

## THE INWARD REVELATION OF THE SON.\*

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“When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me.”—GAL. i. 15, 16.

WHATEVER may be the precise meaning of these words, it is obvious that the apostle uses them to mark that great change in his life which was to him a new creation. Though the thought of Christ within the soul is familiar to him, and indeed fundamental, the interior revelation of the Son by the Father’s good pleasure occurs only once in his writings, and arrests our deep attention. It is a striking point of union between St. Paul and St. John : the Pauline form of “He that hath the Son hath the life.”

But the specific “revelation” of the Son obviously connects itself with two other revelations that are referred to in the text. There was a previous manifestation to him when he was “called” on the way to Damascus : as he says to the Corinthians “He appeared to me also.” And the Son of God was revealed in him that he “might preach Him among the Gentiles ;” or “make all men see,” or “bring to light,” as he says to the Ephesians, the dispensation of the mystery of the Gospel. If therefore, keeping up the unity of this one idea, we regard St. Paul’s

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whole career as summed in the revelation of Christ to him, in him, and through him, we shall catch the spirit of his meaning and be faithful to the ruling phraseology of his personal testimony.

This testimony is specially appropriate as an example to you, who are preparing for the special service of the ministry, and some to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. In a certain sense the words belong as we shall see to the apostle alone; and in a certain sense they belong to him as representing all Christian ministers. But, while this is the case, there can be no doubt that in every thing essential this threefold description of a Christian career is appropriate for all. To every one who becomes in the deepest meaning of the term His servant, Christ appears that He may arrest and claim him; in his heart the Lord is revealed as the secret of his life and strength; and his new life must be a perpetual reflection and proclamation of his Redeemer. Then let us all seek our own in this testimony, and while we listen ask for the influence of the Spirit of consecration.

## I.

We well know with what solemn exultation the apostle is wont to refer to the great event which ended his own false life and began the true life of his Lord in him. How often did he travel that journey from Jerusalem to Damascus! What mid-day sun ever passed over his head that did not recall the heavenly vision to which he was "not disobedient." Now that vision or appearance of Jesus by the wayside was twofold in its design: in

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judgment as to the guilty past, in mercy as a call to the new future. And what it was to Saul it is to each of us. "At midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me." Whose glory was that? The very words might of themselves explain; for there is only one Sun which in the New Testament is said again and again to eclipse the sun of nature. But here our Lord acknowledges Himself, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest!" It is Jesus therefore as a Lord, a Judge, an enemy of his pride, a King coming against his ten thousand with twenty thousand. This revelation is one of holy displeasure. Saul had devoted his great faculties, and his much learning, and his high social influence, to the ruin of the cause of the Nazarene. He was in the full tide of his persecuting career, when suddenly the Lord met him: not by His convincing Spirit, but, in this case and for once, in His own person; the same Lord whom Stephen saw standing and who did not sit down again until He had inflicted His blessed punishment on Stephen's persecutor. He looked upon him and, to use his own language elsewhere, he "died:" as John "fell as one dead" for love, so Saul fell from fear. For it was fear. "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad." The glance of Jesus was the same which one day will be like flaming fire devouring the adversary. After Saul became Paul he remembered that vision of judgment: "Last of all, He appeared unto me also!" As Simon Peter never forget the look that for a time at least broke his heart, so Paul never forgot the look and the voice

that made him lick the dust. "Whom thou persecutest!" That was all the Saviour said; but hear how the penitent, a lifelong penitent, expands it when he is ready to be offered up, and after he has humanly speaking expiated his offence by a life of deep devotion: "a blasphemer, or persecutor and injurious!" Expiated, did I say? Never did this penitent feel that his offence was expiated: that first revelation of the Lord's wounded majesty survived all his wonderful subsequent revelations and haunted him to the end! It was, however, an extraordinary manifestation to the "great apostle," as we call him: though he would have deprecated this epithet, being "less than the least!" It was a manifestation of wrath, as would have been proved if he had been disobedient to the heavenly vision. As it was, he who went to put the saints in prison was made a prisoner himself, shut up three days and three nights in a deeper darkness than the loss of his sight would account for: for though he had in a measure received his commission, he understood it not and his sins were not yet "washed away." Nor had he yet "arisen" out of the prostration into which his future Master's revelation had cast him.

