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AND

Other Sermons

BY THE

Rev. W. L. WATKINSON

Author of "The Blind Spot"



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TO

MY OLD AND FAITHFUL FRIEND

J. BAYLEY LEES, ESQ., J.P.,
HANDSWORTH, BIRMINGHAM,

THIS VOLUME IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

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I

THE BANE AND THE ANTIDOTE

So now it is no more **I** that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.—**ROM.**
vii. 17 (R.V.).

But by the grace of God **I** am what I am : and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain ; but **I** laboured more abundantly than they all : yet not **I**, but the grace of God which was with me.—**I COR. xv. 10** (R.V.).

THE BANE AND THE ANTIDOTE

NOTE—

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE PASSAGES.

1. *The main import of our first text:* "So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me." The meaning of this, stated broadly yet truly, is that the apostle holds that the evil self we find within is not the true self. He recognises that duality of nature of which we are conscious—a rational and an animal self, a spiritual and a carnal self, a moral and a lawless self, engaged in endless, painful conflict. Some misguided scientists have recently succeeded in producing what has been called a diabolical fad. By grafting a portion of one insect upon the body of another they are able to make new organisms; the result, however, is hideous in the extreme. The grafting is done when the creatures are in the pupa state. The insect-grafter may commence work on either the chrysalis or the perfect insect itself; but the chrysalis, egg, or grub of the insect offers the best facilities. The vivisector takes the pupa of a spider, and, by a delicate surgical operation, grafts it upon the pupa of a fly, and when the "freak" has passed the chrysalis state, and merged

into a perfect insect, we have a monster indeed. We may fancy the strange and distressing conflict which ensues within that violated organism,—the clash of irreconcilable impulses and instincts in a creature compounded of, say, butterfly and spider; a passion for the sunshine and a love of darkness, a longing for roses and a thirst for blood, demanding inconsistent satisfaction; the creature perplexed within itself, afraid of itself, devouring itself. Yet this painful creation of the vivisector expresses more closely than we like to think the apostle's conception of human nature when first it becomes conscious of itself. Looking upon the sky above us, we are delighted with the serenity, harmony, and splendour of the stars; studying the world about us, nothing is more impressive than the fitness, orderliness, and beauty which everywhere prevail; but looking within our own breast, we find a chaos and an anarchy teeming with tragic elements. The loftiest and the lowest, the purest and the most abominable, the largest and the meanest, idealism and brutality, divinity and diabolism, struggle for supremacy, and there is no truce to the strife which makes existence a curse. Spider and fly subtly blending in one cruel organism is a pale metaphor of the heart torn by painful antagonisms. The race in every generation has recognised this ambiguousness of human nature, and has felt that whatever the external difficulties with which it has had to contend they have been positively immaterial when compared with the crushing burden of its own consciousness.

While all are conscious of this humiliating duality within the personal life, the apostle distinctly teaches

that our better self is the true self. "So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me." The thought of St. Paul is that there is something in us deeper than sin; that, indeed, it is natural to be virtuous. In our heart of hearts we consent unto the law of righteousness, although practically we disobey it. Sin he regards as a foreign element which mars the integrity of our nature, which beguiles and provokes us to self-assertion and disorderliness, and which brings into experience and consciousness the bitterest suffering of life; yet all the while the original, profounder self sympathises with truth, goodness, and beauty. True, in transgressing the commandment we yield to our sinful nature; but it is equally true that when we sin we put ourselves into opposition to the principles underlying the nature of the universe, and of ourselves in particular. "The fact that I sin implies that I am amenable to the moral law; and that means that it is my nature to be virtuous. If I did not violate the deepest law of my own nature by sinning, it would not be sin."¹ The "I," the real, essential personality, is one with the eternal law; it springs from God, was created in His image in righteousness and the holiness of truth, and amid selfishness, falsity, shame, and misery reveals flashes of the primal splendour of purity, and gives its unhesitating sanction to the eternal righteousness. "So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me."

2. *The main import of the second text:* "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His

¹ M'Taggart.

grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." The same man speaks in both passages; but how immense the difference between the experience expressed to the Romans and that of which he boasts to the Corinthians! In the former passage he deplures the fact that a morbid virus called sin has worked in him every kind of irregular desire, and that it has betrayed him into all manner of inward and practical lawlessness; his life was divided, irrational, mischievous, supremely unhappy. In the second scripture, however, all this has passed away. He has attained to a sound reasonableness of thought and feeling; he walks according to the deeper truth of his own nature; the high virtues approved by his consciousness are attained by him in experience and action; instead of his soul being lacerated in a bitter conflict between lust and law, it has been harmonised by the supremacy of righteousness, delighting in the love and peace of God; and his life has become unselfish and magnanimous to such a degree that he outshines in extent and enthusiasm of service all his great-hearted contemporaries. So vast is the change that it is difficult to believe that the same man speaks in the two places. But mark the cause assigned for the gracious transformation: "By the grace of God I am what I am . . . not I, but the grace of God which was with me." He does not profess that this marvellous victory has been reached through innate strength, through the efficacy of native resolution, or through self-discipline and culture, but simply

and wholly because the divine grace bestowed upon him was not found vain.

In this seventh chapter of the Romans the apostle fully recognises the unavailingness of the struggle to subdue the base elements which have usurped dominion over us. Do what we may, the butterfly cannot emancipate itself from the gloomy and hateful paramountcy of the spider. The flower-haunting instinct cannot expel the bloodthirstiness; the heavenly beauty of the soul is hidden by the spider ghastliness; and with affinities for light and darkness, we yet love darkness rather than light. When we would do good, evil is present with us. And the greatest philosophers in all ages agree with the apostle. They sorrowfully acknowledge the deep schism in our nature, and deny the possibility of any radical and satisfactory reconciliation. It is quite true that the schism is not always equally in evidence, and that when it does reveal itself it may in various ways be softened and disguised; it is quite possible, too, that its manifestations may be chastened by self-discipline: but that the cruel antithesis in human nature can be radically eliminated, most deep thinkers scornfully deny. Philosophy, education, and government make society possible by securing for a while the armed neutrality or the decent behaviour of the warring passions, yet the irrationality of our nature is so deep that the most profound and serious students have confessed it invincible. But the apostle exults because, whilst a foreign force thrust upon him an ignoble servitude, a transcendent energy has secured him liberty and peace. "By the grace of God I am what I am."

By virtue of sovereign, supernatural aid, the black despotism is broken, and the slave of sin passes into the Lord's free man. The deepest truth of human nature has been revealed in Jesus Christ, and the principles underlying the true nature of the universe and man have found perfect expression in His gospel; but the matter does not end there. The Son of God, who is also the Son of man, has bought for us, and brought to us, the redeeming grace which silently and irresistibly restores to the life of reason and righteousness all who do not receive it in vain. His Spirit cuts out of the believing soul the accursed section that an infernal surgery has grafted upon it, purges the virus, stultifies the evil instinct, and restores the torn and bleeding organism to its original integrity and harmony, beauty and blessedness.

II. THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT THAT THESE TWO FACTS AFFORD.

I. That our better self is the truer self, and that the divine grace waits to rescue that better self, are facts full of inspiration to us *as we seek to work out our personal salvation*. As soon as we reach consciousness we know the duality of our nature, we are horrified to find, as it were, two hostile tenants in the house of life. Guided, however, by the light of revelation, we discover to our great comfort that they are not two tenants, but a tenant and a burglar. Sin followed by death has broken into the world and made sad havoc of human nature, yet it has no primitive right, no legal standing; its expulsion in the nature of things is possible, and in the glorious power of grace it is actually mastered and expelled.

Carry the thought deep enough, and you find that human nature is noble and divine. But some will say, Has not sin become a "second nature" to us? Exactly so, a "second nature"; truly terrible and profound, yet second only. There is great encouragement in the fact that our nature was fashioned on the lines of truth, respect for justice, awe of purity, delight in goodness. "I consent unto the law." It is a matter of infinite moment whether we are working with our nature or against it, and we have the deep joy of knowing that whenever we long for righteousness and strive towards it, however our second nature may embarrass us, our original, inalienable nature is with us. When Moloch urged the fallen host to attempt once more their native heaven, he reminded them of a striking fact, forgotten by them in their panic, namely, that it was far easier for them to fly up than to sink.

In our proper motion we ascend
 Up to our native seat. Descent and fall
 To us is adverse. Who but felt of late,
 When the fierce Foe hung on our broken rear
 Insulting, and pursued us through the deep,
 With what compulsion and laborious flight
 We sunk thus low? The ascent is easy then.

A great truth is here for us men and our salvation.

In *our* proper motion *we* ascend
 Up to our native seat.

There is a flippant aphorism to the effect that it is easy to descend, and we have gone on repeating it until we fancy that we believe it; but it is not possible to believe it. The far deeper truth is,

that the hardest task we ever choose for ourselves is to descend. At every step of our descent we must violate the fine, temperate instincts and counsellings of the body; we must withstand the irrefragable arguments of the understanding; we must struggle with the majesty of conscience; we must outrage the affections which so eloquently plead with us; we must beat down our sense of self-respect; we must snap asunder one after another those various social bonds which bind us to better behaviour as by links of gold. At every downward step we encounter benign and immense opposition; we prove that the way of transgressors is hard. It is the painfullest, bitterest thing to thwart our nature and thrust it downward. We have fallen deeply, yet

With what compulsion and laborious flight
We sunk thus low.

We were fashioned in the likeness of God; ours is an upward-seeking instinct; our great faculties are biassed heavenward. What genuine and immense consolation we must ever find in this fact, whilst we seek to work out our own salvation! It is simply hopeless to work against the real constitution of anything—against its grain, its original bias, its in-born tendency and gravitation; but this is not the case when we work towards the true, the beautiful, and the good—we sprang out of the light, we are transcripts of the divine perfection, God has implanted in us the great qualities of moral law and life, and whatever our fall we have never been permitted to lose the heavenward disposition of our divine origination and calling. Our deepest nature

is with us when we aspire towards God ; His law is already in our heart.

Yet we understand that we cannot reach the lost heights without divine succour. No matter with what eloquence Moloch harangued the fallen arch-angels, cheering them on "with upright wing against a higher foe," they continued in the abyss ; despite their structure, they were powerless to reclaim their native sky. And we are as helpless to reach the heavenly height as they were. St. Paul exults in the magnificent change that has been wrought in his spirit, character, and prospects ; he ascribes all, however, to the almighty grace of the redeeming God. "I, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Made to ascend, we lie as helpless as a noble bird with broken wing, we groan in the gulf of dark despair with the blasted angels ; but, such is the mystery of love, Heaven is not hostile to us, strangely enough it is friendly to us, beckons us, bends to our rescue, and the great white wings of the Holy Dove softly spread beneath our stricken nature lift us again into heavenly places.

