ESSEX HALL LECTURE

HUMAN FORGIVENESS

BY

ALFRED HALL, M.A., D.D.

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NOTE

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14, Gordon Square,
London, W.C.1

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ITS IMPLICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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THIS lecture is a plea for the consideration of human forgiveness, for the study of its meaning and principles and the enunciation of its implications and responsibilities. From the days of Jesus onwards the words " I believe in the forgiveness of sins " have been repeated by his followers, and divine forgiveness has occupied a leading place in theology. Around it have swung the controversies concerning the methods and conditions of salvation which have split the Church asunder from the time of the Protestant Reformation to the present day. But the doctrine of human forgiveness has not been developed and given the place it ought to occupy. To many men, especially in times of strife and competition, forgiveness seems foolishness, or weakness, or a violation of justice.

But other obstructions, theological in character, have prevented its development. No one, as he reviews the story of Biblical study, can help being impressed by the ability, industry and patience of Christian scholars. Thousands of volumes bear witness to the sincerity and labour with which they have striven to elucidate the Gospel of the New Testament, and history tells of multitudes of preachers who have made great sacrifices to make their conception of the Gospel known. They have proclaimed the forgiveness of sins, but they have failed to make clear the nature of human forgiveness and the responsibilities it entails. They have often been prevented from making a free study of the subject, owing to their prepossession that justice must be satisfied before pardon can be granted.

An examination of the religious faiths of the East reveals a similar neglect with the exception of the Taoism

of Laotze, the Chinese philosopher. In classical literature of the West we have the statement ascribed to Socrates by Plato in his *Crito* on the eve of his death, " We ought not to repay wrong by wrong, no matter what we have suffered from another." He was conscious of the singularity of his idea, for he added, " I know that few men hold or ever will hold this opinion." But " it is never right to do wrong or to repay wrong with wrong, or to avenge ourselves on any man who harms us by harming him in return."

In modern ethical theories, forgiveness has been allotted a surprisingly small place. One turns to volumes by moral philosophers to find no serious attention given to it and little reference to the problems involved. An outstanding exception is Bishop Butler, who devotes the eighth and ninth of his *Fifteen Sermons* to a penetrating inquiry into the nature of resentment and of forgiveness.

Because of this neglect, men in their oppositions to their fellows have been left without guidance and exhortation, and what is more disastrous still, nations have been so ignorant of the implications of forgiveness that in their efforts to secure permanent peace they have often laid the foundations of future strife. In their negotiations after war the spirit of forgiveness has been absent with a few noteworthy exceptions.*

Further, the influence of theology on our laws, customs and behaviour has been far greater than is generally supposed. For instance, the unforgiving harshness shown by judges and magistrates to delinquents is traceable to the doctrine of the one chance, the doctrine that a man's fate in the hereafter is once and for all decided by his life or rather his beliefs on earth, though in recent times there has been some relaxation in the severity of judgments and sentences and the probation system is operating with good results. But the one fall, however great the temptation, has been punished by lifelong disgrace. The offenders have been dealt with, as though repentance and reform were quite beyond the scope of their achievement. Little account has been taken of the fact that sometimes

* See pp. 25 f.

the revulsion from an evil once committed may be so great as to rule out for ever the possibility of its repetition.

This attitude of society and of the law has rendered the efforts of delinquents to be loyal citizens difficult and sometimes impossible. The chief aim of legal punishment, as Mr. Leo Page argues in his volume on *Crime and Community*, " is the protection of society," but if the doctrine of Christian forgiveness had been understood and made operative, the purpose of legal punishment would have been remedial and educative rather than expiatory and retributive, and the death penalty would have been abolished long ago, for there is nothing redemptive in hanging a man. Thus a theology which is wrong and mistaken not only fails to enlighten the mind and to purify the spirit, but actually twists ideas into uncharitable and dangerous forms and destroys such graces as forgiveness which should direct and govern human relations. A theology which is lacking in mercy issues in estimates and practices which are lacking in mercy.

Yet the quality which distinguishes the message of Jesus is his insistence that God forgives, truly and fully forgives, and his children must forgive one another. Forgiveness with him is no mere aside : it is at the centre of his message. It is so prominent that he makes it the precondition of worship and of every approach to God. " If thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift " (Matt. v. 23). It is true, as Westermarck points out, that " The injunctions of forgiveness and kindness to enemies are by no means exclusively Christian tenets " (*Christianity and Morals*, p. 43), but it must be stated strongly that no other religious leader sets them in the high place which Jesus allots to them.

When we have learnt the principles of forgiveness, we have to discover the right methods of applying them. That is a task which is so beset with problems that generations may pass before it is fulfilled. Liberal Religion is fitted for this work, owing to its faith in man

and in his ability to " erect himself above himself." No help seems forthcoming from the recent theologies of Niebuhr, Barth and Brunner, with their low estimates of human possibility. Brunner writes, with a frankness which almost startles us, " All the ways of man are sinful ways. There is no road to innocence for the guilty, no road to peace for God's enemy " (*The Theology of Crisis*, p. 60). The intensive study of the subject by Dr. H. R. Mackintosh in his volume, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, is impaired by his idea that man is alienated from God by " the dreary pain of *the bad conscience* . . . evil taints it in every element " (p. 52).

