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# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

Is it possible to endure a little strong meat this month? Let us put the matter in this way. What is it that proves a man or woman to be a Christian?

Is it belief in the divinity of Christ, in His atonement for sin, in His resurrection from the dead? It is none of these. Is it regular attendance at public worship, with frequent communion? Is it a devout and prayerful spirit? Is it an active interest in the work of the Church or in social service? It is none of these, nor all of these together.

It is self-denial.

Self-denial, readiness to deny oneself for others, is the one and only test applied by Christ. And He applies it not only consistently, but also persistently and insistently. 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.' 'So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.' 'If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'

He spoke in such a way as to be intelligible to His hearers. The word 'hate,' so startling to us,

would not have raised a ripple of astonishment in them. It expresses the principle of preference. If at any time there should arise a conflict between a father's desires and the duty of self-denial, the will of the father must be set aside. If the mother or the wife should impose her passionate love between the man and the call of self-sacrifice, the love of mother and wife must be set aside and the call obeyed. He puts it, we say, in language intelligible to His hearers. And the word 'hate' would be no offence to them. But they would understand that He used the strongest possible expression because of the fundamental importance of the truth that He wished to teach.

And we ourselves understand it now. For that one text at least the war has made intelligible to us. Again and again the father's desire and the mother's love came between a man and the call to self-denial, and he had to set them aside.

It was not always so. Sometimes the wife recognized the call as clearly as the husband, the mother as clearly as the son. We quote a Canadian mother:

These hands whose weakness knew your baby weight,

So heavy yet so dear, and held it fast,  
Now loose the bond which love and service gave  
And let you go at last.

See, I unclasp each clinging fingerhold,  
 Open and wide my empty arms I throw—  
 What tho' lips tremble and the heart grow chill,  
 Both lips and heart say 'Go!'

Not for the lust of battle or its pride,  
 Not for the dream of glory do I give,  
 But that a dark and wicked thing may die,  
 And Liberty may live!

These lips which found world-sweetness in your  
 kiss,  
 Kiss you once more before an open door;  
 I love you just enough to say good-bye—  
 I could not love you more!

That was well and wonderful. But how often  
 was it otherwise. How often, at the beginning of  
 the war, had a man to leave father and mother and  
 wife and children and brethren and sisters against  
 the will of every one of them, solely in order that  
 he might deny himself?

Now this explains two things which have puzzled  
 us ever since the war began.

It explains the great landslide which took place  
 from public worship and prayer at the beginning  
 of the war, and which caused us so much astonish-  
 ment and alarm. It caused us astonishment and  
 alarm, for we thought that when the war began  
 both men and women would flock to church  
 in order to have the mystery of it explained to  
 them, and in order to receive the comforts and  
 consolations of religion. But there was no mystery  
 about it. Their sons had gone to the war and  
 were in hourly danger of mutilation or of death.  
 What else mattered but that? And it was not  
 comfort that they craved for, it was their sons'  
 preservation and restoration. If church attend-  
 ance could have purchased an early peace, if  
 public prayer could have promised that lives  
 and limbs would be kept safe till peace came,  
 the churches would have been thronged with  
 worshippers.

We had not taught them that Christianity is  
 not the preservation of the life or the limb but  
 the surrender of it. Had we taught them as per-  
 sistent as Christ did that the man cannot be  
 His disciple who does not give up father or  
 mother or wife or children when the occasion  
 calls for it, and that the woman cannot be His  
 disciple who does not give up son or husband  
 upon the same irresistible call, we should have  
 had every man and every woman applying to  
 themselves Christ's sole test of discipleship, and  
 there would have been no landslide from the  
 churches.

But it explains another and a better thing. It  
 explains how it came to pass that so many writers,  
 when speaking about the future of those who fell,  
 suggested that somehow their supreme act of self-  
 sacrifice made heaven secure to them, and how  
 the Christian conscience, reading these writers,  
 agreed with them in defiance of all theology and  
 experience. They had Christ's own verdict with  
 them. This is His test of a Christian—that a  
 man deny himself, that he put away from him all  
 thought of the demands of business and the  
 comforts of home, that he put away from him even  
 the wife's embrace and the mother's tears, because  
 the opportunity has come to him.

