

Goodier, Alban
—The charity of Christ
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THE CHARITY OF CHRIST



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For I am sure
That neither death nor life
Nor angels nor principalities nor powers
Nor things present nor things to come
Nor might nor height nor depth
Nor any other creature
Shall be able to separate us from the
love of God
Which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord.”
(*Romans* viii. 35-39).

From these three passages alone it is evident that to St. Paul, and therefore to his first Christians, and therefore to every Christian in all times, the one essential doctrine of our faith in practice is not only the fact of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, but the fact of the charity of Jesus; not only the fact that Jesus Christ is God, but also that He proved His Godhead by love; the fact that, because He loved men and for no other reason, the Son of God came into this world and Himself became man,—

“God so loved the world

As to give his only begotten son”

(*John* iii. 16);

that, impelled by this same devoted love, He sacrificed the life He had taken,—

“Who loved me

And delivered himself for me”

(*Galatians* ii, 20);

the fact that all through His life on earth the key to His every thought, and word, and action is His intense love for and devotion to mankind. If we grasp this fact, then, as St. Paul has just told us, we have come to a "knowledge which surpasseth all understanding"; if we make it the light of our lives, the ultimate truth that lies beneath every other, and which though all else perish will itself never fail, the argument which weighs with us more than all others put together, the joy upon which, under no matter what circumstances, we can always fall back with satisfaction, then we have secured for ourselves a gladness, an independence, a source of energy, a new understanding of life, with which no other can compare; if we allow it to be our motive force, it will drive us to deeds which no other force can hope to win from human nature.

With this object, then, in mind, let us watch Him. Let us follow His career step by step as we know it, without any addition or embellishment of our own, and see what we can learn.

We find Him first walking alone by the bank of the river Jordan. John the Baptist draws the attention of two of his disciples to Him. Out of curiosity, more perhaps

than for any other reason, these two follow Jesus. He turns and notices them behind Him; He asks them what they want; encouraged by His tone they boldly inquire of Him where He lives.

“Come and see,” He says; and the story significantly goes on—

“They came
And saw where he abode
And they stayed with him all that day.”
(*John i. 39*).

Fired with enthusiasm they return to their friends.

“We have found the Messiah,” they cry, and induce others to come back with them.

To win these His first followers He has worked no miracles; on the contrary He has stood with them by the riverside, submitting to baptism like any sinner; He has trodden alone the winepress of temptation, that He might know the agony that all sinners know. He has drawn them to Himself by His winning personality and no more. Soon they will become so used to Him they will think of Him as “only Jesus”; but for the present the spell is consciously upon them and they follow.

We find Him next in Galilee at the marriage feast, in the company of His mother

and friends. The wine for the banquet has run short; those responsible are in a panic; His mother looks at Him, and with a woman's sympathy points out their anxiety. With a word He smooths away their troubles; He changes water into the best of wine, and lets the rejoicing go on.

A few days later He is back in Judea, holding a conference far into the night with a learned and inquiring Pharisee. The man has not had the courage to come to Him by daylight; fear of others, human respect, have held him back. Even for such a one Jesus will sacrifice His rest, He of whom it was said many times that He was weary, that He had not where to lay His head.

Shortly after this He is again on His way through Samaria to Galilee. Tired and footsore He sits beside a well to rest. A woman from the village comes to draw water; a woman with no good name among her fellow-villagers. He speaks to her; He draws her out; He wins from her some kind of recognition; she runs away to her village, and is so enthusiastic about Him, that the folk come out to Him, and take Him back with them, and it is days before they will let Him go His way.

Arrived in Galilee we find Him again in

Cana. An official has heard of Him and has believed. He comes to Him to plead for the health of his sick son; Jesus there and then, even while He hints at unbelief, sends him away with the assurance that his son is healed.

From Galilee He is soon back once more in Jerusalem. He wanders alone to the pool of Bethesda at the north end of the city, where He knows He will find many a specimen of the refuse of humanity. There He stands over a beggar cripple in his rags and dirt, who has begged beneath that porch nigh on forty years. He speaks to him; questions him about his ailments; bids him rise and walk; and while the beggar obeys, hardly knowing what he does, He Himself slips away into the crowd.

