

I

LUKE XIV. 27: *And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*

GUIDANCE enough indeed is offered us upon the way of life, and this is not surprising, since every leading astray claims to be guidance. But even if the ways of error be many, yet is the truth but one, but that One who is “the Way and the Life”, the unique guidance which surely leads a man through life to Life. Thousands upon thousands bear a name to denote that they have chosen this guidance, that they belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, from whom they take the name of Christians, that they are his vassals, whether, for the rest, they be masters or servants, bond or free, men or women. *Christians* they call themselves, and they call themselves by other names as well which all denote a relation to this unique guidance. They call themselves *Believers*, which is to say that they are pilgrims, strangers and foreigners in the world. No pilgrim indeed is so surely recognised by the staff in his hand—many a one might carry a staff who is not upon a journey!—as calling oneself a believer is the accepted evidence of being a pilgrim. For to believe means precisely this, that what I am seeking is not here, and that is the very reason why I have faith in it. Faith means just that blessed unrest, deep and strong, which so urges the believer onward that he cannot settle at ease in this world, and anyone who was quite at ease would cease to be a believer. For a believer cannot sit still, as a man might sit with a pilgrim’s staff in his hand; a believer journeys on. They call themselves *the Communion of Saints*, by which to denote what they are supposed to be and what they ought to be, what they hope to become some day, when faith shall be put aside and the pilgrim’s staff laid down. They call themselves *Brethren of the Cross*, by which to denote that

their way through the world is not as light as a dance, but heavy and toilsome, even though their faith be to them also the joy that overcomes the world. For as the ship, with sail set, lightly flies before the wind, yet ploughs a deep and heavy furrow in the sea, so too the Christian's way is easy, looking to the faith that overcomes the world, but heavy, looking to the toil and labour of the road-maker. They call themselves *Followers of Christ*, and it is on this name we now shall dwell, to consider:

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE CONCEPT OF FOLLOWING CHRIST;
IN PARTICULAR, WHAT JOY IS INVOLVED IN IT.

When the bold warrior presses forward nothing daunted, and takes in his breast the arrows of the foe, thus protecting his young henchman who follows him, can we indeed say the youth is following him? When the loving wife, in what she holds the dearest in the world, in her husband, thinks she has the fine example she would like herself to attain in life, and so, womanlike—for woman was taken from man's side—walks by her husband's side, and finds support in him, can we indeed say this wife is following her husband? When the courageous teacher calmly takes his stand, surrounded by derision, pursued by envy, and all attacks are directed at him alone, and no one can even take aim at the disciple who is joined with him, can we indeed say that this disciple is following him? When the hen, seeing an enemy approach, spreads out her wings to provide a cover for the chickens behind her, can we indeed say that these chickens are following the hen? Nay, we cannot say so; the case must be altered. The bold warrior must withdraw, so that it may be seen now whether his henchman will truly follow him, follow him in actual danger, when all the shafts are aimed at *his* breast, or whether like a coward he will turn his back on danger, and lose his courage because he has lost his man of courage. As for the noble husband, he must step aside, must go away from her, alas, that now it may

be seen whether the sorrowing widow lacking his support will follow him, or whether, because she is bereft of his support, she will let his example also go. The fearless teacher must hide himself, or must be hidden in a grave, that now it may appear whether his disciple will follow him, will stand his ground, surrounded by derision and pursued by envy, or whether he will depart from his position, in life, dishonourably, because his teacher honourably departed from it in his death.

To follow therefore means to go the way he went whom you are following; it means, that is to say, that he no longer is seen going. And thus was it necessary that Christ should go away, should die, before it could be shown whether his disciple would follow him. It is many, many hundreds of years since this took place, and yet in the same manner still it is forever taking place. For there is a time when Christ goes almost visibly by the child's side, when Christ goes on before the child, but then there is also a time when he is taken from the view of sensitive imagination, so that now the seriousness of decision may show whether the child, grown older, will follow him.