Before an era, in which forgiveness takes its rightful place, can arrive, certain objections to the idea of forgiveness have to be overcome. One is the notion that no transgression can be blotted out and no offence can be really forgiven, seeing that the law of cause and effect works with unerring certainty.

> The Moving Finger writes, and, having writ,
> Moves on : nor all thy Piety and Wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
> Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

It was the distressful lament of Lady Macbeth, " What's done cannot be undone." But forgiveness is not the undoing of an offence, but an attitude towards it which furthers the formation and development of new relations in fellowship.

In human affairs we cannot formulate any hard and fast law of cause and effect. We find in life that the values of the past are subject to perpetual flux. Some event which troubled us a few days ago is soon forgotten and some other event which seemed of no concern at the time assumes large proportions. As Dr. P. H. Wicksteed said in his Essex Hall Lecture, " The past is not, in any effective manner, irrevocable. We may make it, in large measure, what we will." Maurice Maeterlinck wrote, " In reality, if we think of it, the past belongs to us quite as much as the present, and is far more malleable than the future " (*The Buried Temple*). Thus Peter's denial of his Master deepened his loyalty, and Paul's zeal in

persecuting the Christians prior to his conversion transformed him into an ardent apostle. We may exaggerate any past dispute and make it the source of greater evil, or we may transfigure it by forgiveness, until it creates a better understanding. Let us get it clearly into our thought that forgiveness is neither a wiping out of the past nor an attempt to reinstate conditions just as they were, but an effort to redeem the present and the future through an enlightened estimate of past events.

The same holds good of guilt. The actual guilt of an evil deed is supposed to remain so that nothing can alter it. But the feeling of guilt is essentially psychological in its nature and always possesses an incalculable factor. The same deed may carry a variable range of guiltiness. Otherwise no charge of murder would be reduced to one of manslaughter, and no man who had committed an offence inadvertently would be dismissed from a court without a stain on his character. "Thank God!" exclaimed Edmund Burke, "guilt was never a rational thing." But such thankfulness is not always justified, for a saint is often too deeply grieved over some peccadillo, while a villain is not troubled by his most heinous crime. We may be sorry for both that they have lost the sense of proportion, but they supply proof enough that guilt is irrational. Owing to the inward nature of guilt it is not possible to assess the guilt of other people, which may be the reason why Jesus urged his disciples not to judge others. First offences may be due to ignorance as much as to evil tendency. Repetition obviously increases the actual guilt of any wrong, but it diminishes the consciousness of guilt. Because of this inward character of guilt, it is almost impossible to discover the extent of the forgiveness required or the readiness with which it should be offered. Moreover, the consciousness of guilt is the surest sign that the offender is not spiritually dead, but morally alive to his failings. As Carlyle asserted, "Of all acts, is not, for a man, repentance the most divine? The deadliest sin, I say, were that same supercilious sense of no sin—that is death" (*Hero-Worship*). The sense of guilt may deepen as a man progresses in the spiritual

life. He may look back with increasing sorrow upon deeds which awakened no compunction at the time. F. W. H. Myers in his poem, *Saint Paul*, makes regret one of the chief features of his character. Thinking of the Christians whose death he had caused, the Apostle exclaims :

> Saints, did I say? with your remembered faces,
> Dear men and women, whom I sought and slew :
> Ah, when we mingle in the heavenly places
> How I will weep to Stephen and to you.

On the other hand, a man, as he reviews in the light of wider experience the evil he has done, may find that his sense of guilt decreases with good reason, and others may alter their estimate of his guiltiness. To-day we regard some of the men who suffered the supreme penalty under our law and others who were transported to Botany Bay as martyrs for freedom.

It may not be true that " to know all is to pardon all." Yet a fuller knowledge of events and a deeper understanding of human nature would make us hesitate before we impute guilt to others, especially to nations. To quote Edmund Burke again, " I do not know," he said, " the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole nation." John Morley in his study of this great statesman printed those words in italics. A nation condemned as criminal may have a majority of citizens who are naturally law-abiding and whose chief failing may be obedience induced by fear. Nothing angered the German people more than the compulsion with which they were made to sign the guilt-clause in the Treaty of Versailles, which placed the whole responsibility of the First World War upon them. It was an unwise attempt to anticipate the judgment of history. In any dispute to put all the blame upon one of the combatants and to treat any man or nation as an intractable offender is to create and establish an attitude of continued hostility. Sometimes it may be advisable that the injured person should openly acknowledge that his own attitude may have been largely responsible for the rupture, though no onlooker would bring such a charge. That is illustrated in the teaching of Old

Testament prophets. The great prophet of the exile, known as Second Isaiah, heard the Lord pleading with his people, though theirs alone was the sin, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: set forth thy cause that thou mayest be justified" (Isa. xliii. 25, 26; cf. xliv. 22). Micah, as he saw the iniquity of the people, heard the Lord asking wherein he himself had failed that they had rebelled against him: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me" (vi. 3). Hosea saw in the mercy shown by the Lord to Israel the reason why he ought to forgive his wife her unfaithfulness. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . I will not exercise the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee" (xi. 8, 9). These are lofty passages, which must be taken into account in any appraisal of the Old Testament message on forgiveness. How different from this attitude ascribed to the Lord by the prophets is that of nations, when at variance. They gain pleasure from dwelling on the vices of their opponents and are troubled if they have to credit them with virtues. It is difficult to forgive our enemies their vices, but, as Voltaire said, "to forgive our enemies their virtues—that is a greater miracle, and one which no longer happens."

