

others stumble or fall off the course they shall be victorious. In the crisis, in the hurried moment of swift decision, and prompt action, they are strong. And they shall also walk and not faint. In the dull weary journey of life, in its monotonous, hard, uphill, uninteresting road, when the way to come is like the way gone, hard, uphill, and monotonous, in the dull grey walk of life, they faint not.

These three, "mount," "run," "walk," might seem a falling climax, but perhaps they are not. It is easier to mount heavenward, in short, rapid, far-piercing flights of thought direct as it were to the throne of God, than to run the race of life, the hot keenly contested struggle with passion or the world or men. And this is easier than the walk, the lonely, lifelong, monotonous track, when one is cast quite on himself, without excitement or emulation, or immediate gain or prize. It is easier to weather the storm, than to endure and wait when one is becalmed upon the sea of life. To live an ordinary life well is the greatest of all deeds.

A. B. DAVIDSON.

THE WORTH OF SPARROWS.

MATTHEW x: 29-31 ; LUKE xii. 6, 7.

THERE is no quality which Christ required of his disciples in a higher degree, or sought more earnestly to cultivate in them, than that of *courage*. In "the man Christ Jesus" this attribute of our nature (which through the masculine speech of Rome has given its name to *virtue*, as being the proper distinction and excellence of *a man*) attains its perfect, because its most purely moral, exhibition and expression. And the truest courage, if its type be in Him, finds its source and its stay in faith in the living God. The highest manliness is one with godliness.

History, as we read it, entirely confirms the teaching of our Lord. Faith has proved itself to be the root of the most manful and enduring courage, of all the heroic virtues. Where it decays and ceases to be a practical power in society, experience leads us to anticipate a lowering of moral energy, a loss of the buoyancy and elastic vigour of resolution which the higher tasks of life demand, of that self-possessed and stedfast patience which, through all the adverse gales of fortune,

“Bates not one jot
Of heart or hope ; but still bears up, and steers
Right onward.”

Christian courage is called forth by devotion to a spiritual and enduring object that enlists all the powers of the soul in its pursuit,—a devotion animated by an absorbing personal affection, and sustained by a full confidence in the ultimate attainment of its end : it is the high ardour and the brave endurance of faith, of love, of hope. “ Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; ” “ He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ” ; “ Fear not, little flock ; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom ; ” “ Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away ” :—in such sentences as these the self-devotion of Christ’s servants finds its incentive and its warrant. No other moral leader has ever been able to address his followers in language such as this. Nor has any principle been discovered which, as a spring of spiritual energy—of the power to toil, to suffer, and to dare, in the service of mankind and in the pursuit of the soul’s highest good—is in any way equal to that personal loyalty to a Divine Lord, which these words imply in those who heartily believe them.

And yet, while the object which Christ sets before his disciples is so transcendent, and the principles with which He seeks to inspire them are so spiritual, He illustrates

and applies them in a manner the most homely and practical. His mind moves with perfect ease and freedom from this side to that, and from that to this, of the veil that parts us from the unseen. His vision of the spiritual world is unlike that of the poet's eye, "in a fine frenzy rolling," that "glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." It is calm and clear, the full and steady gaze of One who contemplates a near, abiding, and familiar reality. He sees heaven as "the Son of man who is in heaven." And when He tells us of "earthly things," inviting us, as we may say, to follow and to test Him, there is in his treatment of them a clearness of insight, a delicacy of touch, a mastery of the sober facts of life as they lay around Him, which prepare us to trust Him in that higher range of "heavenly things" up to which He leads us.¹ He wins our confidence as Son of Man, that He may command our homage as Son of God. We come to see that it is just because He is so familiar with "heavenly things" that He reads the meaning of "earthly things" so truly. And this "gathering into one" of the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the Divine, this perfect blending of the natural and the supernatural in Jesus Christ, is that which in the end most fully satisfies our faith, and which gives to Christian truth its central position and fixed stability amid the shifting movements of thought and the ebb and flow of human affairs.

The saying of Christ, recorded in both the First and Third Gospels,² on which this Paper is based, is a striking

¹ John iii. 9-13; i. 47-51.