When a child is allowed to hold on to his mother's dress, can we say that then he is walking along with her, just as his mother walks? Nay, we may not say so. First must the child learn to walk alone and on his own, before he can go the way his mother goes, and go as she is going. And when the child is learning to walk alone, what must the mother do? She must make herself invisible. That her tenderness towards him is the same and remains unaltered, that indeed it probably grows greater, just at the time when the child is learning to walk alone, we know very well; the child, on the other hand, may not always understand it. But what is meant by the child having to learn to walk alone and to walk on his own, is, in a spiritual sense, the task set anyone who is to be somebody's follower—he must learn to walk alone and to walk on his own. Strange, is it not? Although it is almost as to something comical and always with a smile that we refer to the anxious efforts of

the child to walk alone, yet language has no more forceful expression, and none more touching or more true, than this description of the deepest sorrow and suffering: to walk alone and to walk on one's own. That heaven's care for us is unchanged, and is indeed, were it possible, still more solicitous in this hour of danger, we know very well, but perhaps we cannot always understand it, when we are learning. So then to follow means to walk alone and to walk on one's own, the way the teacher went: to have nobody in sight with whom to take counsel, to be compelled to choose for oneself, to cry out in vain, as the child cries in vain, because the mother dare not seem to help; to despair in vain, because nobody is able to help, and heaven dare not appear to help. But to have invisible help, this is precisely learning to walk alone, for it is learning to transform one's mind to the likeness of the teacher's, though the teacher has passed from sight. To walk alone! Even so, for there is none, not any mortal man, who can choose for thee, nor in any final or decisive way give counsel in what belongs to the one matter of consequence, give counsel to decide in the matter of thy soul's welfare; and even if there were plenty willing to do so, it were without question but to thy hurt. Alone! For when thou hast chosen, thou shalt no doubt find companions of the way, but in the moment of decision, and whenever there is peril of life, then thou art alone. There is none who hears thy coaxing plea, nor heeds thy passionate complaining—yet is there help and willingness enough in heaven; but it is not seen, and to be helped by it is just to walk alone. Not from without this help doth come, to clasp thy hand, lending support as kindness helps the infirm, nor by compulsion comes to lead thee back, when thou hast gone astray. Nay, but only when thou dost yield completely, dost give up self-will, give thyself over with thy whole heart and soul, then in form unseen the help doth come; but just so hast thou walked upon thine own. We do not see the mighty urge that leads the bird on its long way; the urge flies not before and the bird behind it; it seems as if it were

the bird that found the way: so we see not the teacher, but the follower only, who is like him, and it seems as if the follower were himself the way. For he is the true follower who goes along the same way, going alone.

This is what is implied in the concept: to follow anybody. But to *follow Christ* means, to take up the cross, or as in the text we have read, to bear the cross. To bear the cross means to deny oneself, as Christ makes plain, when he says: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. xvi. 24). It was also this mind "which was in Christ Jesus, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but humbled himself . . . and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 5f.). Such was the pattern, and such must the following be; even though it be a weary and a toilsome labour to deny oneself, a heavy cross to take up, a heavy cross to drag, yet is it, as the pattern requires, to be borne in an obedience unto death, so that the follower, though he may not die on the cross, still resembles his pattern in dying "with the cross on him".¹ One good deed, one high resolve, is not to deny oneself. That, alas, is what we may be taught in the world, because even that is so rarely seen that on the rare occasion we regard it wondering. But not so does Christianity teach us. Christ did not only say to the rich young man: "If thou wilt be perfect, sell all thou hast and give to the poor." To many this demand by itself might well appear excessive and odd; if the young man did this, perhaps he would not even be admired, but smiled at for an oddity, or pitied for a fool. But when Christ speaks he speaks otherwise; he says "Go thy way, sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and come, take up thy cross, and follow me" (Mark x. 21). And so to sell your goods and give to the poor is not to take up your cross, or at most it is the beginning, the good beginning, of going on to take up your cross and follow Christ. To give all to the poor is the first thing, it is, without unduly straining the words, *to take up the cross*; the next thing,

¹ Possibly a reference to Gal. vi. 17.