2. Mark the encouragement these scriptures afford *in our efforts to reclaim our fallen fellows*. We are often called to deal with bad and apparently hopeless cases of character. Sometimes we feel it peculiarly disheartening to contemplate the abject wickedness and misery of society. But we must not allow ourselves to be paralysed by what we see ; there is more than we see ; below the hideous and painful surface are elements of good, possibilities of recovery, sources of hope even when things are at their worst. The face of the sky is sometimes hidden by gloomy

vapours and black smoke, and the eclipsing darkness is full of thunder and lightning : but the clouds are not the sky ; at the back of all this depressing murkiness is the infinite blue, the white stars, the moon walking in brightness, the splendour of the sun. The whole mass of fog is really superficial, vanishing shadows, not abiding substance ; the body of heaven in its clearness hides within and beyond all clouds and eclipses, and ever and anon we catch a glimpse of the blue, the twinkle of a star, the moon's halo, a shaft of sunlight, telling of the eternal glory within the mist and darkness. So it is with human nature, with human society ; when most grievously darkened by ignorance, passion, and licence there yet resides in it an underlying indefeasible nobleness, and it yields sudden startling revelations of an indwelling greatness, of latent exquisite sensibilities, of splendid promise and potency—peeps beyond the blackness of an evil time into the infinite firmament of truth, holiness, and beauty. At the back of all the moral riot and ruin of society is the divinely begotten and redeemed "I," struggling and protesting. In the drunken, the impure, the thief, the violent, the very outcasts of men and women, what unexpected revealings do we witness of pure, kindly, self-sacrificing, heroic, magnanimous impulse—gleams of a splendour truly divine, and that refuses to be quenched ! The Spirit bloweth where He listeth and when He listeth, and the most degraded and forlorn, feeling the divine breath, start from the gutter to their feet, protesting, "I do these unmanly, these unwomanly acts ; I am guilty of these shameful excesses that I loathe ; I

scorn myself for my disgraceful life; I follow these hateful and devilish ways, yet I abhor them; I do them, yet not I, but sin which dwelleth in me." We know that all this, viewed from a certain standpoint, is eminently unsatisfactory; it fills us with regret that such conviction and penitence are so fugitive. Yet this sporadic goodness has great significance; it is indeed well to know that the Spirit of God strives with the most abject slave of sin, the greatest scoundrel and harlot, and that the agonising protest is so often on their lip, "I, yet not I, but sin which dwelleth in me." What hope is here for the evangelist! Alas if men at bottom were devoid of the spiritual idea or indifferent to it! But it is not so. The best feelings of men are with us, their conscience is with us, their aspiration and hope are with us, everything that is deepest in them is with us. Upon this indisputable fact we should fix our eye, and towards these nobler elements and sentiments address ourselves. Be not dispirited by the forbidding surface; persist to see in the chief of sinners that image of God which He has never allowed to become effaced, and which may yet shine out again in heavenly lustre.

In dealing with these extreme transgressors we must not forget that all efforts for their salvation will be in vain except we appeal to the grace of God. As we have shown, the apostle fully recognises this in the second passage we have quoted: "I, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Divine grace effected the wonderful change in the apostle, and the same energy must effect the change in every sinner. It may be said

that the change in St. Paul was nothing so considerable as the change that must be effected in the publican and the sinner; Paul was a moral man, religious, scholarly, genteel. Let us make no mistake. It demands as much grace to bring a saint out of a Pharisee as it does to bring a saint out of a sot, and whenever this is done it is quite as much a miracle. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." And no physician is so sure of a specific, no scientist so sure of a law, no mathematician so sure of an axiom, as we are that Christ Jesus can save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.

3. Finally remember the encouragement these scriptures afford *as we attempt the evangelization of the world*. The apostle in the Epistle to the Romans fully realises the fact, depth, power, disastrousness, and universality of sin. He has no reservation on any of these points. The divisive and destructive element in the race is emphasised by him in this treatise with peculiar frankness and fulness. Whoever may treat lightly the problem of sin, it is not St. Paul. Yet with equal sincerity and conviction he proclaims a gospel of boundless hope. He does this on two definite grounds: first, because he is satisfied that the foundations of the race were well and truly laid; and secondly, because God has not forsaken the work of His own hands—the whole Christian scheme is an all-convincing proof of this. The late Professor Huxley propounded a fundamentally different theory of the

world and life. He came to the conclusion that two distinct and contradictory methods prevail in the government of the world. There is first the cosmic order. This order has no sort of relation to moral ends ; it proceeds on the lines of selfishness, deception, tyranny, and cruelty ; it works through the lower nature of man, not for righteousness but against it ; the thief and murderer follow nature more closely than the philanthropist. Then, secondly, comes the ethical order. This is the programme which makes for justice, truth, mercy, harmony, civilisation. So there are two distinct, incompatible processes contending for the supremacy. So far we may say that St. Paul and Professor Huxley agree ; the theologian and the philosopher express themselves in a characteristic way, but substantially they are of one mind as to the dualistic and antagonistic laws and forces which so profoundly disturb and perplex human thought and life. Here, however, the agreement ends. Huxley regards the cosmic order as the natural order, the power which makes for unrighteousness being in the very constitution of things ; whilst the ethical order and development are artificial, the reformer and philanthropist being employed in building up an artificial world within, and despite a vicious cosmos.

The position of St. Paul is utterly different. He also, as we have seen, is painfully conscious of the warring systems within nature, but in his interpretation of them he unhesitatingly and firmly declares that the moral order is the natural order. In his view the dark things of nature do not constitute or make any part of the real order of the world,

they simply show that the true order has been thrown into confusion. The original, intrinsic, and final disposition of things is very good. The cosmic order is moral, the terrible things of earth and life being artificial and temporary. Truth springs out of the earth, and righteousness looks down from the stars. The "whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together." Nature, with her injustices, duplicities, cruelties, miseries, is constantly starting up with an emphatic protest not to be misunderstood: "I, yet not I, but sin which dwelleth in me." The beauty, the goodness, the beneficence, the joyfulness, which so frequently delight us in the glorious workings and revealings of nature, are the flashings forth of her original and indestructible righteousness. The philanthropist is not striving to build up within an immoral cosmos an artificial system of justice and peace ever thwarted and threatened by immemorial and universal evil, he is seeking to restore the world to its integrity; he is not attempting to get rid of what is organic and inveterate, but to sweep away the rubbish of things false and unnatural, so that he may build again the city of God upon the foundations which He first laid, which have never been destroyed, and which indeed, never can be destroyed. Nature, properly understood, is righteousness, and to that end we work.

How hopeless the task of attempting to fill the world with purity, kindness, and peace, if the modern scientist's view of nature were correct! He warns us that cosmic nature is born with us, that it is the outcome of millions of years of severe

training, and that we must not expect in a few centuries to subdue it to purely ethical ends. "Ethical nature may count upon having to reckon with a tenacious and powerful enemy as long as the world lasts." Yes, let us add, and a victorious enemy; for if science has taught us one thing more clearly than another, it is the uselessness of contending with nature. You get all kinds of blessing by obeying her; but check and combat her at every step and she avenges herself upon your stupid audacity. A man is a fool to strive against nature. That is, indeed, precisely what a fool is; he is the one who ventures to set his individual will against the arrangements of the world, the genius of society, the tides of tendency which determine events with a quiet sovereignty. If the microcosm wages war with the macrocosm, woe to the microcosm! After all brave words, if nature and humanity are base at the bottom, then reformers and philanthropists are fanatics, bent on a task more hopeless than that of attempting to change the leopard's spots or to wash the Æthiop white. But how rational and inspiring is the conviction of St. Paul! Man was made after the likeness of God's mind and will, and in the darkest lands we are witnesses that the Spirit of God fans the heavenly spirit in wild bosoms; that He keeps alive the divinest sentiments, instincts, and desires. "And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us everyone, because of the present rain, and because of the cold." St. Paul saw in the savage islanders the diviner "I." Nansen detected at the North

Pole the warm pulse of the Gulf Stream, in the awful depths of the Arctic sea, in the very heart of eternal darkness and winter ; and so in the abyss of heathendom the apostle joyfully welcomed, in the humanity of the barbarian, the glow of the sea of glass mingled with fire which sleeps before the throne, the action of that infinite ocean of purity and love which may seem very far off, but which nevertheless shoots hope through the nethermost coasts of being. Upon this cheering fact let philanthropists and missionaries fix their eye ; the fact that renders our hope so glorious, our sacrifices so rational.

Yet in our vast endeavour to evangelize the world we must not forget the second scriptural passage which stands at the head of this discourse : “ I, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” Paul as a missionary attained glorious triumphs, but he knew where lay the secret of his success ; and in the wonderful transformations effected by divine grace we find our supreme encouragement as we labour to renew the earth in righteousness. The evolutionist allows that it is possible in some degree to ameliorate the vicious world in which we are imprisoned, and he seeks to animate us to toils and sacrifices by reminding us that through the course of ages we have succeeded in converting the wild wolf into the faithful dog. “ The intelligence which has converted the brother of the wolf into the faithful guardian of the flock ought to be able to do something towards curbing the instincts of savagery in civilised man.” There is little here to kindle humanitarian enthusiasm.

Regarded in the light of history, the production of the dog has been an expensive process; and the civilised wolf is a slender basis for a millennial hope. Little glow of the enthusiasm of humanity is caught at this painted fire. The New Testament finds another and a better justification for our great hope of saving all men. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." A true Christian won at a stroke out of a rotten paganism is infinitely more marvellous and inspiring than any civilised wolf; and we trust the grace that worked these moral miracles to redeem and transfigure the race.

II

NEARNESS TO THE KINGDOM

And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.—MARK xii. 34.

II

NEARNESS TO THE KINGDOM

I. "THE KINGDOM OF GOD."—Let us briefly inquire into the meaning of this phrase. Our Lord is not speaking of a kingdom *above* us: no direct reference is here made to the heavenly universe. He is not discoursing on a kingdom *about* us: for though the Jew was a keen politician, and one who longed for the abolition of Roman rule and the setting up of a patriotic dynasty and government, yet our Lord makes no reference to any such aspiration. Nor does He suggest an ecclesiastical power. The meaning of the expression so often on our Lord's lips, the *régime* to which He alludes in the text, is the kingdom which He reveals *within* us. The close, full signification of the familiar figure implies the establishment of the divine sovereignty in the intelligence, conscience, affections, and will of believing men. It means spiritual obedience. "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." Our Lord sought to renew a conscious relation between the individual soul and God, and to make all obedience personal and spiritual. It means also

a willing, sympathetic, loving obedience. A dutifulness that is external and ceremonial is more or less coerced, cold, calculating; but when the divine sovereignty is welcomed into the heart, obedience becomes inward, instinctive, and affectionate—it is our meat and drink to do the will of our Father who is in heaven. Finally, “the kingdom of God within” means an obedience that is full of peace and delight. Nature is lovely and gladsome because obedience to law prevails throughout her realms; the star is bright, the flower sweet, the bird musical, the earth is rich in beauty and the firmament overflowing with splendour, because the cosmos in every atom and movement delicately observes the laws imprinted upon it by the Creator. And when the highest law is faithfully fulfilled in the human heart and life, and fulfilled in the power and freedom of love, the blessedness of God overflows the soul of man. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink,” it does not signify anything material or sensuous, superficial or conventional, political or ceremonial; it means the indwelling of God in the heart, harmonising the faculties, purifying the conscience, and diffusing through the whole being strength and purity, righteousness and peace.