Forgiveness is not the mere remission of penalties, as many people suppose. Some men even believe that that is all that forgiveness means. There are three possible relations between forgiveness and punishment. The first is the infliction of a penalty without forgiveness, as in much of the past legislation; the second is the remission of the penalty together with forgiveness of the offence; the third is forgiveness without remission of the penalty. It is this third attitude which should claim our attention. We have an instance in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Nothing can be more joyous than the welcome the son receives from the father on his return, but that does not

remove the penalty of his riotous living. He had wasted his substance and the father said to the elder brother, " All that I have is thine." In other words, your brother has had his share and yours remains, but it was meet that we should make merry and be glad over his return. Jesus even taught that the payment of reparations is not always a sign of grace or of repentance, though it may be, if made with a worthy motive. It was the publican, who did not make profession of having paid his dues, who went down to his house justified, rather than the Pharisee who did make such a profession.

" Forgive and forget " is a saying which possesses proverbial sanction, yet it is one of those sayings which lack the full wisdom which any proverb ought to enshrine. It may be that in a perfect reconciliation, the memory of the rupture may rarely be revived in the thought of either party, but when a great wrong has been done, it is well-nigh impossible to forget. Far better advice would be " remember and forgive." Resentment may be expelled by forgiveness, but memory is not under light control. The effort to forget often deepens the memory. If it were successful, the result would probably be that which Dickens has picturesquely illustrated in his Christmas story of *The Haunted Man.* The chief character, Redlaw, a college tutor, being troubled by a painful recollection of a past wrong, received from a spirit which visited him the offer of the power to banish from his mind the memory of all the sorrow, wrong and trouble of his life. He accepted the gift. The result was that he lost at the same time his tendency to sympathize with others and sank to the depths of personal misery. From being kind, he became harsh in his dealings, and his very presence brought sadness and gloom into the lives of all whom he met. After his deliverance, through forgiving instead of forgetting the wrong which had been done, his prayer was, " Lord, keep my memory green." The idea behind the saying, " forgive and forget," may be that no reference shall be made to the offence in the future, and it is true that " it is of little use to bury the hatchet, if it is remembered where it was buried." But when there has been an

offence or strife between persons or nations, they cannot live and act as though there had been no enmity and no disturbance in their relations. Harm will probably ensue, if they make the attempt. How often will men and nations need to be reminded that they can never go back to any previous condition? The relation must be a new one in the light of what has happened, and it may be a better relation, because of what has happened.

What may be termed the personal factor cannot be eliminated. Neither persons nor nations can ever regard their feuds in the same light as an onlooker. I have paid a well-merited tribute to Bishop Butler, but he has gone at least slightly astray on this aspect of the subject. In his Ninth Sermon he states that the injured person " ought to be affected towards the injurious person in the same way as any good man, uninterested in the case, would be." Such a plea for an impartial judgment is right, but the injured person cannot take the same attitude as the onlooker. Whatever his decision may be, it will change his relation to the offender. He has to do something more than make an impartial judgment. As the Bishop himself suggests in the following paragraphs, he has to discover a new temper of mind and course of behaviour, which will supply a solid foundation for future co-operation and friendship.

Summing up the teaching of Butler's Sermons, Hastings Rashdall wrote, " The duty of resentment and the duty of forgiveness are reduced [by Butler] to particular applications of the general law for promoting social well-being." He thought that, " something had been missed in this cold, calculating, utilitarian analysis," and, " that there must be more in forgiveness than the mere limitation of vengeance by the demands of public welfare " (*The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. II, p. 309). That may be true, but the duty of forgiveness must be observed to a very liberal extent out of regard for social well-being, though the practice may be open to the charge of utilitarian policy and of expediency. Personal claims must be sub-ordinated often and readily to the general good. The disputes and wars between nations must not be considered

apart from international security. How far the balance should be allowed to tip in favour of the whole may be a matter for discussion on each occasion, but many of us would maintain that any act of forgiveness and any decision which furthers the welfare of mankind must finally bring good to every nation and not least to the nation which loses the immediate advantage. No dispute to-day can be isolated. The human race is a unit, and "whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." Frederic Harrison said with truth that a Red Indian beating his squaw on a lonely prairie is committing an offence against humanity.

It has often been said that the teaching of Jesus is not original and that many of his messages can be found verbally in the Old Testament and other Hebrew literature. The answer to that comment was given by Wellhausen, when he said, "Yes, and how much more!" In the Book of Genesis we have the stories of Esau and Jacob, and of Joseph and his brethren, which tell of the spirit that forgives and redeems. In the Book of Jonah the Lord is represented as extending mercy to the heathen. But the Old Testament contains passages which breathe the spirit of hatred and revenge. Even in the writings of Jeremiah, which are full of pathos, we find the demand for vengeance on his enemies. "O Lord of hosts, that judgest righteously," he prays, "let me see thy vengeance on them" (xi. 20). In the Book of Deuteronomy, which includes many merciful regulations, we read, "Thine eye shall not pity; life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (xix. 21). We can all recall bloodthirsty verses in the Book of Psalms, but forgiveness is definitely taught in some of the later psalms and prophecies. The topmost note is struck in the Book of Proverbs, which belongs to the later Wisdom literature:

> If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat;
> And if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:
> For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,
> And the Lord shall reward thee (xxv. 21, 22).

