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→*SERMONS*←

DOWNFALL OF CHRISTIANITY.

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The sun shall be turned into darkness.—ACTS ii., 20.

SOLAR eclipse is here prophesied to take place about the time of the destruction of ancient Jerusalem. Josephus, the historian, says that the prophecy was literally fulfilled, and that about that time there were strange appearances in the heavens. The sun was not destroyed, but for a little while hidden.

Christianity is the rising sun of our time, and men have tried with the uprolling vapors of scepticism and the smoke of their blasphemy to turn the sun into darkness. Suppose the archangels of malice and horror should be let loose a little while and be allowed to extinguish and destroy the sun in the natural heavens. They would take the oceans from other worlds and pour them on this luminary of the planetary system, and the waters go hissing down amid the ravines and the caverns, and there is explosion after explosion, until there are only a few peaks of fire left in the sun, and these are cooling down and going out until the vast continents of flame are reduced to a small acreage of fire, and that whitens and cools off until there are only a few coals left, and these are whitening and going out until there is not a spark left in all the mountains of ashes and the valleys of ashes and the chasms of ashes. An extinguished sun. A dead sun. A buried sun. Let all worlds wail at the stupendous obsequies.

discovery to another. The statesman cannot say it; he is not allowed to see the full accomplishment of his schemes. But though Jesus lived only thirty-three years, He was able to say of His life-work, as He surveyed it from the cross, that it was perfectly satisfactory.

I. His fulfilment of the Old Testament was finished. There is hardly a chapter that does not speak of Him. Patriarchs with glowing faces. Poets with heaven-born minstrelsy. Prophets with tongues of fire. They all wrote of Him. Their statements were sometimes apparently contradictory. A lion, yet a lamb. A priest, yet a victim. Fairest among ten thousand, yet without beauty. Sinless, yet sin-laden. But as He surveyed them, He saw that every lock had been unbolted and every jewel was glistening on His breast.

II. The Mosaic Ritual had finished its

mission and was at an end. Jesus Himself had instituted it, and now it was He who declared that its preparatory office was complete.

III. The redemption of man was finished. Nothing needed to be added. No stitch to the seamless robe. No mite to the infinite ransom-price. He had perfectly obeyed the holy requirements of the law. He had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. We therefore, who are one with Him, are to the windward of the storm.

IV. His own sufferings were finished. St. Luke leads us to think that these words were spoken in a very loud voice. They were the shout of a conqueror, proclaiming His victory to heaven which stood on tip-toe; and to hell; and to earth. Your salvation is finished. The only crime that can ruin you now is to reject the salvation which Christ achieved.

THE BIBLE'S "SUMMUM BONUM."

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The Bible is a perfectly plain and a perfectly practical book. The purpose of its giving to the world was not at all that scholars might have a field in which they might try the depth of their insight and expend their best efforts in seeking and securing truth. It was given to plain and practical men, as a prescription to cure them of the disease of sin; to busy and careless men as a trumpet call which they could not choose but hear. Its prime purpose was not to teach either a philosophy, or a science, or an art—not at all to systematize knowledge in any sphere of learning. Its prime purpose was simply to tell sinful men what a God they had, and what they practically needed to do in order to serve that God and save their souls.

It is easy to jump to the conclusion from this fact that the Bible does not teach any system whether of theology or ethics. A moment's thought will guard us, however, against so false a step. Practical maxims, earnest, simple com-

mands, necessarily imply a system of both theology and ethics. To venture upon the simple statement, "Be sure you are right and *then* go ahead," is to commit one's self to a whole theory of the universe. It is to imply that there is such a thing as right and such a thing as wrong; that it lies in man's power to distinguish between them, yea, even to *choose* between them; that it will go well or ill with him according to this choice; that, therefore, there is such a thing as good and ill desert and as reward and punishment attached to them; involving in higher reach of logic the responsibility of the human soul; and higher still the existence of a wise, holy, just, personal God to whom our duty is owed and who according to our desert will reward or punish us. Just so that other maxim, "While we live, let us live" (how many of us practically live by it!), involves likewise a whole theory of the universe, but diverse from the other. It implies that, whatever we profess, we really do not be-

lieve in a God, or a soul, or a life after death; it implies that being brutish in character we are willing to be brutes in life. It is thus impossible to give maxims to guide the life without implying in them a system of truth on which the practical teaching is based. According to the system of faith that lies in the depths of our hearts will be, therefore, the maxims by which we practically live; and out of the maxims of any man we can readily extract his faith.