This is the first we see of Him in His earliest days, moving here and there, "going about doing good," apparently with no special plan, content that so He may be allowed to use His power. But now He sets to work in real earnest. He returns to Galilee, first to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, but where His early companions will have none of Him; next to Capernaum, by the lake of Galilee, where He takes up a permanent abode. Here He is walking one morning by the water's edge;

He comes across four fishermen, busy with their nets; He looks at them, bids them come after him, and nothing in the world seems able to keep them back.

Being settled in Capharnaum He must needs give its people the full benefit of His presence. He finds a poor demoniac on the roadside; with a word He drives the devil out of him, and he is at peace. He enters the house of Simon; He finds an old woman burning with fever, in a corner of the room; He goes over to her, takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and the fever is gone. One morning, as He returns from His prayer on the hillside, He finds a leper lying outside the town; with a word the leprosy is cleansed, and the man bounds away to report his cure to the priests.

Another day He is in His cottage; the crowds have gathered round Him, within the dwelling and without; for already the people of Capharnaum have caught the fever, like the first disciples at the Jordan, and cannot leave Him alone. In the midst of the gathering a man is brought to Him on a mattress, trembling all over with palsy. The bearers cannot pierce through the crowd; instead, they climb upon the roof of the one-storied cottage, remove the tiles, and let down the man upon his mattress

to the spot where Jesus stands. He is not disturbed; He heals the man, of course; more than that, on this occasion He goes a step further and tells him his sins are forgiven.

Yet another day about this time He is walking through the bazaar. At his counter He passes a man, a collector of taxes. He sees in him something that is worthy of a higher calling; He looks into his eyes, He bids him come; and at once the tax collector, like the rest, cannot dream of refusing. But that is not the end; the man has his own way of celebrating his good fortune. He will give a dinner; he will invite his old boon companions, money-changers, men of low degree, whose morals and manners were not of the most refined. To this motley gathering he will also invite his new Master. And Jesus comes; sits down with them at Levi's table, listens to their queer talk, watches them while they eat and drink, endures all their rudeness, even declares that it is for such as these that He has a special commission. Such is the charity of Christ.

These are some of the typical instances that illustrate the manner of Jesus during this first period of His life. For the rest we can only quote the words of St. Matthew,

who three times seems to give up all attempt to follow Him in every detail, and is content with a general summary. Thus at the beginning he writes:

“And Jesus went about all Galilee
Teaching in their synagogues
And preaching the gospel of the kingdom
And healing all manner of sickness
And every infirmity among the people
And his fame went throughout all Syria
And they presented to him all sick people
That were taken with divers diseases
and torments,
And such as were possessed by devils
And lunatics and those that had the palsy
And he cured them.”

(*Matthew* iv. 23-24).

Later, speaking of the days at Capernaum he says:

“And when evening was come
They brought to him many that were
possessed with devils
And he cast out the spirits with his words
And all that were sick he healed
That it might be fulfilled
Which was spoken by the prophet Isaias
saying
He took our infirmities
and bore our diseases.”

(*Matthew* viii. 16-17).

At the end he sums up again his impression in the passage:

“And the Pharisees going out
Made a consultation against him
How they might destroy him
But Jesus knowing it retired from thence
And many followed him
And he healed them all
And he charged them that they
should not make them known
That it might be fulfilled
Which was spoken by the Prophet
Isaias saying
Behold my servant whom I have chosen
My beloved in whom my soul hath been
well pleased
I will put my spirit upon him
And he shall show judgment to the Gentiles
He shall not contend nor cry out
Neither shall any man hear his voice in the
streets
The bruised reed he shall not break
And smoking flax he shall not extinguish
Till he send forth judgment unto victory
And in his name the Gentiles shall hope.”
(*Matthew* xii. 14-21).