the long and weary sequel, is, *to bear one's cross*. Every day it must take place, not once and for all; and there must be nothing, nothing, that the follower is not willing to give up in self-denial. Whether it be something, as we say, of little account, wherein he is not willing to deny himself, or whether it be something great, does not make the least essential difference, for what is of little account is just what becomes of infinite account as it is the guilty occasion of a wrong relation to the self-denial demanded. Perhaps there was one who was willing to do what the rich young man did not do, and hoped that so he might have fulfilled the highest demand, who yet did not become a follower, because he remained standing—"turned round and looked back"¹ after his great achievement; or if he went on still did not become a follower, because in his opinion, when he had done such a great thing, what was less did not matter. Alas, whence comes it that the most difficult of all achievements should be to deny oneself in lesser things! May it not be because there is a certain refined self-love which also appears to be capable of self-denial in what is great? But the less the demand, the more paltry, so much the more does it offend this self-love, because for such a duty it is quite deprived of its own and other people's extravagant praise; and that is why self-denial is all the humbler. Whence comes it that the most difficult achievement is for a man to deny himself when he lives alone and, as it were, in an obscure corner! May it not be, I wonder, because a certain refined self-love also appears to be capable of self-denial—when there are many admirers looking on! But just as it makes no essential difference, what are the different interests in which each individual, according to his circumstances, exercises self-denial, so that a beggar can exercise the same absolutely real self-denial as a king: so does it make no essential difference what are the different interests in which a man refrains from self-denial; for self-denial is nothing else but the deep inward spirit of denying oneself.

¹ Reference to Luke ix. 62?

And this is a heavy, burdensome task. For no doubt self-denial consists in throwing off burdens, and so might seem a light enough task; but it is indeed a heavy one, to have to throw off just those burdens, which self-love would so dearly like to bear, aye, so dearly, that it is only with the greatest difficulty that self-love can come to understand that they are burdens.

To follow Christ means therefore to deny oneself, and so it means *to go by the same way* as Christ went, in the humble form of a servant, in want and scorn and mockery, not loving the world, and not beloved by it. And so it means *to walk alone*, for one who in self-denial forsakes the world and all that is of the world renounces everything that might allure and might distract him,¹ so that he does not go to his field, nor strike a bargain, nor take to himself a wife. One who, if need be, does not indeed love father and mother, sister and brother,² less than before, but loves Christ so much more that he can be said to hate those others, he walks alone indeed, alone in the whole world. It is true that in the multifarious cross-currents of the activities of the world it appears difficult, indeed impossible, to live like this, impossible even to judge whether anybody actually does live like this; but let us not forget that it is eternity that shall judge how the problem was solved, and that the seriousness of eternity shall command a shamefaced silence about all that is of the world, about all that was forever talked of in the world. For in eternity thou shalt not be asked how great are the possessions thou art leaving behind thee—this question is for those who *survive* thee to ask!—or how many battles thou hast won, how wise thou wast, how powerful thine influence—this will be thy *fame in time to come!* Nay, eternity shall not ask about *what of the world remains behind thee* in the world. But it shall ask what treasure thou hast stored up in heaven; how often thou hast overcome thine own soul, what self-mastery thou hast achieved, or whether thou hast been in bondage; how often thou hast in self-denial

¹ Luke xiv. 26.

² Luke xiv. 17-20.

been thine own master, or if thou hast never been so; how often thou hast in self-denial been willing to make an offering to a good cause, or if thou hast never been so willing; how often thou hast in self-denial forgiven thine enemy, whether seven times or seventy times seven; how often thou hast in self-denial borne patiently humiliations; and what thou hast suffered, not for thine own sake, not for the sake of thy selfish purposes, but what thou hast in self-denial suffered for the sake of God.

And he who shall judge thee, the judge from whose judgment thou canst not appeal to any higher, he was not the captain of a host, conquering kingdoms and lands, with whom to speak of thy worldly feats, but his kingdom was one not of this world; he was not one robed in purple, with whom to hope to be in distinguished company, for he bore the purple only as the butt of mockery; he was not powerful through his influence, so that he might wish to be initiated into thy worldly schemes, for he was so despised that the ruler dared to visit him only under cover of the night. Oh, but it were very comforting to meet together with those who are like-minded; when one is cowardly, not to be indicted before a court of warriors, when one is self-loving and worldly not to be called in judgment by self-denial. And this judge not only knows what self-denial is, not only knows how to judge so that no offence can be concealed, nay, but to be in his presence is to be judged, his presence that makes everything keep silence and turn pale which, being of the world, in the world looked well, was heard and seen with admiration; his presence is the judgment, for he *was* self-denial. He, who was the equal of God, took upon himself the humble form of a servant; he, who could exercise command over legions of angels, yea, over the world, that it should exist or be destroyed, went about defenceless; he, who had all power, gave up all power, and could do nothing even for his dear disciples but offer them the same terms of lowliness and contempt; he, who was Lord of creation, made Nature herself be dumb, for it was only when he had given up the

ghost that the veil was rent and the graves were opened, and the forces of Nature betrayed who he was: if this is not self-denial, then what is self-denial!

