

The proclamation of the Gospel is summed up for him therefore in this formula (2 Co 4<sup>5</sup>); the confession of Jesus as Lord is salvation (Ro 10<sup>9</sup>), and it is the mark of a Christian that he serves the Lord Christ (Col 3<sup>24</sup>); for no one can say that Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit (1 Co 12<sup>3</sup>).<sup>1</sup>

If Mr. MAJOR will fill his 'Jesus is Lord' with the full meaning which he finds in the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles, and finish his sentence, his fellow-Churchmen will gladly accept his creed. 'God was in Christ and Jesus is Lord'—it is a short creed, but it is sufficient.

## 'They went both of them together.'<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REVEREND ARTHUR J. GOSSIP, M.A., ABERDEEN.

NOBODY with the least touch of imagination, or any power at all to think himself into another's place, can read the story of Isaac's sacrifice without feeling something hard and cold gripping him tight about the heart. The situation is so merciless and so pathetic, and there is such a terrible restraint about the telling of it, like the deadly quiet of a stricken mourner who says nothing at all, because there are no words that could express it; makes neither moan nor crying, because she is beyond the help of kindly tears; sits dry-eyed, coldly ominously still;—a certain dreadful inevitableness about it all—that lengthy journey with the thing, thank God, yet far away, and God is very pitiful, who knows that He may not repent?—that first glimpse of the distant hills, at sight of which the father's heart must have stood still; and these two, all in all to one another, moving on alone; that sudden question of a half-awakened fear, with the lad's eyes full upon his face; the long climb with drawn, grey faces in that awful silence. As we read, the heart cries out with pain, struggles to help them somehow, as one moans and shudders in his sleep, so vivid and heart-breaking is it all, although the hearts that suffered have been still for some four thousand years.

Think what it meant to Isaac! For the lad knew, so I take it, what the end was going to be. In those days human sacrifice was common and habitual enough. Scholars, indeed, insist that the

full meaning of this story is that it was there on Mount Moriah that the truth first came home to any man that this thing must end, was really a monstrosity and an offence to God. However that may be, it was commonly practised in those days; and, with that grim background to his thoughts, his was no idle question shot at random out of simple curiosity; nor would it need a very subtle mind to hear in Abraham's guarded answer more than his heart could speak! And life is sweet; and he was young, when life is at its sweetest, was still dreaming his dreams, still looking out with flushed cheeks on that wonderful future which hid and held so much that his heart coveted. A little while and he too would set sail, and win the land where dreams come true. And, sudden as an arrow burying itself in his breast, came the cold, awful truth! And yet the lad went on. There are no hot reproaches, no wild outcry; but in tense and utter silence he climbed on and on, with what thoughts jostling one another in his mind, till Abraham stopped and said, 'Here is the place'—and—it had come.

And yet, surely, it is to Abraham that one's heart runs out first. Was ever man so agonized and tortured? The light of his whole life, and he must dash it out, and henceforth grope in a gross darkness! The boy, his boy, who filled his heart with hope and happiness! And he must make it empty, silent, and bleak! If Isaac knew that he knew, what must he be thinking? And if he did not know, how horrible to trap the lad like this, so innocent and unsuspecting! And all his hopes were centred upon him! Had not God said 'In Isaac' he would certainly be blessed—

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Gossip wishes it to be stated that the opening paragraph was suggested to his mind by a reference in one of Marcus Dod's letters to a sermon preached by Professor H. S. Coffin.

this Isaac within a few paces now of death? Did God then never keep His word—was there no truth in Him at all? It was so long now since he had set forth from Haran to inherit the land God had promised him, had surely promised him time and again; and his whole life had slipped away since then, and even yet he owned no foot of it, not even so much as would allow him bury his dead out of sight. And still his stubborn heart believed on doggedly; refused to cease to trust, even when further trust seemed simply silliness. God had said it; and on His word he leaned his whole weight unflinching. 'Mine eyes fail,' cries a Psalmist. 'I am growing blind looking for God,' yet I still peer out dimly and short-sightedly in His direction, am still sure that He will come. And Abraham's faith, too, held on through long barren years. And in the end, the very end, when hope's last dogged spark was winking itself out, that daring faith was justified, for the boy came. And with that God renewed the best of all His promises, and even added to them more and more. To Abraham himself, indeed, it could not be. He must go to his grave a homeless wanderer, must die 'in faith, not having received the promises,' still trusting to the very end. But the boy would enter into all his father's faith had won for him. So God had said, over and over—the boy, this boy. And now a second time He was fooling and cheating him. Why did He let him see the well at all, if he was not to be allowed to drink at it? Surely He knew that that could only make his heart yet thirstier! Why did He give the lad, only to take him back? Why had God lied to him—lied not once but a hundred times? Why in excess of cruelty did He make him the instrument for fooling his own faith and dashing out the hope of which his whole life had been one long, loyal pursuit?

