

CHAPTER IX

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

It has been said in a preceding chapter that when we speak of faith in God to-day what is usually meant is trustful acquiescence in the course of events. That this is a large part of the life of faith is undoubtedly true. The prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, "Father, not my will but Thine be done," is a clear proof that it was part of the faith of Jesus. But by far the larger number of references to faith in His teaching are of an apparently very different kind. The faith to which they call us is to anything rather than acquiescence, it is rather to uncompromising rebellion against what seems the natural course of events. Men are encouraged to seek deliverance from diseases incurable by the medical science of their day, from maladies that by long neglect have become chronic, from premature death, and even from the untamed forces of nature itself. What are we moderns to make of such an astonishing saying as this: "Have faith in God, for verily I say unto you that if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed ye shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed hence, and it shall obey you!" No doubt, as I have said, this is metaphorical language. But Christ certainly meant something more wonderful than what He had done just before He

said it. When taken in its whole context it means something very drastic, and quite unmodern. I take it that it can only mean, that if a disciple of Jesus sees any obstacle, however great, standing in the way of the Kingdom of God, he is to go into the battle against it in the rooted assurance that in so doing he is allying himself with the will of God, and the firm reliance that God will support and reinforce him by His providence and His Spirit. He is not to prostrate himself before the mountain as if it were an expression of the will of God, and trust to God to overrule the mountain for good; he is to seek to explode the mountain and clear it away, by asking great things from God and expecting great things of God.

Are the words really capable of any other meaning? But if it be so, then, clearly, faith of this kind carries in its heart rebellion against the natural course of events, and this again carries with it the irresistible conclusion that there must be much in that course of events that is hateful to God. In other words, the whole of this type of teaching about faith carries with it a certain doctrine of the evil of the world.

It is clear that Jesus Christ conceived of the Kingdom of God as including in the first instance purely spiritual blessings—faith, hope, and love; but it is equally clear that it included also all that concerns man's sound physical life. It is impossible to believe that He who showed such solicitous sympathy for those diseased in body or sick in mind, those who were hungry, those who were in peril from the storm and the wave, could think otherwise

of the Kingdom of God. But if it be so, then how did He regard that mighty course of events which is unrolled before us in human history? What view did He take of the presence of the evils that are manifest on so colossal a scale in the human story? Did He regard them as part of the unconditional will of God? In view of His many sayings about faith of this rebellious, creative type, I do not see how He could possibly have thought anything of the kind. The teaching about faith is rooted in a certain view of the objective evils of human life, without which it loses all its force and meaning; and it is largely because there has crept into our modern thought another view that the remarkable character of this teaching about faith has lost much of its vitality for us at the present time. That view is that the outward ills of human life, being caused by the physical environment, are due to natural law, and as these laws are unconditionally decreed by God, the ordinary evils of life are all to be taken as if they were due to the Divine appointment. This is, of course, simply the "closed system" idea of nature asserting itself under a religious form. A good example of this type of reasoning is found in the deeply interesting *Confessio Fidei* of the Dean of St Paul's. In this "outspoken essay" he maintains a true Divine Incarnation, in the person of Christ, but at the same time repudiates the whole miraculous element in the Gospels. "Still less," he says, "in my opinion, ought we to demand that He should break through the fixed laws of nature, which He Himself ordained, and in accordance with which He orders the course of the world. In so

doing He would not have exalted Himself; He would have condemned His own creation."¹ It appears from this that it would have been spiritually unworthy of Jesus to heal organic disease, to still the storm, and to rise from the dead on the third day. The really noble thing would have been for him to recognise that organic physical disease, the whole realm of natural disaster, and calamitous and premature death were parts of the glorious Divine order. Now whatever we may say of this, it must surely be plain to every unprejudiced mind that it is in discord with the entire New Testament view of things. Further, it is in similar discord with common sense. Every sane human being in practice acts on totally different principles. He does not accept the ravages of tigers and snakes as part of the Divine order. Why should he have accepted bacilli in the body or the brain as such? Every normal human being prays for deliverance from accident by storm or flood, and still more from premature and violent death. This is a universal and natural instinct, and surely rational as well. Yet according to this passage all such prayers are for God's interference with "the order which He has made," and by such prayers the man is "condemning" God's creation. On what conceivable philosophy, moreover, the Dean can maintain that so mighty an intervention as the Incarnation is Divinely worthy and beautiful, while he condemns a complete Resurrection as unworthy of God, I fail to understand. Surely both are "interventions" in