Now Christ never expected that a man should  
 deny himself indiscriminately. He said to one  
 man, Sell that thou hast, and distribute unto the  
 poor. But it does not follow that every man of  
 wealth, in order to prove himself a Christian, must  
 do likewise. In the call to self-denial two things  
 have to be taken into account—the call must be  
 a real call, and the man to whom it comes must  
 realize it.

An example is to hand. It is a striking example,  
 and we must take courage and use it. But it is  
 now that we are about to offer the strong meat  
 that we promised. Let those who are not able  
 to endure it pass on to the next note. They will  
 find it on page 340.

In the January number of *The Quarterly Review* there is an article by the DEAN OF CANTERBURY entitled 'A Scientific Decision on Alcohol.' It is an article on the Report, issued last year, of the Committee appointed by the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) on the Action of Alcohol on the Human Organism. The Committee was a strong one—the DEAN OF CANTERBURY does not see how it could have been made stronger—and Lord D'Abernon was its Chairman.

Dr. WACE wonders that more has not been heard of that Report. Perhaps the reason is that it did not altogether satisfy anybody. It satisfies Dr. WACE, however. From first to last he is thoroughly well pleased with it, and he tells us why.

In the first place the Report informs us that these eminent men of science have come to the conclusion that alcohol will do no serious harm to the human body if it is administered in sufficiently moderate doses, and in a sufficiently diluted form, and at sufficiently long intervals. Well, there is still one other exception. If all these cautions are observed, no harm, says the Report, will be done to the body *so far as direct action is concerned*. And the DEAN OF CANTERBURY is well satisfied with that.

But there is another question. Does it do the body any good? Dr. Cunningham of Edinburgh used to tell the story of a wandering Scotsman who found himself in Vienna. He had run so short of funds that he hired himself to the Cathedral authorities, who gave him a censer to swing. But he failed to learn the language that he ought to have used in swinging it. So he used language that satisfied his Presbyterian conscience, and was just as intelligible to the assembly. One day a brother Scot arrived and was astonished, as the man passed him with the incense, to hear the words continually repeated, 'Gin it does ye nae guid it'll dae ye nae ill.' The DEAN OF CANTERBURY is satisfied that alcohol, the precautions all

observed, will do him no ill. But will it do him any good?

Two things have been claimed for it, one that it is a food, the other that it is a stimulant. The Report denies both. We are not surprised to hear that it is not a food, but we are surprised to hear that it is not a stimulant. Yet there is nothing upon which these scientific men are more emphatic. What remains? One thing remains. And that one thing is so satisfactory to Dr. WACE that it has caused him to write his paper. Alcohol, says the Report, may have a certain sedative effect upon the nervous system.

Dr. WACE himself has found it so. After a long spell of work and some worry he has found that he could not always sleep, whereupon 'a crust of bread and a little claret would give me prolonged and refreshing repose.' And then he says that 'it would be a positive cruelty to many persons of a nervous temperament to deprive them by prohibition of the sedative comfort which they find in alcoholic beverages alone.'

Now it is not to be supposed that the DEAN OF CANTERBURY enjoys his claret and ignores the Christian demand of self-denial for the sake of others. On the one hand he admits that the necessary sedative may be afforded by tobacco. But on the other hand he distinctly refuses to see in the abuse of alcohol by others a sufficient reason why he and those who agree with him should be deprived of the 'rest and cheer' rendered by alcohol.

Here then is a clear and, as we have said, a striking example to work with. The principle is undeniable. It is self-denial for the sake of others that proves a man a Christian. The DEAN OF CANTERBURY would be the last to deny it. But is this a case for self-denial? Dr. WACE clearly believes that it is not. How has he arrived at his decision?

In the first place he feels the need of alcohol.