What a wild tumult of emotions—outraged love, a father's breaking heart, a faith burdened till it could bear no more, could hardly stagger on where God directed—must have been surging and swelling within the man's soul, although he spoke no word, but climbed on steadily. 'So they went both of them together,' to and through their common sorrow; but, if the lad's face was drawn and pale, are there not beads of a far sorer agony standing out on the father's anguished forehead? No wonder they called Abraham 'the father of the faithful'! No wonder that a faith so remarkable,

and an obedience so complete, was counted unto him for righteousness. Once on a day the Prince of all Believers climbed a hill yet more steep, with a cross yet heavier pressing hard upon His heart, into a darkness even grosser and more black. For God had promised Him that He would save the world; and He was going to His death, with not one soul in all the world that understood or that believed, yet He went on unflinching. Where God led, there He would follow. And because of that undaunted faith of His, and that perfect obedience tested to the uttermost, He has destroyed our enemies, and won us our salvation. And in all history, perhaps, no act of any man comes nearer to His own than this uttermost sacrifice of Abraham, who gave his very all to a God who seemed faithless and discredited, climbing that other hill into that other darkness, with his hopes all shattered, and God's promises all broken, and his sore, lacerated heart pained all but past the bearing. Dr. A. B. Davidson was of opinion that the greatest act of faith recorded in the Bible, after our Lord's, was that of heathen Nineveh, who, when God threatened them with destruction in forty days, turned His threats and their very extraordinariness into a kind of promise, did not believe His threats. 'Who can tell?' they said. 'Unless some one can tell for certain that God will not turn and repent, they will wait. That is the length that faith will go; it will hold on by a thread so slender as that; it will hope in God's mercy when there is nothing to be said for, and everything to be said against it, short of this that no one can say for certain. Who knows? Who can tell?'

And that is very wonderful. And yet somehow this other grips one more. 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called,' so ran the promise. And yet Isaac he gave back to God.

Well, that is faith; that is what our Lord asks of us. Give Me faith, He says; and that is what He means by it; what He Himself gave when so asked; what He hoped we would grant to Him. And if we did, what would He not do in and through us. But, ah me, any tiniest pebble is enough to stumble us; and any smallest disappointment sours us and makes us grievously suspicious against God. Nothing of ours is threatened, but we cling to it, dour and sullen. Yet look at Abraham and look at Christ, and surely you will let it go, and remain quiet and believing.

'So they went both of them together.' But—the father's heart was sorest in the common sorrow. That is what we have found. And, to-day, has it come to be your turn to climb the hill of sacrifice, that long, hard hill that strains the heart and tires so cruelly? Something has happened; and the life that used to be so sunny has of a sudden become shivery and grey. There is no need to hurt the yet fresh wound, to make you wince by blundering into description and detail—your heart knows what it is only too well. And you are meeting it bravely enough, I do not doubt. Perhaps because you have acquired the art of leaving yourself absolutely in God's hands, have gained the peace and the serenity that come from that, like those that settle down on one when he starts on a long sea voyage, and has no frets nor cares, for there are others there to do the managing and guiding for him, and he need not worry over things. Or perhaps it is only with a certain apathetic courage that accepts what can't be helped. The thing has come, and there is nothing to be said. 'What does one do,' asks a character in Lucas Malet's *Wages of Sin*, 'when all the best is taken away from one, when life has grown trivial, stunted, narrow? After a time, my dear, one lights a candle called Patience, and guides one's footsteps by that.' Or perhaps it is with a heart struck cold and bitter, that can bear, but cannot understand how God could treat it thus; which may say never a word, but which is unbelieving and rebellious; has ceased to pray; has lost all sense of God's kindness and tenderness. Life was so happy until this fell suddenly out of the sky; and now everything is so different—life grown a thing to be endured, a burden to be carried with a panting and strained heart.

Yet, at least, you are not alone. Your Father is beside you: and the Father's heart is sorest.

Must it not be so? Is there any agony so terrible as to be called upon to stand beside one's little one in deadly pain?—too small even to tell you what is wrong, or to suggest how you might ease it—the little wailing voice; the hot, dry, restless hands; the head tossing from side to side with sleepless eyes, while the strength swiftly, steadily, keeps ebbing—is not that a far more intolerable thing than to be racked with pain oneself? And God is your Father, and you are His own child, and no one suffers but He suffers more cruelly than we ourselves. However lonely is the

road, you have one sure Companion; however personal the sorrow, one other heart is bearing it along with you; for it is His yet more than yours. So you 'go both of you together' down to the cold heart of what is a common sorrow—but—the Father's heart is sorest.

Can I see another's woe  
And not be in sorrow too?  
Can I see another's grief  
And not seek for kind relief?  
No, no! never can it be!  
Never, never can it be!

