable, and she begged her dear boy's pardon. . . . As they were talking the clock struck nine, and she

reminded him how, when he was a little boy, she used to go up to his bedroom at that hour, and hear him say, “Our Father.” And once more, oh, once more, the young man fell down at his mother's knees and sobbed out the prayer which the Divine Tenderness uttered for us, and which has been echoed for twenty ages since by millions of sinful and humbled men. And as he spoke the last words of the supplication, the mother's head fell down on her boy's, and her arms closed round him, and together they repeated the words “for ever and ever,” and “Amen.”

Yes, it is a strangely moving experience, to have gone to a person to ask pardon for some offence, and to have felt the unearthly shame and humiliation of being actually asked for forgiveness by the person we had wronged. Even in that pathetic illusion of love's blindness we get a hint of the inner mystery of the Divine Forgiveness. Such an experience is shot through with the lights and shadows of Eternity. It brings us to the foot of the Cross. Not that God's Spirit in Christ's Passion confesses *our* sin to *us* ; but that, identifying Himself with humanity there, and bowing side by side with men within that transcendent all-enclosing glory of Truth and Holiness which is the very ground and condition of His own Love, and upon which the stability of the universe depends, He makes (to His own greater Self, as it were), for us, and with us, the great reconciling confession. We cannot repent as we ought to repent, and we know we cannot. But at Christ's Cross we are assured that God's Forgiveness contains everything that our poor, broken, and flickering heart-sorrow lacks. Is there any Sorrow like unto that Sorrow? All my penitence, all my confession, is there—all my defeated hope and inward shame, all my blighted purity and the sense of doom,—there in the heart of that agony of the Forgiveness of God. ‘And the benefit of it we accept, as we accept a mother's prayers and tears, as something our selfishness has required, but which, henceforth, we trust our selfishness shall never shame.’

V.

Here, at the end, we find ourselves still standing on the shore of the ocean of the ‘mystery of Godliness,’ seeking only to read the message of the music of its falling waves. It *is* a mystery ; but of light, not of darkness. It is simple with love's simplicity : it is exhaustless as love is exhaustless.

A child can begin to understand it; but the eyes of faith go searching out the length and breadth, the heights and depths of it, only to be blinded with excess of light.

Standing afar off the remorseful Peter beheld the Cross; and he wrote, long after, of 'the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish, spotless—predestined even before the foundation of the world.' The sight convinced him that the agony which was unveiled there was an agony which slept in the breast of God before the beginning of time. And in the great vision of the consummation of human history, there is seen 'in the midst of the Throne . . . a Lamb . . . slain.' That vision is a reflexion of the mind of the beloved disciple who stood beneath the Cross.

Above, behind, and in the Cross of Calvary there is the Eternal Cross, sin's perpetual wound in the holy heart of God. Calvary was the completing, the filling full of the anguish in the experience of God forgiving. But the moaning undertone of the Divine Pain stretches through all the span of time, and out beyond it, both before and after. The dull ears of the human race, confused with the wandering sounds of earth, have seldom heard it. Once or twice has an echo been caught by some earnest listening

soul, and written by the Spirit of God upon the sacred page. The impulse which prompted the immortal picture of the Suffering Servant was surely a heaving of the anguished breast of God. Then with the coming of Christ, and through the few short rushing years of the Saviour's ministry, 'swift up the sharp scale of sobs God's breast did lift,' till it ended in the mighty yearning sigh which broke upon the earth and made the Cross.

A poet has recently depicted the prayers of the nations, friend and foe alike, borne by the angel Sandalphon into the presence of God:

'With Thee, with Thee, Lord God of Sabaoth,
It rests to answer both.
Out of the obscene seas of slaughter hear,
From East and West, one prayer:
*O God, deliver Thy people. Let Thy sword
Destroy our enemies, Lord.'*

Then, on the cross of His creative pain,
God bowed His head again.
Then, East and West, over all seas and lands,
Out-stretched His piercéd Hands.
Then, down in Hell they chuckled, 'West and East,
Each holds one hand at least.'

'And yet,' Sandalphon whispered, 'men deny
The Eternal Calvary.'

Literature.

THE GREAT CONDÉ.

HISTORICAL biography is either a hit or a miss. The biography of a contemporary may have elements of interest however badly it is written. But there is no excuse for a badly written biography of one who belongs to the past. It had better not be. There may be only one person who has the knowledge that is necessary to write a contemporary biography, and that person may be unqualified otherwise. A historical biography is the property of any one who takes the trouble to become master of the facts.

The Hon. Eveline Godley has written one of the best historical biographies that we have ever read. Its subject, *The Great Condé* (Murray; 15s. net), is not of absorbing interest at the present moment, and its 630 pages of unusually close type

are not alluring to the eye. But the moment we begin to read we find ourselves taken hold of by an adept in this art. The fulness of detail is found to be the cause of the fascination. And, large as the book is, the reader will be very busy indeed and very strong-willed who will lay it down before he has finished it. Most assuredly this biographer has given us a biography that will live.

How is it that the Hon. Eveline Godley has obtained the military knowledge sufficient for the description of strategical movements and intricate battles so as to put to shame the ordinary military historian? Certain it is that we obtain not only a clear conception of the court of France and of the great Condé's own character, but also a minute and intimate knowledge of the battles and sieges and marches of the end of the Thirty Years' War and the other great campaigns in which Condé