II. NEAR THE KINGDOM.—We will seek to distinguish those of whom our Lord affirms that they are “not far from the kingdom of God.” Who are these peculiarly placed ones? We may confidently and thankfully allow that the kingdom of God is within many. They have come to the saving knowledge of His name, they have made proof of His love, they walk in His fear, they

await His coming. Others, however, are not only not in the kingdom of God, they are "afar off"; indeed, such is the remoteness of some that it may justly be said they are not within sight of it. Their spirit is sceptical, they are blankly indifferent, contemptuous, and hostile, abjectly worldly, practically disobedient. Christ instructed His disciples that when they entered into a city and their message was rejected they were to withdraw, but whilst doing so to announce to the unbelieving citizens, "Howbeit know this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." The kingdom of God came nigh to them, whilst they were very distant from it. Many to-day stand in this paradoxical position. The kingdom of God has come nigh to them; the Lord of the kingdom has made His presence known to them; the gospel of the kingdom is preached to them; the Christian Church appeals to them; the institutions and influences, the circumstances and associations of Christian civilisation press upon them; it is absolutely impossible for them to get away from the kingdom, it enfolds them on every side: but in thought, mood, sympathy, and purpose thousands who are in daily contact with Christian privilege and influence at many points, are entirely destitute of spiritual affinities and farther from the kingdom of God than some pagans. Our Lord, however, in the text reminds us of a third class, whose relation to the kingdom is more indefinite and perplexing—they are "not far from" it. They stand on the borderland of the kingdom; their mood is sympathetic, their attitude expectant; they have tender susceptibilities and sincere desires, a thirst for

God, a sense of spiritual need, and an affinity of soul for all things holy and good that constitutes them almost Christian. They do not assume to be trees of righteousness, full of the fruits of light; nor can they be ranked with barren fig-trees showing no sign of life; but rather are they like the trees of spring bursting here and there into green shoot and pink blossom, and only waiting for a sunny hour or sprinkle of rain to put on the fulness of beauty.

1. There is a nearness to personal godliness that is brought about by *intellectual sincerity*. We may believe that this was true of the lawyer in the narrative under consideration. He appears to have been an anxious inquirer, from the intellectual standpoint. "And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly," wisely, thoughtfully, intelligently, "He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." Sincere, honest thought brings the thinker close to those higher truths which are not contrary to reason, but which unassisted reason does not apprehend. Dr. Johnson was accustomed to say, "If a man thinks deeply he thinks religiously"; and deeply pondering the problems of nature, life, and duty, men have often found themselves brought to His feet who spake as never man spake. No merely intellectual endeavour can bring us into the enjoyment of saving truth and spiritual satisfaction; it may easily prepare us, however, for the word of Christ, and to receive in Him the fulness of the blessing of reconciliation and peace. In reading the writings of authors known as agnostics, utilitarians, and sceptics, we must often feel that whilst verbally

they seem a long way from the Christian creed, yet actually they come very near it in the doctrines they accredit and the spirit they reveal. They use other language than theologians use, they contend against this or the other position of conventional religion, they suffer from many misconceptions and prejudices, yet are they in fact not unlike this lawyer in the great truths they admit and in the fine spirit they display; and we believe that our Lord says of these, as of the intellectual seeker in the text, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." They are not in the kingdom, but they are enamoured of its walls of jasper and gates of gold. John Bright said of a certain freethinker that he was "a Christian without knowing it"; and although we cannot allow that a man can be a Christian without being aware of it, it yet remains possible that sincere reflection may bring a doubting thinker much nearer to the evangelical truth than he apprehends. Let us never discourage reading, reflection, research, as if these necessarily put the seeker farther from Christ. By intellectual processes many are brought to the threshold of the spiritual kingdom; just as the star guided the wise men of old into His presence who came to guide our feet into the way of peace.

2. There is a nearness to personal godliness that is brought about by *moral integrity*. As some are brought near to the kingdom by intellectual influences, others approach it from the standpoint of conscience. We cannot fail to detect the genuine ethical ring in this interlocutor: "Which is the first commandment of all?" And when Jesus had indicated the twofold

supreme commandment, the scribe said unto Him, "Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but He: and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices." This is not the expression of a merely curious or polemical temper, there is nothing here captious or controversial, but at once we feel that we are dealing with one deeply sincere, and who is anxious to understand and possess the very essence of righteousness. And our Lord, who knew what was in man, instantly recognised the scribe's moral sincerity and enthusiasm. "And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

Let us steadily acknowledge that a sincere sympathy with righteousness and loyalty to practical virtue constitute the chosen way to Him who alone can impart the righteousness of God. To affirm that real virtue is possible only through the commission of sin is the falsest philosophy. It is impossible, in the nature of the case, that we should remain simply innocent, say these teachers; indeed, innocence is farther from virtue than guilt, and transgression of the law is the necessary transition to real, experimental goodness. The broad road is the normal path of moral progress. We are never taught that in order to reach intellectual strength and serene wisdom we must suffer episodes of folly and madness; or that in order to attain perfect health we must breathe noisome air, and develop

through stages of disease and corruption; but, mysteriously, our moral life is to attain perfection by our breaking, and not keeping, the noblest law of all—madness and leprosy of soul being the conditions of ultimate wisdom and immortal health. However philosophers at the study table lightly amuse themselves with such theories in the ping-pong of metaphysics, they have no plausibility whatever in the eyes of Christian men. We have the unspeakable advantage of knowing intimately One who possessed the whole secret of righteousness, who displayed the full glory of righteousness, and who disclosed all the steps of normal progress from innocence to perfection. How does this theory of submission to temptation look in the light of the Lord Jesus? “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” In the story of our Lord there is not the faintest hint of sin being a necessary factor in the development of the moral life, but everywhere the assurance that the condition of true growth in holiness is always in the resistance and transcendence of evil. The sky may be reflected in a puddle, but if we attempt to reach the stars that way we shall discover our mistake. By doing perseveringly the best that we know, we reach the best of all. Victor Hugo says truly, “There is no way to the highest except through the high”; and thousands of perplexed men and women, through high thinking, high living, and high striving, find the highest of all in the knowledge and fellowship of Jesus Christ.

We must be most careful, so that whilst we emphasise the richness of evangelical truth we do no

injustice to moral truth. In his eagerness to magnify the grace of God, the preacher is sometimes in danger of representing the moral seeker at a disadvantage as compared with the outrageous sinner—the very virtue of the one being a hindrance in the path of salvation. It may be so; Simon the Pharisee being farther from justification than the woman who was a sinner. Let us not, however, press such contrasts too far, and draw inferences from them that were never intended. We must sow to ourselves in righteousness, not sow wild oats, if we are to reap in mercy. The biographer of Horace Bushnell tells us that the young student for seven years failed to find the power of Christ. There was nothing positively or distinctively Christian about him, and there was in him a growing spirit of doubt and difficulty as to religious doctrine; yet during all this time of grave perplexity and distress he was marked by scrupulous conscientiousness, stern integrity, purity, and honour, and in the end he became the confessor of Christ with the power of Christ. Fidelity to the moral law has been the lode-star amid the intellectual conflicts and spiritual bafflements of multitudes of noble souls. It has been said, “He who comes to moral integrity necessarily comes to Christ.” We could not say this; but we dare affirm that he who in dark and doubtful days seeks the highest truth in a life of moral integrity is not far from the kingdom of God. If the vision tarry, wait for it in a serious and reverent spirit, wait for it in the practice of every duty and virtue; and though the vision tarry, it will surely come, it will not delay.

3. There is a nearness to personal godliness that

is brought about by *ceremonial faithfulness*. A true inclination and susceptibility of soul are developed by a right use of the divinely appointed means and channels of grace. It seems that the faithfulness of this scribe to the study of the law and the ordinances of worship had brought him hard by the blessing. A penitent may so misuse the means of grace that they prove to him a diversion and snare; but as a grand rule the successful seeker seeks along the prescribed lines of private prayer, Bible study, public worship, and the communion of saints. It may be true that for long the sincere seeker strangely fails of the inward and invisible grace of the outward and visible sign, the conscious salvation promised in the statutes and ordinances of the Lord. John Wesley was a striking instance of this. For something like fifteen years he prayerfully sought the secret of heartfelt piety. He pursued the anxious quest in Epworth, Oxford, Georgia, and in Germany. Again and again he seemed close to the conscious grace, only once more to be baffled by mysticisms, legalisms, and ritualisms, having stopped short of the real thing. But we must not, on account of these instances of misconception and delay, depreciate the ecclesiastical pathway into the kingdom of God; the real reason of the postponement is elsewhere.

The whole question of these suspensions and delays, when the seeker is so near to the kingdom, is often exceedingly mysterious. As we have seen, by intellectual sincerity, moral integrity, and ecclesiastical faithfulness men are brought to the edge of the great blessing they seek, and they then

lapse into a protracted state of deepest unrest and painfulness. There is, in many well established instances, a long and trying hiatus between the mental, moral, or churchly preparedness and the conscious grace of Christ. "Hide not Thy face from Thy servant." "Be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down into the pit." Much has lately been written about "retarded crowns." The florist takes the bulbs of lilies of the valley and other flowers, and subjecting them to the low temperature of a refrigerating chamber their development is checked until such time as he may wish to display them, when they are removed from the ice-house into a warm place and immediately bloom; thus flowers which gladden this present spring would naturally have bloomed last year. Sometimes the human heart appears similarly retarded; the whole summer stirs in it, and it seems to touch the actual point of breaking into the efflorescence of purity and peace and the joy of the Lord, when it is checked, chilled, and troubled for months and years. It may be a consolation to remember that as these retarded crowns of the florist almost invariably yield the finest blossoms, so many illustrious saints have known most of the weary days of penitential waiting. But, whatever may be the cause, some remain long in this hesitating state, filled with strange fears and bewilderments. Everybody knows that the freezing-point of water and the melting-point of ice touch each other, as it were, at a special temperature. What a wonderful point that is, 32° Fahrenheit! A hair's breadth lower, and the water

becomes ice; a hair's breadth higher, and ice becomes water. So the soul knows a definite point where its whole character is changed; and such is the mystery of its life and movement that it will tremble at this point for days, months, and years, unresolved between the mightiest issues.

III. ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM.—We urge those who occupy the critical position indicated by our Lord to take the decisive step that brings them into the kingdom.

1. Suffer a word of *admonition*. We often say that the most important step men take is the first step: is it not rather the last? Whatever interpretation is put on our Lord's words in the text, He certainly meant to signify that we may be near the kingdom and yet not in it, and that it is of supreme importance that we take the ultimate step. Amiel writes, "That which is not finished is nothing"; and whilst the saying is true as applied to many things, it is chiefly true concerning a soul in the close neighbourhood of salvation. The penitence that is not carried through to conversion is nothing. The gate of heaven may be as thin as a sheet of tissue paper, yet it is of infinite moment whether we are on this side of it or on that. Scientists affirm that copper is simply aboriginal elemental matter that was on the way to become gold, but it got shunted on the wrong track and stopped just short of the splendid consummation. How much that just stopping short meant! Yet who can measure the distance between the baser metal of unregenerate nature at its best and the transformed and transfigured character which is the

fine gold of the sanctuary! That one thought for good, that final act of surrender, that trust of the soul triumphing over the last unbelief—how much it means! how much the lack of it means! One determination of the will, and we prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God; one venturing, trusting act of the heart, and we know the love which is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. Was ever any position, any moment, so overwhelmingly critical?

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!

