

one, much out of the other, for his own spiritual benefit and growth in grace.

He knows all about miracle. He appreciates the scientific difficulty. But: 'It cannot be too often emphasized, that to reject the resurrection of Jesus on the ground of the impossibility of miracle is to create another miracle as impossible as that which we hoped to avoid.' Yes, and more

incredible. For in physical things we cannot tell where you are; in spiritual things you can only be where there is cause and effect. 'If Jesus did not appear after His death, how are we to account for that mental state which gave birth to Christianity, and created the Christian Church and the Christian Sabbath?' 'The Christian Sabbath' is well said; it is sometimes forgotten as an item.

The Prince of Believers.

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

IF we were asked what character in the New Testament offered our Lord the most audacious faith, most of us, probably, would fix upon the penitent thief and that strange trust of his, which shone out of the midnight darkness, when faith seemed sheer unreason and mere imbecility. And yet I, for one, am not sure I would not give my vote for James. For to him it was given to believe that the child with whom he had grown up in the old nursery at home, beside whom he had learned his lessons year in and year out; with whom, as a little fellow, he had played at marriages and funerals and make-believe; often, no doubt, as a boy will, quarrelling with Him over some small trifle; with whom he had slept in the same little bed at night,—that the child who every evening knelt down with him at the same mother's knee, and day by day learned about God from the same mother's lips, was Himself the Son of God, the Word, the express image of God's person—his own old playmate, his own brother, with whom he had lived for thirty years! Even the New Testament can show no faith so strong and daring and bewildering as that.

Yet James was characteristically sane and cautious, not at all the kind of man to be swept off his feet. So cautious, indeed, that when his brother set out on His mission, James for one flatly refused to countenance Him as a prophet; would have nothing to do with Him and His claims; was not at all exultant while the people were eagerly flocking about Him, and His name was being buzzed to and fro by excited groups at every street corner; was, indeed, much ashamed of Him and His ongoings, scandalized by the

pitiful stories that came home on every wind of how He, an ignorant peasant, a mere village carpenter, dared to attack godly and learned people like the Pharisees, who had given their whole lives to religion and theology; ashamed of how He was consorting with the very scum, had sunk so low as to endeavour to buttress up His failing cause with recruits like publicans and sinners, from the contamination of whose very touch James, like all decent people, would have twitched away his garment's hem; of the blasphemous stories He kept telling, comparing the great God to the most unseemly things, until at last poor James could stand it no longer; and roundly asserting that his brother had gone off His head, actually set out to bring the poor sufferer home and shut Him up where at least He could do no further harm, and bring no more disgrace on His afflicted family. Peter and James and John might be taken in, and throw in their lot with the movement, but James held ostentatiously aloof; other poor fools might believe this was the Christ, but James was quite convinced this was no prophet, but a self-deceived impostor; no Messiah, but a lunatic! So it was to the very end. Be sure that James was in Jerusalem all those Passover days when Christ was being dragged about from one tribunal to another, and at last was led out to a felon's death; but he appears to have taken no interest in the proceedings whatsoever, simply to have gone on with his worship in the temple, praying, no doubt, with earnestness and a sore heart for his misguided and most miserable brother, the brother who for years had been the family's cross and heartbreak and disgrace.

So true is it that one can live for half a lifetime within sight of Christ and see no special beauty in Him that we should desire Him. It is, indeed, their very nearness to the Master that is most people's difficulty; because they have grown up beside Him that they so ignore and overlook Him. If we could come to the Gospels with fresh and unjaded minds, could open Luke for the first time, how it would thrill and move us to our depths—to learn that the great God loves us like that, that He is so self-sacrificing and so self-forgetful and so wholly lovable! Think what it would be to turn the leaves and come for the first time upon the Prodigal, or the Upper Room! But the old threadbare words have passed so often through our minds that we now listen to them wearily and yawningly, and with a wandering attention, as to a trite and sapless commonplace that wakens hardly any flicker of interest. If we had never had experience of God's forgiveness, and could now make proof of it for the first time, would not our lives be flooded by a sudden sunshine, and our hearts be gay as children who must dance because their happy feet will not keep still? But because we have worn a pathway to the fountain open for uncleanness, because we have received God's grace so often and so faithfully, we have largely lost sense of its marvel; can accept it nowadays with small surprise and less emotion; hardly anything of the old thrill, and little of the inspiration it once brought. At first men were dazed by it—they could not take it in, could hardly credit it, had to tell every one they met—as we all did during the war when glorious news came through. But when these excited people burst in upon us, crying, 'God loves us, has forgiven us, believes in us!' 'Of course,' we say, 'why shouldn't He? That's what He's for!' and when with hands that tremble they point to the Cross, whispering, 'Look!' 'Tut,' we reply, 'we've often seen it before!' and turn upon our heel, quite unimpressed. 'It is a great thing,' says old Halyburton, 'to receive God's pardon every time as though this were the only time we ever could receive it.' But our familiarity with it has largely deadened the Gospel's appeal, robbed it for us of half its force. It is our nearness to the Master that blinds many of us to the mystery of Jesus' person, to the wonder of His power and love. We read how Christ did marvellous works: and then how He came into His own country; and with that we draw a long breath before we turn the