² It is very probable that particular sayings of our Lord of a proverbial or parabolic character, such as those of Matthew x. 27 and 29 (Luke xii. 3, 6) were reiterated on different occasions, with varying turns of expression; just as symbolic actions (e.g. *the cleansing of the temple*) may have been repeated, if circumstances called for the repetition. But one can hardly suppose that a *continued discourse*, such as that of Matthew x. 26-33 (Luke xii. 2-9) was delivered a second time in almost the same words. This being assumed, there can be little doubt that St. Luke reproduces more correctly the order and

example of this unique characteristic of his teaching. It brings together in one sentence God—and the sparrow; the immortal soul with its life beyond the reach of “them that kill the body”—and the hairs of our head, practically numberless to us, yet all numbered by our Father in heaven; and it does this without the slightest shock of strangeness or jar of incongruity. And this union of lowliness and grandeur, of sublimity and homeliness, lends to our Master’s “Fear not” a power to soothe and to encourage such as no other words possess.

It is significant that Christ marked with so much interest the more lowly and homely of the creatures around us. He does not say, “Consider the eagle”—the monarch of the air, the symbol of empire and of victory; or, “Consider the nightingale,” the sweet Eastern bulbul, that floods the Jordan banks and the shores of Gennesaret with its passionate music; but, “Consider the raven”—a fowl of ill-omen and unattractive to the eye, or draws attention to the sparrow, a very Pariah amongst the feathered tribes! It is like his preference for publicans and sinners over the lordly Pharisee and learned Scribe. Who but Jesus would have dreamed of getting poetry and theology out of ravens and sparrows! Who but He would have compared Himself, as He did in the most pathetic utterance of his life, to a hen vainly calling her heedless brood to the shelter of her wings! But this fashion of speech became Him who was “meek and lowly in heart”; and who, moreover, being one with the Author of Nature, interprets best her deepest and simplest lessons. Of Him

connection of the discourses recorded in common by the two Evangelists. St. Matthew’s memory is *theological* rather than *historical* in its bias. The “sayings” of Christ, on which he loves to dwell, have grouped themselves in his mind around certain great themes of discourse, with which his attention is absorbed. “Luke is like a botanist, who delights to study each flower in the very spot where it has sprung up, and amidst its native surroundings. Matthew resembles the gardener, who is culling splendid bouquets, for some special purpose which he has in view” (Godet, *New Test. Studies*, p. 16, Eng. Tr.).

most of all we should expect the words of our English poet of Nature to be true :

“To me the meanest flower that blows, can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

That Christ should thus have had an eye and a heart for “the lilies” and “the ravens,” for sparrows and chickens, being what He was, and having such an errand in this world as He had, is a fact full of instruction in itself, and profoundly reassuring as an index to the mind of God. Such language from his lips should help to correct our pride and thoughtlessness, and teach us a religion more considerate and humane, more open-eyed to the kindly and affecting aspects of the daily life of Nature ; while it serves to enlarge and deepen our views of the universal providence of God.

And what a revelation Christ’s saying respecting the sparrows gives us of the working of that Providence ! What an omniscience and omnipresence it implies ! He declares that God actually notices and cares for every little feathered thing that flits twittering through the air, or hops from bough to bough in innocent and happy freedom, or pipes its solitary note “alone upon the house-top.” And when the tiny creature falls, struck by stick or shot or stone, “it does not fall on the ground,” He says, “*without your Father.*” Nay, even as it hangs in the poulterer’s stall, strung up with fifty others, waiting for the purchaser, poor almost as itself, who can find the farthing needed to buy two of them,¹ still it is not “forgotten before God.” The pitiful little tragedy, from beginning to end, is watched and recorded by the Supreme Mind ! If He observes all that, what is there which He overlooks ! If He “caters providently for the sparrow,” and interests Himself in its fate, how solicitous his care

¹ Sparrows, and small birds of similar kinds, are still a common article of food amongst the poor in Palestine. See Smith’s *Bible Dictionary*.

for all his living creatures! How minute and delicate and sympathetic, as well as far-reaching and omnipotent, the oversight of his providence, which is not less special than general, not less particular than it is universal.

