

CHAPTER VI.

FEAR.

YOU may run up and down the gamut of human failings and find no single attribute which is responsible for so much sorrow and disaster. It would seem that in true Religion there is absolute necessity for fearlessness. Do not fear Man, or the Devil. All you have to fear is doing what you know God does not like. It seems to me, as a plain man and careful observer, that nearly all the so-called Christian religion is built up on the foundation of a purely imaginary idea that there is a very hot place waiting for you if you don't look at things in a particular way—*i.e.*, through the spectacles of those who have from time to time, and for motives best known to themselves, laid down certain laws as to rewards and punishments. If you do so-and-so, believe in me and my interpretations of Divine wishes, you will go to heaven; but, if not, if you dare to think for yourself, you will fall into the hands of an angry God who will subject you to everlasting damnation. What a dreadful creed. God Almighty is thus credited with the failings of an insatiable monster ready to burn in hell-fire the creatures made in His image simply because they don't or cannot follow the dogmatic teachings of certain sects of the so-called Christian Church? I say "so-called" advisedly, because I do not consider that the Christianity of our dear Lord Jesus Christ is at all represented by the Church of Rome or the Protestant Church. Hundreds of years after Christ the dogmas and sacer-

dotal practices became glaringly prominent, and then the Great Prophet of Arabia was given his mission against idolatry. His mission had wonderful results, and the Mahomedan faith in its simplicity and goodness spread from Persia to the Atlantic Ocean. Then some centuries later Martin Luther appeared, and endeavoured to sweep away the idolatries—for they are nothing less—of the then so-called Christian Church. He partially succeeded in his mission, and the Reformed Church no doubt was a great advance on the Romish Church; but it did not go far enough, and to-day we find that, though the Prophet Mahomet from the South and Martin Luther from the North made such strenuous efforts to do away with Sacerdotalism, the evils remained, and they remain to this very day.

I trust I may be excused for bringing in the following lines, because they seem rather frivolous when we are on such an intensely serious subject, but perhaps they explain the situation fairly well. A certain man was walking along a street when he met a gentleman attired in black with a white clerical collar and tie. He said to the clerical one, "Oh, can you tell me something about religion?" "Oh yes, my friend, I can; verily you can only rightly believe in the truth of Hokey Pokey Whisky Bung. If you really believe this you will be saved." The inquirer after truth thanked his informant and said, "I don't feel quite sure about it; it's good of you to tell me. I will think it over." He then walked on, and further down the street met another gentleman attired in similar garments, and put the question to him, also mentioning the fact that he had heard that "Hokey Pokey Whisky Bung" was certain to lead to the better land. The cleric number two held up his hands in horror and amazement, and said, "Oh, my poor friend, you are being led

in the path which leadeth to destruction if you follow H.P.W.B.; it is altogether wrong, and probably instigated by the Evil One: there is but one really safe path which you may tread to heaven, and that is *Hikey Pikey Sikey Krikey*. In this there is certain salvation. I will tell you all about it if you will give me a good living, a comfortable income, and a bit of land on which to build a church. But, my dear Christian friend, if you don't believe in H.P.S.K., you will infallibly be burnt for ever in hell fire." The anxious one walked a little further on and met yet another man attired like the others in decent black with tie and collar, and asked him about the correct thing in beliefs; but this one gave him such a pitiful account of sitting on clouds with harps and unpleasant companions that he said, in desperation, "Well, religious experts differ so much that, as a layman, I am utterly bewildered and know not what to believe." Now, though this may seem flippant, it is not really so, for I want to show that the religion which depends upon the devices and imaginings of man is a poor thing and not worth cultivating. What is a religion based on fear of punishment worth? Absolutely nothing. What a debasing thought it is to imagine that the God of Mercy is for ever looking out for a chance of punishing us. The love of God, the recognition of His infinite goodness and the fear of ever doing anything wrong or deceitful or mean ought to be enough. What do I care about hell fire or any other fire if God is with me?