Indeed he does not hide it that that is his real argument. But how will that argument serve in other cases? How will it serve with a Christian man of wealth, supposing that the issue came home to him in the simplicity with which Christ brought it home to the rich young ruler? But, he argues, my money brings me many comforts and some social consideration. The DEAN OF CANTERBURY would be ready to smile at the absurdity. Then again, *How would such an argument have served in the great war?*

It is not an airy matter, this of self-denial. Being the evidence of our Christianity it is not likely to be. Two things, we said, were necessary—the cause must be sufficient, and we must see it. Is the cause sufficient here?

Who can help recalling the example of St. Paul? The case was one of meat. We scarcely can refrain from calling it a paltry case. The meat which had been offered to idols in the pagan temples was sold cheaper than other meat, and the poor were glad to buy it. Many of the early Christians were poor. But should they eat this meat? There were weak consciences that said No. Did Paul ignore them? Did he turn upon them and say the sooner they got over their scruples the better? No; what he said was this: 'If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.'

The question in our day is drink. Would it be to misinterpret Paul to say that if he had lived in our day he would have answered, 'If alcohol make my brother to offend, I will drink no alcohol while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend'? We wonder that so trifling an occasion as his called forth so strong a statement. Can we conceive how strong the statement would have been had the occasion been that which faces us to day?

But no doubt the real reason for the DEAN OF

CANTERBURY'S conclusion is that he does not see how great the occasion is. Let him turn for a moment to his brother, the Bishop of London. Dr. Winnington Ingram's need of alcohol as a sedative to the nerves, working day by day among the millions of London, cannot be less than that of the DEAN OF CANTERBURY. Yet he does not use it. For he knows.

Two daring things were done by Christ. The first, He made religion consist in self-denial. The second, for every act of self-denial He offered an immediate reward.

We say daring things. We say so. To Him there was nothing daring in them. When we do a daring thing it is more or less experimental. The issue is unseen. The very aim is imperfect. There was no experiment with Him, and there was no uncertainty about the object. This was religion. There could be no other. And He knew with triumphant certainty and immeasurable joy that for every act of self-denial He could offer an immediate reward.

We have touched upon the self-denial already. We pass now to the reward. But first of all notice one additional thing about the self-denial.

The Church has missed the meaning of it. It is a tremendous charge to make, but it is true. By the Church we mean, of course, historical Christianity, not every branch of the Church or every individual Christian. The Church saw that Christianity consisted in self-denial and for a time was Christian, every individual follower of Christ denying himself for others, as the occasion offered.

But by and by the demand became too difficult. In other words the Church ceased to be sufficiently Christian. Then was made the great mistake—surely the greatest mistake that any Church on earth has ever made—Christians were divided into two classes. In the one class were those who

gave themselves to self-denial, in the other those who were not expected so to do. They were all called Christians, but to mark the distinction between them, those who gave themselves to self-denial were known as 'religious.'

It was a double disaster. It was a disaster for the religious. Their very title became a technical one. And what did it signify? Not self-denial for the sake of others, but self-denial for its own sake. More than that. The very self-denial itself ceased to be voluntary and became enforced obedience to a system of rules and regulations which fettered every free action and arrested even every free thought.

But if it was a disaster for the religious it was a greater disaster for all the rest. The profession of Christianity for the great multitude of Christians was deliberately declared to be nothing but a profession. The Church knew that Christianity consisted in self-denial, and yet it said to all but the very few religious, You can be Christians without denying yourselves. And the Christian multitude accepted the easy doctrine.

How is it now? Surely the Free Catholics will allow us to say that if the Reformation did nothing else it destroyed the distinction between the 'religious' and the rest. But it is open to Free Catholics or any other to add that what the Reformation did was to abolish the religious without making the non-religious self-denying. And that is the damning fact to-day.

That is the fact from which we cannot free our fathers, and from which we have not the courage to free ourselves. Christ did a daring thing when He made Christianity consist in self-denial. Too daring, we say. It cannot be done. It never has been done. It never will be done. Human nature cannot rise to it. Insist upon it and Christianity will disappear. It will go down before some other of the religions of the world, the religion of Buddha, perhaps, or of Muhammad.