During this period it is that we hear that cry of Jesus, which seems to reveal His whole soul:

“At that time Jesus answered and said
I confess to thee O Father
Lord of heaven and earth
Because thou hast hid these things
from the wise and prudent
And hast revealed them to little ones
Yea Father for so hath it seemed good in
thy sight
All things are delivered to me by my Father
And no one knoweth the Son but the Father
Neither doth anyone know the Father
but the Son
And he to whom it shall please the Son to
reveal Him
Come to me
All you that labor and are burdened
And I will refresh you
Take up my yoke upon you
And learn of me
Because I am meek and humble of heart
And you shall find rest to your souls
For my yoke is sweet and my burden light.”
(*Matthew* ii. 25-30).

In seeming despair of telling all they knew
of this period, two Evangelists gather it
together in this picture:

“And Jesus went about all the cities and
towns
Teaching in their synagogues
And preaching the gospel of the kingdom

And healing every disease and
every infirmity
And seeing the multitudes
He had compassion on them
Because they were distressed
And lying like sheep that have no shepherd
Then he saith to his disciples
The harvest indeed is great
But the laborers are few
Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest
That he send forth laborers into
his harvest."

(*Matthew ix. 35-38; Mark vi. 6*).

We must pass quickly on. We can say nothing here of His teaching; nothing of the great Sermon on the Mount in which He laid down the lines of the Christian ideal; nothing of that sympathy of soul which made Him raise a dead man to life, just that He might stop a widow's tears; nothing of that scene at a Pharisee's table, when He defended a sinful, outcast woman, and made her a friend of His own for life; nothing of the quiet with which He met abuse and insult and mocking laughter; in spite of all He "went about doing good." All the time there seems to grow on Him, not bitterness because of ill requital, not despair because of constant failure, not aloofness because of offenses against Him, but

an intense sympathy for this ignorant people, who were to be excused because they knew not what they did.

Meanwhile He had chosen His Twelve and had trained them enough to send them out for their first experiment in preaching. They had gone and had returned; full of their success they had come to pour out their experiences before Him. He had received them with words of encouragement and with words of warning; and now He would reward them with a day of rest alone with Him in a desert place apart. They set off for their holiday, happy as children; a day alone with Him was reward enough for anything. But their joy was short-lived. The crowd had got wind of their departure and had pursued them. The heart of Jesus could not resist; it sacrificed its day of rest; it gave itself away to this following multitude. Jesus spoke with them all the day; in the evening He fed them, though for the purpose He had to multiply the little store of bread that they had brought; not till it grew dark did He leave them. Such is the charity of Christ.

There followed a day of unceasing miracles, wholesale and regardless, as if He would finally win this people by His "full measure, poured out and flowing over." For

He had reached the climax of His life. Hitherto He had given lavishly all that He had, He had done for them all that He could; now He would go further, He would promise them Himself, He Himself would be their food, their life; in Him, in the eating and drinking of Him, they would find a healing greater than any they had so far known. Even God could go no farther; but thus far He could go, and He would put no limits.

From this time there comes a change. Miracles there still are in abundance, seemingly more tender, if that were possible, than those that have been wrought before; still they are told with a detail and a circumstance that lets us know that a change was at hand. And indeed it was. It was now that He took His Twelve apart, and drew from Peter the confession in the name of them all that He was "Christ the Son of the living God"; now that He gave the chosen three, Peter, James, and John, the proof that their confession was true by being "transfigured before them"; now that He began, in words that could not be misunderstood, to warn them of what was coming, to prepare them for the worst and strengthen them, when His love would lead Him to give His life for His beloved

And with His manner, so does His language seem to change. Hitherto, in spite of the two addresses, the one we call the Sermon on the Mount, the other at Capernaum on the Bread of Life, it is rather His deeds than His words that have attracted us; henceforth we find Him no less "mighty in word," whether with His friends or with His enemies. And yet it is always the same story; the same endurance, the same gentleness, betraying the infinite forbearance of the Man, the infinite sympathy and self-surrender.

For instance, He finds His followers arguing together about their rank and precedence; poor men, they had yet much to learn. He sits down on a stone by the roadside; He calls a child to Him, and sets him between His knees before them; He tells those men that His ideal is even such a child as this. Or again He warns them against the giving of offense to others; instead, let them spend themselves in rescuing their fellowmen from ruin; and He illustrates His point by the story of the shepherd who left his flock to go after one sheep that was lost. Or He inculcates upon them the virtue of forgiveness of injuries. "Not seven times," He says, "but seventy times seven times" must offending man be

pardoned. In such ways as this does the charity of Christ show itself in word and instruction during this second period of His life.