¹ *Outspoken Essays*, Series II., p. 49.

the ordinary course of nature, or they are nothing at all.

The thought of an individual may remain at such a stage of thought as is mirrored in this *Confessio* for a time, because life is short and its intellectual, like its practical, problems are perplexing, especially when the mind involved is widely and acutely sensitive to the complex currents of thought of our age. But it is surely inconceivable that the thought of an age can rest there in its search for coherence and stability.

The perils of this conception of the outward evils of life as being part of the unconditional Divine Will for man become obvious in another paragraph of the same Essay. "The Divine Life, under human conditions, was the life that ended in the Cross. And it is worth while to remind ourselves that what is best for us is best also for others. The Church at present suffers as much from the vicarious hedonism of its social ethics as from the self-indulgence and greed of some among its unworthy adherents. Both are equally materialistic, both alike rest on an estimate of good and evil which makes the Incarnation unintelligible."³

The general drift of this, taken in connection with the Dean's other writings, is that Christ bore the Cross of the world's evil fate, and that this is the highest kind of life. If we would live the highest kind of life we, too, must bear the cross. So far we are all on common Christian ground. We are all under the vicarious law. But when the next step is taken, "the cross is best for others," we get

³ *Outspoken Essays*, Series II., pp. 48, 49.

on somewhat dangerous ground. In part it is true. Historically, every human being has to bear his share of the common lot. But what selfishness and sinful apathy and cruelty that need not be may creep in and shelter themselves under that formula—"The cross is best for others"—however cultured, humane, and noble in spirit some may be who formulate it!

From this second proposition the Dean advances to a favourite topic, "the social hedonism" of the modern progressive party in the Church, which, it is not obscurely hinted, may be as materialistic as capitalist greed. Of course it may, but is it? And is its aim fairly described as "social hedonism" at all? It seems to me that the long delayed but gathering Christian protest against adverse social conditions has, at its roots, a deep sense of the sacredness and value of all human beings. Its true aim is not an increase in the pleasures of the poor, as the phrase "social hedonism" insinuates, but the assertion of their inherent right to conditions of life that will not breed disease, atrophy of the higher nature, unnecessary exposure to casualty, and premature death. Each and all of these aims seems to me to be as it were visualised in the "signs" of Jesus, and revealed by Him as of the very nature of the Kingdom of God, and therefore of the will of the Father. If this is hedonism, then Jesus Christ was a hedonist. But so is every one of us when it comes to dealing with our own children, or with any human being for whom we have real affection. What should we think if any one remonstrated with us for our solicitude

for the physical and mental welfare of our children and for the provision of conditions essential for that welfare on the plea that it is the highest calling of our children to bear the Cross, that if that life was good enough for the Son of God, it is good enough for them? The truth is that in such reasoning we are moving in a sphere quite remote from reality.

But to turn from a writer to whose genius we are deeply indebted in other spheres of thought and practice, does not the conviction that the miseries of human life are unconditional and irremediable enter deeply into much of the higher thought of our age? I have quoted Huxley and Bertrand Russell as representative of the agnostic thought of their time. But have things been so much better with the thoroughgoing Idealists?

As I read Mr Bosanquet's account, for instance, of Religion, or Mr Bradley's account of the Absolute, I find that while morality is the region in which I am to strive continually for social progress, it is in Religion or Philosophy that I am supposed to rise into a region in which the contradictions and tragedies of life are transcended. I get "above the battle," and see that all things have their place, the lower and the higher, the real and the less real, in the Absolute. I am reminded of the well-known passage in a greater master from whom the disciples derive much of their inspiration.