Whilst on the subject of "Fear," I must not omit to reprint a curious letter I received from a gentleman whose ideas concerning the future must keep him in a continual state of terror—it will be observed that he calls me a "guilty sinner," and the question of how a "sinner" can be anything

but "guilty," or how a guilty person can be anything but a sinner, must be left for those ingenious persons who make a study of the solution of enigmas of the obviously simple class. There is a strong comic vein in my nature, and it is so strong at times that it leads to my annoying, whilst harmlessly amusing, my friends; and, in the spirit of comedy, I cannot resist the temptation of publishing the following letter from a gentleman I do not know, but who appears to know me.

" December 6, 1913.

" To the Rt. Hon. Baron Headley.

" My Lord,—I trust your lordship will pardon my writing to you, but seeing your name in the paper as one who has become a convert to Islamism, I have prayed about it, and feel compelled to draw your attention to the main fact of religion, and it is this: You and I and everyone are sinners—God is Holy. Now, *how can you, a guilty sinner, be happy and at home with a Holy God?*

" Until this question is answered I do not see any reason or sense in entering into any other question—other questions only divert the mind from *the main issue*.

" If I can in any way help you to answer this question, so that you will know how you can be happy and at home with a Holy God, I shall only be too pleased.—With many prayers, yours very sincerely,

ARTHUR ROBERTS, M.D.

" P.S.—Kindly read through the Gospel of John *at one sitting* as you would any other book. Do this twelve times."

To this remarkable letter I sent the following reply :—

December 20, 1913.

“ Dear Sir,—I have only just received your letter of the 6th inst., which was sent to the wrong address.

“ With regard to ‘ guilty sinners,’ I must ask you to speak for yourself—if you are one such unfortunate, and associate with others like yourself, pray allow me to inform you that I am *not* particularly guilty, and I don’t like being with ‘ guilty sinners ’ at any time—I avoid them carefully.

“ My faith in my dear and merciful Creator is so boundless that I hardly like to speak of it ; but I can assure you that I never take any step or perform the smallest duty of life without looking to God for aid and guidance. God is ever with me—Allah-o-Akbar—and He knows that I try hard to do my duty to Him and to all my fellow-creatures.

“ I was not ‘ born in sin ’ ; I am not a ‘ child of wrath,’ and my father and mother did no sin in bringing me into the world.

“ I have often read all the Gospels, but cannot now promise—even to please you—to read the Gospel of St. John twelve times at one sitting, as I am a busy man.—Faithfully yours,

“ HEADLEY.”

“ To Arthur Roberts, Esq., M.D.”

If Mr. Arthur Roberts only knew how happy I feel since I have shaken off even the last pretence of idolatry and superstition he would himself long to embrace Islam and understand the happiness and blessedness of being at one with God.

I trust I am not transgressing any rules of propriety in reproducing these letters, which were, I take it, never intended to be private. Two more letters passed between us, and the correspondence then ceased. It is, of course, impossible to argue with a man unless there is a distinct understanding as to the premises and, since the fundamental ideas held by the gentleman whose letter appears above are quite different to my own, nothing could come of a continuance of the discussion between us.

I believe that human beings are born sinless, but that, as time goes on, they are more or less led astray by their surroundings, and fall into all kinds of error and sin, from which nothing but the love of God can save them.

Whenever the almighty power of God and His love for mankind have been truly revealed to a man his love for doing right comes before all other desires. Such a man will not be able to at once subdue all his failings and sins, but the taste for that which is perfect will gradually awake in him a dislike of all that is wrong and contrary to God's wishes. Throughout the whole of life the battle must go on, and even when Satan seems to prevail for a short season we must not be downhearted but still look to God for assistance. As time goes on the onslaughts of the Evil One become less effective till, in the end, they will be more easily resisted, but it will not do to neglect our prayers for guidance and strength from on High.