Christianity would go down before Buddhism or Muhammadanism? Not before Buddhism. For Buddhism demands self-denial absolute and unrewarding. And not before Muhammadanism. For Muhammadanism is reward and nothing else. Christ did two daring things. He made Christianity consist in self-denial and swept the ground from beneath the Buddha's feet. For every act of self-denial He offered an immediate reward and swept the ground from beneath the feet of Muhammad.

We come then to the reward.

A volume of sermons by the late Canon SCOTT HOLLAND, hitherto unpublished in book form, has been gathered together by the Rev. Christopher CHESHIRE, and has been published by Messrs. Longmans under the title of *Facts of the Faith* (7s. 6d. net). Mr. CHESHIRE contributes a short Introduction to the volume, in which he claims a high place for Scott-Holland as a preacher. The highest of all indeed. For he says, 'Up to the moment when death claimed him he was the greatest, much the greatest, of living preachers.'

But Mr. CHESHIRE speaks as one who heard Scott Holland preach. He does not say that those will agree with him who only read his sermons. Yet there are sermons in this very volume of an originality of thought, an insight into the mind of Christ, and a richness of expression, of which it might be possible to say that no living preacher could both preach and publish them. One of these sermons deals with the subject of reward.

Its text is well chosen: 'But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted' (Lk 14<sup>10, 11</sup>).

'So,' he says, 'that is the result of being humble, is it? "Go up higher; have worship." Shall we not all do well to be humble at this rate? It will be easy enough to sit down meekly in the lower room, if our position of inferiority has only got to last until someone arrives to bid us move up to a more deserving situation. Is it, then, but a preliminary condition, this Christian humility, which we must pass through in order to leave it behind? Is it merely the proper mode by which to make our approach to a higher dignity, by which to appeal to those who can authoritatively recognize and approve and promote us? If so, we shall sit on there in the chosen place where humility so aptly reveals itself, always expecting our probation to end, always listening for the good word that will release us from our self-imposed restraint. "Friend, go up higher." How we shall leap to hear the salutation! How gaily we shall be off to receive our due reward!'

But that word arrests him. 'Reward,' he says, 'that is the perilous word.' And you are with him at once. 'Yet that is the word of which the Gospel is never in the least afraid. It always parades rewards, and more especially in cases like that in my text, where it is emphasizing the moral necessity and self-forgetfulness of humility. It appears almost to revel in the irony by which it contrasts the surrendering of the sacrificing self and the immediate and abundant reward which its self-sacrifice is sure to reap. If, for instance, it is dwelling on those inner practices of devotion, which belong peculiarly to the pure will and the hidden intention, then it is just here that it delights in the refrain, "Your Father which seeth in secret shall reward you openly." Hide your prayers, hide your alms, hide your fasts; let no eye notice them; disguise them; seek no public recognition of them; have no regard to external opinion; have no ulterior purpose; seek no gain, no applause; be unconscious of what you are doing; hush it all up from every eye, even your own; let not your own left hand know what your right hand is doing; retreat back into the inner-

most chamber of your soul; and there, without the shadow of a passing movement of self-consciousness, lose the sense of yourself, and of your needs, and of your personal position in the absorption of prayer. Beat out of your inner will all egotistic desire by real spiritual fasts and scourgings, by the severe discipline that is worked out in those secret recesses of the soul, alone with yourself in the dark, with all doors shut, with all the world's attention barred, with all that could blur or stain the pure intention of self-devotion utterly excluded and expunged, with the last remnant of egoism driven under and vanquished. Do all this, and then what happens? Why then your Heavenly Father, who sees all that has been done in the inner secrecy, flings open the doors, calls you out into the open, bids all eyes be turned upon you, signalizes far and wide His joyful approval, heaps upon you in full daylight the glad signs of His favour. "Your Father which seeth in secret shall reward you openly." This is the thrice-repeated refrain, as if our Lord would proclaim this large final publicity of reward.'