"All the various peoples feel that it is in the religious consciousness that they possess truth, and they have always regarded religion as constituting the true Sabbath of their life. Whatever awakens

in us doubt and fear, all sorrow, all care, all the limited interests of finite life, we leave behind on the shores of time; and as from the highest peak of a mountain, far away from all definite view of what is earthly, we look down calmly on all the limitations of the landscape, and of the world, so with the spiritual eye man, lifted out of the hard realities of this actual world, contemplates it as having only the semblance of existence, which, seen from this pure region bathed in the beams of the spiritual sun, merely reflects back its shades of colour, its varied tints and lights softened away into eternal rest. In this region of spirit flow the streams of forgetfulness from which Psyche drinks, and in which she drowns all sorrow, while the dark things of this life are softened away into a dream-like vision, and become transfigured until they are a mere framework for the brightness of the eternal.”³

That is, assuredly, a fine passage containing truth that we deeply need to know. Religion is “the sabbath of the spirit,” and we see nothing truly until we see it “under the form of Eternity.” But deep as is the thought, is there not more than a trace of opium in it? One cannot but remember that Karl Marx began his pilgrimage as an enthusiastic disciple of Hegel. Is it surprising that if this was his conception of religion, his passionate hatred of oppression, his sense of the wrongs of the poor made him discard it altogether, and that all over Europe to-day his disciples in turn are proclaiming with a myriad voices that religion is mere “dope”? It is impossible to get

³ Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*, Eng. Tr., vol. 1 p. 3.

the Hebrew prophets into Hegel's account of religion, nor, it seems to me, is it any more possible to get into it the deeper and humaner mind of Jesus of Nazareth; and an account of religion that cannot hold these seems to me too narrow. Christian thought cannot admit of a God so wholly "above the battle." There is surely no room or ground here for the "faith" of which Jesus mainly speaks. Is there room for more than that kind of acquiescent faith which trustfully accepts the course of things because it believes that all contradictions are for ever solved in the Absolute, and that our highest life is to get "above the battle" too?

I gladly admit that many who have found their main intellectual inspiration here have been what Heine claimed to have been, and that they may justly be called "brave soldiers in the warfare of the liberation of humanity." But did they get their inspiration from that conception of the Absolute, or from an older tradition in which they were reared?

The real drift of this form of idealism, so far as its philosophy of religion is concerned, seems to me to find much more congenial expression in Hegel's notorious acceptance of the Prussian State of his day as the ideal and final form of human government, than in the passion for social reform of some of his followers, from Marx and Lassalle onwards.

Is not the root of the whole error, for such I cannot but believe it to be, found in the belief that the tragedy of human life is unconditional and immovable, and in the fatal readiness of even the

best human beings to put the evils that confront them straightway into that category? In that case the only escape is to ignore them as unreal and illusory. I have been quoting agnostic and idealistic philosophy to illustrate this point, but what could not be said in like terms of the story of the Christian Church?

Modern history alone can furnish us with many examples. Why was it that the Protestant Churches at the Reformation were so slow in attempting the conversion of the world? They accepted heathendom as a great immovable mountain in the way of the Kingdom of God. They further acquiesced in it as the sovereign will of God, which it was obviously foolish and impious to oppose. Luther himself, who had taught such great things about the power of faith, took this view, and took refuge in the thought that the Lord would dispose of heathendom and "the Turk" at His second coming in glory and power. About two hundred years passed before evangelical Christendom began to realise that this was a mere opiate for the heart and conscience, and that it was not the will of God that the majority of the human race should live and die without the Gospel. But it took another century and all the momentum of the Evangelical Revival before the world mission of Protestantism got definitely under weigh, and it took a mar of heroic mould to lead the more earnest Christian men and women of his time to pass over from acquiescent to creative faith. It is very significant that William Carey began his enterprise by stating his two famous principles,

"Expect great things from God: attempt great things for God." Something had obviously occurred to change his thought of God, to make it greater and more generous in this matter than Luther's. That development in his idea of God changed the faith of acquiescence into rebellious faith, and in the light of that he learned to look upon the gloom and evil of heathendom as removable, and to expect the Divine help in his attack upon it. Had he been able to anticipate the method of dealing with evil suggested by Hegel, he might have lived a much more peaceful life; but Christian history would have been very different.

