

Christ Incarnate in the Christian Church.

In trying to appreciate the significance of the life of Christ it is necessary constantly to bear in mind that Christianity is no mere scheme for the salvation and perfecting of individuals. Christ lived and died, not only to save men, but man. The ultimate goal of Christianity is expressed by S. Paul, in Ephesians iv. 13, in the words, "Till we all come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." He does not say, till we all come to perfect men, but to a perfect man. The words suggest the truth that, as members incorporate in one body, men may aspire to a perfection, even the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, which, as separate individuals, they could never hope to attain. The same truth is suggested by the closing words of S. Paul's prayer on behalf of his readers, at the end of the third chapter. He prays that "they may be strong to apprehend," together "with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth," that so they might "be filled unto all the fulness of God." The words imply that "the fulness of God," the goal of the Christian life, is not to be attained by any individual as such, but must be sought in closest union "with all the saints." The knowledge of Christ's love which is to lead on to this fulness is too vast for any individual to grasp; would he measure its breadth and length and height and depth he must do so as a member of the universal Church.

To go back to the words quoted before, "Till we all come to a perfect man." The life of Christ affords the only real explanation of their meaning. His life is a prophecy of what God intends man to become, and as such enables us to interpret the Divine purpose in human history. It is only in proportion as the life of Christ is understood that it becomes possible to interpret aright all human history.

The traveller by night may pass through the loveliest scenery or visit the most impressive landscape, but as long as the darkness continues unbroken he remains unconscious of that which lies before him. Suddenly, however, as from the dark cloud overhead there issues the vivid gleam of the lightning flash, the outlines of the scene

before him are revealed, and though the light has passed long ere he has caught the full force of what he has seen, he has at least learnt something of what to expect when the night shall have passed and the full light of the sun shall have been poured upon the scene. We have here an illustration, imperfect though it be in detail, of what the Incarnation has done in human history. Man, as we believe, was originally created innocent and in the image of God; but during the long night of sin which followed its bright beginning that Divine likeness was more and more hidden and overclouded, till at length men ceased to believe in the existence of the Divine nature within them, and selfishness became the ruling principle of their life. Then it was that across the midnight darkness of sin the life of Christ shone with a radiant brightness which served to reveal once more the Divine image in man that sin had so nearly effaced, and at the same time to suggest the glorious future in store when the Sun of Righteousness should be completely manifested in the world. The thought suggested by the illustration is full of encouragement in looking forward to the future. S. Paul never despaired of the destiny either of individuals or of the race. He treats the one perfect life which has been lived in the world, in all its purity and perfection, as a prophecy of what God intends men to become. The Gospel record, too, shows that He, who knew better than any one else the weakness and sinfulness of human nature, who, as we are told, needed not that any should testify of man because He knew what was in man, was never known to despair of man's future. The accomplishment of God's original intention for the human race as a whole, may have been delayed by the introduction of sin; but we dare not believe but that the original intention will one day be fully carried out. We can sympathise with the divinely inspired confidence of the poet who could say—

Neither vice nor guilt,
Debasement undergone by body or
mind,
Nor all the misery forced upon my
sight,
Misery not lightly passed, but some-
times scanned
Most feelingly, could overthrow my
trust
In what we may become,

Let us imagine that an artist, having made a magnificent vase, were to summon all his friends to see and admire his work. Whilst they are engaged in doing so a rival artist, who has come under the disguise of a friend, moved with envy at the beauty and magnificence of what he beholds, seizes the vase in his hands, and, throwing to the ground, dashes it into a thousand pieces. Whilst the eyes of all are turned in astonishment and indignation upon what appears to them irreparable damage, the original artist, alone unmoved, calmly bids them wait. All he asks is that they will allow him sufficient time, and he is prepared to undo the mischief which has been done. Days, months, years pass away, and still he bids them wait, assuring them that all will be made right at last, but that meanwhile they must be content implicitly to accept his assurance. The harm so lightly accomplished will take long time and infinite patience to repair. But now at length the long awaited day arrives, and once more he bids his friends assemble to witness the restoration of his original work. And as they behold the vase which before they had seen broken into a thousand pieces, re-made out of those same pieces in such a way that nothing is lost of its original grace and beauty, they are filled with admiration for the skill and power of the artist, and to a far greater extent than if the vase had never been broken at all.

(To be Continued.)

We live day by day under the illusion that it is the fact or event that imports, whilst really it is not that which signifies, but the use we put it to, or what we think of it.—Emerson.

We find the grass and flowers are types, in their passing, of the passing of human life, and in their excellence, of the excellence of human life; and this in twofold way: first by their Beneficence, and then by their Endurance; the grass of the earth, in giving the seed of corn, and in its beauty under tread of foot and stroke of scythe; and the grass of the waters, in giving its freshness to our rest, and its bending before the wave.—Ruskin.