As time passed, a change for the better took place and we

find an elevation of tone in some of the Books written between the Old and the New Testaments, in the centuries which used to be known as " the period of the divine silence." The great authority on these Books, Dr. Charles, wrote, " A study of the literature that comes between the Old and New Testaments shows that there was a steady development in every department immediately preceding the Christian era." It is of interest that Dr. Charles states that " this literature was written probably for the most part in Galilee, the home of the seer and mystic," * for Jesus lived in Galilee. Dr. Charles continues, " On the doctrine of forgiveness new light has come through a critical study of *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.*" This volume was written about the year 120 B.C., and it must have been known to Jesus. Some of its sayings impress us by their likeness to his in spirit, thought and word. Thus the Patriarch Gad says to his children, " Love ye one another from the heart : and if any man sin against thee, speak peaceably to him, and in thy soul hold not guile : and if he repent and confess, forgive him. But if he deny it, do not get into a passion with him, lest catching the poison from thee he take to swearing and so thou sin doubly." In the Old Testament Apocrypha, in Ecclesiasticus, occurs the saying, " Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done thee; And then thy sins shall be pardoned when thou prayest " (xxviii. 2).

The originality of Jesus was in his ability to select from the mass of sayings the essential truth and to place first things first. In some things he showed novelty, especially in his parables. But as Carlyle stated in his *Hero-Worship*, " The merit of *originality* is not novelty; it is sincerity." Jesus invested these old sayings with an authority which gave them power.

He stated in plain language the conditions on which we may hope for forgiveness. They are two in number and both are essential. One is obvious; sincere repentance for the wrong done. The other is that any man who seeks forgiveness must be willing to forgive the

* *Between the Old and New Testaments*, p. 147; p. 9 (Home University Library).

wrongs which have been done to him. This condition is stated in the Lord's Prayer. " Forgive us our trespasses, as [*or* because] we forgive them that trespass against us." Jesus stressed this condition in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. A certain lord had listened to the appeal of one of his servants for mercy and had forgiven him a debt amounting to approximately two and a half million pounds. No doubt the debt was put at this figure to make the disciples aware how incalculable was their indebtedness to God. The servant went out and took by the throat a fellow-servant who owed him four pounds and he refused to cancel it. When the lord heard of this, he renewed his claim and delivered the unforgiving servant to the tormentors. The comment which Jesus made was, " So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts " (Matt. xviii. 21 f). Thus he taught that repentance for wrong done is not enough. Forgiveness of others is an indispensable condition of receiving forgiveness.*

As I have stated, the Old Testament furnishes us with a few stories from which we may learn something concerning the implications and responsibilities of forgiveness. The most instructive is that of the relations between Esau and Jacob. Jacob supplanted his brother and robbed him of his birthright. Later in life, when both had prospered, they met again. Jacob sees Esau coming towards him with a band of four hundred men. He supposes that the day of reckoning has come and he takes precautions for his safety. He sends a present before him : he puts his wives and children in the order of his preference, and he approaches bowing himself obsequiously to the ground as he moves forward. But no sooner did Esau recognize him than he ran forward to meet him, embraced and kissed him. The main fact of the story is that the first real approach to reconciliation was taken by the man who had been wronged (Gen. xxxiii). Dr. Henry Preserved

* These two conditions are elaborated by Canon Redlich in *The Forgiveness of Sins* and by Dr. G. B. Stevens in *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, pp. 340 f. See also Dr. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 311.

Smith, who writes the article on " Forgiveness in the Old Testament " in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, comments that " Forgiveness of man by man occupied a small place in the mind of the Hebrews, if we may judge by the evidence at our disposal." But concerning this attitude of Esau he writes, " Since the reconciliation takes place before the actual acceptance of the gift, this seems to be a case of real forgiveness." If it is, then we have in these early times an instance of the way in which wrongs are going to be righted and the world redeemed. It matters not whether the story is fiction or history. It teaches that it is not a payment forced from an offender that will save a situation, but the generosity of the man sinned against may restore right relations. Sometimes it is well to forego reparations and not to send the bill in when it is obvious that it cannot be paid. A man can stand upright and become defiant, when he is told that he must pay the last farthing, but he bends in humility when he is forgiven and excused penalties which are beyond his power.

It can, however, be argued from the character of Esau that he was indifferent to the wrong he had suffered. If that were so, he cannot be said to have forgiven. Forgiveness is possible only when there is the consciousness of an injury received as deep as the injury inself. Benedetto Croce writes, that " in the moral sphere the act of censuring and the act of forgiving are not two but one and the same " (*The Conduct of Life*, p. 46). The statement sounds paradoxical, but it is true. To forgive is not to excuse. It is to accuse, and yet to pardon and to work for the offender's reform. The duty of forgiveness can never be fulfilled unless the duty of resentment is observed. The offender must be made to feel all the bitterness of having given pain and done injury by the wrong committed. Such resentment is perfectly consistent with the greatest goodwill, for goodwill is never easy-going towards wrong-doing. The offender must be made to see the value of the forgiveness bestowed upon him and he cannot see this, unless he is aware that his action is disapproved and resented. To overlook a fault is not necessarily to forgive

it. Only the man who is tortured and troubled by the offence can truly forgive. He bears all the sadness and pain of the ill received and he makes clear how keenly he feels it. But he also makes evident that he is willing, when repentance is sincere, to enter into fellowship again. " Pardon and condemnation go together and cannot be separated," as Benedetto Croce asserts. If we keep that in mind, we may accept the definition given by Dr. H. R. Mackintosh that " forgiveness is an active process in the mind and temper of a wronged person, by means of which he abolishes a moral hindrance to fellowship with the wrong-doer, and re-establishes the freedom and happiness of friendship " (*The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, p. 28).