If we come a little further down in history, the struggle for the abolition of slavery begins. Again, Wilberforce finds the Christianity of his day practising an acquiescent faith, and tolerating all "the horrors of the middle passage" on the plea that negroes were inheritors of "the curse of Canaan"; in other words, throwing the responsibility for the irrevocable judgments of God on an accursed race. We know how, even after his conversion, the devout Newton continued for a time to command a slave-ship. But the leaven of the Revival had penetrated more deeply into the little group of Abolitionists, and Wilberforce, and a greater and more generous thought of God was stirring within them, which gave them courage to pass beyond acquiescent to creative faith, and to sweep away instead of bowing down before the "mountain," or drugging themselves with thoughts of its "unreality."

The years pass on, and the progress of the Industrial Revolution fills the new factories with

white serfs and child toilers. In the struggle against the evils of the new economic movement religious opinion was divided. The Hammonds, in their striking book on *The Town Labourer*, have put the two different interpretations which divided the Evangelicals as follows:

“The devout Christian, confronted with the spectacle of wrong and injustice, may draw either of two contrary conclusions. In the eyes of his religion the miner or weaver is just as important as the landlord or the cotton lord. Clearly, then, one will argue, it is the duty of a Christian State to prevent any class, however poor, and however trivial its place in the world may seem to be, from sinking into degrading conditions of life. Every soul is immortal, and the consequences of ill-treatment and neglect in the brief day of its life on earth will be unending. If, therefore, society is so organised as to impose such conditions on any class, the Christian will demand the reform of its institutions. For such minds Christianity provides a standard by which to judge government, the industrial and economic order, the life of society, the way in which it distributes wealth and opportunities. This was the general standpoint of such a man as Lord Shaftesbury. But some minds draw a different moral from the equality that Christianity teaches. Every human soul is a reality, but the important thing about a human soul is its final destiny, and that destiny does not depend on the circumstances of this life. The world has been created on a plan of apparent injustice by a Providence that combined infinite

power with infinite compassion. The arrangements that seem so capricious are really the work of that Power. But the same Power has given to the men and women who seem to live in such bitter and degrading surroundings an escape from its cares by the exercise of their spiritual faculties. . . . Thus, whereas one man looking out on the chaos of the world calls for reform, the other calls for contemplation: one says, 'Who could tolerate such injustice?' the other says, 'Who would not rejoice that there is another world?'"⁴

The nerve of the difference here, clearly, is that whereas the former view holds that the evil state of human society is of human wrong-doing and is therefore removable by the help of Almighty God, and calls for creative faith, the latter holds that in the last resort the evil state of society is due to the appointment of Providence, is therefore unconditional, and calls only for the faith of acquiescence.

The torch of progress fell from the hands of those Evangelicals who held the latter view and was carried on by Shaftesbury in the great career which reached its climax at last in the passing of the Factory Acts.

It is impossible and needless to follow the story all the way through, or to give more than one further illustration. To-day by far the greatest of all public questions is the question of the prevention of war, and the unifying of the nations in the common enterprise of humanity. It surely throws a flood of light on the prevailing religious teaching and thought of our time that all over the great

⁴ *The Town Labourer*, pp. 223, 224.