Thus, brethren, does the Lord deal with every enemy whom He receives and transforms into a friend. Of course there may be great varieties in the manner and effect of this external appearance to a man at his conversion. Some the Lord calls without this judicial visitation: at least, the visitation is not one that arrests in a course of mad rebellion. But few there are who enter on the service of Jesus

without having first to fall down before the majesty of His mediatorial glory. Have you been thus smitten by the sword of the Redeemer's merciful wrath? Do you remember your own midday, when the Saviour effectually wakened you from your sleep of sin, stopped you on your way of folly and converted you thoroughly from your past life? Then you can enter into the spirit of the apostle's grateful remembrance. You have not so wonderful a tale to tell of Christ's first manifestation of Himself: the only miracle was the change in all your feeling, a miracle to yourself alone. It was to you a quiet revelation through the word by the Spirit to the inner man. Suffice that it brought down your pride and humbled you at the feet of Jesus.

But this was not only a judicial appearance to the persecuting Saul. It was also a call, as the Galatian text tells us: a call, that is, to submit to the mediatorial authority and give himself up to the absolute disposal of Christ. The set time had come when he, the elect vessel separated from the womb, was to be invited to enter on his vocation. I say, invited; for we must not regard his predestination as a decree that impressed him into the Lord's service independently of his own volition. He was set apart, but with the foresight of his own submission. The apostle himself evidently considered the whole scene as an appeal to his will through his heart: "Wilt thou be My servant? Go to Damascus, and consider well My claims; and let My servant Ananias know thy mind and purpose." He testifies that he was not disobedient. He went to the house

which was to be for a season his prison, and there reflected : on his past Judaic hatred, on the many presentiments he had had, on the instances of his deliberate resistance of the unknown Spirit of Christ pleading with him, on the wonderful appearance, on the sacrifices he must make, on the amazing glimpse of duty set before him, and on the new world generally that was opening around to his view. He fixed his purpose at once and for ever ; and when Ananias came, as Martha came to Mary, with his " He calleth thee ! " the captive had already made the full surrender.

If we are the true servants of Jesus we also have renounced and yielded all. The appearance of Christ to the soul in holy displeasure is not perhaps so rigorous a necessity in every case. But no one, however early blessed with grace, enters on the perfect service of the Redeemer without pondering and yielding to His secret call. " He calleth thee ! " one may say of every soul sooner or later. If you are His, you remember your deliberate obedience to the call. Perhaps you are now hearing it. I may speak to some who are still under the effect of the first appearance : prostrate, not in terror and awe and blindness, but in doubt and the pains of an unsettled purpose. Imitate the apostle, and give the solemn hours to deep consideration. Think of the foolish past. Think of the golden opportunity afforded now. Think of the great future which shall open before you. And, having pondered well, tell the Ananias that comes from Jesus that you are ready to be His servant, wholly, devotedly, and for ever.

## II.

So far all has been external. But when the apostle passes to his personal experience of the Gospel, he uses another variation on the language of Christ's appearance. It is not now the Saviour's appearing to him, but the good pleasure of God revealing His Son within his soul; and there is very much to ponder in the remarkable word itself. Though the expression occurs only here, it is one which we feel at once to be a profound and perfect definition of the whole mystery of the Christian life. Here we have no question between the apostolic privilege and that of the common Christian. It is simply the grandest and most sublime formula ever used for that doctrine of an indwelling Christ with which the New Testament abounds: at least ever since the Saviour said, "I in you and you in Me." We might indeed be tempted to think that the apostle refers to the revelation of the Gospel made to him. But that will come by and by. Meanwhile, let us hold fast this one meaning: the manifestation of the Son of God within his soul. It is the apostle's highest and deepest expression for the mystery of our new life. That Christ in us is the secret of our regeneration is the doctrine of all the New Testament. St. John says: "He that hath the Son hath the life." The Master of John indirectly said it, "I in you and ye in Me:" illustrated as these words were by the doctrine of eating His flesh, and by the relation of branches to the vine. But St. Paul has given us the widest variety of parallels. In the next chapter he says that he no