This is what was implied in the concept of following Christ; but now let us consider *the joy that is in it*.

My hearer! If thou wouldst suppose a youth standing at life's beginning, where the many ways open out before him, and asking himself which course he would wish to pursue: does he not make close enquiry whither each one leads, or, what is the same thing, try to find out who has gone that way before? Then we name to him the famous, the worthy, the glorious names of those whose memory is preserved among men. To begin with, we recite so many names, that the choice may have some relation to the youth's possibilities, and so that there may be no stint of the wealth of alternatives offered; but he himself, urged by the craving in his soul, now makes a narrower choice, and finally there remains to him one only name, the one that in his eyes and in his heart is the finest of them all. Then his heart thrills when with enthusiasm he names this name, for him the only one, and says: By this way will I go, for by this way went he!

But we shall not now divide attention or waste time naming such names; for there is in the end but one name in heaven and upon earth, one only name, and hence but one way to choose—if a man is to choose seriously and to choose aright! Since a man has to choose, there must be more ways than one; but also there must be only one way to be chosen, if the seriousness of eternity is to be in the choice. A choice of which it can be said that one might just as well choose the one way as the other does not have the seriousness of eternity; there must be in the choosing absolutely all to win and all to lose, if the choice is to have the seriousness of eternity, even though, as we have said, there must be a possibility of choosing between alternatives, that the choice may really be a choice.

There is but one name in heaven and on earth, but one

way, and but one pattern. He who chooses to follow Christ, chooses that name which is above every name,¹ that pattern which is highly exalted above all heavens, which yet is so truly human that it can be a pattern for a human being, and so shall be named in heaven and on earth, in both places as the highest. For there are patterns whose name is named only on the earth, but the highest, the only name, must have this very character of uniqueness, from which again it is to be recognised as the only one: that it is named both in heaven and on earth. This name is the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. But surely this is something joyous, that we should dare to choose to go the same way as he went! Alas! in the confused and confusing talk of the world, the simple and the serious sounds sometimes almost like a jest. That man who doubtless exercises the greatest power ever exercised in the world calls himself proudly the follower of Peter. But to be a follower of Christ! Truly that does not tempt a man to be proud; it is granted equally to the mightiest and the humblest, the wisest and the simplest; which is again just what is blessed about it. And is it so very glorious a thing to be that Highness which no other can become; is it not rather dreary! Is it so glorious a thing to dine off silver when others go hungry, to dwell in palaces when so many have no shelter, to be the great scholar no simple man can be, to have a name in a sense in which thousands upon thousands are excluded: is that so glorious! And if this—this envious distinction—were the highest our life on earth could offer, would it not offer an inhuman and intolerable fate to the fortunate man! But how different, on the contrary, when the only joy is to follow Christ! Greater joy there cannot be than this—to be able to become what is highest; and this supreme joy cannot be made more full of courage, more blessed, more confident than it is already, with its joyful thought, given by *heaven's loving kindness*: that it is in the power of every man.

So the man who chose to follow Christ goes forward on the way. And when he must also learn to know the world and

¹ Phil. ii. 9.

what is in the world, the world's strength and his own weakness, when the struggle with flesh and blood distresses him, when the going is heavy, and there are many foes and no friends, then the agony of it may well wring from him the moan: I walk alone.

Listen to me. If a child learning to walk came crying, and said to his mother: I am walking alone, would she not answer: Isn't that splendid, child! And so also with the following of Christ. On this way, it is not only true to say, as is said elsewhere, that when need is greatest help is nearest, nay, but here, on this way, the greater the suffering the nearer to perfection. Is there any other way known where this is true? On every other way it is the reverse that is true: if sufferings come, the weight of them outweighs all else. So much so, that it may even indicate the wrong way has been chosen. But on that way where a man follows Christ, the height of suffering is the height of glory. Even as the pilgrim moans, in his heart he reckons himself to be in bliss.