camp of the British army in France the chief difficulty of belief of thoughtful men was the difficulty of "God and the war." How could one possibly reconcile the goodness of God with the existence of the horrors in which they were living? It was always, that is to say, taken for granted that God was responsible for the war. Just as it was in each of the cases cited above, the acceptance of heathendom, of "the horrors of the middle passage," and of the white slavery of early industrialism, so with many is it still with regard to war. Piety of a certain type regards this supposed Divine decree with trembling, but acquiescent, faith. Like Calvin, with reference to Divine predestination, it would say, "I confess that the decree makes me shudder, nevertheless it is true." Now, two sinister consequences inevitably follow from this belief. First of all, if we must throw the ultimate responsibility for the horror of the war upon God, the whole thought of God becomes darkened, and faith in Him becomes by so much the more difficult for those who still cling to it; while in many it is completely destroyed. Secondly, all those who hold this belief are thrown out of action for all hopeful and constructive labour for enduring peace. The belief that God decrees war must inevitably tend to make war inevitable. Surely the way of rebellious rather than of acquiescent faith is the way of Jesus. To Him who healed the sick it cannot be a matter of Divine decree that men should maim and torture each other; to Him who raised the son of the widow of Nain and gave the youth back to his mother, and wept by the grave of Lazarus

for human sorrow ere He revealed the "glory of God" by restoring him to the home of Bethany, it cannot be a matter of absolute Divine decree that ten millions of the youth of Europe should be lying in early graves, and that for so many homes the lights have gone out.

If He really wrought those deeds, if they were characteristic of His mind and revealed His Father, then this is no case for acquiescent, but one rather for rebellious and creative faith, the faith which says, "War is an evil thing, it has no deep roots in the Divine nature of things, it is an intruder in God's world and it must be driven out and destroyed."

But the course of our argument has now brought us to the very heart of our problem.

What is the general view of the outer evil of the world, the tragic element in human experience caused by man's subjection to the material environment, that has been implicit all along in our argument, and that is now emerging into clearer light? I would say, to begin with, that the view towards which, in my view, the argument leads, is grounded in the best modern Theistic thought. It assumes that thought, and, starting from it, goes a stage beyond it, still, I think, developing its fundamental principles. First of all let us make that general Theistic position clear to our own minds. In general it may be stated thus. The world is a place of soul making. The supreme end is the creation and development of personalities. It may have other ends, but the final key to the whole is found in the ideal values, and in the spirit of man in which these are expressed and God is revealed.

From this standpoint modern Theism is able to show reason and meaning, too, in the hard schooling of man by Nature. We can show to-day with something approaching demonstration that not only man's physical being but his intelligence was developed in the struggle for existence, that conceptual thinking itself, as well as scientific thought is, historically, largely due to the pressure of the environment, and to the advantages which better ways of thinking gave to those who discovered and practised them. It was because men paid so dearly for their ignorance that they first learned to love wisdom.

The same stern schooling drove them into social groups, kept them there and taught them to discover and develop new ways of living that made society more secure and more progressive. There is no great virtue that dignifies human nature that has not a history, and behind that history there is always that same remorseless, insistent pressure of the environment. Religion itself has a history as well as intelligence and morality. A vital impulse like that which "first drove living creatures from the water to the land, and from the land to the air," and sent man voyaging from the arctic to the tropic zones, has prompted him alone of all living things to cast his life out into the unseen and the intangible, in quest of succour and at last of life everlasting. Behind that, too, we see the pressure of the dark, ambiguous natural environment, and of sorrow, suffering, and death—in a word, of the whole tragic element in human experience. Religion cannot be completely contained within any

single definition, but assuredly always at the heart of it there is the endeavour to "overcome the world." It is "a prayer for life." It is a protest and appeal to the Eternal against the sorrows, sufferings, and indignities of the world of time. In the flood of light which the Science of Religion has cast on its historical nature the whole Communist theory of religion as "dope" disappears as a complete perversion of facts. Its roots lie, not in the desire of the mighty to drug the masses, but in the vital revolt of personality against the tragic element in experience. One of the great elements in the rise and development of religion has been death itself, death which has aroused the human spirit from animal acquiescence in its doom and sent it on the quest for immortality. Such is the general argument of the best Theistic thought to-day. Far from finding anything in the ultimate nature of the universe inconsistent with the Divine Love, it finds in that Love alone the true impulse and motive of Creation. Love is essentially creative, and we are really living in the heart of a great creative process, and witnessing the bringing into being of free human personalities and their education, discipline, and development.