In the meantime the clouds are gathering about Him; soon the storm will burst and He sets Himself to meet it.

Hitherto most of His days have been spent in Galilee, where He might expect most friends, where men were more spontaneous and responsive to the affection that He showed. Now He must go forward; He must stand before the people in Jerusalem and proclaim to them what it is that He has come to teach. It will be a hard struggle; He will have to use language stronger than He has ever used before; He will be compelled to assert Himself yet more clearly, to utter words of warning yet more fiercely, even to condemn those men who understood but would not believe, the men who had already decided that they would treat Him only as an enemy, and would not rest till they had taken His life.

And yet in the midst of all this stormy time the sunshine of His charity keeps breaking through the clouds. One morning, as He is standing in the Temple square, His enemies drag before Him a woman steeped

in shame. One of two things, they tell themselves, He must do; He must condemn her or He must defend her; if He condemns, they will boast that His mercy is limited after all, if He excuses, they will denounce Him as a defender of immorality.

But He has His own way of meeting them; He says not a word, He stoops and with His finger writes something on the ground; what it is we do not know, but the men who stood about looked, and read, and were ashamed, and one by one slunk away; when at last He stood up there was no one left but just the poor woman and Himself. Then and not till then did He speak.

“Where are they that accused thee?” He asked. “Hath no man condemned thee?”

She answered: “No man, Lord.”

And He said: “Neither will I condemn thee. Go, and now sin no more.”

It is at this time, too, that He pronounces those wonderful utterances which prove the longing of His heart; the more His enemies reject Him, so much the more do His words seem to burn with affection.

“I am the light of the world

He that followeth me walketh
not in darkness

But shall have the light of life.”

“When you have lifted up the Son of man

Then shall you know that I am He.”

“If you continue in my word

You shall be my disciples indeed

And you shall know the truth

And the truth shall make you free.”

“Which of you shall convince me of sin?

If I say the truth to you

Why do you not believe me?”

“As long as I am in the world

I am the light of the world.”

“I am the door

By me if any man enter in he shall be saved

And he shall go in and go out

And shall find pastures.”

“I am come that they may have life

And may have it more abundantly.”

“I am the good shepherd

The good shepherd giveth his life for his
sheep.”

“I am the good shepherd

And I know mine and mine know me

As the Father knoweth me and I know the
Father

And I lay down my life for my sheep.”

“My sheep hear my voice

And I know them and they follow me

And I give them life everlasting

And they shall not perish for ever

And no man shall pluck them

out of my hand.”

Such is the language of the heart of Jesus in the midst of all the storm and stress. It is at this time, too, that He describes His idea of duty to one's neighbor in the story of the Good Samaritan; at this time that we find Him taking His rest in Bethania, accepting hospitality from Martha and Mary, showing His charity by accepting kindness done to Him; at this time that He responds to the appeal of His disciples and gives them a lesson in prayer. He passes by two blind men and heals them, though His companions thought them importunate in their clamor; takes a dumb demoniac and sets him free; finds a poor suffering woman and relieves her; while He fiercely chastises the Pharisees who calumniate Him, brings them to nothing when they try to put Him in the wrong, avoids all their devices to catch Him, complains bitterly of their falsehood and hypocrisy, still He is always the same Jesus, always ready with hand outstretched to help, with word to console, even to the Pharisees themselves condescending, whenever they ask Him to sit at table with them.

Such was the story of what may be called His great Jerusalem mission. A man is proved more in suffering than in satisfaction, more by failure than by success; and

Jesus was no exception to the rule. Many, it is true, had been won by His teaching; many more by His personality; still the heart of the rulers was hardened more than ever, and His life was in danger. But He would die when He chose, not when His enemies designed; and His hour was not yet come. He gave them a last dreadful lesson, the lesson contained in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus; He spoke to His followers of humility, in contrast to the arrogance of the Scribes and Pharisees; and then He hid Himself away in the country. We find Him next at the tomb of Lazarus, comforting his sisters, Martha and Mary, Himself weeping over the grave of a dear friend, at last, as a crowning act of friendship, calling his body from the tomb and restoring it to life. It was another of those tremendous, unthinkable acts of charity which seemed to paralyze for the moment friend and foe alike.