Under this head of censure we are brought face to face with the hardest problem connected with forgiveness. At what point after a deed of extreme and planned wickedness is forgiveness to become operative? Let us take as an instance the plotting of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*. In this drama the villainy is all on one side, on that of Iago. By his evil schemes he drives the noble Moor to kill the wife he dearly loved. After this dreadful event Iago shows no sign of repentance, but only stubborn and defiant silence. He says,

> Demand me nothing ; what you know, you know :
> From this time forth I never will speak word.

Shakespeare expresses the reaction of the natural man in the words of Lodovico,

> To you, lord governor,
> Remains the censure of this hellish villain,
> The time, the place, the torture : O enforce it !

That is the note on which the drama ends. Professor Seeley in his *Ecce Homo* writes, " Othello is certainly not wanting in manly spirit, yet we should despise and almost detest him if he forgave Iago." But should we? Certainly we should, if Othello were simply indifferent. But surely forgiveness is not to be limited to minor offences. Seeley supports his statement by asserting that " Every virtue, and not forgiveness only, becomes in certain

cases impossible to human infirmity. Every virtue in the extreme limit becomes confounded with some vice, and the only peculiarity in the case of this virtue is that the vice which counterfeits it is peculiarly contemptible." * Be it admitted that we have a serious problem here, for we are dealing with an irreparable wrong. But are we in these extreme cases to surrender ourselves to any human infirmity which plunges us into savage and uncontrolled hate and contempt? If we are consumed merely with the desire for requital, do we not lose something of our human dignity and become the sport of passions we ought never to countenance? We need to be on our guard against some human infirmities.

But that does not answer the question concerning the forgivableness of irreparable wrong. Those who believe in unlimited forgiveness may point to the words which Jesus, in Luke's version, uttered from the cross, " Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do " (xxiii. 34). But this saying does not appear in some of the best manuscripts. It is not in three of the oldest and most reliable codices, and Westcott and Hort reject it, placing it in brackets. But let us accept it, for it evidently represents the spirit which the early disciples believed their Master possessed. Yet the context seems to show, as some commentators have maintained, that the saying referred only to the Roman soldiers who were obeying their orders. As we continue to read Luke's story, we notice that Jesus made no encouraging promise to the malefactor who railed on him. If he had made such a promise, he would have been violating the law of forgiveness. To forgive a man who is unrepentant and defiant is unethical. If there is an unforgivable sin, surely it is the sin in which a man persists.

Further, the plea of ignorance can be urged on only few occasions. Only rarely can it be said, when injury has been done, that the sinner was seeking good, but had mistaken the way. There are villains who know that what they are doing is villainy and deliberately devised villainy, and who on discovery show no sign of repentance,

* Eversley Edition, p. 334.

unless it is going to serve their purpose. In these extreme cases discipline is necessary and sometimes a form of punishment may be required. But what form? Torture? It is impossible to assess the amount of physical torture which will balance the vice of envy or any other vice. As Mr. Leo Page writes, "To require a judge to determine the degree of pain precisely adequate to expiate moral guilt is to demand what is patently impossible." * Moreover, however deeply imbued with evil any human being may be, he remains a human being and must be treated as a person. If as individuals, owing to the slenderness of our connection with him, we are conscious of no responsibility towards him, we nevertheless hold that the state or society, of which he is a member, should work for his reform until his tendency to crime has been eradicated. No form of punishment is justifiable unless it works in that direction.

It begins to look as though our difficulty is not concerning the spirit in which we ought to act, but the method we ought to adopt. That raises the question of penal reform which is in its infancy and with which I cannot now deal. It is, however, possible to say that though we cannot treat a villain as though he were an innocent man, yet he ought to be brought under cultural influences, and if he shows signs of repentance, the process of forgiveness should be pursued. There are limits to forgiveness, but there should be no limits to the effort to reform a degraded character.

It does not follow that to be lenient to an offender who remains unrepentant is to be guilty of conniving at his wickedness or being accessory to his crime. In history there are records of the forgiveness of unrepentant men which have moved us deeply. Only one need be mentioned, that of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Was Stephen conniving at wickedness, when he prayed for his persecutors at the very moment they were hurling stones at him? "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts vii. 60).

* *Crime and Community*, p. 68.

There is a difference between Stephen's persecutors and Iago. They acted under the influence of anger and religious passion and Iago's offence was deliberate. Cold, calculated intention increases the culpableness of an offender. Further, whatever the crime or offence, the general character of the person concerned in it has to be taken into consideration. Because of this, our judges to-day do not pass sentences with mathematical precision but vary the length of conviction according to the previous record of the offender, be it good or bad.