The whole theistic conception has thus been wrought out with a breadth and thoroughness that in my judgment make it stronger and more satisfying than it ever has been before, and that make it, also, the most reasonable solution of the problem of Nature and Personality in the field to-day.

The argument of this book, indeed, rests upon this common Theistic ground and only proposes to carry it a stage further.

It is part of that conception that the whole outward world of evil which humanity has to undergo, the whole tragic ascendancy of the material over the spiritual, out of which so many individual tragic experiences come—outward accident, plague, famine, premature death of all kinds, and countless disasters of fortune and frustrations of toil by the niggardliness of Nature—are all in the Divine counsel educative and creative of knowledge and of virtue, of all in short that goes to make a full human personality. I do not, of course, mean that this is true of each individual. Calamities may happen to him that, being what he is, he cannot at the time surmount, falling on him not by his own fault, but by the working of the vicarious law. But the general principle is as I have stated it. Now it would seem, naturally and logically, to follow from this general principle that none of these evils are unconditionally fixed and fated as part of man's inevitable lot, but are all relative to his imperfect and faulty development and are therefore remediable, and, ultimately, removable.

The penalties of every rational educational system are capable of being escaped or removed by the pupil's learning his lesson properly. The reason for their existence disappears with the ignorance or the vice which calls them into action. Were it otherwise they would, of course, cease to have any educative power, because with their unconditional continuance the motive with which they supply

the pupil for learning his lesson or amending his ways would be withdrawn. Why should he trouble himself to do either when he must suffer the penalty in either case?

But the thoroughgoing application of the idea of divine education to human destiny by Theistic thought would seem to carry with it the thoroughgoing consequence that all the outward evils of human life are removable if we could find and follow the right way, and, as we have seen, the human race has progressed in knowledge and virtue just in proportion as it has believed in the removability of the ills of its lot, and has resolutely set itself to remove them. The standard philosophical Theism of to-day hesitates here in the application of its own fundamental idea; it is not certain that there may not be a tragic element in the very nature of things that is unconditionally fixed and fated for man, so long as he is man, and that is, indeed, due to his very finitude. But if that is so there must be tragedy in heaven, tragedy as an eternal element in all creation. Against this I would set forth the idea that all human tragedy is educative, and is meant to be finally overcome. In other words, I would submit that current Theism should here speak with a more consistent voice, and carry clear through its own fundamental faith that the material exists for the spiritual, and that the present ascendancy of the material over the spiritual is educative and transitional in the Divine intention.

If we thus make the Theistic interpretation of the riddle of the world on this point clear and consistent with itself, we shall be now in a position to

test and, it may be, to develop it by bringing in the historical personality of Jesus. Have we not here, by the grace of God, a unique opportunity of discovering what the Universe really is? Here is the ideal man, or at least, as all Theists must agree, the man who, of all men, comes nearest that ideal. Shall we find that He is subject, just as all the rest of us are, to that brute material element whose dominance over the powers of spirit is at the heart of all the outward tragedy of human life? If it be so then I cannot help thinking that here we have a grave difficulty for Theism which will be all the graver the clearer our estimate of the uniqueness of Jesus. But on the other hand, if disease and death fled away before Him as the Gospels say they did; if the storm fell silent at His word; if by His creative faith He was able to dominate the powers of hunger; and if, finally, He broke the bands of death itself, then to me it seems as if here we have a supreme confirmation of our faith in the spiritual character of the universe, and a prophecy of the day when all "death and crying and mourning" shall have passed utterly away. If it be so, then these miracles of Jesus cast a clear and penetrating light on the whole dark mystery of outward evil in human life; they are not external evidence of the revelation, but part of the revelation itself. In their light all that is dark and mysterious in our outer lives, and in the life of humanity, falls into its place in that vast process of creation whereby God is making and disciplining human personalities, "bringing many sons into glory." Yet, on such a view, we do not fall into that error, which we have

seen to be so fatal to human progress and religious faith, of ascribing the evil of human destiny to the unconditional decree of God. The existence of evil in the world is not part of the eternal Divine order. It is a transient element, and seeing it in the light of the Eternal, faith may say of it what a Father of the Early Church said of the terrible Diocletian persecution, "It is but a little cloud; it will pass away!"