But the evening of His days was drawing in. He looked towards the sunset and knew that in a week or two more the great sacrifice must be made. We are told how He seemed to pull Himself together to face the ordeal; how He turned His steps towards Jerusalem for the last time, "rejoicing as a giant to run His course"; this last journey

to the city is crowded with events which reveal His nature at every step. Outside a city gate, as He enters in one evening, ten lepers cry after him from afar. He answers their cry; sends them to report themselves to the authorities, on their way every one is healed. One of them returns to thank Him, and Jesus is glad; but His heart feels it that the others have no word of gratitude.

“Were not ten made clean? Then where are the nine?”

Again it is apparently during this last journey that some poor women surround Him bringing their children to Him for a blessing. The disciples object; they try to put these obtrusive women aside, the Master had no time for such as them. But He would not have it so. We are told He rebuked them and said:

“Let the children come to me.

Do not prevent them;

For the kingdom of God

Is for such as these.”

And He put His hands upon them, and embraced them, and blessed them, and then He went on His way.

Thereafter He met a youth, rich, well-intentioned, evidently well-bred, with some

idea in his mind that he would yet do something with his life. This young man accosted Jesus, asked Him for advice about his future; and Jesus, at first content with an ordinary level, told him to keep the law of God and it was enough. But the man was not content, he wanted more; whereupon, we are beautifully told, "Jesus looked on him and loved him." In the end the young man failed, but not before he had drawn from Jesus another trait of His character.

He went on and came to Jericho. Here He healed two blind men on the roadside; here, too, He found a man, a publican, who was anxious to get a sight of Him as He passed, but being small of stature feared he might be lost in the crowd. So he had hurried forward and climbed a tree. But Jesus as He passed, looked up and saw him; and gladdened the poor publican's heart by inviting Himself to stay in his house for the night. Last of all He came once more to His beloved Bethania, to the house of Lazarus, and Martha, and Mary, which seems to have been a favorite resting place for Him who, as He said, "had not where to lay His head." Here Mary could not restrain herself; once more at supper she was at His feet anointing them with precious ointment; had she some foreboding that the end

was near, and that this was being done in preparation for His death?

And now we have come to the last week of His life. He stayed in Bethania till the Sunday; then, as if by one last grand act to vindicate the power over men that He could use if and when He chose, He allowed them to feel His fascination. He allowed them to come about Him, beside themselves with joy, waving their palms and spreading them beneath His feet; singing their hosannas to the Son of David, to Him who came in the name of the Lord, carrying Him in triumph into the city, into the very Temple of the Most High. His enemies looked on and murmured but He would not be thwarted; they complained but He silenced their complaints; for this last time He would have His way, whatever they might do with Him before the week was out.

And yet even in the midst of this triumphant procession as on other occasions the heart of Jesus Christ burst through its bonds. When the crowd had brought Him from Bethania up the slope of the Mount of Olives, and Jerusalem lay outstretched beneath Him on the other side of the valley, He stopped the cortege, He dismounted from the ass that bore Him, He burst into tears at the sight.

So begins the last week of the life of Jesus on this earth. The next three days are strenuous. Each night He retires from the city to His favorite Bethania; each morning He comes into the town, a distance of several miles, to fight His last battle with the ever-growing power that has long since determined to have His life. He does not spare Himself or them. There is no flinching. With power in His eye He drives the sellers from the Temple; with the language of oratory He pours out parable after parable revealing to His enemies in terms that cannot be mistaken their evil ambitions, their rejection of Him and their doom. They heckle Him with questions and He answers them everyone, till at last they dare ask Him no more; they pretend that He does not speak clearly about Himself, and He proves to them that already they know enough. He turns to the people and warns them against their false leaders; He turns back to the leaders and denounces them to their face, pronouncing over them that "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," which deserves to take rank among the masterpieces of human language. He looks into the future and declares the coming doom; the destruction of the chosen city, the end of the world and its signs,

the corruption of men, the judgment, the return of the Son of Man, and yet after all the reward of those who will be "the blessed of His Father."

