

Faith, Hope, and Charity.

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'Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.'—1 Cor. xiii. 13.

THIS chapter comes in, in a way peculiarly characteristic of St. Paul. He often diverges at an idea. He goes off, as we say, at a tangent. He leaves the subject he has been talking of, and speaks at large on some other subject it suggests. Many of his finest passages are to be found in these asides. So, as I say, here. He had been telling the Corinthians of the offices and endowments God had appointed in the early Church. He had been distinguishing their kinds. He had been emphasizing their value. Then, while he speaks, another and a brighter attainment hovers like a vision before him. It fixes his eye. It fills his soul. Touch is added to touch. Line is added to line. And the image gathers brightness and beauty as he proceeds. And the issue is the perfect portrait of the greatest of all the graces, left lifelike and glowing on the canvas of Scripture, so complete that nothing can be added to it as nothing can be spared from it, so surpassingly beautiful that the most sceptical must pause and admire. Let us speak for a little then of faith, hope, and charity—their distinctive nature, their eternal permanence, and the superiority of charity.

I. (1) We are to speak of their distinctive nature, and we first take faith. Faith—a great scriptural keynote! Suppose a man to take up the Bible for the first time, would he not be struck with the constant repetition of this word faith? 'Here,' he would say, 'is something important indeed. Without it I cannot please God. Without it I cannot conquer the world. I must walk by it, live by it, die by it. What is this mystery, this marvel of faith?' Faith in the human sphere is simply belief that is founded on testimony, and faith in the religious sphere is belief founded on the testimony of God. But inasmuch as the testimony of God is mainly a testimony in regard to Himself,—the character He possesses, the relation He occupies,—faith towards God means not only assent to a truth, but confidence in a living Person. And thus faith's initial act is unreserved surrender, its stated con-

dition is absolute reliance, and its necessary fruit is perfect peace.

(2) If it be faith thus to believe in God, hope is faith and something more. It is faith astir and longing. What faith is content to accept and repose upon, hope desires to see. If faith attaches itself to the Promiser, hope attaches itself to the thing that is promised. If faith rests on the Person, hope looks forward to the prize. If faith apprehends a present Saviour, hope apprehends the future inheritance. And this whatever the mystery may be. Is it the mystery of a sin-struck and pain-laden world? Then while faith points to One in the midst of it whose purpose is working through all, hope points us on to something beyond it, even a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Is the mystery the mystery of personal doubt or distress? Then while faith clasps the hand of an unseen Christ, saying, 'I will be dumb, opening not my mouth, because Thou hast done it,' hope can forecast the joy to follow, 'What He does, though I know it not now, I shall know hereafter.' Is the mystery the mystery of death? Then while faith clings to Him who leads through the valley, saying, 'I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me,' hope sends its glance through the gloom and rests on the glories of the other side, saying, 'Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.'

3. Charity, or love. It is not charity in the sense of mere almsgiving, for you observe the apostle declares that a man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and yet have no real charity—charity in the sense in which *he* uses the word. Nor is it charity in the sense of kindly breadth and tolerance. It is one of the characteristics of true charity, indeed, that it thinketh no evil; but it is not the *sum* of true charity itself. The charity of which the apostle speaks is the spring from which all such streams originate, the stem on which all these blessings hang. It is love—love to man! Yes. But love to man so far as it

presupposes and is based upon love to God. There, after all, is the test of the love of which Paul speaks,—distinguishing between love as a natural faculty, and love as a spiritual grace. It is love that is shaped by another's example, love that is exercised for another's sake, and that other the God who has first loved us. So, though the streams of this love may run over on earth, and bestow and diffuse themselves in blessings among men, the springs are in heaven. They are deep in the fathomless eternity, hid with Christ in God.

II. We are to speak of their *equal permanence*. For as I read the passage, it does not imply that faith and hope abide merely here, while charity abides hereafter, and is the greatest inasmuch as it does so. The thought is rather this, that *now*, that is, after gifts have disappeared, as the tapers in the full light of day, these three graces shall remain, as great lights in the firmament, to shine for ever and ever. That is not the most common interpretation, and perhaps it is not the most intelligible one. We are accustomed to contrast faith with sight, and hope with fruition, and to say that as heaven is the place both of sight and fruition, the faith and hope that precede them must vanish, that love may alone survive and be all in all. Little wonder if the idea is a common one, when it is embodied in the very Paraphrase that is based on the words—

Faith, hope, and love, now dwell on earth,
And earth by them is blest ;
But faith and hope must yield to love,
Of all the graces best.

Hope shall to full fruition rise,
And faith be sight above :
These are the means, but this the end ;
For saints for ever love.