It is, therefore, inevitable that the Bible, being consistent in its commands, should imply a consistent system of ethics, and it is of much importance to us to know what that system is. It does not state it, indeed, as the philosophers would state it. But it no less clearly states it than they state their own systems, and we can easily compare it with theirs. Nor, let any one imagine that because the Bible does not scientifically state its system, it has simply adopted some one of, or a hodge-podge of, the systems which are prevalent among men. Its system differs from all men-born ones just in the degree that the pure teaching of God might be expected to differ from the *residuum* of that teaching left after straining through the very open sieve of a narrow and sinful human heart. We may compare it in whatever element we will, and on every comparison we shall find biblical ethics immeasurably superior to that of the schools; we shall find that though the Bible does not present an un-human, it does present an unmistakably super-human system.

It will be sufficient for us to institute this comparison in only one point. But it will serve good ends to choose for the point the key-point of the systems—the question of the *Summum Bonum*. I call this the key-point because, of course, when it is settled everything is settled. The question, "What is the highest good which man can strive after?"—of course, on that depends everything. This is simply to say that the ideal a man has will determine the whole life of the man; of course, it must determine his notion of virtue, of duty, of motive—it determines also his whole character,

motives, modes of life. The man for instance who, practically, considers wealth the highest good in human attainment, will necessarily think it virtuous to turn the world over in the effort to get money, and it may soon not matter much to him how he gets it so only he gets it; he will hold it his duty to acquire and save it even unto cheaterly and miserliness; he will act on money-making motives; he will sink finally into a mere minting machine. According to our ideal, thus—our idea of what is the highest good—so is everything—our characters, our lives, and their issues. If it be low, so will our life be low, and our death. If it be high, so will our life be high—and that which comes after death.

Now, how does biblical ethics compare with other systems in its teaching of what is the highest good? However they may differ in other particulars, all human systems of ethics are at one in this: they all find the highest good in something *human*. They differ vastly as to what human thing it shall be—whether the pleasure of the individual, or of the race, his or its conformity to nature, or even his or its virtue. And as they differ in their idea of the thing, what constitutes it, so too in what is fitted to gain it, even when they call it by the same name. But they agree in this: they rise no higher than man, than some human quality or possession, in the assignment of their chief good. Thus by them, one and all, the attention is centered on what is human; man is bidden look no higher than himself for his ideal, and the race is elevated just as much as the boy was able to lift himself by his trousers' straps. Nay, further: man's attention being concentrated on man, he soon finds himself the type of man; and the inevitable and constant result has been that the ideal is, in the last analysis, practically found in the *individual's* happiness or development. Practically, the Epicurean sinks into a sot; the Stoic schools himself into cruel indifference to the fate of those about him; the Altruist cannot think the mass of mankind happy so long as so substantial a part of it as himself is unhappy, and thus learns to seek their happiness through his indulgence, rather than his happiness

through theirs. And thus everything ends in self-worship or self-indulgence, high or low. The world has never been able to invent anything better than this. See, then, the immense superiority of biblical ethics! It takes man out of himself, and bids him seek the highest good in the glory, not of his pitiful self, but of his all-glorious God. In no self-gratification, in no self-glorification, can he reach the height of his ideal. He is forced to look out of himself; he is necessarily lifted above himself; he is given at last a ladder to climb whose top rests securely against something other than and higher than his own head. With his eye set on glorifying his Saviour and Maker, his idea of virtue is transfigured and purified from earthly dross, his notions of duty are ennobled, his motives become holy, and his whole life divine. In this one point we can see the transforming greatness of Christian ethics.

This, I say, is the biblical idea of the *Summum Bonum*. But of course the Bible does not say in technical words "the *Summum Bonum* is the glory of God." That is the way a scientific moralist, had he not been struck dumb at the grandeur of the thought, would have put it. But the Bible was not concerned about scientific morality. It was concerned about practical morality. It was not addressed to scientific moralists. It was addressed to simple men and women. And the way it puts it—you may read it in many places, and nowhere more plainly than in I. Cor. x., 31—is: "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." How does this differ from that? Much every way; most notably of all in this: the Bible gives no statement—it gives a command. It teaches, as they said of Jesus, with authority. It comes, not coldly saying, "This is the best thing, on the whole, to do," but calmly declaring, "This is a thing which you *shall* do—on penalties." And it is well to note this sharply. There are no ifs and ands about it. It simply says, "*Do it!*"