"If thou hadst known," He cried,
"And that in this thy day
The things that are to thy peace
But now they are hidden from thy eyes
For the days shall come upon thee
And thy enemies shall cast a trench
about thee
And compass thee on every side
And beat thee flat to the ground
And thy children who are in thee
And they shall not leave thee a
stone upon a stone
Because thou hast not known
The time of thy visitation."

Once only in the midst of all this gloom do the clouds seem to lift. Jesus is seated at the Temple gate, watching the passers-by as they drop their alms into the box. Among them comes a poor widow. While others give abundantly of their abundance, she drops in her tiny mite. He takes notice of her sacrifice. He calls His disciples to Him; He points the woman out to them all; He tells them that that poor widow has given more than all the rest; for others have given of the superfluity, but she has

sacrificed her very livelihood. Such again is the charity of Christ, that distinguished so well the gift from the love of the giver.

On Wednesday at midday He retires from the scene; these last hours He must spend in silent preparation for the end. Meanwhile He knows full well that the conspiracy against Him has worked out its plan; one of His own Twelve has been bribed to betray Him; He knows it all, yet never for a moment by word or deed will He betray His betrayer. Thursday passes silently by; the Twelve are evidently with Him; in the afternoon they come to Him and remind Him that it is the day for the Paschal Supper. Immediately He responds; He chooses two of their number; they shall go into the city, to such and such a place, and prepare; He speaks as if the whole city of Jerusalem were in His hands, at His own free disposal.

Then comes the last night of all. St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who understood the heart of Jesus Christ as did no other, speaks of this night with special emphasis. Fifty years afterwards it is still fresh in his memory, every deed the Master did, every word He spoke; and He introduces His account with the significant sentence that seems to sum up the whole life:

“Having loved his own that were in
the world

He loved them unto the end.”

Watch Him, then, on this last night, the night when, above all others, His character, His charity was made manifest. He sits down with His own chosen Twelve at supper. “With desire,” He says, “I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer.” He checks their mutual rivalry; instead He commends to them service of one another; to prove His words, He rises from among them, takes a towel and basin, and washes the feet of every one. Meanwhile He knows full well that His betrayer is in their company; He gives him his warning, but ceases His kindness in no way. He institutes the Blessed Sacrament; gives them His own Body and His own Blood to be their food and drink, gives them the power to hand this on to all succeeding generations; lavishly, without regard and limit, He pours Himself out; such is the charity of Christ.

Nor is His language less telling than His deeds; His love for once seems almost to lead Him to excess. Peter will deny Him, the Twelve will desert Him, but never mind; He will gather them again to Himself. He Himself will leave them and they will

be alone, but never mind; He will send them the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Strengtheners, and in time will come to them Himself again. He is the vine, they are the branches, so near are they and shall they be to Him; and He concludes with a prayer that this union may be never broken, that where He is they may also be, a prayer that is worthy of God-Man, the God of love.

We must hurry through the rest. We find Him, an hour after this last prayer, once more in prayer in a garden, in an agony even unto blood. He is discovered there by the traitor and delivered to His enemies, and this time He lets them have their way. He is deserted by His own, dragged back to the city to trial; in the court He is insulted, struck by a common soldier, spat upon, in the end condemned by all as a blasphemer. All night He is in prison, abandoned to a brutal guard; next morning He is again condemned, then dragged through the city that the sentence may be sanctioned by the authority of the Roman governor. Before that governor the charges are renewed, growing ever stronger as the passion of the people arises. He is a malefactor; He is a perverter of the nation; He forbids the giving of tribute; He is an enemy of Rome since He makes Himself to be a king; last

of all, in their minds worst of all, He declares Himself to be the Son of God, and therefore can deserve no pardon.