From what I have said it must be inferred that we are not to wait until the offender has reached the position in which he is forgivable and is thoroughly cleansed from the stain of his guiltiness. This aspect of the subject was treated by Dr. R. C. Moberley in his *Atonement and Personality* (pp. 48 f.). He pointed out that if forgiveness is thus made to depend upon a certain condition of the culprit's personality, there is no place left for forgiveness. It drops out altogether. If the culprit has earned forgiveness, he has a claim to be welcomed back into fellowship, and to refuse to welcome him freely and gladly is to be guilty of an injustice. He has paid the price of redemption.

This brings us to one of the main responsibilities of forgiveness. If forgiveness is sincere, the forgiving party will be ready to bear the greater part of the price of reconciliation. Horace Bushnell, in his book *Forgiveness and Law*, made a great contribution to the subject, when he stressed the idea of " making cost for enemies," which he employed to illustrate his own ingenious and broad-minded interpretation of propitiation. He wrote, " The forgiving party must be so far entered into the lot and state of the wrong-doing party, as to be thoroughly identified with him, even to the extent of suffering by him and for him " (p. 48). One reason why men are slow to forgive is that they object to this part of the transaction. Forgiveness is a painful process when it is limited to blotting out the iniquity of someone who has done deliberate harm to ourselves or to someone we love. But when to this is added the responsibility and cost of restoring the

relationship and of actually becoming "thoroughly identified with the wrong-doing party," the demand seems unfair and insufferable. Thus it is that forgiveness is the supreme act of courage and unselfishness. It is the highest moral achievement. Dr. Douglas White, in his volume *Forgiveness and Suffering*, points out that, "the higher we go in the scale of human goodness, the fuller we find the exercise of free forgiveness; the holier the man, the readier his forgiveness and the remoter any thought of penal infliction. Human forgiveness may be imperfect, but is on the right lines; where it is most free, there it is most perfect" (p. 63). We do no more than others, if we love only those who love us, but to act in the spirit of love to those who have done us wrong is to attain to divine perfection. It is to act as God acts, for he is kind to the evil and the unthankful.

In parable and by definite statement, Jesus taught that he who forgives must pay the price, and also that the larger the forgiveness, the greater the response received. "A certain lender had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. When they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?" (Luke vii. 41, 42). The price may vary. The whole burden may fall on the generous soul. But sometimes it is the only way of reconciliation, the only way to allay the ancient feud and to put an end to the vendetta. It is a stern experience, and it makes manifest that forgiveness is not maudlin sentimentality, but an exacting claim. Mr. L. A. Garrard emphasized this in his volume on *Duty and the Will of God*. He wrote: "By the twofold love (love to God and love to man), which is the duty of the Christian, is meant an attitude of will, not a feeling of affection" (p. 72). Of course, there is feeling in it. That cannot be excluded entirely from any experience, but it is not the uppermost quality. Forgiveness lifts a man or a nation out of the realm of sentimentality with its fickleness into that of duty with its imperative demands.

Nature in her processes is in many ways lower than man in his activities, but in some of her methods she surpasses

him. Mr. Ronald Symond wrote an illuminating article on this subject under the title " Justice in the Teaching of Jesus," which was printed in the *Hibbert Journal* of July 1933. Nature repudiates man's narrow commercial and transactional ideas. She sometimes gives thirty-, sixty- and a hundred-fold in return for a seed. Jesus taught a similar bounty of generous love will distinguish the children of the kingdom of God. He saw this already operative in all the higher human relationships, in the unreserved welcome of a father to his wayward lad and in the bonds which unite families. He preached it as the ideal state. He illustrated it especially in the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt. xx. 1–16). Perhaps the generosity of a noble soul is shown more clearly in that parable than in that of the Prodigal Son, for the impulse of parental love is absent from it. John Ruskin found in it the reply to the economists of his day.* The first labourer received the amount agreed upon; a penny was the bargain and a penny was paid. That was just. But life would be mean indeed, if all human relationships were limited to a narrow contractual justice. Goodness would be at a discount and love would not exist. The householder said to the man who complained, " Is thine eye evil, because I am good? " The sons of the kingdom of heaven will be like this man who was a householder. In the interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son, due consideration must be given to the attitude of the father. An offender is always expected to make a definite and clean break from evil. But whether such a break and consequent return are possible depends not merely upon the offending party but also upon those who have been injured. We can imagine fathers to whom no son, however repentant, would return, though he was reduced to swine's husks. One of the most delightful incidents in the parable is the way in which the father cuts short the confession of his son. He saw that the son's repentance was complete. If repentance is genuine, if it is a voluntary, unconditional surrender, as it was in the prodigal son, who said, " Make me as one of thy hired servants," uncondi-

* *Unto This Last.*

tional forgiveness must be offered, as the father offered it, when he said, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him."

