

found solution nowhere else. These problems may thus be stated.

First, How can God be just and justify the sinner?

Second, How can righteousness of conduct be made possible to those who are poisoned and paralyzed by sin?

As to the first it must be remembered that the word "justify" means the clearance of the soul from guilt. Justification must be infinitely more than forgiveness. Sin must be put away, and made to be as though it had not been. For justification the soul must be put into a place of purity, so restored that there shall be no spot, or blemish, or stain, not merely upon the record, but what is of infinitely deeper significance, upon the character. To be justified before God is to be put into such condition, that no trace remains of the guilt of sin. That is the problem which is solved in the Cross. How can God be just, that is, true to Himself in nature, and yet justify the sinner, that is, receive him upon the basis of freedom from sin?

The second problem touches practical life, and deals with an actual condition, rather than a relative one. How can righteousness of conduct be made possible to those who are poisoned and paralyzed by sin? The difficulty of the problem is at once discovered if the impossibility of producing right conduct in man is thought of, apart from the subject immediately under consideration, that, namely, of the Cross. It is a problem that has never been solved in the past, neither can it be at the present hour. Right conduct can only issue from right character, and therefore is not possible to man whose whole nature is poisoned and paralyzed by sin.

These are the problems with which the Cross is approached. Can a man be justified before God, and sanctified in his own actual experience? Can a sinner be so

XXI

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

THAN this there is no subject more mysterious and yet more sacred in the whole realm of revealed truth. This is the heart of that mystery of the love and wisdom of God, which wrought towards, and made possible the salvation of man. At the commencement of this study I would place on record not idly, and not for the mere sake of doing so, but under the urgency of a great conviction, that I am deeply conscious of approaching things too high, and too profound for any finality of statement. Personally I increasingly shrink from any attempt to speak in detail of the great fact of the Cross. This is not because I am growing away from it, but rather on account of the fact that I am more deeply conscious every day of my need of all it stands for, and as I have pressed closer to its heart, I have become almost overwhelmed with its unfathomable deeps, and its infinite majesty.

It is impossible, however, that any consideration of the mission of Jesus should be complete, if this subject were omitted. Let all therefore who approach the subject do so with abandonment to that Spirit of God Who "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God,"<sup>1</sup> praying earnestly to be led, so far as it is possible, to see and understand the mystery of His pain.

In the light of the earlier studies, it may here and now be stated that the Cross solves two problems that have

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 2: 10.

cleared from guilt that he may have a conscience void of offence? Can a man, whose powers have become paralyzed by the virus of sin, be so changed as to enable him to do the things he cannot do? Can a man be made able to translate the vision of an ideal into the actuality of daily life? These problems baffle all the wisdom of man apart from the Cross, and still defy all attempts at solution. These are the problems solved by the mystery of Christ's sufferings.

The present study is not directed to an examination of the results of the Cross, but to a reverent contemplation of the way by which they were made possible.

It is impossible to follow the Lord into the place of His mightiest work. Alone He entered and wrought. No man followed Him, nor could follow Him at all, in help, or in sympathy, or in understanding. Fallen man was degraded in will, emotion, and intelligence, and therefore was not able to help, or sympathize, or understand. From that inner mystery, therefore, man was excluded.

Tracing the Lord through the three years in which He was constantly conscious of the Cross, it will be noticed how gradually and yet surely, He moved out into the loneliness of the final fact of His work. While living in Nazareth He was a favourite. He "advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men."<sup>1</sup> At the commencement of His public ministry both the rulers and the multitudes gathered round Him. The men of light and leading were at least interested in Him, and ready to listen to Him, and more than inclined to patronize Him. They were among the first to fall back from Him. As He, in the great progress of His teaching, uttered deeper and yet deeper truths, men who were merely curious be-

<sup>1</sup> Luke 2: 52.

came excluded, and only His own disciples remained in anything approaching close association with Him. Yet further on, the ranks of the disciples were thinned. After the discourse recorded in the sixth chapter of John, in which He declared He would give His flesh for the meat, and His blood for the drink, of the world, many went back and walked no more with Him. Without closely following the details, it will be seen that His approach to His Cross is marked by constant withdrawals, until at last the nearest flee, the story of their going being recorded in one tragic sentence, "Then all the disciples left Him, and fled."<sup>1</sup>

He passed into the actual place of His passion, the region of that mystery of pain through which He was about to solve these problems, in utter loneliness. No man could help, no man could sympathize, no man could understand. Let this always be borne in mind when His suffering is followed and contemplated.

Men may gather reverently to the place of the passion, but can only know of it from what is revealed in the words that fell from His own lips. That should be accepted as a canon and principle of interpretation concerning the sufferings of Christ. What others may think or say, can only be of value as it harmonizes with, and expresses the meaning of the words He Himself uttered. Nothing can be known of that mystery of pain save from Himself. Any attempt to go beyond this limit is a mistaken attempt, and borders upon the realm of unholy intrusion. The subject had infinitely better be left where He left it, considering reverently, and only, His own words.

