

II.

THE WORSHIP OF FAITH

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? . . . And they fell down and worshipped Him; and opening their treasures they offered unto Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”—S. MATT. ii. 1, 2, 11.

THE Gospel for the Epiphany tells the story of three wise men who came from the East to Bethlehem by the leading of a star to find an expected King, and fixes on that story as a type and prophecy of the ends of the earth coming and bowing down to Christ. For not only were the children of Abraham to be admitted into the kingdom of God, and allowed to do homage to Christ, as they supposed, but many were to come from the East and West who had never heard of Abraham, and sit down with him in the kingdom. “The kingdoms of the world were to become the kingdoms of God, and His Christ.”

That is why to us of the Gentiles the Feast of Epiphany must always be real and joyful.

“Sal-

[p 13]

vation,” as our Lord says, “is of the Jews.” Our knowledge of God has come to us from the Jews—from Moses, David, Isaiah, and the other prophets; and our Lord Jesus Christ was in His human nature a Jew. But we celebrate Epiphany because in Christ it was fully revealed that although salvation was from the Jews, it was not *for* them exclusively, but for them and us; and that they were first called only that they might be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and might spread the knowledge of God to the ends of the earth. When we English first came to this island, and for a long time after, we were pagans, worshipping gods whose memory is still preserved in the names of our days of the week. But from the day when Augustine landed in Kent, the knowledge of Christ has been spreading over the land, and though at times its light has been faint, still from that day to this there has been in England a Church of Christ, a company of the faithful, who, like the three wise men, have been bent on worshipping Him.

Let us ask, then, What is it to worship Christ?

It will be plain to all but the youngest that to worship Christ must mean something more than a devout movement of the lips, or a devout posture of the body, because all such outward movements are only valuable as the sign of what is passing within. If you shake hands with a

[p 14]

man, your shaking of hands is nothing in itself, but it is a sign of the good will you bear him. The body is the means by which our spirit makes itself felt and understood, and so our words and deeds, although they are necessary—we could not get on without them—are only valuable because of their meaning, and when they are sincere expressions of that meaning; and therefore, also, our words and gestures of devotion, most necessary as they are to our worship, are still only a sign of something signified, and only valuable when they are sincere expressions of it. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit,” *i.e.* not only with their words and gestures, but with their thoughts. Now, we all worship something in our

thoughts; that thing or that person whom we love most, or trust most, or reverence most, is our god. To that, whatever it may be, our spirit bows down, although our knees may bow down to Christ. Strange as it may sound, it is quite true that there are men who worship money, men who worship power, men who worship reputation, men who worship pleasure; that is to say, they care more for these things than for anything else; their whole nature is set upon them, and that is worship; they are Christians only in name. For to worship Christ is to bow down with love and wonder and thankfulness before the most perfect goodness that the

[p 15]

world has ever seen, and to believe that that goodness was the express Image of God the Father. If you respect anything before goodness, you do not really worship Christ. Unless you can heartily join in with His blessings and His woes, and agree that the “blessed” people, the people to be loved and admired and imitated, are the pure, the merciful, the peacemakers, you do not really worship Christ. Unless you hate sin and hypocrisy in yourself and in every one else with all the force of your nature, you do not really worship Christ. A Christian is a man who believes that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son and Revealer of God; and so, if you have some other god before whom in the secret places of your spirit you bow down, it is an idle misuse of words to call yourself a Christian.

But if, as I hope, all of us here are not such merely formal Christians, but real worshippers; not simply bowing the knee in church, but bowing the will and the affections all the week; loving and reverencing nothing so much as Christ; desiring nothing so much as that we may be brought nearer and nearer to His likeness; owning Him as our King, and doing our utmost to extend His kingdom;—then these wise men will be a parable of ourselves, and we shall offer to the King such gifts as we have to offer.

We shall offer Him our gold, whether it be little or

[p 16]

much; and we shall offer it by using it for ends that He would approve. What those are we have to decide for ourselves; there are no express commandments which we can obey; we are each stewards over ourselves and over our property for Christ, responsible only to Him. It is difficult to lay down even the most general rules that are worth anything; for if we say, “Buy only what is necessary and avoid luxury,” that does not help us: for what is luxury? Are we to call everything luxury that is not necessary to sustain our bodily life? Surely these “unnecessary” things, such as books, pictures, and music, are just the things that speak to our spirit, and help to raise the level of our life, and make it gracious. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God; and God can speak to us clearly through books and pictures and music. Little help can be got by the mere maxim to avoid luxury, except so far as it relates to food and clothing, where a counsel of simplicity is never out of place.