But the Roman governor is not satisfied. He hears Jesus is a Galilean, and he hopes to escape from his dilemma by sending the culprit to the Galilean tetrarch, the only man who, in all the life of Jesus, had been treated by Him with contempt. Here He is interrogated, but He makes no reply; He is mocked and befooled, but He utters no protest; in the end He is returned to the Roman governor, for Herod is too wily, and too great a coward, to commit himself by condemning Him. Pilate is no less anxious to acquit Him, not for Jesus' sake, but to free himself from censure. He parleys with his victim, argues with the mob that clamored for His blood: tries to bribe them by the surrender of Barabbas the political criminal, scourges Jesus, has Him utterly degraded, shows Him to them, "a worm and no man," in the hope that at the sight their vengeance will be satisfied.

But it is all of no avail; He must die; and Pilate pronounces the word of condemnation. He is led to the place of execution, carrying His own cross; on the way He speaks once, to some women who wept at His misfortune: "Women of Jerusalem," He

said, "weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

Arrived at Calvary He is stripped of His clothing and nailed through His hands and feet to a cross; torture enough to make all thought impossible. Yet we have the record of the things that were uppermost in His mind at this time. First were His executioners: poor creatures, they knew no better:

"Father, forgive them,
for they know not what they do."

Next was a fellow-victim, a criminal crucified with Him. This man showed Him sympathy and fellow-feeling, and he received as his reward:

"Amen, I say to thee,
this day

Thou shalt be with me in paradise."

There were two who stood by, His mother and "the disciple whom he loved." He was to leave them; He had broken their hearts; He would heal them by giving them to each other. Such to the end was the charity of Christ.

And so He died. Yet as if to show by some external sign what that death signified, He would not have His body taken down and buried, till a soldier had come, and had proved to the world that dead in-

deed He was, by running a spear through His side and heart. He drew the spear out; from the wound there came out a few drops of blood, then only water; the charity of Christ had not another drop of blood to give—

“Greater love than this no man hath
Than that he lay down his life for
his friend.”

For part of three terrible days His body lay buried; on the third day the rock-tomb was found empty. Then followed some strange things. A few women, who had come to mourn for Him and had found the body gone, suddenly saw Him standing before them in the garden. He saluted them, He let them embrace His feet; without any doubt He was the same, the same familiar Jesus. One woman in particular, the woman who had been a sinner and was now His devoted friend, sought Him with grief inconsolable. He came to her, playfully He tried her; at last by a word He revealed Himself, giving her a joy that nothing could ever again kill.

In the evening of that same day two of His disciples were going on their way from Jerusalem to another town. They were wavering in their faith, they had heard the story of the women, they talked to each

other, encouraging each other's unbelief. He came along the road and joined them; He took part in their conversation; before they had reached their journey's end, though they did not recognize Him, He had won their hearts and they were loath to let Him go.

That same night He stood among His own, gathered together fearful in an upper room. Gently He chided them, by evident signs He convinced them that it was He; He left them full of awe, yet beside themselves with joy. But one of them had been absent from the gathering. They told him what had happened, but he would not believe; they gave him the evidence of the wounded hands and feet, but he rejected it; not until he had himself put his finger into those wounds and his hand into the pierced side would he yield. And the gentle Master heard, and accepted the challenge. He stood again among them; this time the unbelieving one being present. "Peace be to you," He said as usual; then to the delinquent:

"Put in thy finger hither

And see my hands

And bring hither thy hand

And put it into my side.

And be not faithless but believing."
Such is the condescending charity of Christ.

For forty days like this He went in and out among them, comforting them, strengthening them, giving them assurance of His abiding presence:

“Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.” Then He was taken from their midst. He ascended into heaven, but not before He had convinced them that in a mystic way He would still be forever with them.

Such then, in shadow only, is the charity of Christ. From beginning to end it is a consistent picture, overwhelming in its greatness, incredible, as men would say, in its manifestation, yet too consistent, too great, if we may use a paradox, too incredible not to be true. No man could have invented such a story, much less have convinced others had it been false. It is a thing unique; it is human charity raised to its ideal; it is beyond the ideal, being lit up with the inner light of charity divine. And we rightly say it is; for being divine it cannot die; Christ having risen dieth now no more. He is yesterday, today, and the same forever, and we live and die and rise again in the triumph of the knowledge that nothing need separate us from the love of God, which we have in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