Of these there have been recorded seven several utterances. The first three manifest His keen and marvellous

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 26: 56.

insight, even on that Cross of shame, into the deepest things and simplest necessities of human life. The last four are expressions of His own Spirit's experience in utter loneliness, and come out of that awful isolation:

The first three: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do";<sup>1</sup> "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise";<sup>2</sup> "Woman, behold, thy son! Behold, thy mother!"<sup>3</sup> In these is evident His pity for men in the issue of their sin, His power towards those believing in Him, and His provision for those upon whom His love is set.

Then the last four: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"<sup>4</sup> "I thirst";<sup>5</sup> "It is finished";<sup>6</sup> "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit."<sup>7</sup> Here man stands in the presence of the process of His mightiest work, through strife and suffering to the consciousness and calm of victory.

I repeat emphatically that beyond what these words reveal of the Cross, man has neither ability nor authority to go.

From the present study the first three sayings are eliminated, and save for a final moment, the last two also. Thus two words are left which express all that man can ever hope to know of the sufferings of Christ. First, the spiritual anguish, expressed in the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"<sup>8</sup> and second, the physical agony revealed in the brief but awful exclamation, "I thirst."<sup>9</sup>

While believing that this was the true order of the sayings, that the physical pain was not mentioned until after the cry of the spiritual anguish had been uttered, I propose

<sup>1</sup> Luke 23 : 34.<sup>2</sup> Luke 23 : 43.<sup>3</sup> John 19 : 26, 27.<sup>4</sup> Mark 15 : 34.<sup>5</sup> John 19 : 28.<sup>6</sup> John 19 : 30.<sup>7</sup> Luke 23 : 46.<sup>8</sup> Mark 15 : 34.<sup>9</sup> John 19 : 28.

to notice, first, the words "I thirst,"<sup>1</sup> considering them in few words, remembering ever, that silence is often the most perfect exhibition of true understanding and deep sympathy; and then to attempt a somewhat closer examination of that awful cry of the spiritual anguish, which revealed all that man may ever know of the mystery of that pain by which He redeemed the lost.

I. The word of the physical agony, "I thirst."<sup>2</sup> What can any say concerning that? Is it not rather subject for lonely contemplation and meditation? It is hardly possible to approach it without fearing lest the approach may be that of sacrilegious curiosity. From such we would utterly be delivered, and therefore I do not propose to dwell for a single moment upon the actual physical pain of Jesus. The whole of it surges out in that cry, "I thirst." To know all that was behind those words, rather recall briefly, quietly, and slowly, almost without comment, the facts that had immediately preceded the Cross:—

The night watches in Gethsemane.

The flash of the light of the torches upon the darkness of the night.

The kiss of the traitor.

The arrest.

Still in the darkness of night, the arraignment before the high priests.

The hours of waiting, and of tension.

The appearance in the morning before the high priests and the council.

The palace of the Roman governor with that strange interview between Jesus and Pilate, withdrawn from the rabble into some quiet apartment.

<sup>1</sup> John 19 : 28.<sup>2</sup> John 19 : 28.

The journey from the house of Pilate to the palace of Herod.

The first and final meeting with Herod, the corrupt, the depraved, Herod who had so often sought an interview with Him, and had never obtained it until that last hour, Herod who never heard the voice of Jesus, for to his curiosity Christ vouchsafed no single word.

The rough handling of Herod's brutal soldiery.

The journey back to Pilate.

The awful scenes through which Pilate strove to save Him, while priests and people clamoured for His blood.

The scourging.

The pathway to the Cross.

The crucifixion.

Hours into which eternities were compressed! Through all in silence He endured the Cross, despising the shame; in silence, with no word of complaint and no word expressive of pain, "as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth."<sup>1</sup> In the hours of darkness, three words breathing tender interest and infinite love, one outcry of the spirit, and then, not so much a wail as a smothered sob of pent-up human agony, "I thirst"; the very expression of human agony, dignified, neither complaint nor appeal, but simply the statement, a terrible revelation of such suffering as is beyond explanation.

And now let it be remembered that all this is outward and physical, and human, and is but the symbol of the inward, and spiritual, and Divine. If in loneliness we pass over this pathway, and consider these scenes in contrition and tears, we have not then reached the heart of the mystery. Beyond all these stretch the infinitudes of suffering.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 53 : 7.