longer himself lived but Christ in him. And, again, that he laboured for the Galatians till Christ was formed within them : as a new life is formed in the womb. But here he is very bold, and says that it pleased God to manifest or "reveal His Son in me." What could that be, what can that be—for we are speaking of a present matter—but the divine fiat introducing or revealing the Son into the soul as its new life? Hold fast, Christian brethren, that sublime thought at all costs. Let none take it from you. Suffer yourself never to be satisfied with any lower definition of the regenerate life than this. Take it in all its simplicity; and let it interpret all others, while itself is interpreted by none. It is the queen and mistress of all the definitions: all others lead up to it and derive from it their perfection. Run them all over in your mind, and you will see that here is their common crown. The genuine and consummate Christian has Christ "revealed" in him: not only "formed" as the mother bears another unconscious life; not "created" in him, which seems unsuitable; not merely given to him as if superadded; but the right word is "revealed." As the Son is revealed in the flesh, in human nature, giving a new and divine personality to that nature, which rules and sanctifies and glorifies it, so the Son is revealed in the penitent prepared by the revelation that came upon him and to him. He becomes conscious of a higher, nobler life than his own; than that which his first father gave him. His Lord is within him, a sacred, unspeakable mystery of holy life which made the apostle say "I live, yet not I: Christ liveth in me." That is the con-



summation of all former appearances of the Son of God to the man whom He would make His own.

But do not forget that remarkable expression, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." This does not mean, any more than the other terms referred to, that there was a sovereign decree absolutely and independently flashing the new light of life into the soul of Paul; but it says that after the preparations in which we do something, indeed do a great deal, the act of regeneration is the calm exercise of omnipotent power: like that which commanded the light to shine out of darkness, it commands the light to shine on the soul from the face of Christ internally revealed. The final and perfect gift of the Son as a new life is the direct and absolute act of God. In the preliminaries which lead to it we must co-operate with Him. In the work of our repentance and submission under the mighty hand of the convincing Spirit, we have much work to do that never will be done for us. In our yielding to the Saviour's call we have also much to do: in laying aside every impediment and following the voice of the Lord whithersoever it leadeth us. Up to the sacred hour, the sacred moment when this sun rises upon our internal world, when the life in God really begins, we are and must be active. But when the elect and set time has come, then the good pleasure of God begins. "It pleased God:" for this most precious revelation you must wait. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it to me as thou wilt!" as she said in whom He was revealed as in no other. So must you wait, until this your change come. The Son of God must be "revealed" in you: there is no word in human

speech that more plainly expresses a distinct act of the voice and will of God. And it is most important to remember this. It is the law of a full participation in the Christian covenant, viewed under all its aspects. We offer much penitent obedience to the law ourselves; but there is a moment when the justifying word is spoken. We do much ourselves to put away our defilement; but there is a moment when we are sprinkled and fully accepted on the altar. So we must wait, amidst the full activity of the life of repentance, for that supreme word which says to the soul: "Receive My Son, your life!"

Be on your guard therefore against mistaking the deep, eternal significance of this consummating revelation. The truth we have been dwelling on is simply this: that the external manifestations of Christ unto, or upon, or around the soul are only preparatory to His full manifestation within. Do not confound the one with the other. Because they do thus confound them, or forget the relation of the former to the latter, many remain long in a state of great imperfection. They have a certain measure of life, but not the life more abundant. They have received the manifestation on the way to Damascus, but not the revelation in Damascus itself. They have had the look cast on them that humbles and invites: they are humbled and they are trying to come; but that is all their religion. They see men as trees walking: the second touch they have not received. Or, returning to the idea of our text, their life is one spent under the sound of Christ's voice, who judging and calling stands at the door.

He has never entered Himself, though His grace may force its way in. It is a very solemn thought that much of the current religion of the day labours under this defect. It is like that of these Galatians; one concerning which the Holy Spirit says, or the church in the Spirit: "I travail for you in birth till Christ be fully formed in your souls!" How much of Christianity may be in a man without Christ! How many years may he be living with Jesus at the door, on the threshold, sending inward half His grace: but not entering yet! Am I, fellow Christians, sounding your heart? Is the word of God dividing asunder between your imperfect Christianity with Christ's revelation on you, and the perfect Christianity which is the secret of Christ within. If so, let me urge you to set apart a waiting hour; and never to rest until you know that the fourth day's sun has risen on the chaos, or, rather, until you know by its own evidence, as all revelation must be known, that the Son of God is the new and true and perfect life of your soul.

### III.

And now let me return for a moment to the peculiar vocation and prerogative of the apostle. It might seem as if he meant to say that the Son of God was revealed within him in order that through him the Gospel of the Son of God should be preached to the Gentiles. But elsewhere he speaks as if he regarded the outward revelation of the Saviour as a necessary result of His internal revelation in every Christian. In either case the glory of

mortal life in the flesh is the reflection of Christ's glory.

