

I.

## THE OBJECT OF FAITH

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” —2 COR. xiii. 14.

S. PAUL closes all his Epistles with blessing, and his blessing is always the same: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” In the course of his letters he has been reasoning and exhorting, perhaps even blaming and threatening, as in these letters to the Corinthians, but at the end he stands aside to let them see One of whom he is only the apostle—One who stands over them with kind, loving face, waiting to bless. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you” —His gracious presence, His favour, His countenance, be with you.

For that is what the word “grace” means. It is a word whose meaning is sometimes a little difficult to determine. It means, first of all, a certain beautiful look of the face, and then it comes to mean rather a charm in the expression, as a sign of disposition, the charm of graciousness; and

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then afterwards it comes to mean some form in which this graciousness manifests itself, some gift of strength or protection. Our English word “favour” had once this same double meaning. Old writers use it for the expression of a face, as when Bacon says that “beauty of favour,” *i.e.* of expression, “is better than beauty of colour.” Now it means rather the kindness of which the face is one sign. And we still get the double sense in the word “countenance;” speaking not only of a man’s countenance, the expression of his face, but of his giving countenance to things, *i.e.* favouring them.

When, therefore, S. Paul speaks of the grace of Christ, he means sometimes the goodness and graciousness of Christ, at other times some gift of strength which the favour of Christ has given him, as when he says, “Not I live, but the grace of Christ that dwelleth in me;” but always not far removed from his thought is the graciousness of that Face that looked down upon him on his way to Damascus, and cast out all the fury and hatred with which he had burned, and won him for ever to His service. And so he wishes for all his converts, as the greatest blessing he can wish them, that their whole lives may be passed in that presence, under the protection of that gracious countenance. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

Ah but you will say, “We have never seen Christ,

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either in the flesh or in a vision.” That is true; but, then, neither had these Corinthians to whom S. Paul is writing. Their knowledge of Him was a knowledge only of His words and deeds as they were taught in all the Churches; and that we share with them, or we may share it if we will. And surely, as we read and ponder our Gospels, there does rise up before us the image of Jesus as He lived upon the earth; so that, although we know Him not after the flesh, we still in a real sense know Him. And by that image we may test the spirit that prevails in the Christian Church to-day, whether it is indeed the Spirit of Christ. What, then, is He like? What kind of countenance is it that shines out upon us from the Gospel pages? Let us turn to them and see.

“And as they went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed Him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, Lord, have mercy on us, Thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, that they should hold their peace: but they cried out the more, saying, Lord, have mercy on us, Thou Son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I should do unto you? They say unto Him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. And Jesus, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes: and straightway they received their sight, and followed Him” (S. Matt. xx. 29-34).

Yes, but one may say, “No such acts of healing

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are done now. The face of Christ can no longer be compassionate.” Is it so? Are no acts of healing done? Do no blind recover their sight? Is every sickness unto death? True, Christ does not work by His own hands and voice; but is it not by His Spirit, think you, that medicine has been in Christian times so carefully studied, and hospitals erected, so that now multitudes of people are healed every year? And even if this or that sickness be not cured, does that prove that Christ’s face has lost its compassion? Let us hear S. Paul’s teaching on this point. “For this thing” (for the cure of his disease) “I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee.” The light of Christ’s countenance, the blessing of His compassionate presence, was sufficient without the healing of bodily infirmities. Take another passage.

“When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd” (S. Matt. ix. 36).

Christ, then, had compassion on other things besides bodily sickness. Often this, and the death to which it leads, are the only griefs that men compassionate in themselves or in others. But Christ has compassion also on ignorance; on the aimless wandering of men after their own [p 5]

desires, without a master to follow; on the weariness of spirit that such a life brings about. “Come unto Me,” He says to such, “and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest to your souls.” If you read on a verse or two further, you will see that this compassion of Christ, so far from being idle pity, at once took shape in action by His mission of the apostles to teach. And teaching remains one of the great functions of the Church of Christ. It is a good test of Churchmanship: “I am a Christian; then whom do I teach? Who is the better for my having been called to Christ’s service? On whose ignorance have I taken pity?” Though the Church of Christ in England has in these last days wonderfully renewed the spirit of her youth, there are still too many Churchmen who have not yet grasped the idea that the Church is missionary—is Christ’s means of showing compassion on the ignorant and wandering. Such parables as “the lost sheep” and “the prodigal son” they apply, with a humility that would be exaggerated if it were not merely thoughtless, to themselves, whereas their place is among the “ninety and nine,” and perhaps their behaviour like that of the “elder brother.” It is always difficult for those who have received freely, to recollect that they must freely give. The Jews in

old days never rose to their full responsibility as missionaries to the nations; they lived among them,

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and traded with them, content to spoil them if they could as they spoiled the Egyptians, but treating them all the time as of another blood, in whom God had no interest. So it was that they were hated throughout the whole Roman world, and in many countries this old hatred persists. Now the Christian Church inherits the mission of the Jews; it is responsible for the backward peoples. We have to see to it that we do not use them merely as opportunities for gaining wealth, sinking them deeper in the mire for our advantage, instead of striving by all means to raise them [sic] Missionary work has often been ignorantly and foolishly undertaken, but it has not always been so; and in the future we may trust it will be so less and less. There are missions now existing which combine the devotion of Francis Xavier with the sanity of Livingstone, and the result of their work is such as to quicken our faith.