II. With sorrowful silence and fearfulness of utterance we approach the deepest darkness. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"<sup>1</sup> These words reveal a mystery, and represent in mystery a revelation. To them we turn for a theory of the Atonement, only to discover that theorizing is impossible. Alone in the supreme hour in the history of the race, Christ uttered these words, and in them light breaks out, and yet merges, not into darkness, but into light so blinding that no eye can bear to gaze. The words are recorded, not to finally reveal, but to reveal so much as it is possible for men to know, and to set a limit at the point where men may never know. The words were uttered that men may know, and that men may know how much there is that may not be known. In that strange cry that broke from the lips of the Master there are at least three things perfectly clear. Let them be named and considered. It is the cry of One Who has reached the final issue of sin. It is the cry of One Who has fathomed the deepest depth of sorrow. It is the cry of One Himself o'erwhelmed in the mystery of silence. Sin, sorrow, silence. Sin at its final issue, sorrow at its deepest depth, silence the unexplainable mystery of agony, and agony of mystery. These are the facts suggested by the actual words. In that order let them be pondered reverently.

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"<sup>1</sup> The logical, irresistible, irrevocable issue of sin is to be God-forsaken. Sin in its genesis was rebellion against God. Sin in its harvest is to be God-abandoned. Man sinned when he dethroned God and enthroned himself. He reaps the utter harvest of his sin when he has lost God altogether. That is the issue of all sin. It is the final penalty of sin, penalty not in the sense of a blow inflicted

<sup>1</sup> Mark 15 : 34.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 15 : 34.

on the sinner by God, but in the sense of a result following upon sin, from which God Himself cannot save the sinner. Sin is alienation from God by choice. Hell is the utter realization of that chosen alienation. Sin therefore at last is the consciousness of the lack of God, and that God-forsaken condition is the penalty of the sin which forsakes God. Now listen solemnly, and from that Cross hear the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"<sup>1</sup> That is hell. No other human being has ever been God-forsaken in this life. Man by his own act alienated himself from God, but God never left him. He brooded over him with infinite patience and pity, and took man back to His heart at the moment of the fall, in virtue of that mystery of Calvary which lay within the determine counsel and foreknowledge of God, long before its outworking in the history of the race. What explanation can there be of this cry from the lips of Jesus? None other is needed than that declared by His herald three years before, and considered in previous studies. "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!"<sup>2</sup> He has taken hold upon sin. He has made it His own. He has accepted the responsibility of it. He has passed to the ultimate issue. There is a statement in the writings of Paul, to my own mind the most overwhelming, the most profound of the New Testament: "Him Who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."<sup>3</sup> Reverently hear the strange and sublime words, "Him Who knew no sin He made sin." A man says, I do not understand that. Neither do I. But there is a declaration, and in the hour of the Cross is the fact. On that Cross He was made sin, and therein He passed to the uttermost limit of sin's out-

<sup>1</sup> Mark 15 : 34.<sup>2</sup> John 1 : 29.<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. 5 : 21.

working. He was God-forsaken. He knew no sin. He was made sin. He was forsaken of God. Because He knew no sin there is a value in the penalty which He bore, that He does not need for Himself. Whose sin is this that He is made, and for which He is forsaken of God? My sin. I can say no other in the presence of that sublime miracle. Each must for himself stand there alone,—*my sin*. He was made my sin. If in passing to the final issue of my sin, and bearing its penalty, He created a value that He did not need for Himself, for whom is the value? It also is for me. "He bore my sin in His body upon the tree."<sup>1</sup>

And yet the broader fact must be stated. He bore the sin of the world. Himself knowing no sin, by such bearing He created a value which He did not require. For whom then is the value of that awful hour? For the whole world, whose sin He bore. Behold Him, on the Cross, bending His sacred head, and gathering into His heart in the awful isolation of separation from God, the issue of the sin of the world, and see how out of that acceptance of the issue of sin He creates that which He does not require for Himself, that He may distribute to those whose place He has taken.

Turn for one brief moment only to the next fact, closely allied to that already considered, never to be separated in the final thought, and only now taken separately for the sake of examination and contemplation. This cry is not merely that of One Who has reached the final issue of sin, but it is therefore, and also, the cry of One Who has fathomed the deepest abyss of sorrow. Sorrow is the consciousness of lack. What is the sorrow of sickness but the consciousness of lack of health? What is the sorrow of bereavement but the consciousness of the lack of the loved

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. 2 : 24.



one? What is the sorrow of poverty but the consciousness of the lack of the necessities of life? What is the sorrow of loneliness but the consciousness of the lack of companionship? All sorrow is lack. Then it follows by a natural sequence of that, that the uttermost depth of sorrow is lack of God. There is no sorrow like it. There is no pain comparable to it. The human heart through the infinite mercy of God has never in this life really known this uttermost reach of sorrow. There are moments in life when it would seem as though God had hidden His face as men pass through dark experiences, but if He had actually withdrawn Himself, the sorrow of the hiding of His face would have been as nothing, to the sorrow of the actual absence from Him. In this hour when Jesus was made sin, and was therefore God-forsaken, He knew as none had ever known, the profundities of pain. The vision that had been His light through all the dark days in the three and thirty years, was lost. The strength of that fellowship with the Father which had been His on every rough and rugged pathway, was withdrawn. In perfect harmony with the purpose of God He passed into the place of separation from God, and in the awful cry which expresses His loneliness, there is revealed the most stupendous sorrow that has ever been witnessed through the ages.