2. A word of *direction*. What is the last step, and what must move us to take it? That is a very curious chapter in history which relates how closely thinkers came to the solution of great problems, and yet just failed by a hair's breadth to hit the joy and glory of discovery. They required but one slight idea, and it would at once have filled their whole body and the whole world with light; the great inventors and discoverers grasped that lacking thought. By adopting a simple expedient hitherto strangely overlooked George Stephenson converted the locomotive from being a mere toy into the car of civilisation; by discerning a simple fact of nature Darwin changed the dream of evolution into a fruitful science; and it is almost always the case that great discoverers only add the one thing lacking, which is generally a very simple thing. It is much the same in the spiritual life. Said our Lord to the rich youth, "One thing thou lackest." What is that one thing lacking, that one thought, emotion, act,

which keeps the penitent out of the kingdom? Simple trust in God's mercy, absolute surrender to God's declared will in Jesus Christ. We are not saved by great acts and sacrifices, although we think we are; and this misconception is the root of the evil. Intellectual penetration and achievement are not in any wise conditions of salvation; God does not demand that we write a poem like the *Iliad*, compose an oratorio like the *Messiah*, paint a masterpiece like the Transfiguration, or do some equally mighty intellectual work of solution or creation before we can be saved. We are not saved because of great ecclesiastical sacrifices, or on account of obedience to elaborate ritual and discipline. And although moral integrity may bring us nigh, it is not by works of righteousness that we have done that we can be saved. Yet the thought of these things is a stumbling-block to many. "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." The whole secret is here. Take God at His word, confide in His promise, trust and love Him with your whole heart, and the great transaction is done, you have passed from death unto life. When Tersteegen the German poet spoke from his own history he expressed the experience of many devout souls: "It is a small thing with God to cause us to find in our souls in one moment, without trouble, that which we may have sought externally for years with much labour."

3. Finally, a word of *encouragement*. How readily

and cordially Christ responded to the scribe! The Master recognised all that was good in him, saw with gladness how near he came to the golden goal, and we may hope that the Redeemer's welcome won him all the way. Let all who have come so far, who have got well into the sphere of godliness, who feel the breath of the higher world, who hear the clear call of God, who respond to the charm of Christ, in whose heart the Spirit works, upon whom heaven looms, let these be guilty of no recession, but accept the strong consolation and claim the fulness of blessing. Alas! to approach so nearly to all that for which we were born, and yet to miss it! to miss it not accidentally—for men never do that—but through fault of purpose, sympathy, and striving! A newspaper writer recently described a strange habit that seamen have of visiting a famous city without landing. He said, I spoke with the mate of a ship one day at Venice, and asked him how he liked the city. Well, he had not been ashore yet. He was told that he had better go ashore; that the Piazza San Marco was worth seeing. Well, he knew it, he had seen pictures of it; but he thought that he wouldn't go ashore. Why not, now he was here? Well, he laid out to go ashore the next time he came to Venice. So he lay three weeks with his ship, after a voyage of two months, and sailed away without even setting his foot on that enchanted ground. How many, after crossing troubled seas of doubt and conflict, and finding themselves in the very haven of rest, yet hesitate to take the last step and possess the land. "Glorious things are spoken of thee, thou city of God." Leave behind you the salt,

estranging sea ; be no more tossed to and fro ; plant your foot on the smiling shore, walk its streets of gold, wear its white raiment, share its beauty and joy. "He came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

III
THE IMAGINATION IN SIN

And Josiah took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, . . . and burned the chariots of the sun with fire.—2 KINGS xxiii. 11.

III

THE IMAGINATION IN SIN

JOSIAH sought to purify Israel from the idolatry established by his predecessors, and in the course of this reformation occurs the incident recorded in the text. He "took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, . . . and burned the chariots of the sun with fire." It will be asked, What has this to do with the modern world and with modern men? This is precisely what we wish to show. The text, then, contains a twofold lesson which all generations ought to lay to heart. We are reminded of—

I. THE PRETENTIOUSNESS OF SIN.—"The horses . . . given to the sun . . . the chariots of the sun." Very large and magnificent indeed! Great words and splendid imagery! There is wonderful exaggeration about all idolatry. The idol without eyes was known as the God of light; without breath, it was worshipped as the God of life; it could not stand unless it were nailed down or shored up, yet it was distinguished by an august title. "We know that an idol is nothing in the world"; but these nothings wear the highest names and titles, and through the superstition of their worshippers they have been

invested with the grandest attributes. As it was with the gods of the Pantheon, so is it with the rabble of the vices; they are full of pretentiousness, they steal supreme names, they make impossible promises. The world of iniquity is a world of dazzling colours, false magnitudes, lurid lights; it is a theatre of colossal illusions and of magical arts, producing the appearances of magnificence, gaiety, and romance. So long as we are content with virtue we know only what is simple and modest; but the moment we contemplate a life of disobedience everything becomes chromatic—the pathway of despair appears strewn with flowers, corruption walks in cloth of gold. “Horses . . . given to the sun . . . chariots of the sun.”

I. How brilliant is *the world of diseased imagination* as compared with *the world of sober reality* in which we are called to work out our life! To-day we are all readers. What are we reading? History, science, philosophy, theology? Are we bent on finding out the great meanings of real and sober life? You know better. Our leisure hours are mainly taken up with tales of mystery and imagination. Now, we do not seek to stigmatise all the literature of imagination, yet we venture to say that even when such literature is pure we may easily have too much of it. It is not well to dwell long with unthinkable people in impossible situations, to live and move in an ideal and a fantastic universe; it puts the eye out for the actual world in which our serious business lies. “I hate vain thoughts,” protests the psalmist. “Vain thoughts.” What are these? Wild dreams, barren reveries, pictures in the fire,

the imagery of vapour, mirages of the brain, the kind of thing which constitutes about nine tenths of modern reading. But much of the fiction in which we allow ourselves to indulge is positively wild and licentious. Multitudes who will not for a moment in actual life tamper with the vices gilded by literary art spend their leisure hours in contemplating these lawless things projected into visionary realms. What is the secret of this mental licence? The fact is, actual life seems so narrow and prosaic, so dull and dreary, that we steal away in the solar phaeton along giddy and dangerous paths. How dim and insipid is the life of sober virtue by the side of lawlessness, excused by sophistry and glorified by imagination! In fiction the grey world becomes kaleidoscopic, and the evil world is etherealised into coloured vapours whose fantastic movements fill us with curiosity and wonder. So, despising and forsaking the modest vehicles appointed for the pilgrimage of human life, we mount the flaming car of imagination, and, drawn by fiery steeds of passion, with Zola, or his likes, for a charioteer, we make the dizzy, intoxicating, yet terribly dangerous circuit of the sun.

2. Again, the same truth comes out as we compare *the victories of war* with *the victories of peace*. War is sometimes inevitable, things being as they are. The scientist holds that in nature a lesser evil is permitted to prevent a greater. In the human sphere just war is a lesser evil to prevent a greater. There is something better than life, and that is right, equality, liberty; war is the desperate resort of the wronged and oppressed. It is infinitely better to be

bleeding conquerors than bleeding slaves. Still, war is an evil, a terrible evil, and we must ever pray and work for the golden year when men shall learn war no more. Yet what a glamour there is about the red spectre! The poet justly sings, "the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war." When a regiment of soldiers marches down the street, every window is occupied, the pavement is crowded, the interest and enthusiasm are universal. The scarlet coat, the glittering steel, the regimental colours, and the screaming bugle fascinate the senses and stir the blood. But no crowd turns out in the morning to wave handkerchiefs over the colliers going to the pit, or in the evening to cheer the factory hands returning from the mill. There is no glittering romance about industry, no enthusiasm about the tasks which bring the daily bread, no poetry about the toil which creates the wealth of nations. "Arms and the man, I sing," makes a glorious epic for the Homers, Virgils, and Miltons, but the poet is unborn who can create an epic out of Carlyle's "Tools and the man, I sing." The agents and instruments of honourable toil are admirable; they cannot, however, be set to music. The labourer's life does not lend itself to poetry. Industry wheels a coster's barrow, but the powder-cart is the dazzling chariot of the sun.

3. Compare *the career of unlawful speculation* with *the life of honest gain*. How large, glowing, bewitching, is the former compared with the level course of the latter! Look at the titanic speculator. In a few years he emerges from obscurity into national notoriety. He buys estates, lives in palaces,

dangles on the edge of a peerage, perhaps gets it, and becomes the envy of millions. His whole course of action is outside the legitimate, but it is dramatic, full of sensation and surprise. How different the course of the little shopkeeper, with his "small profits and quick returns"! No song or story this time; no scent of poetry about the ledger, unless it sometimes reminds one of *Paradise Lost*. The daring adventurer attains the golden goal in an electric car, whilst the honest trader is a wayfaring man. It is much the same in humbler life. One working man is a gambler, living with the delirious hope of landing a fortune; another is content to deposit in the Post-office Savings Bank a few shillings saved by pathetic economies. How poor the greasy little bank-book appears in comparison with that magical book in the bejewelled fist of the wizard of the betting-ring! The gambling life is swift and dazzling, like the gathering of gold in a dream, whilst the life of prudence and economy hardly knows a thrill. The one is the rapture of an aërial car touring through stars and rainbows, the other the dull drudgery of a dust-cart.

4. Finally, the same truth is evident when we compare *the course of sensual pleasure* with *the simple pleasantness of a sober life*. How violent the delights of sensualism! The company in the drinking-saloon soon transcend all trouble, want, or difficulty. They forthwith become in imagination admirals, generals, millionaires, statesmen, orators—they taste the raptures of wealth, genius, fame, greatness. They are "elevated," they have

ascended the chariot of the sun, whilst the moon and all the stars make obeisance to them. Another workman, having completed his daily task, returns to his cottage, with its certain cares and simple pleasures. How tame the entertainments of the fireside!—simply ridiculous when compared with the fiery delights of the dram-shop. One young man, released from duty, hies to the Palace of Varieties; the place is enchanting, the comedy clever, the company hilarious. The night passes in a swoon of wine, song, music, beauty, humour. His earnest, serious comrade goes to the night school; and whilst the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties is truly a fine sight, it must be confessed that it woefully lacks theatrical colour and sparkle. One woman elects a life of fashion and gaiety, and swims in a purple light, sipping the nectar of many blossoms; her sister is content with the simple life of love and duty,—the one a burnished butterfly, the other a drab humble-bee. The daughter of pleasure glides through cloudland in the chariot of Aurora, lined with roses; her sister, slow and tame, does the journey ingloriously in a bath-chair.

So it is throughout. The illegitimate and destructive, the things seriously wanting in reason and godliness, appeal most to the imagination; their garishness and glamourousness bewitch and lure into false ways. Scientists teach that the cause of beauty in some creatures is a waste product of the body. For instance, the pigments that give colour to the feathers of birds are said to be very similar to bile; so that the crimson of the kingfisher, the green of the parrot,

the rich dyes of the dove, the dazzling plumes of the peacock, the glitter of the humming-bird, and the gorgeous hues of the bird of paradise are based upon a bitter secretion, a mere excrement. Be that as it may, it is certain that many things in human life which are blazoned forth under the grand names of enjoyment, greatness, fame, gallantry, and heroism, spring from the basest passions of our fallen nature. Here is the mystery of iniquity. It thrusts into our hand the magnifying-glass. It works wonders with the paint-pot. It transfigures the dust-bin. The chariot of ruin is the gilded chariot of the sun. Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

II. THE PREPOSTEROUSNESS OF SIN. — “And Josiah . . . burned the chariots of the sun with fire.” Throughout the whole of the reformation that he effected Josiah manifested his deep contempt for the idolatry that had wrought such mischief in Israel. With cutting irony he abolished first one evil thing and then another. As to the vessels made for Baal, “he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Beth-el.” He brought out the grove from the house of the Lord, “and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people.” The altars “did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron.” “And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.” And when he came to deal with the chariots of the sun he

gave fresh expression to his contempt, holding them forth to scorn. He "burned the chariots of the sun with fire." To cremate the chariots of the sun was the grimmest humour. The sun is fifteen times hotter than the hottest thing upon the earth; therefore if an incombustible car is requisite anywhere, it is essential for the insufferable solar majesty; so that when Josiah carbonised the car of the fiery god he convicted it of fraud and doomed it to infinite contempt. To make a bonfire of the chariot of the sun was as ridiculous as if Noah's ark had suffered shipwreck in a fish-pond. All Israel smiled scornfully at the calcination of the pretentious things.