There is truth in these words, and there is error. Granted that charity is the best of the graces. When the Paraphrase says that, you are bound to believe it, for the text says it also. But when the Paraphrase goes further, and says it is the greatest, because the others shall fade away and charity alone endure, you must look elsewhere for such a doctrine, for St. Paul does not say so here.

There are indeed some kinds of faith which must necessarily vanish. Faith, so far as it is a pilgrim grace, shaped by the pilgrim needs, securing the pilgrim-blessings, the faith of which Paul speaks when he says, 'We walk by faith and not

by sight,' that will have passed. Faith, we say, as a pilgrim grace, will have ceased, because the pilgrimage that called for it is done,—all needs ended, all problems solved. And faith shall disappear so far as it is a warrior grace, the faith of which St. Paul says, 'Fight the good fight.' Faith as a warrior grace will have ceased, for the battle is over. The warfare is accomplished. Henceforth there remaineth a rest for the people of God.

But when we have spoken of faith under these two aspects, as a pilgrim grace and as a warrior grace, have we covered the field that faith has to move in, have we exhausted the work that faith has to do? Nay, surely. There are two kinds of faith—the faith that belongs to the relationship between creature and Creator, and the faith that belongs to the relationship between saved and Saviour.

There is the faith, we say, that belongs to the relationship between creature and Creator. Though the soul may be blessed or illumined with the closest intercourse with Him who is the God of its life and the length of its days, still between creature and Creator there will be a great gulf fixed, never to be crossed as the ages roll on. And all throughout the endless years, while the souls He has glorified will be growing near and yet nearer Him, like and yet liker Him, still no appreciable progress is made toward the pinnacle where He sits infinite in being, measureless in perfection, Jehovah Almighty, the Ancient of Days. The relation between God and the soul through eternity is like the mystery we hear of in mathematical science. The lines will for ever approximate, yet never meet: and the space intervening is the region of faith.

Or take the faith that belongs to the relationship between saved and Saviour. In heaven as well as on earth there will be faith in Christ as Redeemer. There as here Christ is the appointed Mediator, the Revealer of the Father's love, the channel of the Father's blessings. There as here, all that is seen and all that is enjoyed, shall be seen and enjoyed in the person of the only begotten Son. If so, there will still be faith in heaven. There will still be the faith that justifies, for in heaven they look to Christ as their righteousness. There will still be the faith that sanctifies, for in heaven they look to Christ as their life!

No faith in heaven! No faith in God as Creator! True, if there is no mystery in heaven. True, if there is nothing to be hid from us, nothing unseen by us in heaven. True, if in heaven the soul will be able to say, 'I have by searching found out God, I can now declare the Almighty to perfection. There is nothing more to learn. There is nothing more to believe.'

No faith in heaven! No faith in God as Redeemer! True, if there they ever cease to cry, 'Worthy is He that was slain; salvation to our God that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.' True, if heaven were ever swept bare of the emblems of Calvary, and ceased to be fragrant with its sacrifice. True, if ever there shall come a time when the just made perfect can say, 'We stand, and that not by the gift of God, it is of ourselves.'

Brethren, you who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good and gracious, you who believe and have found him precious, would you like a heaven like that? Could there be a heaven like that? Would not its pillars dissolve, its framework melt, and the city that hath foundations fall away into ruins?

I rest upon His merits,
I know no other stand;
Not even where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

And as with faith, so with hope. We say, hope is lost in fruition; and so in a sense it will be. But will not another kind of hope, often renewed and often satisfied, be one element in the very fruition we look for? Why, what are the spirits of the sainted dead but prisoners of hope? They tarry in expectation of many things. They wait the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body. They wait the descent of their Lord. They wait the home-coming of their friends. They wait the accomplishment of the Church. They wait the full and the final establishment of the kingdom of God and His Christ. Yes, and when all these things are gained, hope will have its office and its mission still. For heaven is a progress as well as earth, not, indeed, from grace to grace, as here, but from glory to glory, a progress most real and inspiring.

No hope in heaven! True, if you can eliminate from the heaven of the saint, one of the purest and most powerful elements of our joy upon earth. True, if you suppose that in heaven the soul

becomes stereotyped in character and in growth, where there is neither variety nor change any more. True, if the soul, once within the gates of pearl, can sit down and say, 'There is no fresh service to be engaged in; there is no fresh view to be gained.' Are you prepared for a heaven like that? Let us rather believe there are fresh pastures for the flock to feed on, fresh fountains for the flock to draw from, at every stage and winding of that peaceful journey, by which the Lamb leads them onward, till the life in heaven becomes a life of holy expectation and desire. Each vessel shall expand as it fills, and ever fill in expanding. And the measure of their capacity is the measure of their hope.