page. For what will this next chapter not contain! If He wrought such extraordinary things for these aliens and strangers, what will He not do for the women whom He knew as lassies now that they were ill; for the men, who had been at school with Him, in their desperate need? 'And yet,' says a poet, thinking of how Christ's heart went out to all mankind:

And yet, I think, at Golgotha,
As Jesus' eyes were closed in death,
They saw with love most passionate
The village street of Nazareth.

But when we turn the page, it is to find a blank—only these few words written, 'Here he could do no mighty works, because of their unbelief,' save that He healed a few sick folk. 'Pshaw!' they said to one another, when rumours of incredible happenings kept blowing in on every wind, 'there's nothing in it. It's just Mary's laddie who used to run my messages for me; it's just our village carpenter who mended that same chair on which you're sitting now. Miracles! not he.'

The fact of the matter is that James was the religious member of the family, or at least had the credit and the reputation of so being—James and not Jesus. A conscientious, grave, and austere man, he had devoted himself to God's service, and become a Nazirite, wore the long hair of that honourable order, practised their asceticisms and their self-denials, spent long hours a day upon his knees in prayer. The whole life of the house had to be governed largely to suit his religious habits, and no doubt this was gladly done; for every Jewish parent counted it an honour to have a Nazirite among her sons. Jesus took such food as was set before Him; but there were many things James could not touch. Jesus no doubt rose early and spent hours alone among the hills, but in the daytime He had little time for prayer, had to work hard and long to feed so many mouths; and when the evening came there were the little ones to help, and the mother to take care of in a hundred little ways that no one ever saw but He; and always there would be some child, crying and very desperate, calling for Him, with a broken toy clenched in its hot little hand for Him to mend, or some boat that would not sail aright, sure that He would not be like other grown-ups, but would see how huge was this disaster, and contrive somehow, with those clever hands of His, to put things right, and chase away the tears: or

there were tired folk to be helped, or some sick neighbour to be comforted, or some one who had fallen into sin, and with whom every one else had broken, to be sought out and cheered. His was a full day, crowded with little kindnesses; but no one appears to have thought of it as specially religious! Every one knew that where He was, there there were happiness and sunshine; every one saw that always He was thinking about others, never of Himself. But in time they just accepted that, as we all do. It was His way to be kind and unselfish; and they thought no more about it. But James was always at his prayers, and always at his fasts, and always at his religious exercises, till the very bairns, who hailed his Elder Brother with shouts of delight and came tumbling to meet Him, grew hushed and awed and awkward in presence of the spare, ascetic, other-worldly saint, whom every one could see was a saint.

Long years after, looking back, James spoke with a certain bitterness and fierceness of these things, warned others that to fast and pray and busy oneself in religious ordinances is an empty thing unless it is having effect upon our character and daily life.

These things, he says, are not religion; but simply the means whereby we may attain to it; the fuel with which it is fed: and the thing itself is to be kind of heart, and free from selfishness, to think of others, and to spend oneself for others; to make the world a brighter place by lifting burdens from tired shoulders, and sharing the sorrows of sad hearts, and helping those who have no claim on us, except that they are needy and that we have help to give. It is not difficult to understand what face had risen up before him when he defines religion as a great unselfishness and a compassion and a giving of oneself away with both full, generous hands. Is your faith bearing fruit like that? he cries, in his own pointed way. Are your prayers teaching you to gain the Christlike mind? Because religion, as I saw the Master live it out, was a most practical and homely thing. I wonder have we learned that, you and I? Some people never do, go to their death with eyes unopened. Ruskin has a very scornful passage on our phrase 'divine services'; telling us that, while it is right and fitting that a child should ask its father for what it would like, and thank him for what he has given, no child would call that serving him! Yet that is what God's children term it—

that is all the service many of them ever give! Without prayer we can never keep the Christlike mind alive; the thing cannot be done. But prayer and church attendance and the like are not religion, far less Christlikeness. For that is to be self-denying, to forget oneself, to think of others, to refuse to shut oneself within one's narrow interests, to make our aim not how much we can get, but how much we can do, and all this in the little nothings that make up our daily round.