Here is the truth that we wish to enforce—namely, that, despite all paint and spangles, all exaggerations and splendours, sin is a miserable sham, utterly unworthy of rational men. Treating of the grotesque sculpture found in our cathedrals, Ruskin writes thus: "The builders evidently felt very deeply a truth of which, in modern times, we are less cognisant: that folly and sin are, to a certain extent, synonymous, and that it would be well for mankind in general if all could be made to feel that wickedness is as contemptible as it is hateful. So that the vices were permitted to be represented under the most ridiculous forms." This was the spirit of Josiah's act, and this is what we supremely wish you to see and feel—the absurdity and contemptibleness of sin, sin of all kinds. Wickedness is a screaming farce, as it is also the supreme tragedy. Despite its theatrical rhetoric, it is a hollow lie doomed to detection and contempt. There is not a bit of

reality, reason, or satisfaction in it. A leading journal, speaking of vicious literature, asks, "When will people realise how very dull and limited vice is? When one has read one story of vicious people and their common, dull thoughts and actions, a healthy mind revolts against that company, and no amount of brilliant setting is sufficient to hide the ugliness and sterility of the subject." Yes, the paradise of passion is "the garden of glitter"; yet, notwithstanding all its pretentiousness, it is sordid, dirty, vulgar, ugly, squalid, base, brutish, and ghastly, doomed to swift and cruel retributions. The guilt rubbed off, sin is mean, hideous, and dismal beyond language. "What fruit had ye, then, in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death."

Have nothing to do with things that cannot bear the test of *thought*. Thought strips away the cunning disguises of sin; it is the searchlight making clear the fact. In the hour of reflection our reason gives the lie to passion, our instincts rebuke our fancies, our conscience scorns the sophistries of imagination. Do not occupy yourselves with ambitions, friendships, and pleasures which shun the light, and which will not bear thinking about; and certainly illicit literature, selfish speculation, sensual pleasure, will not bear such thought. Have no pleasure, no friendship, no gain, that fears the scrutiny of your best hours. Ride in no chariot that cannot brave the fierce light of reason and conscience.

Have nothing to do with that which cannot bear the test of *experience*. Respect the principles and teachings which have been tried and attested by

generations. The devil has a dictionary of his own, and if you accept his definitions everything in disobedience seems clever and attractive. Lying is "smartness," drunkenness "jollification," and so on. Take your definitions from Dr. Johnson; the dictionary speaks the experience of the race for ages. It is a stern, achromatic lens, forbidding any rainbow fringe of illusion, and disclosing the naked truth under glozing words. The devil has a grammar of his own, his marvellous syntax making the worse appear the better reason; but the bitter result teaches his victims that the logic of hell is as false and fatal as its rhetoric is glittering. The devil has an arithmetic of his own which shows how large and splendid are the wages of unrighteousness; but in actual life his specious arithmetic works into bankruptcy and beggary of every kind. Fancy may figure the wicked as borne aloft in chariots of the sun; but a ray of daylight reduces the pretentious things to the monstrous forms of the policeman's stretcher, the workhouse ambulance, the prison van, the hearse that bears men to the grave ere they have lived out half their days.

Have nothing to do with that which will not bear the test of *time*. Things that are seductive in certain hours and moods of temptation look mean and prove deadly enough if we wait awhile. The clock is a wonderful touchstone. Time tries all things, and detects the plausibleness which might deceive the elect. What looks fair at noon becomes black enough when thought about on the pillow; what appears innocent in the midnight debauch will not bear the morning's

reflection ; what seems right at midsummer bows the soul in shame under the scrutiny of the watch-night ; that of which we think little in the hot blood of youth, we mourn over when our head is white, and cry to God, "Remember not against me the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." The illuminating power of time shows up sin as vain, absurd, and contemptible. We are amazed and confounded that we could ever thus have played the fool. And in the future our disillusionment and confusion can only be more complete and awful. Everyone has heard how the mirage of the Eastern desert cheats the senses of the traveller with pictures of splendid cities and lovely landscapes, but it is not so commonly known that the desolating simoom immediately follows the mirage, substituting for false splendours wrecked caravans ; so within the mirages of life hide retributive elements, storms of God's righteous anger which overwhelm those who yield themselves to lying vanities and obey not the truth.

The truly great and solemn things of human life are its simple duties and its pure pleasures. The unpretending flower of the ivy is specially rich in nectar ; bees haunt it far more eagerly than they do many of the brilliant blooms which seem prime favourites of the sun. It is much the same with all that concerns human life. About genuine and precious things there is a modesty, a reticence, a simplicity, like the soft and serious lustre of gold ; but time serves only to bring out their preciousness. When the garish things fade and the delirious moods are over, the simply noble pursuits, relationships, and enjoyments of the godly remain a deep, delight-

ful possession. When the poppy is shed, the grass is still green; when the hues of the rainbow fade, the sky is blue; when the blazing leaf of the creeper drops, the ivy clings to the wall; when fireworks have spluttered out, the stars shine on for ever and ever. Set your mind on the abiding. The grandest thing that any of us can do is to live a simple life nobly. The large, the splendid, the ecstatic, the romantic, the glorious, grow out of humble life faithfully lived. "By patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked unto the recompense of reward."

Christ alone can strengthen us to live such a life. He knows what "the chariots of the sun" mean. He was tempted by the vision of the kingdoms and the glory of them. He saw and felt the power of the realm of illusion. The arch-sorcerer worked all his spells on the Son of man. He saw the streets of gold, the fields of poppies, the lotus meadows, the gardens of poisoned roses, and He turned from all the false, flattering show to a life of lowly duty, simple pleasure, unselfish work, and consecrated sorrow. He refused "the chariots of the sun," and followed the call of duty, the path of the Passion. In the strength of the Master take up your cross and follow Him, and you shall find the realities of power, greatness, and everlasting joy. In life you

shall prove the deep peace of the pure, the humble, and the devoted, and in death realise absolute and final victory. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place." You shall never lack strength, honour, or victory, if you trust in Him. You shall be deeply satisfied with His service; not one of His promises shall fail. And when the end of the journey comes, one of these radiant cars will await you when you need it most; and loved ones, witnessing your triumph, shall cry, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

IV

THE REALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL
LIFE

The life which is life indeed.—1 TIM. vi. 19 (R. V.).

IV

THE REALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

IN speaking of a life that is "life indeed," St. Paul implies that all life is not such, but that many live a false life. In the conviction of the apostle, the true life, the life indeed, is the spiritual life.

The visible is not the real. Art students are familiar with sciography, the science of shadows; in truth, however, thinking men know that the visible universe is throughout a world of shadows, and that all human knowledge of the things seen is sciography. The philosopher recognises that the material realm is a realm of appearances; the scientist is forced to the conviction that the physical world has a metaphysical basis; the physiologist knows that the body is objectified ether; and the historian has the pathetic sense that he paints the images of a dream. "They seem to have seen, these brave old Northmen," says Carlyle, "what meditation has taught all men in all ages, that this world is after all but a show—a phenomenon or appearance, no real thing. All deep souls see into that." But the visible is the sign of the real. All

is not emptiness and illusion. Nature, humanity, and history are figures of the true. And the grand design of revelation is not to convince us of the unsubstantial character of this tangible world and life, but rather, assuming this fact, to reveal the realities and laws of the eternal sphere, the underlying spiritual truth. The life that is "life indeed" is, in the reckoning of the apostle, the life that recognises the eternal reality, and that puts itself into a right relation to that reality—the life in which we apprehend God, know His Son, taste His love, hold fellowship with Him, seek to know and do His will, and earnestly prepare to see His face. The "life indeed," says the apostle, is to look steadfastly to the things which are unseen and eternal.

Many, however, hold a very different creed. They know life only on its material side, and do not trouble themselves with what may lie beyond the horizon of earthliness. They consider that the spiritual man lives an imaginary life, that he beats the air, and that whilst pursuing phantoms he misses the real rewards and pleasures of existence. To love God is to waste in the air those precious affections which ought to unite us one to another; to consult the will of God is to put arbitrary caprices in the place of demonstrated and invariable law; to live with the sense of eternity is to warp all life and miss our only opportunity. The "life indeed," says the secularist, is to concentrate ourselves upon the here and now.

At the outset, then, can we discriminate between the substance and the shadow, and assure ourselves which life is "life indeed"? Is the carnal man

right, or the godly? Are we walking in a vain show and disquieting ourselves in vain when we walk after the flesh, or is it when we walk after the Spirit? Are we rational when we live primarily for gold and for what gold can buy, or when we live for godliness and the ethereal rewards godliness promises? Experienced travellers know how to detect a mirage; they are able to distinguish between cloudland and the solid earth, between the mocking vapour and the fountain whose waters fail not; they are not beguiled by the city of the mist, however realistic its domes and towers, but at once differentiate it from the city which has foundations. By reliable tests they satisfy themselves as to which are the deceptive shadows and which the real landscape and the true path. Can we, in this perplexing pilgrimage of life, similarly distinguish between the true and the false? Several tests will demonstrate the reality of the spiritual life. Consider—

I. THE PERSISTENCE OF THE SPIRITUAL INSTINCT.—Despite the most frantic efforts we cannot rid ourselves of the consciousness of the spiritual universe. The world around us is ever changing, the fashion of it passes away, a thousand illusions have been exposed, things that have stood the test of centuries are convicted and condemned, but from age to age the spiritual world continues to assert itself in the thought and conscience of mankind. We bury our eyes in the dust, and try to persuade ourselves that there is only dust; yet it is never long before we are compelled to look up and recognise our destiny in the heavens. This

very age in which we live has afforded a singularly striking illustration of the persistence in man of the spiritual sense. Early in the last century the French philosopher Comte sought to reduce worldliness to a rational system, and he carried out his purpose with astonishing ability and enthusiasm, seeking to answer all our questions and to satisfy all our aspirations within the horizon of the terrestrial life. Then having done his utmost, he was compelled to acknowledge that the range of the material universe does not satisfy the human intellect and heart, that there is in humanity a spiritual instinct to be reckoned with, and that no philosophy meets our case until it has passed into a religion. So, in his later days, the great sceptic set himself to complete his task by creating a new religion. It was, as we might suspect, a poor religion. The faith of Christianity *may* be an illusion, but the assumptions of positivism we *know* to be such.

The astronomer Herschel once promised to show a distinguished party the spectacle of the heavens through his telescope; as, however, the night proved cloudy the ingenious scientist hit on a pretty device. He cut out in cardboard a little image of Saturn—the globe in the centre and the rings complete; then having lighted it with lamps, he fixed it on the garden wall, and when the spectators looked through the astronomic tube they thought they were gazing into the mystery of the firmament. Comte performed a similar trick in another sphere. He set before the world a marvellously clever representation of the eternal truths of theology, just as the guileful astronomer with cardboard and naphtha fixed the

constellation on the garden wall. Comte's bogus deity and immortality were sorry substitutes for the eternal verities ; but what a strong and unexpected testimony was given to the spirituality of life when the most plausible and audacious scheme of materialism ever propounded was found utterly unworkable until it began to express itself in theological language and to use religious symbols !