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh  
And thy Maker be not nigh!  
Think not thou canst weep a tear  
And thy Maker be not near!

O! He gives to us His joy  
That our grief it may destroy:  
Till our grief is fled and gone,  
God doth sit by us and moan.

That is the very teaching of the Testament. It is rank blasphemy to think of God as outside of the suffering of the world—your suffering. It is cruel to rail against Him for His ordering of your life. For no one feels your difficulties as He does, not even yourself. It is a man of sorrows, one tired and aged before His time by the keenness of His sympathy, by ever entering into other people's troubles, by making them His troubles, by giving Himself without stint for their relief, whom the Gospels tell us is God's very image and His express likeness. Always there is that pain in God's eyes, always that sympathy wringing His heart. Whatever else and more the Cross means, surely it means this—that Maeterlinck is wholly wrong in picturing God as sitting smiling on a sunny mountain; high above, and untouched by the woes and miseries of this uneasy earth. Not sitting smiling, and not lolling at ease on a sunny mountain-side, but in the thick darkness at the very heart of the world's sorrows, bowed by a cross that even He could hardly carry, so grieved, so wounded, so heartbroken, there it is that we see God clearest, there that we understand what He is really like. Trouble has come to you, and we others turn into it to give you our kindly word or such help as we can, and then we go our way out of it all again. For after all it is not ours. But always it remains with you. Yet you are not alone in it. Whatever troubles you troubles God too; is His as much as yours; and you go 'both

of you together' up the steep hill of sacrifice. But the Father's heart is sorest.

Moreover, it is in the light of this that we must read the Master's sufferings and death. There have been explanations of the Cross which almost break one's heart to read, and do they not break God's?

Always when meditating on our Saviour's passion, let us begin by fastening on Paul's great words that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,' or on those of the Gospel, 'God so loved the world that He gave up His only begotten Son' for it—His foolish, blundering, heartbreaking world.

So, when the Master climbed His hill of sacrifice, He did not go alone, but there was One beside Him suffering in His suffering, even more than He Himself. So they went both of them together to the Cross and darkness—He and God—and the Father's heart was sorest. What it all must have meant to God no human heart can ever picture. To watch the scoffing and the mockery, the spitting and the buffeting, and make no sign—the dreadful things which He hid from us yonder in the darkness, and the long hours of waiting there amid that ribald, teasing, cruel mob, before at last death came. How terrible is the restraint

of the Almighty, how fearful is His patience! 'Christ's atonement,' says Dr. Dods, 'was nothing more than His quietly and lovingly accepting all that sin could do against Him.' And He was not alone in that; for God was hurt by what hurt Him, was wounded by His wounds, and He, too, quietly and lovingly accepted it. There is a fine and mystical picture in our own National Gallery in London: Christ hangs upon the Cross; the darkness has more than begun to deepen; and at first that is all one sees. But, looking longer, one becomes aware that behind the Cross, supporting our Lord with His arms, and looking down on Him with infinite kindness, stands the Father. And His face, too, is grey with more than the Son's pain; and He, too, shares in the Saviour's agony. And is not that the supreme meaning of the Cross, and its chief terror?—that our sins, your sins and mine, hurt God like that; that always, always, always, He is wounded by them as our Lord was then; that it was not Christ only who climbed the grim, stony hill of sacrifice, and not Christ only who went down deeper and deeper through the darkness, but they went both of them together, the Father and He; and the Father's heart was sorest. Only at such a price, and such a cost, was our salvation won.

## Literature.

### THE NEW ATLAS.

WE have to scrap our Atlases. However much we paid for them and however much we love them, they have to go. It is a new world. It needs a new Atlas. So evident is it all that Messrs. Macmillan have issued *The Handy Royal Atlas of Modern Geography* without a word of preface. In place of a preface we find two highly coloured charts, a North Polar and a South Polar chart. We open it at the beautiful title-page. We turn over and come upon the dedication: 'To His Royal Highness Edward, Prince of Wales, this Atlas is by Permission most respectfully Dedicated.' We turn another page and read the contents. We turn one page more and we are in the midst of the maps.

The first is a Chart of the World on Mercator's

Projection. The second is a map of Europe! The very look of it is strange to us. Germany is now nearly as well proportioned as France. That Prussia which, since Frederick called the Great, had been all tail and the tail all sting, has had its stinging tail shortened, much to the benefit of its appearance on the map. And then to the East of Germany, here are two countries our maps had not shown since we began to study maps.

There are, besides the charts, fifty-two maps. They are all the work of Mr. G. H. Johnston, F.R.G.S., of the Edinburgh firm of Messrs. W. & A. K. Johnston, and they are of the finest workmanship. No attempt is made to catch the vulgar eye for bright colouring, yet some of them—we notice Switzerland unexpectedly for one—are quite arresting in that respect.

Upon the Index the utmost care has produced