III. And now having spoken of these graces in their distinctive nature and equal permanence, let us speak of the superiority of the last.

Why, then, is charity the greatest?

(1) While other graces are receptive, this grace is diffusive. In the exercise of faith and hope I benefit myself, but in the exercise of love I benefit others. Faith appropriates, hope anticipates, but neither faith nor hope dispenses. The blessedness that attaches to them is the blessedness of getting, not the blessedness of giving. But while love blesses him who exercises it as really as faith and hope, it blesses others too. It binds the broken heart. It cools the throbbing head. It rejoices with them that rejoice, and weeps with them that weep. It touches the old waste places into life and greenness. It goes forth through the highways and byways to tell of that marvellous love which called itself into life and being. Faith and hope may help us to enjoy. Love will teach us to serve. By faith we rest in the Lord. By hope we wait patiently for Him. By love we are preserved from weariness in well-doing, but go about seeking to do good. That, then, is one reason why love is the greatest; other graces are receptive. Love has this distinction—that it is diffusive.

(2) And this leads me up to the last point. Love has the pre-eminence over faith and hope, not only because it is diffusive, but because it is divine. Faith and hope bring one near God; all honour to their office for doing so. But love can do something more. Love makes one like God. God is not faith. He whose eyes are as a flame of fire, searching the universe with its world of mind and matter, whose thoughts range before and behind, cannot be said to believe. God is

not hope. He who dwelleth in the Light that is inaccessible and full of glory, supremely and unchangeably blessed in Himself, world without end, cannot be said to expect. But God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. And thus while faith and hope may be necessities of the soul considered as a creature, love is its calling and destiny as a saint. It is to this we are called, and for this we must strive. Blessed are they that follow after! Blessed are they that attain!

Such is the sisterhood of grace. Is it yours? Faith, hope, and love, are they with you? And are you pursuing your journey through life in their sweet and sustaining companionship? If not, ask yourselves how you can safely exist, ask yourselves how you can safely die? A faithless life—that means no creed to rely on, no Christ to follow!

A hopeless life—that means no heaven to look for, no prize to win! A loveless life—that means no fruits to yield, no sheaves to garner, after your toil in the world's great harvest field! But, brethren, it need not be so. He whose person, whose promises, and whose precepts are the objects of these graces; Himself is also their only bestower. 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened.' And then, though you have to say, 'Lord, help my unbelief,' you will be able to say, 'Lord, I believe.' Though you have to say, 'Lord, help my hopelessness,' you will be able to add, 'Nevertheless, I hope.' Though you have to lament, 'Lord, I acknowledge my lovelessness,' you will be free to appeal, saying, 'Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee, and seek to love my brethren for Thy sake.'

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

THE THEOLOGY OF CIVILIZATION. By C. F. DOLE. (*Allenson*. Fcap. 8vo, pp. xxiv, 256. 5s.)

The Theology of Civilization is another expression for the theology of to-day. Physical science has been at work and has civilized us. But we cannot do without theology. We have still to pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' And where prayer is, there is theology, the search after the God we pray to, after the God who gives us our bread. We cannot do without theology even to-day. But we are civilized now, and our theology must fit our civilization. So it is a new book, full of new thoughts. It is even prophetic. And though we may not live to see its prophecies fulfilled, it stirs new hopes within us.

By the Cambridge University Press there has been issued a volume of Palestinian Syriac texts, from palimpsest fragments in what is called the Taylor-Schechter collection. These palimpsests were recovered from the Genizah of the synagogue of Old Cairo, through the complacency of the Grand Rabbi of Egypt, in the year 1897. They have been edited in the most careful and scholarly manner by Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Gibson, and eight facsimile plates have been added as an appendix.

The Cambridge Press has also published *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, together with the Apocalypses of each one of them*, edited from the Syriac MS, with Translation and Introduction, by Dr. Rendel Harris.

Professor Ira M. Price of Chicago University has published, through the Christian Culture Press of Chicago, a popular account of all the recent material furnished by the Monuments for the illustration or elucidation of the Old Testament. The title is *The Monuments and the Old Testament*. Now, this is Professor Price's subject. He knows it, and is enthusiastic over it. He forgets nothing old, and misses nothing new. There have been more sumptuously illustrated books of this kind, but none that combines instructive writing and telling illustration more happily.

THE IDEAL OF HUMANITY. By K. C. F. KRAUSE. EDITED IN ENGLISH BY W. HASTIE, D.D. (*T. & T. Clark*. Crown 8vo, pp. xix, 191. 3s.)

'Krause found me with his devout and comprehensive philosophy years ago, during a period of storm and stress, when the other great systems of thought and even the great religions of the world