Although James had no faith in his brother, Christ believed in James; and probably few nails in the Cross He had to carry hurt Him more than that He Himself had so to vex and wound His brother's heart. Apart from natural affection, there was a sincerity, an earnestness, a sterling worth in him that called out Christ's regard. Of him, too, surely it might have been written, as of that other not dissimilar soul, that Jesus beholding him loved him, with a frank, admiring love that showed plainly in His eyes. And accordingly one of the first of those to whom He appeared after His resurrection was His own oldest brother.

What these two said to one another in that unimaginable interview, the Scriptures, with their innate delicacy, give no hint. 'A word did it,' Savonarola used to say, speaking of his altered character and life, 'a word did it'; but he never told the word. No more did James drop any hint; only, like Saul on the Damascus road, he too saw and believed.

High things were spoken there, unhandled down:
Only they saw thee from the secret shrine
Returning with hot cheeks and kindled eyes.

How many of us, stubborn in our unbelief, or careless and indifferent, have been so suddenly arrested, found ourselves face to face with Christ, this Master whom we had ignored, if not disliked; and all at once we saw. Just how it came about we do not perhaps know, and could not perhaps tell. Only what had been blank to us grew full of meaning; what had seemed utterly impossible was seen to be the most sure and most glorious fact; what had been nothing, everything. 'James, the slave of Jesus Christ,' is how he opens his Epistle.

Of James' service to the Church it were not easy to speak too much or too highly. Even apart from his relationship to the Master, his own great gifts of mind, and purity of soul, and saintliness of

character, marked him out as a leader even in the circle of the first disciples. And to him there was given a post than which none was more dangerous or delicate or difficult to fill. For nowhere was the Church more vexed and harried than at its headquarters in Jerusalem, and yet it was here, on the scene of his Master's martyrdom, among the very men who had contrived it, that he chose to serve and bear his witness. When the persecution broke out, nearly all the others scattered, bearing the gospel north and south and east and west; but James' heart clung to Jerusalem; and he seems to have faced the danger and stayed on. A less wise or conciliatory leader, or one less sympathetic to the old religion, would have been hurried to an early death. But, so old Hegesippus tells us, James' austere saintliness won reverence even from the Jews—this man who prayed so much for the people in the temple that his knees became hard as a camel's; whom almost alone among the Christians, Jews could understand, and did admire.

Nor was that all. For what particularly strikes one in time is his open-mindedness, which, contrary to the normal course, grew with the years, not lessened. All James' instincts were conservative and cautious; the whole turn of his mind was such that naturally he would have been narrow and prejudiced and even bigoted. Left to himself, he would never have gone to the Gentiles; and when tidings that Peter and then Paul had done so reached him, he felt that things were not going his way, nor as he would have chosen. Yet when the clamour grew, and the orthodox folk appealed to him, sure of a favourable ruling, though he knew that it meant endless trouble to himself, the man did violence to the bias of his nature and the set of his mind, and boldly threw his influence into the scale for liberty of action. It is not my way, he said; and I myself could not have done it. But God seems to have spoken, and revealed that they are right, not I; that what I imagined to be principle was merely private prejudice, and now that He has taught me, I dare not oppose His will. And it was largely James' tact and conciliatoriness and humility that held the Church together, and saved it from disruption into half a dozen warring sects.

All which is evidence of real greatness of soul. It is so easy to sulk and be stubborn when things will not go our way, to elevate our likings and

our prejudices into principles; so hard to give way gracefully and heartily, to welcome new truth, when we see that it is truth, though not what we hoped and believed would prove truth, but the opposite. A soul that keeps its windows open to the light and air, that is willing to listen when God speaks to it, that is prepared to follow truth wherever it may lead, is one with which God can do anything. But most of us are thrwn and dogged, hold to our views of things just because they are ours, do not want further light—will not admit that it is light, insist that the accustomed is the real, and are sadly inhospitable to the unfamiliar. For no gift should we pray God oftener than for openness of mind, especially in these times of transition, when everything, thrown back into the crucible, is emerging in new forms—most of all if we are growing old. For ageing minds, like ageing limbs, grow stiff and inelastic, find it increasingly difficult to twist themselves to the new point of view, and increasingly easy to dismiss the novel as mere decadence and heresy, although sometimes it is God's voice they are resisting. It was not easy for James, yet he did it. There are people to whom certain of the virtues seem to come by nature, and others for whom they are desperately hard. And it is they who, doing violence to their natural disposition, gain what was none of theirs who are the greatest saints. As Newman says, it is not the ninety-nine points where it is easy, but the one where it is hard, that is the test.