And yet once again. If man imagines that he has now fathomed or understood the Cross, he is reminded by the very fact, that this cry is a question that something, perhaps the mightiest and most marvellous of all the facts, includes him, and defies his every attempt at final analysis. He is in the place of sin as to its final issue, and in the place of sorrow in its abyssmal depth, and yet now note that while He states the fact that He is God-forsaken, He

in the midst of the experience asks the question, "Why?" It is never recorded that He asked such a question before. Never again is there record of so strange a fact. In that withdrawal of the Divine presence, which is the issue of sin, and the depth of sorrow, there is the enshrouding of the Spirit of the Christ in a great and awful mystery of silence. If these infinitudes may be measured by the small standards of human individuality, it may be at once declared that there is no experience of life through which men pass, so terrible as that of silence and of mystery, the hours of isolation and of sorrow, in which there is no voice, no vision, no sympathy, no promise, no hope, no explanation, the hours in which the soul asks why. The river, the darkly flowing river, how men dread it, and yet there is something more fearsome than the darkly flowing river. It is the mist that, rising from the river, wraps men round in its chill embrace, until they do not know where they stand, or where the river is. There is no agony for the human soul like that of silence. The perfect One, made sin, and suffering all sorrow, had reached that place of silence and of mystery. Who shall explain it? I cannot. When I am asked for a theory of the Atonement I ever reply that in the midst of the mighty movement, the Lord Himself said "Why?" and if He asked that question, I dare not imagine that I can ever explain the deep central verities of His mystery of pain. Men stand outside the circle of that incomprehensible agony, they behold Him forsaken of God, at the uttermost issue of sin, in the deepest profundities of sorrow, in the mystery of an awful silence, and all this as they hear Him say, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"<sup>1</sup> Let there be no attempt to penetrate further into that hallowed and awful realm.

<sup>1</sup> Mark 15: 34.

And yet the subject of the sufferings of Christ cannot be so left. Standing overwhelmed in the presence of these sufferings, feeling increasingly man's utter inability to understand or explain, with a great sense of might and majesty overwhelming us, we hear the next words that pass His lips. "It is finished."<sup>1</sup> Immediately the heart sings a new song,—

"O Jesus, Lord I 'tis joy to know  
Thy path is o'er of shame and woe,  
For us so meekly trod."

How in the depth of the darkness the mighty work was accomplished, men will never perfectly understand. Eternity cannot suffice for the unfolding of the dread mystery of the passion, but this is known, "He bare my sins in His body upon the tree,"<sup>2</sup> He stood where man should have stood. The pains of hell that were man's portion, gat hold on Him, and man passes into the light of the heaven which was His by right, and which He brings to him.

Such were the sufferings of Christ, so far as we have been allowed to come near them in the inspired narrative. What have we seen? So little and yet so much. Unable to appreciate all the meaning of the words, yet great facts now shine in radiant revelation, and from the study we may make statements which constitute the evangel of hope and of power. These deductions may be expressed in old words, the theological words of our fathers. I pray God that we may restore them. I would not plead for the restoration of mistaken interpretation of the words, but that we may lay hold upon them in their true and infinite value.

Gazing then in astonishment at the sufferings of Christ

<sup>1</sup> John 19 : 30.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 2 : 24.

I declare them to have been vicarious sufferings, expiatory sufferings, atoning sufferings.

They were vicarious sufferings, for He stood in man's place when He suffered. The penalty He bore had no relation to the life as lived. He stood connected with all human sin and failure, and seeing that He bore it, man is delivered from it.

They were expiatory sufferings. Through what He bore, He exhausted human sin, He put it away, He made it not to be.

They were atoning sufferings in that through them He has dealt with all that separated between man and God. He has now made possible the restoration of the lost fellowship, and man may henceforth live in communion with Him.

Thus has He solved the problems first suggested. By the way of that Cross, and by that way alone, God may be just, that is, true to Himself in nature; and justify the sinner, that is, place man into the position of one for whom sin is made not to be, and who is therefore clear from guilt.

The second problem is assuredly solved by the mystery of the Cross, as will be more fully seen when contemplating His resurrection. As He passes out of death, He comes into a new life which He may now communicate, and which is to be for paralyzed men a new dynamic and a new purity, in the power of which all life may be transformed, and all victories won.

Thus we have foregathered on the outer margin of that deep sea of sorrow through which the God-man wrought with God, though for a while in separation from the consciousness of His presence, a redemption which meets all difficulties, and solves all problems, and opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