Men and nations are to accept readily any sign of a change of character or a confession of error or a regret of wrong-doing. " If thy brother sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him " (Luke xvii. 4). Sometimes the injured party must take the first steps. So Jesus said, " And if thy brother sin against thee, go, shew him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother " (Matt. xviii. 15). The injunction which follows reads, " But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established." This also was probably spoken by Jesus. Dr. Travers Herford, in a scholarly article in the first issue of the new journal, *Faith and Freedom*, calls attention to a parallel saying in the Talmud, to the effect that if a man, when he has approached his enemy, fails to obtain forgiveness, " he may take with him two or three friends and again go to his enemy." That is to say, when personal influence has not succeeded, arbitration is to be sought. But the verse which follows in the Gospel is an obvious addition to the words of Jesus. It reads, " And if he refuse to hear them, tell it to the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican." This must be rejected for the following reasons. It is found in Matthew only and is not in the parallel passage in Luke (xvii. 3, 4); there was no church existing in the time of Jesus, probably he never thought of founding a church, and the saying thus reflects the custom of a later time; and it does not breathe the spirit of Jesus.

It will be noticed that Jesus stresses the need for gaining the brother. That is the purpose to be kept steadily in view; to bring about that state of things in which he and you can live and work together in harmony. Make the brother feel that you want his regard and goodwill, and his enmity may cease. The same is true of nations. In all the trouble through which the nations

are passing or may pass, the main question is whether they desire to possess one another as brothers and to live in mutual helpfulness.

Deliverance cannot come until all the nations have cleansed themselves of pride which disintegrates all human relationships. They have to rid themselves of what Captain Liddell Hart has termed "superior rightness" (*Hibbert Journal*, January 1947), and perceiving their own faults and shortcomings, realize their responsibility for the insecurity of international relations and their own deep need of forgiveness. Aristotle in his *Ethics* maintained that the highest type of manhood is the "great-souled man," who knows that he is a great soul. But the Christian ethic teaches that the great-souled man will be lowly of heart. Victory has a powerful tendency to engender in every nation the pride which deprives it of greatness of soul. Consequently, every nation in its day of triumph has to be alive to the moral dangers of victory. Many nations have recovered from defeat and become greater than before, but only a great-souled nation can recover from a victory and manifest the magnanimity which should be shown to a fallen foe. Here it must be mentioned that adequate account is not taken of the obvious fact that it is always harder for a defeated than for a victorious nation to forgive. Its consciousness of humiliation arouses resentment which may be the source of future strife. People in this country sometimes say that they will never forgive the Germans, being quite oblivious of the harder difficulty that Germans must have to forgive our nation. If a victorious nation readily forgives, it awakens in its erstwhile foe the same desire to forgive, and an end is thus put to alienation. That was illustrated after the Boer War in the policy of Campbell-Bannerman. Again, Bismarck, to whom much of the recent strife can be traced, was well acquainted with this influence of magnanimity. He wanted the support of Austria for his far-reaching schemes. In consequence, when Prussia defeated the well-trained army of Austria at the Battle of Sadowa in 1866, he made such generous terms with her that he evoked the anger of the Prussian military caste,

but he secured what he desired, the friendship of Austria. Though he had ulterior motives, his action bears testimony that it is a truth of psychology and of history that nothing so surely destroys bitterness in a defeated nation and nullifies its hostility as generosity.*

The God whom Jesus bids us worship and adore is the God of Forgiveness, the God of Love and not the god of equivalence, whom many people were educated to fear as children, a god who watches for every wrong act and punishes it and who notes down every right act and rewards it. This old god of equivalence is a pagan god. The children of Israel worshipped him in their early days. They heard him issue the command, " an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but that practice was better than allowing every man to do what was right in his own eyes. Our Anglo-Saxon forefathers worshipped him and said, " a limb for a limb or for each fair damages." The people of the East worshipped him and believed that there was no escape from the consequences of any deed. Modern men still extol him, though they render their lip-service to the Heavenly Father whom Jesus made known. Their practical devotion and their real obedience they reserve for the god of equivalence. They have symbolized him by carving a figure holding balancing scales in one hand and an executing sword in the other. They have put a kerchief over its eyes to signify that their god is impartial, and instead they have made him into a blind god. A blind god, and yet he is supposed to command the allegiance of men in every land, who seek the equivalent of what they do and give. The nations also loudly proclaim that all they ask is bare justice and in all they do they are only seeking their rights. They believe that in all their undertakings, they are being loyal to God, but the being who accepts such homage is the god of equivalence. When they have made treaties they have kept before them the old *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Politicians have offered their tributes of praise to this god of equivalence. They have built

* See article in *Hibbert Journal*, April 1915, " Life and Matter at War," by Henri Bergson.

altars to him and piled them high with their offerings. They have cried, " a dollar for a dollar, a pound for a pound, a tariff for a tariff." They have cried that, but they have not lived up to the demands of even this pagan god, for if they had been faithful to their creed, they would not have been dishonest and would never have sought to overreach each other. They have thrust even this god of equivalence into the background and compelled him to go into recess, when they have come to action. They have not sought equity. Let us not, therefore, despise the old Mosaic law of an eye for an eye. The principle underlying it is not altogether bad and it would never appear as such, if it were not for the crude terms in which it happens to be expressed. Men and nations have yet to attain to that level, and when they reach it, the kingdom of God will not be afar off.

Evidently this god does not set a high enough standard before his devotees, for " a man's reach should exceed his grasp." That is why we should try, though we may fail, to worship the God of Love and of Forgiveness, of whom Jesus spoke. We must remember the life of him, of whom it was said that, " When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously " (I Pet. ii. 23). We must recall the commands, " Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not." " Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven." Those are almost the hardest sayings known, though they are beautiful in appearance. They are, however, at the heart of Christian teaching in its earliest and purest form. Some day, let us hope, the ideas which rule men and nations in our time will pass away, for both in the East and the West, theology, ethics, economics, law, society and civilization are based on uninspiring theories of satisfaction, karma and justice, which must be abandoned before the Christian ideal can be successfully attempted.