Always it is so—we must quote SCOTT HOLLAND still. 'It startles us in the paradoxes of the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Everything shall be theirs. The great inheritance shall simply tumble into them; gift upon gift, largess upon largess, victory upon victory, royalty after royalty—all shall be theirs just because they crept out of sight, and asked for nothing, and stripped themselves of desire, and forswore ambition, and abhorred triumph, and hated possession, and shrunk from power, and lived only to make surrender. Because they wanted nothing, therefore they shall have everything; because they are meek, therefore the whole round earth shall be theirs for their royal inheritance.'

Now the first thing that SCOTT HOLLAND sees in this immediate offer of reward is its boldness. We have already spoken of the daring of Christ. SCOTT HOLLAND speaks of the boldness of His

gospel. Its boldness lies in the narrow ridge along which the follower of Christ has to walk between self-denial on the one side and self-seeking on the other. For every act of self-denial you are offered a reward. But if you allow a touch of calculation to discolour the impulse of self-sacrifice then the sacrifice is tainted and the reward cancelled. Lose your life and you will save it. But you must lose your life without a thought of saving it. Lose it in order to the saving of it and you have never lost it at all.

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How could Christ dare to say it? Ah! We have come to the secret now. We cannot hold it back any longer. Christ knew that men are really capable of acting on motives which prohibit all idea of ulterior personal interest. If there is failure it is not the incapacity of men to be moved that causes it, it is not the incapacity of any man. It is the insufficiency of the motive. Christ knew that He had a sufficient motive, sufficient for every man that would ever come into the world, the motive of love for Himself. The only daring was to throw that motive open to every man's apprehension. But of course it had to be thrown open. For there is no constraint in love.

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One thing remains. We have said that the reward is immediate. It is more than that. It is contemporaneous. 'We do not first lose our life in order that we may gain it; but by losing it, and in the act of losing it, we gain it. They are simply the obverse and reverse of the same act. We go on losing it, and so go on gaining it. The first condition is no mere preliminary; it never ceases to be the one condition on which the result takes place. The impulse, the instinct to seek the lower place, is itself the secret of a responsive discovery by which we find ourselves translated to a higher room.'

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Here is the answer to that puzzling and most prevalent objection to Christianity, that it is a religion of weakness. Does Christ say, 'Take the

lowest room?' He says also, 'Friend, go up higher.' 'The Christian life'—we quote SCOTT HOLLAND again—'is a life of energy, of aspiration, of exaltation, of heroic ambition. Always it is mounting on eagles' wings, always it is inheriting new powers. Meekness is not weakness, but the secret of all our strength; for if we only distrust and deny ourselves, and trust entirely in the force of God, acting in us, there is nothing that we cannot aspire to do; there is no glory that may not be achieved, no adventure too hazardous to risk, no hope too splendidly daring. "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." That is St. Paul's confident assertion. Because he can do nothing, because he is crucified, because he is dead to himself, because he confesses himself to be the chief of sinners, because he is weak, and worthless, and empty, and vain, therefore for that very reason there is nothing that he cannot do. Therefore he labours more abundantly than they all, yet not he but the grace of God in him. Our worthlessness is the measure of our worth. If once we knew our own unworthiness, then in would pour the full tide of God's energy to fill our emptiness, to recoup our failure. "With God all things are possible." Now, with God, and in God, we may dream the great dreams; we may set out on the heroic hope; we may nourish the vast ambition.'

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So, then, this is the gospel of the grace of God. What an opportunity we have to-day to preach it. We cannot move without the memory clinging to us and controlling our thoughts, the memory of those men who, for a great motive, put aside all the comforts and conveniences of life in order to deny themselves for others, men who turned their backs upon the tears of mother and wife and children and even the love of life itself. What have we to say to the fathers and mothers, the wives and children of these men? We have among us men who put it all aside and went forth ready to sacrifice their own lives also, but who have returned to listen to our gospel again. What have we to say to them?