Humanity has endured terrible things, it is true, in its long battle and march, but what treasures of hard-won knowledge of God, of nature, and of human life, what records of heroic struggle, of love that has not failed, of faith that has overcome the world, it bears with it as enduring results of that struggle! It is, as we have seen, possible to take a gloomy view of that "long result of time," to arraign the process through which it has been achieved, to use the light of the ideal which has been given us for other purposes in order to cheapen the human achievement, and accuse the great world of nature, and Him who ordained it, and thereby subtly to assert one's own superiority to them all. I do not think that we find that note in the greatest and finest spirits who, while they feel most deeply the sorrows of humanity, can most justly measure what it has achieved. Rather do they "glorify God" and His world of nature and the consequent result in man.

Let us hear St Francis as, worn out with physical toil and suffering, he draws near his end:

"Praised be my Lord God with all his creatures, and specially our brother, the Sun, who brings

us the day, and who brings us the light; fair is he and shines with a great splendour: O Lord, he signifies to us Thee!

"Praised be my Lord for our sister the Moon, and for the stars, the which He has set clear and lovely in heaven.

"Praised be my Lord for our brother the Wind, for air and clouds and calms, and all weather by the which Thou upholdest life in all creatures.

"Praised be my Lord for our sister Water, who is very desirable unto us, and humble, and precious and clean.

"Praised be my Lord for our brother Fire, through whom Thou givest us light in the darkness; and he is bright and pleasant and very mighty and strong.

"Praised be my Lord for all who pardon one another for His love's sake, and who endure weakness in tribulation: blessed are they who peaceably endure, for Thou, O Most Highest, shalt give them a crown!

"Blessed be my Lord for our sister the Death of the body from whom no man escapeth. Woe unto him who dieth in mortal sin! Blessed are they who are found walking by Thy most holy will, for the second death shall have no power to do them harm. Praise ye and bless the Lord, and give thanks unto Him, and serve Him with great humility."

Man has paid a great price for what he has won, but what he has won has been worth it all. There is no indication that he is as yet at anything but the beginning of his day's work; and when one

measures from what he has come there is no reason to doubt but that he will achieve incomparably greater things by the Grace of God. But I can conceive of no better way of arresting his progress than by assuring him that there are divinely appointed barriers to his progress in the subduing of the material to the spiritual.

What has come over religion that it has allowed science to get ahead of it here? What man inspired by the true spirit of science will set any boundary to his aspiration to discover the secrets of the earth and the heavens? Why should religion accept limits to the power and the love of God and the possibilities of prayer? Against all such limits set by man's unbelief stands Christ with His incessant call for faith. It is indeed strange that men should have been so blind to this, and to its far-reaching significance. We are afraid of His words, we try to minimise them and tone them down. But the truly significant thing is that the fear that man might make too much of them never seems to have crossed His mind. His one fear seems to have been not that the men of His time should believe too much, but that they should believe too little in the power over evil of believing, loving, and hoping prayer. If He were among us in the flesh to-day, would He speak in any different fashion? But if He did use such words to us would we not be compelled either to disbelieve them, or else to recast and expand all our thoughts of man, of Nature, and of God?

The malady of our time lies in its contracted thoughts of God. We think too narrowly and

meanly of His Power, His Love, and His Freedom to help men. That is what the "miracles" of Jesus and His teaching about Faith mean. That God is more near, more real and mighty, more full of love, and more ready to help every one of us than any one of us realises, that is their undying message.