And what makes James' triumph more remarkable is that he was both a passionate and a quick-tongued man. No one can read his Epistle without learning that; without discovering where his shoe pinched and his soul bled. Again and again he returns to it with shame and self-loathing, heaping up dreadful words of shuddering and disgust. The very snakes can be robbed of their fangs and venom, but the tongue can no man tame; and there are years of struggle and of failure in that bitter cry. Do what we will, it masters us, breaks through our guard, hurries us where we had not meant to go, into hot angry words, and bitterness of judgment; into a deadly poison of detraction; into talking about others, meaning indeed no harm, and yet none the less doing it; hinting faults, passing on what we have heard without the slightest knowledge or the least investigation, wounding others' reputation merely to give a fillip to a conversation, or revive it when it

drags. It is the very fire of hell, cries James, aflame in our own nature: and as he cries the man tears at the Nessus shirt that stings and burns him, yet which he cannot get off. It is what makes hell hell, and it is ablaze in us, and will not be trampled out; leaps into flame, tread desperately on it how we will. All which seems unreal and exaggerated to us, who keep stumbling half a dozen times a day into such sins, and think no more about them, never remember our hot words or our idle chatter about other folk, account these very little faults hardly worth chronicling. And yet, as James looks back, the thing about Christ that appears to have remained most vividly with him, the characteristic that bewildered him the most, was just His perfect mastery of His tongue. Often as James as man and boy had been irritating, often as he had spoken woundingly, often as he had misjudged and misunderstood Him, never once had Jesus been betrayed into passion or ill-humour or one unguarded word. That seems to have been the element in His perfection that haunted James, and humbled him, and stirred him to a wondering envy. If any man seemeth to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, he has but small resemblance to the Master as I saw Him.

Well, we have a great fight before us! Yet, as we enter it, let us catch something of James' intrepidity and sheer gallantry of spirit. There never was a finer spiritual fighter, one with steadier eyes, and a heart less afraid. When a temptation leaps at us we, for the most part, whimper and snivel and pity ourselves, go into action whipt before the issue is joined. But not so James, who exults in battle—'Count it all joy,' he says—hails a temptation from afar as a new opportunity of victory, another field where freedom can be won and shrewd blows struck, defines it as a chance, not of sinning, as we do, but of winning.

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

The soul that faces what life sends so gallantly and with such utter faith cannot be vanquished. Could we but gain the spirit of this doughty fighter, we too would pass on from strength to strength, from one impossible triumph to another and yet greater, would really find that all things work together for our good.

In the Study.

Virginitus Puerisque.

No Excuse!

'They all with one consent began to make excuse.'—
Lk 14¹⁸.

If I were to ask the boys and girls who had never made an excuse to hold up their hands, I wonder how many hands we should see? I should not be surprised to see no hands at all. Certainly nobody would see my hand.

Making excuses is one of the commonest habits and one of the silliest. Very few people wish to hear excuses. They can't be bothered with them. And yet we go on bothering others to listen to them and bothering ourselves to make them. About the one time when an excuse is excusable is when we are likely to be gravely misjudged or misunderstood on account of some big thing of which we are entirely innocent. As for the little

things we get blamed for in everyday life, it is better just to bear the blame and say nothing, rather than get into a habit of excusing and explaining. Perhaps you will think that sounds rather hard, but every sensible boy and girl knows these little hardships are the things that make men and women of us.

Have you ever met a person you could never put in the wrong? They had an excuse for everything. Other people might be wrong, but *they* were right. They had knocked a cup off a shelf and broken it. Oh yes, but some one else had placed the cup on the edge of the shelf, otherwise it would never have been broken! They had lost their temper hopelessly, and scratched their small sister's face. Yes, but the small sister was so provoking! They had told a lie. Well, no, they hadn't exactly, they just didn't understand what you meant. Aren't people like that annoying,