There are those, indeed, amongst ourselves who do "consider the ravens" and the sparrows, and everything that lives and grows, with the keenest and often the most reverent interest. Ornithology alone has become a science in itself, to which a student of Nature might fittingly give the labour of a life-time. For modern naturalists have discovered how marvellous these common creatures are—especially the commonest and most familiar of them; how exquisite is the mechanism of their organs; what an endless variety of adaptations their structure and their habits present; what subtle and profound laws connect every part of every living thing with every other part and with the elements in which it lives, and with its kind, with the whole scheme of nature to which it belongs, and with the buried worlds beneath our feet which are already yielding up their dead. And their teaching may help us, in some degree, to understand why God should have such regard even to a single sparrow. If his creation is so intimately bound together in every part as biological science seems to shew; if the ideas which govern the entire range and course of life in its cosmic history find expression in every living organism, so that the laws under which the human body exists may be detected in a microscopic animalcule, then we need not wonder that Christ should have chosen the sparrow as an instance of God's providential care.

Indeed, without any scientific insight into the matter, we may be sure that our heavenly Father, "being Lord of all," cannot despise or overlook the humblest of his creatures. Even a large-minded and noble-hearted man is distinguished above others by his freedom from contempt, by his insight

into the meaning of little things, and his sense of the sacredness and the value of common life. His mind is superior to the mere bulk and splendour of outward things. And with God this must be so in the most absolute sense, to the most perfect degree. "He hath respect unto the lowly." And this "respect" extends in due measure to all his creatures.

It is only when we believe that his care is thus universal that we can absolutely rely upon it for ourselves. If there were anything—bird, or beast, or creeping worm, or any single speck of life in the vast population which lives and moves and has its being in a single drop of water, that might escape his notice or be for a moment beyond his ken, we could never be sure of his guardianship for ourselves. The more deeply science penetrates into the mysteries of life, the more minute and impalpable are the forms which they assume. Growth and decay, health and disease, even feeling and thought on their physical side, resolve themselves into a series of molecular changes and an interaction of microscopical germs. The secret of the constitution of matter and of the correlation of forces lies hid in the baffling recesses of the infinitely little, where, let Science push her researches far as she may, God will still have room to hide Himself as effectually as He did from the bewildered groping of men of ancient times.¹ There is nothing hyperbolic, nothing that should surprise us, in Christ's assertion that by Him "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." How can it be otherwise? Before Him all differences of physical magnitude disappear. He sees at once the part in the whole, and the whole in each smallest part; the atom in the world, and the world in the atom; the lowliest of his creatures in the highest, and the highest in its relation to the lowliest and least.

¹ Job xxiii. 8, 9.

But how, it is often asked, can we speak of *care* and *watchfulness*, when

“Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shrieks against our creed”?

Nature shares indeed with ourselves in the mystery of suffering and death, and, in strange sympathy with her discrowned lord, she “groans and travails in pain”¹ under “the bondage of corruption.” But it is an article of our creed that she will have her part in “the liberty of the glory of the sons of God,” and that out of her long travail a new birth is coming, which in some fashion that “doth not yet appear,” will compensate for all the ages of her painful and laborious “subjection to vanity.” For “the creation” surely, as well as for “the sons of God,” the Apostle predicts that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.” Even as things are, we are apt in certain moods to heighten imaginatively the pangs of the animal creation. We see our misery reflected in their pangs. They suffer, and they die; but they know nothing of “the *sting* of death” which pierces the soul of man and envenoms life for him in so many ways. We need to be on our guard against anthropomorphic conceptions of Nature as well as of God.

What Christ tells us of the care of God for the animals about us should make us more considerate in our treatment of them than many of us are. It may be that the story of “Balaam and the ass,” at which in our too confident modern wisdom we are apt to smile, was intended to convey to us a serious warning in this respect; and that when for once “the Lord opened the mouth of the ass,” it was not only to “rebuke the madness of the prophet,”² but at the same time to utter a plaintive appeal on behalf of all

¹ Rom. viii. 18-23.