There are two chief ways in which to test ourselves whether we are giving our gold to Christ. The first is, to take a clear, straightforward, wide view of our responsibilities. What hinders our worshipping Christ is sure to be some form of selfishness, and therefore to examine ourselves in our duty to our neighbour is no idle exercise. If, then, we suspect ourselves of the sins of luxury and

[p 17]

covetousness, let us begin with our family, and ask ourselves such questions as these—whether, remembering our marriage vow, we admit quite fully the equal claims of the wife on

the common purse, or whether we think it an act of benevolence to allow her what remains after we have satisfied our private wants; whether we allow to the children their proper food and clothing; whether we allow them their proper education, for mind as well as body, for body as well as mind, for soul as well as either; whether we have been guided, for example, in our choice of schools or teachers by the mere fact of their cheapness, or dearness, or fashionableness, apart from any question of their sufficiency for the great end in view. By such questions as these, we may examine ourselves in our duty to the family; and if we are satisfied with the result of our examination, we can go on to consider whether, in a wider circle, no poor relations have claims on us, which so far have been unrecognized; our parents, do they need our help? our brothers, or sisters? And if we are satisfied here, we can look outside the ties of blood, to other relationships which are every bit as real. We may be employers of labour, or we may be workmen,—here is a relationship with rights and duties on either side; and we have fellow-villagers or fellow-townsmen and fellow-countrymen, who for different causes may need and claim our help, as

[p 18]

they do. Thus extending our investigation, circle beyond circle, we shall come to master the great lesson of Epiphany, that there are no final divisions among mankind.

In connection with this subject it is important to keep in mind that even money relations are relations between men, each of whom has the right to call God Father and other men brothers. It is easy to forget this. The poor man is too prone to regard his richer brother simply as a purse provided by God for his use; the rich man to do his almsgiving as a necessity, in the easiest way he can, without thought or care, forgetting that the problem he has to help to solve is this: how grinding poverty which is a curse may be abolished, and the poorer helped to help themselves. In the same way the employer of labour is apt to regard his men as so many hands receiving certain wages, and because any rise in the rate of wages tends to diminish profits, his labourers become competitors and antagonists; and so, on the other hand, the labourer comes to think only of the money he receives, and is not careful that his work shall deserve it. Both sides are liable to forget that they are men and brethren with common sympathies and mutual duties, and an equal interest in the things of the spirit; and if this real relationship between them, this real bond of mutual helpfulness, is forgotten, there succeeds, and must succeed, envy and hatred.

[p 19]

This brings me to speak of the other safeguard of the right use of money—to prefer as far as possible public to private ends. Here is a practicable and Christian form of communism. The Greek historian, in a famous passage, made it a boast of his nation, that while they were economical at home, they were lavish in everything that respected the good of the community. In their case it was a just boast, and it is well worth remembering, and trying more and more to realize here in barbarian England. In no way so well can rich men show their faith in the Christian dogma that we are all members one of another. The hope that wealth may one day be equally distributed must be more or less chimerical, because men are far from being equal in skill or in energy; but it is well that those Christians who have in various ways attained to riches should be able to realize their community with their fellows in this way as in others, by returning it to those from whom it has been won in a form that all can enjoy. We may hope that the time will soon come when no one will have to share with his neighbour the means of life,

but the time can never arrive when we shall lack the opportunity of sharing with each other the means of the *good* life.

But the wise men offered other things than gold; they offered frankincense and myrrh. A word or two, in conclusion, on these. Other things are

[p 20]

valuable besides money, and these, too, we may offer to Christ. All our faculties may be used either well or ill, either for Christ's glory or to His shame. The artist may use his powers rightly, for the best purposes, or he may abuse them; so may the teacher; so may the workman; so may all and any of us who have duties one to another. The thorough and willing performance of any duty, however humble or however exalted, is like the offering of incense to Christ, well-pleasing and acceptable.

And then there is myrrh, which deadens pain. This is an offering, apparently, of no great cost, but which Christ loves to receive—the soothing of each other's sorrows. It is true that the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle; but the members of a Christian community should not be strangers to each other. It should be possible to share our sorrows, so that they may lose their bitterness; for it is not consolation we require in time of trouble, but sympathy. And we should help each other, in the fretting wear and tear of this working-day world, which we can scarcely call sorrow, but which is certainly not joy. We may endeavour that our daily life shall be lived with as little friction as possible; that the burden of daily toil be not made more burdensome by misunderstandings. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."