The psalmist sang, as he thought of the forgiveness of God,

> As far as the east is from the west,
> So far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

At first sight no forgiveness seems higher than that, but Jesus carried the good tidings of forgiveness a stage further, for whether he thought of human or divine forgiveness, he regarded it not as the mere removal of transgression but as the beginning of joyous life. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke xv. 7). Forgiveness is often spoken of as an act. It certainly has all the definiteness of an act. But it is more than an act, for an act may be something accomplished once and for all, as the theologians say. And forgiveness is also a process. It is a spirit which purifies, enriches and increases the fellowship of the beloved community, and it continues to bless as experience grows and develops. It aids and furthers the redemption of mankind. It opens doors so that men and nations may enter into the joy of the Lord.

> It is an attribute to God himself,
> And earthly power doth then show likest God's
> When mercy seasons justice.

LIST OF ESSEX HALL LECTURES

1893. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGY AS ILLUSTRATED IN ENGLISH POETRY, by Stopford A. Brooke, M.A., LL.D. (Out of print.)

1894. UNITARIANS AND THE FUTURE, by Mrs. Humphry Ward. (Out of print.)

1895. THE RELATION OF JESUS TO HIS AGE AND OUR OWN, by J. Estlin Carpenter, M.A., D.D., D.Litt. (Out of print.)

1897. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEACHING OF JESUS, by R. A. Armstrong, B.A. (Out of print.)

1899. THE RELIGION OF TIME AND THE RELIGION OF ETERNITY, by Philip H. Wicksteed, M.A., Litt.D.

1902. SOME THOUGHTS ON CHRISTOLOGY, by James Drummond, M.A., LL.D., D.Litt. (Out of print.)

1903. EMERSON, by Augustine Birrell, K.C. (Out of print.)

1904. THE IDEA AND REALITY OF REVELATION, by H. H. Wendt, Ph.D., D.D. (Out of print.)

1905. THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL IN THE POEMS OF TENNYSON AND BROWNING, by Prof. Henry Jones, LL.D. (Out of print.)

1906. THE MAKING OF RELIGION, by Samuel M. Crothers, D.D.

1908. DOGMA AND HISTORY, by Prof. Dr. Gustav Kruger. (Out of print.)

1909. EVOLUTION AND RELIGIOUS PROGRESS, by Prof. F. E. Weiss, D.Sc. (Out of print.)

1910. THE STORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UNITARIAN MOVEMENT, by W. G. Tarrant, B.A.

1911. RELIGION AND LIFE, by Rudolf Eucken. (Out of print.)

1913. HERESY: ITS ANCIENT WRONGS AND MODERN RIGHTS IN THESE KINGDOMS, by Alexander Gordon, M.A. (Out of print.)

1914. THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF PLOTINUS AND MODERN PHILOSOPHIES OF RELIGION, by W. R. Inge, D.D. (Out of print.)

1918. THE PLACE OF JUDAISM AMONG THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD, by Claude G. Montefiore, M.A. (Out of print.)

1920. CHRISTIANITY APPLIED TO THE LIFE OF MEN AND OF NATIONS, by Charles Gore, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D. (Out of print.)

1921. THE LOST RADIANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, by L. P. Jacks, M.A., D.D., LL.D. (Out of print.)

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1923. THE MORAL BASIS OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS, by Viscount Cecil, K.C. (Out of print.)

1924. THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGION IN NEW ENGLAND, by W. W. Fenn, D.D. (Out of print.)

1925. SOME PHASES OF FREE THOUGHT IN ENGLAND IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, by the Earl of Oxford and Asquith, K.C. (Out of print.)

1926. MAN IN THE LIGHT OF EVOLUTION, by Arthur Thomson, M.A., LL.D. (Out of print.)

1927. THE DIVINE RETICENCE, by Willard L. Sperry, M.A., D.D. (Out of print.)

1928. CHRISTIANITY AND THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA, by R. H. U. Bloor, B.A.

1929. THE MESSAGE OF THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE MODERN WORLD, by S. H. Mellone, M.A., D.Sc.

1930. THE IDEA OF GOD, by the Rt. Rev. A. A. David, D.D.

1931. MAN AND THE MACHINE, by Sir E. John Russell. Out of print.)

1932. LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR EVERYBODY, by Sir Michael Sadler.

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1934. HUMAN PERSONALITY AND THE FUTURE LIFE, by G. Dawes Hicks, M.A., Ph.D., Litt.D.

1935. CHRISTIANITY AS A NEW RELIGION, by Canon Percy Dearmer, M.A., D.D. (Out of print.)

1936. LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN CRITICISM, by Herbert McLachlan, M.A., D.D., F.R.Hist.S.

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1944. IDEALISM AGAINST RELIGION, by John Macmurray, M.A.

1945. IDEALISM AND REALISM, by R. Nicol Cross, M.A.

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1947. AN APPROACH TO TRUTH, by F. J. M. Stratton, M.A., LL.D., D.Phil., F.R.S.