² See EXPOSITION, *Second Series*, vol. v., p. 126, 127.

the dumb beasts of burden, whose masters are often their pitiless oppressors. And when God sees fit to say by his angel, "Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass *these three times?*" it seems that He observes and remembers every angry unjust blow inflicted on any of his creatures. They are put within our power; are made our servants and companions: and good and faithful servants they have been. Man owes his civilization, under God, to the domestic animals. We are permitted—as indeed it is necessary—to take their life in order to serve our own. But their capacity for suffering is a bond of sympathy between ourselves and them which forbids the infliction of deliberate torture. And surely, when "every work is brought into judgment," Almighty God will have something to say on this account—not only to the brutal carter who furiously lashes his overladen overdriven beast, but also to the gay sportsman who finds the zest of his pleasure in the fierce delight of killing, and turns sport into butchery; and to the cold-blooded vivisectionist, who hunts through all the ingenuities of torment that his imagination can devise or his skill can execute for some possible discovery. It is not by force and cruelty that Nature's secrets are to be won from her. Put thus upon the rack, she will know how to close her lips and to baffle and mock her inquisitors. It is a blot upon our civilization, and upon the progress of knowledge, that the torture-chamber should be reopened in our midst and consecrated afresh to the worship of a self-pleasing and self-magnifying Science. The judgment of God in this matter has, indeed, already been expressed, in the effect which all such cruelty has upon its perpetrators, in the inevitable reaction by which every wanton abuse of man's power over the creatures tends to blunt his moral sensibilities and to make him callous in his dealings with his fellows. We may be sure that for our own sakes, still more than for theirs, He who

has given us this dominion, and made us only less than Himself in this world of ours,¹ is concerned that we should rule in mercy. It is as though Christ said in speaking of God's care over the sparrows: "You hold these creatures cheap and contemptible enough. You destroy them without scruple for your convenience, or for the mere whim and pleasure of doing so. But your heavenly Father feedeth them. Yes: and not one of them, bird or beast, falls to the ground, but He notices, and holds the hand that dealt the blow responsible."

From the value of sparrows, however, we must pass, and rise to an estimate of our own worth in the Divine regard. And a juster sense of the interest which God, as the Maker of all, takes in his lowlier creatures tends in no wise to diminish, but rather to enlarge our conceptions of his care for us, and to make our trust in his providence more practical and more complete. Our God, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," is not a self-contained and unconcerned spectator,—

"Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall!"

He who has fashioned "every living thing that moveth after its kind," and in its own order in place and time, knows how to adjudge to each its due measure of value and importance. And He has declared that, in his eyes, the material and irrational universe cannot be weighed against the value of the human soul. The earth was made for man: man himself for God. The interest and value of the creatures around us centre in their relation to man, and increase as they approximate to him; even as we may suppose that the interest and value of individual men, in the Divine view, centre in their relation to Christ, and increase in proportion to their nearness to Him. And it

is on account of their connexion with us, in view of the services that they render us and of our treatment of them with its bearing upon our own temper and disposition, that the animal creatures seem to be specially marked and individualized in the Divine regard. "Doth God care for oxen?" Unquestionably He does; and St. Paul by no means wished to deny the intention which the kindly provision of the Mosaic law bears on its very face.¹ And yet, "He saith it altogether for our sake."

When we first awake to a sense of the wonder and the splendour of the universe that is spread around us, we feel ourselves dwarfed and belittled by its greatness. "When I consider thy heavens," exclaims David—or when I look abroad upon the earth with its myriad forms and orders of existence, rising tier above tier, circling world within world in mystic mazy dance, or when I bend beneath the fury of the storm, and watch the play of the lightning in the midnight sky—"what is man," what am I, in view of all this magnificence, amid the sweep of these vast resistless forces which bear me for a moment on the surface of their current! But such thoughts humble only that they may exalt us. If the natural world is so grand a spectacle, what of man the spectator, the interpreter, without whom it would seem to be, for all except its Maker, "but as a picture to a blind man's eye"? If the powers of Nature are so mighty and so terrible, how shall we deem of the mind that has learnt to wrest their secrets from them and yoke them to its service? If the animal creation is so marvellous a fabric, so richly adorned, so endlessly varied in its forms and functions, what then of him whose bodily frame is the crown of the whole edifice, and whose godlike reason makes him the heir of its accumulated treasures?

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 9, 10; 1 Tim. v. 18; Deut. xxv. 4. For similar provisions see Exod. xxiii. 19; Lev. xxii. 28; Deut. xxii. 6, 7; and compare Prov. xii. 10 (literally: *A righteous man knoweth the soul of his beast*).