If our faith in the spiritual world were a mere hallucination, a perception without an object, it would of necessity ever become more attenuated and less influential. The scientist assures us of this. Creatures never retain organs of any sort that are useless. The eyes of fish isolated in a dark cave are gradually aborted ; if birds for any reason cease to fly, their wings forthwith decline in size and strength ; if, through change of environment, any organ of a creature becomes useless, the disused organ slowly yet inevitably disappears. Nature never weights any creature with useless organs or faculties, but each living thing strictly corresponds with the sphere in which it is designed to exist. And when we find in man spiritual organs and faculties, cravings and instincts, intuitions and aspirations, can we believe that they are false and useless, having no part to play in our life and destiny ? Surely not ; these spiritual faculties must, on the theory that the organism always fits the circumstances, stand related to corresponding facts of the universe ; and when we see that these spiritual instincts persist from age to age, we are assured, on grounds of science, of their reality, authority, and importance. And they do persist. The spiritual

instinct is the most inveterate and influential of all our instincts. The lapse of ages does not weaken the religious sense of the race; on the contrary, it leaves that sense more vivid, clear, and profound. How often are we told that a great sceptic is, by some original and searching argument, about to drive out the popular faith in spiritual things; and then the terrible book is launched upon us, subjecting religious convictions and hopes to remorseless logic and scathing sarcasm! And what is the result of a thousand of these great argumentative assaults on the spiritual beliefs and sympathies of the race? Absolutely nothing. The spiritual capacity of humanity continues to declare itself; heart and flesh cry out for the living God. The supernatural never asserted itself with greater power in the mind and conscience of mankind than it does to-day. The infidel cannot rid himself of the spiritual instinct however much he may flout the spiritual universe. That instinct the worldling cannot choke with thick clay. The sense of the invisible haunts the bad. And the better men are, the more vividly do they taste the powers of the world to come. "Persistence is the sign of reality," says the scientist; and nothing more manifestly persists than our sense of personal relation to God and eternity. No; we are not duped by a mirage. The city we see beyond is not a reflection on the desert vapour; it has foundations, it cannot be moved, its builder and maker is God. "That they may lay hold on the life which is life indeed." It is something to "lay hold" of; substance, not shadow. We grasp the solid and abiding.

II. THE IRRATIONALITY OF HUMAN LIFE WITH-

OUT THE SPIRITUAL IDEA.—The whole system of things with which we are familiar is utterly baffling and unutterably distressing unless we see in it the working of a larger thought and purpose than that which meets the carnal eye. If we are to regard the universe as rational, and human life as serious and satisfactory, the spiritual idea is essential. In one of my walks I often pass a youth of weak intellect who spends his days whipping a top. The seasons come and go, one year succeeds another, but they find and leave the poor fellow wholly occupied with the gyrations of his bauble. Most likely in his dim consciousness some of his efforts are felt to be more successful than others; he will most probably have good days and bad ones; he will know the glow of victory and the agony of failure; all the varied sensations of the ordinary life of humanity no doubt report themselves in his obscure brain. Still, the range of his thought and feeling is limited by his toy, and we must admit that such an existence is pathetically incomplete and disappointing. But really, if there is no deeper thought in life than what appears to the sensationalist, and no greater purpose in it, that idiot boy enthusiastically whipping his top is a startling picture of the human race, and a rough parable of the cosmos. Our tops differ endlessly in size and character; some have more gilt on them than others; some are streaked with rainbow colours of fashion, whilst others are rough-hewn indeed; some go to sleep on marble pavements, whilst others stagger on cruel ground; some spin noiselessly, while the hum of others is heard beyond the seas; but it amounts to

much the same thing: life is exhausted by us all in a strangely inadequate task; it is at best woeful and exasperating emptiness. Nay, if we look into the vast universe about us, what is it throughout but a gigantic spectacle of top-spinning? Whirling suns, waxing and waning moons, flowing and ebbing tides, revolving planets, wandering stars, all are so many colossal tops driven by idiotic force through aimless cycles.

Of course there is a way of investing things with a fictitious value and significance by giving them great names. The dictionary defines a top as a "gyroscope." And after this manner, when we have emptied life of its spiritual meaning, we may go on calling human occupations, relations, and experiences by grand names; we may still talk largely of society, morality, friendship, science, art, patriotism, literature, scholarship, philosophy. But men cannot be permanently duped by polysyllables. The idiot boy is not one whit less pathetic because the superfine person chooses to describe his occupation as the propulsion of a gyroscope. And so, if we deprive life of its moral and ulterior significance, reducing it to mere surface and sensation, we cannot still our brain and heart by any trick of nomenclature. A big, sonorous word does not fill the soul because it fills the ear; and if life has no spiritual signification, no abiding issue, then no paint, poetry, or philosophy can long conceal its nakedness or blunt the sting of its mockery.

There is no logic in life except we give it the larger interpretation: it is a melancholy enigma, and only that, until we recognise its spiritual ideas and laws,

its transcendent ideals and hopes. When we know the living God, when we discern an infinitely wise government prevailing through all the apparent confusions of nature and history, when we appreciate in worldly things the complex apparatus of moral discipline, when we see duty and suffering purifying and perfecting deathless life, then, and only then, do we find rest unto our soul, because we have found an adequate motive and consequence for all that is.

III. THE DEEP SATISFACTION OF THOSE WHO CHERISH THE SPIRITUAL HOPE.—It is certain that those who deny their spiritual instincts are deeply discontented. The question that has been so eagerly discussed in our day, Is life worth living? is a question urged by unspiritual men; and the temper in which they ask and answer the question reveals painful dissatisfaction with themselves and with things as they are. The discontent of the intellect drives them to accuse the world of irrationality; the discontent of their heart utters itself in cynicism; the discontent of their passions expresses itself in satiety; the discontent of their conscience is revealed in pessimism and despair. And if this life were all, we *ought* to be discontented; if it were all, human discontent is the only rational thing in the universe. With infinite travail we keep our top spinning for fifty or seventy years; and when its hum dies into the silence of the grave, what profit have we for all the labour that we have wrought under the sun? It has been said by a cynical philosopher that man is simply a lucky bubble on the protoplasmic pot. But if he is nothing more than a bubble, blown by the breath of blind

chance and pricked by the hand of blind death, he will steadily and reasonably refuse to believe that he is a "lucky" bubble.

It is altogether another thing with the spiritual man. The "unintelligible world" is much more intelligible to him; he does not feel the depressing thought of the purposelessness of life; he does not suffer from the diseased indifference naturally bred of the theory that all things are vain; and he is not paralysed by the spectacle of the world's suffering. The spiritual life answers his questions, meets his needs, makes possible his ideals, consoles him in sorrow, and gives him victory in death. I have spoken of the poor lad spinning his top; let me remind you of a very different artist in the same vocation. Lord Kelvin is a top-spinner, and his achievements in this line are among the distinctions of his great career. But what a mighty difference between the performance of the idiot boy and that of the great philosopher! When he spins a top, he illustrates momentous problems. He answers questions touching mechanics and dynamics. He explains the nature and action of light, heat, and magnetism. He settles geological controversies. He elucidates the mysteries of the firmament. Ah! a top in the hand of the scientist is no longer a pedlar's toy, a child's plaything signifying nothing; it has become a great organ for illustrating the laws of the universe, giving men the mastery of their environment, working out precious and manifold results of utility and beauty. So with this human existence. In the hand of the worldly life is an idiot's toy, pathetically unmeaning; but in the hand of the

spiritualist it has acquired infinite meaning and moves to splendid issues. In some aspects human life may appear trivial and vulgar, but to a spiritual man it has another aspect altogether and unspeakably magnificent and satisfying. To the worldling it is a jest, a blunder, a tragedy: to the believer in God and futurity it is a benediction, a science, a triumph.

1. We may affirm that in the truest sense *the Lord Jesus revealed to us the spiritual world*. History suggests that America was known in Europe before Columbus. It was known, however, as the merest speculation—little more than a dream of the imagination, a pretty myth for poets, a fabled world of gold and gem dimly seen in the mists of the sea. But the mighty continent suddenly became an influential fact in the consciousness and life of Europe when Columbus had once told his story. The famous admiral converted a fine fancy into one of the greatest facts in the history of the race, for ever since then the world beyond the Atlantic has made itself felt in the thought, the commerce, the government, indeed in the whole evolution and shaping of Europe. Which thing is a parable of Christ's relation to the spiritual universe. He is verily the discoverer of that universe; in a very special sense He brought life and immortality to light by the gospel. Before the Advent elect souls in some sense realised the spiritual sphere; they knew God, they saw the land that is afar off, yet only dimly, and could not order their speech aright because of the darkness. As to the great multitude of men, the spiritual universe was a thin speculation, a poet's conceit, a hesitating prophecy,

a hazy possibility lying on the far horizon ; and thus apprehended it could not deeply influence the common life and character. But Christ made known the things which are unseen and eternal, as Columbus discovered America. He made the vague definite, the doubtful indisputable, and transformed the faint, flickering hope into a conviction and passion of supreme force. The heavenly universe forthwith became a master fact for mankind. He made it to live in the thought, the conscience, and the affections of the multitude in all generations. Henceforth the vision of God inspired or overawed men of every rank ; the knowledge of the spirituality of human nature awoke in the slave and the outcast the sense of more than royal dignity and right ; the fact of Christ's character and grace put " a wholly new system of nerves into every virtue " ; and the hope of immortality became the infinite consolation and strength of those who were fainting under temptation and suffering. Christ, by flashing upon us the great vision of the divine, the perfect, and the eternal, awoke in us the latent spiritual instinct ; it is He who founded that active, passionate, fruitful spirituality which created the modern world, and in which lies the hope of the race.

2. *In Christ alone do we find ability to live the spiritual life.* How disastrous is the power of the visible, the sensuous, the sensual ! We cleave to the dust, and it blinds us. A Jewish legend affirms that if an angel spends seven days on the earth it becomes gross and opaque and loses the use of its wings. We all know the debasing power of the worldly environment. The lust of the flesh, the

desire of the eye, and the pride of life secularise and animalise. It may be true that we cannot utterly extirpate any of the great faculties and instincts of our nature, but certainly we can to an alarming degree becloud and stultify our primitive and noblest powers. Splendid physical capacities may be marred and degraded almost beyond recognition and service : by animal indulgence men absolutely spoil—if they do not totally destroy—vision, touch, taste, and, indeed, every fine attribute of their bodily nature. By neglect we atrophy the distinguished faculties of the brain : nothing is more common than to meet with men who totally lack the superb gifts of music, beauty, and poesy, simply because they have concentrated themselves on grosser pursuits and neglected these intellectual faculties. And so we may do injustice to our highest nature until the eyes of the heart are darkened, all sensitiveness to spiritual presences and influences is lost, the power of belief in higher things decayed, and the supreme faculties of the soul, which enable us to hold fellowship with God and which constitute our glory, are dulled and paralysed it would seem beyond recovery. Thousands about us are spiritually dead, they have withered from the top, they have given up the ghost, so far as the highest being is concerned they walk the streets in their shroud. This is the awful doom which threatens us, and other deprivations and afflictions are mere trifles compared with it. “To be carnally minded is death.” Secularism pleads that our whole attention be given to earthly interests, that we should not for a moment be permitted to look heavenward ; but

even philosophical critics having no sympathy whatever with spiritual religion perceive the fatal effects of an exclusive devotion to material interests. "Secularity is the English vice, and we may rejoice to see it attacked. It ought to be the beginning of a new life for England, that the heavy materialism which has so long weighed upon her is shaken at last. We have been perhaps little aware of it, as one is usually little aware of the atmosphere one has long breathed. We have been aware only of an energetic industrialism."¹ And the writer proceeds to enlarge upon the evil for which that secular temper, "this eternal question of a livelihood," is responsible. To concentrate ourselves upon wealth and luxury prevents us aiming at great ideals, it is the paralysis of the power of admiration, it quenches enthusiasm, it destroys high and generous feeling, it chills the love of fame and the ambition of great achievement; in a word, we fall victims to "the bald barrenness of money-getting," we gain the world and lose our soul. Thus even secular moralists descry the action of the sordid life upon our nobler powers.