When speaking of the revelation of the Son in the soul of Paul, we could not think of any difference between him and other Christians. But now that we speak of the revelation of Christ through the elect vessel we must make a distinction. The person and work of Christ have been revealed through him as through no other. St. John was the highest medium for the reflection of the glory of the divinity of the Son ; but St. Paul was the highest medium for the manifestation of His mediatorial work. And in the neighbourhood of the text he shows us how that work was revealed to him. Not having had the privilege of the other apostles to receive from the Lord's own lips the instructions which expanded into perfection at the Pentecost, he was taken into Arabia, and there taught in such a manner that he could always say, "I received nothing from man : all from my Lord Himself." There are sundry passages in the epistles to the Corinthians which seem indeed to indicate that the holy apostles were, as instruments in the revelation of Jesus to the church, almost on a level with the word itself. As from the face of Christ radiated the glory of God, so from the face of the apostles radiated the glory of Christ. And through St. Paul, one may say, some special revelations were given beyond those of all the others. Very much that the early disciples had not heard and that the Twelve had only dimly received even at the Pentecost, was made known by revelation to this elect organ of the will of Jesus. Through him in a

very eminent sense all men were "made to see the mystery."

We glorify God in the apostolic theologian ; but we feel that the best part of his example is this, that his whole life and character show us how the internal revelation of Christ must light up the Christian's whole being, leaving no part dark. Sometimes St. Paul dwells on his special prerogatives ; though only when the authentication of his mission compelled him to glory. Generally, and with much deeper joy, he exults in making himself an example of the effect of an internal glory like that of his Lord streaming through into the whole economy of daily life. "For me to live is Christ." You know how constantly he speaks of himself as a man in Christ, or as one in whom Christ is : so constantly that it becomes his formula and watchword for a Christian. Let us for ourselves remember that every one of us is called to be a living epistle representing in commoner terms the living Gospel of Christ. If you seize that idea and live by it the effect will be wonderful on your life. You will come to regard yourself as simply a mirror, reflecting back to the Lord, but still more around on others, His glory. A mirror rather than a glass : not through it studying Him, though that is also true and blessedly true, but from it reflecting Him. Yet, if you look cunningly at the words you will observe that even the mirror does not do justice to the meaning. It is very much more, with all deference to St. Paul, than receiving and reflecting rays from a mirror when I am said to have the Lord revealed in me that He may be revealed through me : His thoughts more highly thought out in mine ;

His affections beating in my poor heart; His heavenly motives animating my aims and giving selfishness and self its mortal wound; His charity distending to infinity my love to God and man; His righteousness helping my righteous soul to satisfy and dare the law; His divine-human grace within me working out in the sight of heaven and earth the meaning of His own Christian religion! This is the thrice blessed revelation of Christ through us!

Finally, I must carry your thought back to the remarkable expression of the text: "that I might preach Him." You will feel better than any description the exquisite hurry and confusion of the thought that can hardly linger upon self for a moment, not even as a stepping-stone for reaching others, but goes precipitately on: "to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him to the Gentiles!" It is not too much to say that the very theory of Christianity to this apostle, not merely its finest enthusiasm, is that when once Christ is in the heart the whole life must be entirely His. "God shall be in all" in due time. Meanwhile, the religion of this lower earth and within the Christian Church is the whole life swayed and swayed absolutely by the claims of Jesus. Nothing is imperfect, nothing is omitted, if "to live is Christ." That is the lesson of the conversion, regeneration and obedience of Saul afterwards called Paul. And that is the lesson of the entire New Testament, and its general assembly of the Redeemer's servants. It is the glory of Christ alone that we are called once for all to reflect upon the world. This is specially, it may be, incumbent on those who are entirely and exclusively

set apart to the ministry. Nothing must stream forth now from them but the rays of His illumination : not any lights of philosophy or science ; not the poor sickly radiance of their own genius and talent ; not the refracted and reflected rays of public opinion ; not the light of their own schemes of divinity ; not anything that is theirs. But Christ alone must shine through them. And every Christian in another and perhaps deeper sense is called to the same dignity. Then let us, beloved in the Lord, resolve this day to dedicate ourselves anew to this our vocation. Let us ask of God that the Son who is our life may be more clearly than ever revealed in us : the last film of doubt being removed. Let us make it our own business to put away everything that might dim the reflection : that so our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us and through us in life and in death and for ever : to Whom be all honour eternally. Amen.