The world is not meant to be a huge burden and mystery, crushing man down into savagery and fetishism, or into the dreariness of Agnostic despair: it is a pedestal on which he is set, a foundation on which his immortal life in Christ is to be built up. It is not a desert in which he is left to roam, hungry and weary, his "soul fainting in him": but, if he will learn to make it so, it is at once a home and a school for his childhood, strongly built and wisely stored for uses both of nurture and of discipline. It is a sanctuary for his worship, with its "storied windows richly dight," through which the light of Heaven, shaded and sifted for his earthly sight, streams in upon him and crowns him with a supernatural halo as God's anointed and ministering priest.

It is "*your heavenly Father*" that "feedeth them"—sparrow and raven, bird and beast. He is their maker: He is "*your Father*," and as your Father He "feedeth them." This constitutes the difference, the immeasurable distance, which no theory and no possible discovery as to the genesis of man's body and the mode of its creation can in any way diminish, between the human and the merely animal: "We are also his offspring." The tiniest babe that rocks in his cradle, the lowest savage that prowls in his native forest or lurks in the dens of our great cities, may learn to call God *Father*; and while that is possible, there is an unspeakable worth and dignity latent in his nature. It is man's derivation from God, his Divine sonship and birth-right, recovered in Christ Jesus, which lifts him consciously above "the beasts that perish," which gives him his dower of reason and of will, his nobler passions and spiritual instincts, which "teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven." And if being in this "honour," he "understandeth not," and will not understand, it is no wonder that his life becomes mean and miserable in his own eyes, and that he is

compelled to ask himself the question whether such a life is "worth living."

What, then, are we worth in the eyes of God? "More than many sparrows," says Christ in his homely and wonderful way. *How much more* He came to shew by dying for us. "By the grace of God He tasted death for every man": and if that be true, then the meanest man that ever lived was worth all that is expressed and implied in the "passion" of the Son of God. Nature had given her best in sacrifice, pouring out her "rivers of oil and seas of blood" on countless altars; but "all had flowed in vain." Frenzied with their guilt, men had even slain their own offspring, and had offered "the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul," committing in doing so only a new and more desperate crime. "None could by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him."¹ Nor was it "possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."² And yet they did not "cease to be offered." The demand for atonement remained unappeased, incurable, until Christ came, "once in the end of the world, to put away sin by his sacrifice."³ For nothing short of the sacrifice of the Cross could be brought into comparison with the value of the human soul. Such, at any rate, was the thought and the experience of those who lived under the immediate light of Revelation, and who had had this problem before them for ages, finding at last its solution here. The very sense of justice, under the instinct that taught man his own worth, forbade him with his forfeited and guilty soul to "draw nigh unto God," until "the propitiation" was "set forth." Till then his worship, at the best, was a worship mixed with shame and fear.

But "He loved me, He gave Himself up for me," says St. Paul: God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." And what is *He* worth? He is precious in

¹ Ps. xlix. 7.

² b. x. 4.

³ Heb. ix. 26.

our eyes ; we have no words to set forth his greatness and value. But what is our regard for our Master Christ compared to the complacency and delight with which the Father looked down upon Him when He declared, "This is my beloved Son"? And yet, He "delivered Him up for us all"! We must needs tremble as we think of the intensity and force with which God has "set his love upon" us, if these things be so. If the sufferings of our race sometimes make us ask with Job, "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?"¹ the sufferings of our Redeemer on our behalf increase that wonder a thousandfold. Surely "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." There must be capacities latent within us, a destiny in store for us, vastly greater than we can now conceive, to make it, if we dare to say so, *worth while* that such a sacrifice should be undergone "for us men and for our salvation."

To those who "know the love that God hath toward us," fear and despondency are no longer possible. We "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." "We receive a kingdom that cannot be moved." "We glory in tribulations also." He that for us "spared not his own Son, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" The humblest creatures around us—every bird that sings, every flower that blooms—may serve to rebuke our fears and murmurs. Winds blow and waters roll to bless us. Life and death are both our ministers. "All things are ours," if we "are Christ's," as "Christ is God's."

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¹ Job vii. 17, 18.