See how a man setting out on any other way must first make himself familiar with the uncertainties of it: it may go well, and without any difficulties, but there may also be so many obstacles heaped up that he can make no progress. In following Christ on the way of self-denial, there is, on the contrary, the perfection of assurance; for on this way the "marks" of suffering are the joyous signs that the right way is being followed. But what joy can be greater than to dare to choose the best way, the way to the highest! And again, what joy so great as this, except the joy of the infinite security of the way!

Yet there remains one last blessed joy in the concept of following Christ. For in truth he, who was revealed, does not go with his follower, neither does he go visibly in front of him, but he has gone *before*, and this is his follower's joyful hope: that he shall follow where he has gone. It is one thing to follow him on the way of self-denial, and this itself were joyous; it is another thing to follow him into eternal bliss. When death has divided two who were lovers, and then the survivor dies,

we say: She has followed him now—he had gone before. So Christ went before, and not only so, for he went to *prepare a place for his follower*.¹

When it is a human forerunner of whom we are speaking, then it may be true to say that by going on before he has made the way easier for one who comes after; and when the way about which we are speaking refers to the earthly, the temporal, the imperfect, then it may even happen that the way has been made quite easy for the follower. This is not true with reference to the Christian or with reference to the perfect way of self-denial; it is essentially the same hard way for every follower. But then it is in quite another sense that we say of Christ, he went before: he did not by going before prepare the way for his follower, but he went before to prepare for his follower a place in heaven. A human forerunner at times may justly say: Now it is easy enough to come on behind, when the road has been laid down and made ready and the gate is wide. Christ, on the other hand, must say: Behold, all is ready in heaven—if thou art ready to enter in by the strait gate, and to go forward on the narrow way, of self-denial.

In the preoccupations of the world it may seem very doubtful about this place in the beyond; but the man who in self-denial has renounced the world and himself must have assured himself in doing so that such a place exists. Somewhere indeed must that man be who does exist, and somewhere have his habitation; but in the world he has renounced he can have no place: hence there must be some other place, there must be, if he is even to be able to make the renunciation. Oh, is this not quite simply understood by anybody who has really denied himself and the world! And to stake one's life on the question whether one be really confident that there is such a place in the beyond, whether one actually is assured of eternal life, is simple too. The Apostle Paul says (1 Cor. xv. 19): "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, then are we of all men most miserable." And it is so indeed, because any man who for

¹ John xiv. 2.

Christ's sake renounces all the good things of the world and endures all its evils, if there be no blessedness in the beyond, is deceived, horribly deceived. If there be no blessedness in the beyond!—to me it seems that it would have to be, if only from sympathy with such a man. So that if a man does not set his mind on earthly things and on good times, does not yearn for worldly gain, nor even grasp it when it is offered, if he chooses toil and strain, and, as well may be, ungrateful labour, because he has chosen the better part, if when he must do without earth's reward, he has not even the consolation of knowing that he did all he could to earn it: then is he a fool in the eyes of the world, he is the miserable man of the world. Were there no blessedness in the beyond, then were he of all men most miserable, and it were just his self-denial that had made him so—him, who had not even striven to win earth's prize, but had of his free will renounced it. If, on the other hand, there is a blessedness beyond, then he, the miserable, is yet the richest of all men. For it is one thing to be the most miserable in the world, when the world is considered to be above all; it is another thing to be the most miserable in the world when blessedness is, or is to be, the highest. The proof that this blessedness exists is very finely stated by Paul; for there cannot be the slightest doubt that without it he had been of all men most miserable. But if a man strives to make himself secure in the world, tries to get himself the world's gain, then his assertion that there is a blessedness beyond is not quite convincing; it will scarcely convince others, it has scarcely convinced himself. But let none sit in judgment on this, or each upon his own case only, for the very readiness to judge another in this matter is an attempt to secure one's own position in the world; else one would realise that both judgment and blessedness belong to another world.

Ah, in the course of time it has often happened, and still it keeps on happening again and again, that someone goes before for whom another yearns and whom he fain would follow: but never has anyone, any loved one, any teacher, any

friend, gone on before—to prepare a place for him who follows! As Christ's is the only name in heaven and on earth, so too Christ is the only forerunner who has thus gone before. There is between heaven and earth only one way: to follow Christ; both in time and in eternity there is but one choice, one only: to choose this way; on earth there is but one hope of eternity, to follow Christ to heaven. In life there is one blessed joy: to follow Christ; and in death there is one final blessed joy: to follow Christ into Life!

SAMPLE