But again: it is not only abroad that our Church must be missionary; we must be compassionate also on those multitudes in our large towns, of whom we may be tempted sometimes to cry, "Send them away"—anywhere, so that we are not troubled about them. We become not unreasonably irritated with them sometimes for pressing their own solution of their troubles; we enroll more police to keep them in their place; we are surprised and offended that they have not more reverence for law, and still

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more offended if they learn respect for order and form themselves into trades unions. But into the secret of their misery, it may be, we have no wish to penetrate; we are glad to pass by on the other side. Now, of course, it is not given to every one to find a solution for woes of this magnitude, but we can at least be all interested and alert, and if a suggestion is made that seems likely to be helpful, we can help to realize it by all means in our power.

Again, Christ has compassion not only on sickness and ignorance, but on sin—on the sinner who repents.

"And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, . . . Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. . . . And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman,

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Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (S. Luke vii. 36-40, 47-50).

Compassion, then, is one thing that we can see in the face of Jesus Christ; this is part of

His grace; and this grace we may confidently claim for our own need, and by the Spirit of Christ in us manifest it to others.

But His grace is not thus exhausted. There is a story told by S. Mark of a young man who came and kneeled to Him, and asked Him what to do to inherit eternal life, telling Him that he had kept the commandments from his youth; and the story goes on, "Then Jesus looking upon him loved him." He loved him for his zeal, for his earnestness, for wishing to do better, for wishing to make progress; loved him and gave him something to do for which, however, he was not strong enough. But still, those words stand written, "Jesus looking upon him loved him." And we know that as He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, He has still the same love for all our earnestness, all our efforts to rise out of selfishness, all our desires for the good life.

Compassion, then, for suffering and ignorance and sin that repents, love for enthusiasm, this we have seen in the face of Christ. Let me remind you of but one passage more—the story of an incident that occurred just before Christ's death, in the house of the high priest.

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"And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with Him. And he denied Him, saying, Woman, I know Him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with Him: for he is a Galilæan. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (S. Luke xxii. 55-62).

Can you imagine with what a face our Lord looked upon Peter, who had thrice denied Him after confidently affirming that he would go with Him to death? Would that that face would shine upon us, with whatever reproach, when we in word or deed deny Him, that so we too may remember and weep!

We have seen, then, something at least of what S. Paul meant by wishing for the Corinthians that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ might always abide with them. He meant the perpetual light of His presence, to pity, and encourage, and love, and warn, and forgive.

So far I have only been speaking of the first

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part of the text, for only so much is S. Paul's usual benediction. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." What is added by the clauses that follow—"and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost"? It is not an additional wish. S. Paul would not have wished the Corinthians any blessing in which the Romans and the Galatians might not share. It is a further explanation. What is it that shines upon us through the face of Jesus Christ?—it is the love of God. What effect has the light of His countenance upon our hearts?—the communication of the Holy Spirit.

1. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is really the love of God. For Jesus Christ is the express Image of the Father. He came to reveal Him, so that he who had seen Him should have seen the Father: that compassion at our weakness and ignorance and suffering, that love of our effort after godliness, that sorrow at our failure, was a revelation of the mind of the Creator. It is in that way that God the Father regards us. There is much in God's ordinance of the world that we cannot understand, there are many mysteries still too difficult for us to fathom; but since Christ has come, we know this at least for certain, that God loves us, that He does not delight in our sorrows as some men once thought, that He does not laugh at our failures, that He does not despise our weak

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attempts at righteousness, that He wishes us to be holy as He is holy. So that now we know this we can pray to Him no longer as to a stern King, almighty, all-dread, but as to a loving Father. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the love of God.

2. And more even than that: it is the communication to us of the Holy Ghost. As S. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in a previous chapter (iv. 6), "God hath shined in our hearts, to give unto us also the light of that glory of God, which we had seen in the face of Jesus Christ." As we look upon Christ, His Spirit passes upon us; just as in the upper chamber at Jerusalem He stood among the eleven and said, "Peace be unto you," and breathed upon them His Holy Spirit, so it is now and always. Wherever He is, there He blesses us with His Spirit; we cannot look for Him without finding Him, and when we look up at Him He blesses us. To look into the face of Christ is to receive His blessing. May that upward look be ours throughout our whole life, through whatever difficulties of belief, through whatever temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and may the gracious presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is to us the assurance of the love of God, and the communication of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.