But how does this candid critic propose to save us from the fatal influences of an exaggerated secularism? How will he touch our emotions, vivify our imagination, restrain our cupidity, chasten our selfishness, and ennoble our character? He confidently relies upon art, science, poetry, and literature, each with a capital letter, to maintain our ideal life, our freshness of feeling, and to neutralise the demoralising influences of worldliness. Pictures, spectroscopes, epics, and literature are to rescue us

¹ *Natural Religion.*

from the blinding, belogging, devouring dust. Surely we should be deaf to the most convincing teachings of history and blind to a thousand facts of life if we trusted in any such intellectual and artistic salvation. In the chapter before us the apostle deals with this very question of the deleteriousness of worldly greed, ambition, and indulgence—the foolish lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. Does he exhort the earnest men to whom he wrote to seek salvation from the corrupting influences of worldliness in philosophy and poetry, in knowledge and taste? Right before his eyes was the obvious and emphatic condemnation of any such theory. In Athens and Rome, in Corinth and Ephesus, he beheld the fine arts in their perfection and the most brilliant literature of the ages; and yet the god of the people was their belly, their glory was their shame, and their whole life was immersed in earthly things. He lifts his eyes to loftier realms, and finds the secret of strength and immunity elsewhere than in beauty, music, and poetry. “But thou, O man of God, flee these things (of covetousness and indulgence); and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal. . . I charge thee in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession; that thou keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in its own times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling

in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power eternal. Amen." The apostle finds the great ideals, the fountains of inspiration which save from material corruptions and sensual mire, in the facts of the unseen and eternal. We must be swayed by a passion for righteousness, and in the thought of the holy God, in the discipleship of Christ Jesus, in the hope of eternal life, in the patient waiting for the appearing of the Lord must we work out that personal righteousness in power and beauty. From this upper realm our strength must be drawn, and only so long as we abide in fellowship with it are we immune. In this victory of faith; in these glowing, uplifting, energising thoughts; in these hallowed passions, aspirations, and hopes, are we secure from all contaminations. Here no dust blinds, no mud sticks, no sensuality soils. The heavenly virtue is our supreme salvation against the whole treacherous, debasing environment. An apparatus has just been invented for preserving life in an atmosphere of carbonic acid or in an explosive mixture of fire-damp and air. A miner carries on his back a knapsack, which contains a supply of pure air: from this a tube is conveyed to the mouth, whilst the nostrils are closed by a spring; the same vessel is connected with a bright lamp fastened to the miner's chest. Both the man and his light are perfectly independent of the vitiated atmosphere; the knapsack being connected by a tube with a reservoir of air fed from above, existence and light can be maintained for a long period amid the most deadly gases. Image of the spiritual man pursuing his task

in the miasma of daily life ; his breath and illumination drawn from upper worlds, he calmly fulfils his mission with absolute impunity, gathering heavenly treasure even in the vapours of hell. In the power of Christ's resurrection, in the hope of His coming, let us deal with carnal situations and things, and the spirituality of our nature and the spirituality of life shall be maintained despite the gross medium in which we dwell and act ; and so far from the world debasing or coarsening us, it shall splendidly and eternally serve us, as the subordinated, disciplined briar bears the rose upon its top.

V
REVISED ESTIMATES

We are true men.—GEN. xlii. 13.

V

REVISED ESTIMATES

I. THE MISTAKEN ESTIMATE.—“We are true men.” They spoke flatteringly of themselves and of one another; yet had they a good report of the truth itself? We know that it was not so; they were anything but true men. And are not many of us guilty of self-deception? We all know people who form ridiculously false conceptions of the merit of their doings, giving themselves credit for a degree of virtue that it is impossible for their friends to allow, and we wonder how they can be thus blind. But do not some of us similarly delude ourselves, reckoning ourselves true men when we are nothing of the sort? How came it to pass that the brethren of Joseph formed such a false conception of their status? How is it that we form false estimates of ourselves which may beguile and betray us into perdition?

1. *They rested in their superficial goodness, and forgot their deeper wickedness.* “We are no spies.” No, they were not; they felt hurt by the suspicion, they scorned the thought. But there are worse things than going forth to see the nakedness of the land, worse sinners than spies. And these

very men were guilty of far more monstrous wickedness. Let us see. Turn to chapter thirty-seven of this book. Ver. 2. Joseph "brought unto his father their evil report." Ver. 4. "His brethren . . . hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." Ver. 5. "And they hated him yet the more." Doubtful conduct for true men. Ver. 11. "And his brethren envied him." Ver. 18. "And when they saw him afar off, . . . they conspired against him to slay him." Hardly the thing for true men. Ver. 20. "Come now, therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit; and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him." And yet true men! Ver. 26 shows that Judah belonged to the "lucrative party," and was inclined to a less crime if it were more profitable. "And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content." How fully they realised the fraternal relation! Sweet brothers! Ver. 31. "And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood: and they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no." How straightforward and ingenuous! Ver. 34. "And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him." Affectionate children! They boasted themselves "true men," whilst they were guilty of malice,

falsehood, treachery, and murder. They were unmanly, unbrotherly, unfilial. They were not spies, but they were liars, impostors, kidnappers, fratricides, monsters. They ignored the profound wickedness of which they were guilty, and dwelt fondly upon a goodness that was not very good.

Is not this a common method with us still? We comfort ourselves because we are blameless in matters which concern the surface of life, and forget our lapses in the weightier matters of the law. We congratulate ourselves upon a trifling excellency or supposed excellency, upon a virtue which costs nothing, a virtue which has never been tried, and yet in heart and life we transgress the fundamental principles of truth and justice, of purity and love, of godliness and righteousness. We are courteous, affable, genteel, honest, are indulgent parents, agreeable neighbours, are honourably mentioned for our public services and patriotic sacrifices, and on these and similarly slender perfections we fondly dwell, giving them an altogether fictitious importance, whilst in our hearts we cherish the worst passions and are guilty of the most unrighteous deeds. The greatest sinners pride themselves upon traits of character, upon minor moralities which from any serious point of view are matters as absolutely indifferent as glittering specks are on stones of the highway which we find in the dirt and leave there. In Isaiah we hear the God of Israel denouncing His hypocritical people for their sanctimonious pretensions whilst living in abject sin: "I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that is

not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provoketh Me to My face continually, sacrificing in gardens, and burning incense upon bricks; which sit among the graves, and lodge in the vaults; which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou" (lxv. 2-5). Men living in the practice of the most heathenish and abominable sins yet contrive with cunningest casuistry to find in themselves praiseworthy qualities and deeds, although the good points they emphasise are shadowy and paltry in the last degree; and these Pharisees are as numerous in the world as they are in the Church. Our Master, too, discerned and reprobated this trick of disguising sin: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." It is sometimes astonishing to find how thin is the varnish and how cheap the tinsel which disguise and decorate the foulest sepulchres. "True men." The virtues of true men are as real as the soul, as deep as life, as comprehensive as duty; true men know truth in the inward part, they reveal it whether they eat or drink or whatsoever they do; they strive to act blamelessly in things great as well as small: but, alas! too many calling themselves "true men" regard only the surface, boasting virtues which are the merest wayside flowers, and ignoring the many terrible roots of bitterness which strike deep into

the red soil of the heart and whose fruition is death.

2. *They rested in their exceptional goodness, and forgot their prevailing wickedness.* "We are no spies." So far they were right; yet in how many other respects were they painfully wanting! Their cumulative base characteristics we have just seen. But is not this seizing on a creditable trait of character, and ignoring the bad traits, a constant source of self-deception? One employer hearing of another oppressing his workpeople, says proudly, Well, I am not by a long way all that I ought to be, but, thank God, I am not a sweater! A workman with serious vices is yet industrious, and his habitual boast is, Well, whatever else I am, I am not a loafer! A wretch ill-uses his wife, whereupon many a crimson sinner in the neighbourhood congratulates himself, Well, whatever else I am, thank God I am not a brute! A tradesman fails, and forthwith the worst people in the town draw themselves up and declare emphatically, Well, at least I have always been straight! The prodigal son, listening to a story of covetousness and meanness, chuckles, Nobody can charge me with money-grubbing! And he who is a walking lie, a mass of selfishness, full of egotism and pride, flatters himself when his neighbour is accused of tippling, Thank Heaven, I never was a beast! The popular idea is that the Pharisee is found only in the Church among religious people; but the Pharisee is in the world also, he hides in the most outrageous sinners, and it is often curious to hear the sanctimonious accent in the hiccough of the drunkard, and to see the broad phylactery showing

through the finery of the harlot. "We are not spies," not tipplers, not tyrants, not sharpers, not loafers, not beasts. What a comfortable feeling is created by dwelling upon the fact that we are not without a creditable point, negative or positive! One daisy does not make a meadow, but we dote on our one daisy until the whole landscape seems a-bloom; one swallow does not make a summer, but we laud our one swallow until the sky seems full of birds; one star is not a constellation, but we extol our one star until we feel ourselves glittering like the Milky Way. The apostle says, "If we offend in one point, we are guilty of all"; yet we argue as if to keep one point were to be innocent of all. "True men." They are true at the centre, true all round, the soundness of their heart discovering itself in the harmony and beauty of their whole life. But, alas! we judge ourselves by a phase of exceptional goodness, and because we are not spies conclude ourselves saints.

Once we saw Vesuvius swept by a severe snow-storm, the effects of which were very wonderful. The crest of the mount was veiled in vapour, and for a while the flaming fire and lurid smoke disappeared, its sinister features were softened, and the whole dark mountain was white as snow in Salmon. Had Vesuvius been misunderstood and wronged? Had it suffered a mysterious and splendid conversion, and henceforth renouncing its evil reputation would the mount that burned with fire become an Alp whose crystal battlements pierce the royal blue, and whose slopes of stainless white spiritualise the lights and colours of dawn, noon, and sunset?

From being an object of terror, had it by some benign power been transformed into a magnificent symbol of purity and beauty? Alas! in a few hours the illusion was over; the hill of evil omen resumed its old forbidding aspect, proved its real character, and justified its bad reputation—its slopes were as black as ever, on its peak the red blaze glowed, and its poisoned fumes once more offended the heavens. In society we are most familiar with transformations of this kind. Men who are habitual transgressors occasionally reveal gracious aspects of character, they know interludes of virtue, they vary the sad monotony with noble deeds; and it might easily be concluded that their friends had misinterpreted them, or that suddenly they had suffered a gracious conversion into saints. Alas! it is seen too soon that it is only Vesuvius in a snowstorm; their goodness is superficial, sectional, and sporadic; there is no chronic change, no quenching of the unchaste fires, no blessed and abiding transformation of Ebal into Gerizim, of the volcano into Lebanon, of Mount Vesuvius into Mount Blanc. But these fitful, partial, fugitive moods are often highly judged by the sinner; the goodness that is nothing more than an exceptionable phase and a mere episode is fondly magnified by him and accounted a manifestation of his real self. A snowstorm does not give a character to Vesuvius, and God reckons lightly the virtuous moods and doings which at rare intervals chequer a life of chronic and habitual unrighteousness.