The question for us is, are we doing it? "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." There is a sense in that that we may not all be gathering. Why, for instance, are you going to your business

house to-morrow morning? To make money? Good. For what? Consciously in order to glorify God in the wise, true, noble use of it? No? Well, then, are you a Christian? My dear lady friend, to serve what purpose are you planning to give that entertainment to-morrow? Is it in order to glorify God through it? Perhaps you never thought of that. Well, are you a Christian? What God commands is—let us face it unflinchingly—that we shall do nothing without taking absolute care to see that we are trying to glorify God in the doing of it. Now do not say, as some of you may be just ready to say, that this was never meant to apply to such every-day things as these. Paul was of a different opinion; he says it applies to the very choice of the food we eat and drink we drink—in fact, to *everything* (let us not emasculate that word) that we do. And do not say, as more of you are perhaps ready to say, that it is impossible to keep the command. What does that mean except that it is impossible to do this and at the same time live a godless or inconsistent life? It is true, indeed, that we cannot do this and at the same time be votaries of pleasure; that we cannot do this and at the same time be worshippers of wealth; that we cannot do this and at the same time be eaten up with selfishness. This is all true enough; but it is no discovery of ours. Christ himself declared that we could not serve God and Mammon. He himself asserted that we must desert the world to become His disciples. If we feel that we cannot observe this command, therefore, and leave one atom of our old self in us—remain anything like what we are—why, we are just proving that Paul was only repeating the doctrine of his Master, for that is just what Christ told His disciples too. And the beloved disciple repeats it after his own fashion also: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. . . . For *nothing that is in the world* is of the Father." How can we, then, hope to make a compromise between them?

Nor does the command stop here. The inspired writers go on to tell us what we must do, much in detail; yes, even the spirit in which we must do it. Thus, in

Philippians, Paul, after repeating this same command in essence, continues by commanding that we should moreover do all these things "without murmurings and disputings," or as we might more clearly render the words, "without grumbings or questionings"—without grumbling at the difficulty, or hardness (shall we even say harshness?) of the task, or stopping to consider narrowly and question as to just how far obedience is necessary. This is nothing more than to say that God not only wishes His command outwardly obeyed, but also inwardly. It is not obeying it—we are not glorifying God—either when we are showing that we, His servants, find Him a hard Master, or when our effort is, not to yield Him unquestioning service, running even beyond the command in eager love, but to be careful to do no more for Him than we must. Would you think your own children were living only to your honor, if they yielded you only such obedience?

Although the Bible does not stiffly say, therefore, "The *Summum Bonum* is the glory of God," it does much better. It

says practically and to every man in words that every man can understand: Do everything you do, consciously in order to glorify God in the doing of it, and do it all freely and gladly with no grumbling at having to do it and with no desire to confine the doing of it to the narrowest possible limits. Thus, though the Bible does not discourse learnedly as to the *Summum Bonum* or the nature of virtue, or duty, or motives, it does manage to place very sharply before the mind and sink very deeply into the heart of the really earnest reader, very clear notions of what is the highest good, what is virtuous, what duties are required, and what motives are high and to be followed. It lacks all technical terms—the Christian man may not know one scientific phrase; but if he has hearkened to the teaching of "THE BOOK," he will know how to govern his life and to be good. He will know ethics practically if not scientifically. Is not this the object of all ethics? Does not herein lie the supreme claim of Christian ethics to be the one true and adequate system?

MISSION WORK IN LONDON.

BY GIDEON DRAPER, D.D. (METHODIST EPISCOPAL), NEW YORK.

(Our London Letter.)

An account of one of the remarkable and model missions in this great city must be both interesting and instructive to the readers of *THE TREASURY*, and helpful and inspiring to Christian workers where there are similar needs. It has been an exceptional year, as the London City Mission has just celebrated its semi-centennial jubilee. Amid the many exercises, there was the characteristic English "Breakfast," and an especial sacramental service. The first hour of the second half century of the society's existence was set apart for special prayer. The usual annual meeting found place among the countless "May Meetings," although it was in June, and the "Jubilee" had an unique celebration upon a later occasion. With the uniform courtesy and

hearty welcome of our English brethren the writer was permitted to be present at many of these gatherings, and given exceptional advantages for information. Historic Exeter Hall was the theatre for the public meetings, whose walls have reverberated for half a century with eloquent utterances in the interest of every benevolent, charitable and religious agency known to Christendom. Large and enthusiastic audiences greeted the deservedly popular "London City Mission." Unsectarian, it has a warm place in the affections of every branch of the Christian Church. It may well say, "My monument is around me," for throughout the five-millioned city there are proofs of its omnipresent beneficence and Christliness.

Upon the jubilee occasion its four hun-