3. *They rested in their present goodness, and forgot their past wickedness.* “We are no spies.” They were right in that particular matter, right at that particular

time ; but what of the past ? The moral insensibility and forgetfulness exhibited by these brethren are simply surprising. " And they took Joseph and cast him into a pit." What next ? " And they sat down to eat bread." One would have fancied that that terrible act of burying a brother alive would at least have spoiled their appetite, but it did not—they ate the funeral biscuits with mockery and laughter. Then thirty years passed away, and they thought the whole thing forgotten and dismissed for ever. Thus we too deal with our sins. If we only realised what our sins mean, if we could once feel their hatefulnes and shame, their exceeding criminality, their awful implications, if we could see them even dimly as God sees them, we should have little relish for anything that this world gives—our bread would be ashes, our wine wormwood, our crimson sackcloth, the sun's light darkness, and the summer's flowers the embroidery of a shroud. The sense of sin would spoil everything ; it ought to spoil everything. But we sin against God, we dishonour ourselves, we wrong our brother, and then sit down to eat and drink, to laugh and sing ; we lie down to sleep and dream, we go forth to buy and sell and get gain, as if nothing had happened. We wipe our mouth, we wash our hands, and straightway forget what manner of men we are. We talk about " cleaning the slate," and it is astonishing with what facility politicians can effect that trick. It is not a slate that we have to clean. Our sin is graven with a diamond on the rock for ever, unless Eternal Mercy erase it. " God requireth that which is past." There is no statute of limitations in the

moral universe ; and however blameless we may be to-day, the past clings to us, condemns us, calls for blood. We shall never be "true men" until purged from our old sins. When William Herschel constructed his large telescope and discovered the planet Uranus, he was directed to appear at Windsor so that George III. might hear of the wonderful discovery from the lips of the discoverer himself. The astronomer duly appeared at the palace, bringing with him his telescope and a map of the solar system. He was wholly occupied with the sublimities of the universe, and the last thing he thought about was his personal delinquency. Now, Herschel, while still a boy, had deserted from the army, many years previously. In some way this fact had come to the knowledge of the king, and when the astronomer was ushered into the royal presence his majesty remarked that before they could discuss science a matter of imperative business must be transacted ; whereupon he handed to the astonished astronomer a paper, written by the royal hand and bearing the royal signature, pardoning the deserter. Herschel had become a great man, and no doubt considered that he had outlived the memory and got beyond the reach of his juvenile transgression. But the monarch's instinct was correct ; the royal pardon must cancel the old sin, and enable the king on a proper footing to show favour to the quondam offender. So we leave behind us ugly deeds which fade from our memory ; we become influential, venerable, honoured men ; we talk largely of science, learning, government, wealth, or theology ; still God requireth that which is past, and He can

never lift upon us the light of His countenance until we have sought and found forgiveness for the offences of long past years.

The brethren of Joseph were not "true men." Their self-estimate was utterly wide of the mark. They flattered themselves in their own eyes until their iniquity was found to be hateful. Alas! is it not thus with some of us? Our boast that we are "true men" is the conceit of a blind soul. Our goodness is superficial, our guilt profound; our goodness is little, our sins as mountains rise and swell; and although with passions cooled and opportunities lacking we are not now sinning as once, yet He who requireth the past writes bitter things against us and makes us to possess the sins of our youth. "True men," indeed!

Angel seemed to human sight,
Stood a leper in Thy light.

II. THE CORRECTED ESTIMATE.—How wonderfully God cleaves to our very heart, makes His arrows to smite our conscience, and shows us of what spirit we are, no matter how cleverly and profoundly we may have been disguised! Many years ago a slave in Brazil found a supposed diamond of nearly a pound weight. It was presented to the emperor, constantly guarded by soldiers, and was supposed to represent millions of money. An English mineralogist, however, produced a cutting diamond, and with a scratch exposed the pleasing fallacy. One stroke was enough. A real gem would have suffered no scratch; but it was no diamond at all, and the millions vanished in a

moment into thin air. So a single stroke pierces and exposes character. It was thus in the narrative before us. "And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God: if ye be true men, bring your youngest brother unto me." That single scratch scored the whole string of pseudo-diamonds. "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." The "true men" were found out, they knew themselves to be frauds. It was the same with Christ and the rich young man. He kept all the commandments, had kept them all from his youth up. Said he complacently, "What lack I yet?" "Jesus said to him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me." Fatal scratch! The youth was only a white crystal after all. "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." So was it with the woman of Samaria. How smart she was, how ready with history, what an excellent controversialist! "Jesus said unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither." One keen cut and the jewel that had charmed many knew herself to be paste.

So God will, one day or another, in one way or another, find us out. We notice sometimes that our friends suddenly stand revealed in a light most unexpected; they flash upon us in a character hitherto wholly unsuspected. Indeed the most

startling revelations we witness are revelations of people whom we have known for years. And so our true selves may long be concealed from ourselves; but at last God makes us to know of what spirit we are, and we become filled with astonishment and distress. By Christ "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed"; by Him "the world is convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment." The Pharisee at last takes the place of the publican, and smiting upon his breast cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

A true man! Is not this the grandest character that we could desire? How eloquent it is! Is not this the epitaph we envy? Rich man! successful man! great man! gifted man! None of these compares with a true man! We ought to covet that inscription more than sculptured urn or animated bust. Yet, whenever we know our real spirit and standing, we are painfully conscious that we do not merit such a characterisation. "True men." Oh no, far from it. "I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." We speak out our deepest conviction when we confess with the sacred poet:

False, and full of sin I am.

"We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know Him that is true." The great teaching here is, that Christ the Son of God has come, and has furnished us with the sense, the power, and the understanding necessary in order that we may see and know the true God who stands in opposition to the imagined and

vain gods of the world. Here is the point at which to begin. We become true men only as we apprehend the true God. Philosophical moralists usually start a long way from this, a long way below this; but it is the grand characteristic of revelation that it attempts the salvation of man only through the manifestation of the glory and grace of God. Christ is the Son of God, He is the true God Himself, and in Him we behold in softened splendour the essential and eternal holiness. How sweet, kindly, strong, large-hearted, pure, and faithful is that central Figure of the New Testament! The normal man has this or that redeeming feature amid beclouding infirmities and faults; but in the fulness of time came One who showed us virtue in its reality, in its fulness, and in sweetly ordered harmony. Critics murmur that the doctrines of Christ were not original; His holiness was. We had not seen anything like this before. For the first time we knew what holiness meant. The world has not been able to take its eyes off Him for two thousand years. The Son of God is come as the Son of man, showing that, through the knowledge and fellowship of the true God, human nature attains the fulness of its glory in light and purity, in love and life. When we look upon the sublime perfection of our Lord we instinctively exclaim, How sovereign is the beauty of human nature when, through the eternal Spirit, it reaches the fulness of the divine conception! "We know Him that is true." We know Him who is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all.

"And we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." Then are we "true men." Our

“being in the True” is the being found in Christ, and because we are, and as long as we are, in Jesus Christ, we are in the Father. We have become partakers of the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world through false and irregular desire. If “we are in Him that is true,” our goodness is no longer superficial. His Spirit that searcheth all things searches the deep places of our thought, feeling, and volition, making us to know truth in the inward part, and in the hidden part to know wisdom. He makes us true in the sense that the love of holiness is the deepest and most serious thing in our life. If “we are in Him that is true,” our goodness is no longer partial and intermittent. All qualities lovely and strong adorn and sustain us. What the old poet wrote of his saintly friend is realised in all who are passionately loyal to their Lord :

In the centre of his breast
 (Sweet as is the phoenix' nest)
 Every reconcilèd grace
 Had their general meeting-place.

And the practice of justice and truth, mercy and humility, shall be the law and habit of life. “If we are in Him that is true,” no pride or passion of past years shall afflict us with the sense of falsity, shame, and guilt. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.” This is to be true men. To know truth as truth is known in God; to prove the grace that makes of sincerity and integrity the very essence of life; so to walk in the light that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses and keeps us from all sin; to be so filled with the spirit of love and faithfulness that we can

not be false to any man,—this is to be “true men”; and anything less than this high, large sense of the term is hardly worth talking about.

Pope wrote truly:

An honest man's the noblest work of God.

Yes; the “work of God”: we cannot make ourselves perfect. “When I would do good, evil is present with me.” But Christ is here to share with us all His delightful perfections. It is entirely the work of the omnipotent Spirit of grace to make us honest men; to give us a noble conscience; to cause us to know truth in the inward parts; to create within us a pure heart, a right spirit; to make us godly, strong, faithful, pure, all that men ought to be. “For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man should glory. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.” And only as we live in Him can we live pure, transparent, beautiful lives. “For the Lord God . . . shall call His servants by another name: that he who blesseth himself in the earth, shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth, shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from Mine eyes” (Isa. lxxv. 15, 16). Come, O Christ, our Pattern, our Perfecter, lead us out of our frailties, our insincerities, our enslavements, our confusions, our sorrows, our remorse for the past, our fear for the future, and make us altogether like Thyself.

men of good, men of God, therefore manliest of men. We wait at Thy feet, we continue waiting, looking, praying, expecting, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

VI

THE UPWARD LOOK

If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth.—COL. iii. 1, 2 (R.V.).

VI

THE UPWARD LOOK

INQUIRE into—

I. THE NATURE OF THIS HIGHER LIFE.—“ Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God.” Everywhere in nature is found a certain upward gaze and striving. A great principle animates all the members of the animal kingdom, from the lowest to the highest organism, a principle that prompts them to rise towards the great source of light and heat in order to perfect their structure and improve their functions in the glorious light of the sun. The infusoria of the deep seas ascend from a lower existence in the sunless abyss, they rise into the upper, illuminated waters; give time enough, and they leap on shore, and succeeding species are slowly perfected until the obscure life that originated in the ocean slime mounts the air, exulting in the lark singing at heaven's gate and in the eagle soaring in the sun. Everywhere an instinct stirs in the animal creation, prompting to aspirations in perfecting organisms and their functions. There is also an inherent principle in plants urging them to rise from underground darkness into the regions of light, from the gloomy

cave into the bright realms of day, from the shady forest high up into the radiant sky.¹

Every clod hath a stir of might,
 An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
 And, grasping blindly above it for light,
 Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers.

So, apart from all revelation, we find in ourselves instincts seeking upward, aspirations towards things higher than those of time and sense; we look beyond the physical life, we conceive ideas and hopes touching the unseen and the eternal. However it may be explained, we persist to dream great dreams, we aspire to higher spheres, we seek to realise ourselves in an upper universe—we impatiently long for a sky in which to spread our wings as royal birds do, we reach yearningly towards a central light in which our being may glow and blossom like the flowers. Much about human nature and life seems poor and disappointing, but this impetus and this passion for the transcendent shed a wonderfully redeeming light on our apparent mortality and meanness. We belong to the plant order in our frailty and fadingness—the wind passeth over us and we are gone; yet are we climbing plants. Starting suddenly out of the darkness and as rapidly vanishing, we are like sparks from the anvil: yet, like the sparks, we fly upward.

Now, what has the faith of Christ to say to this inner striving, to these glances, longings, dreams, aspirations after the spiritual and abiding?

Most frankly and emphatically does Christianity *accept* the upward-seeking instinct. If otherworldli-

¹ Mossman, *Origin of the Seasons*,

ness is an error, no document is equally responsible for it with the New Testament. There is not a single word of rebuke for the alleged serious mistake of concerning ourselves with the thoughts and things of the unknown and everlasting; on the contrary, the whole habit of supernaturalism is sanctioned on every page. Jesus Christ makes no attempt to prove the existence of God, the spiritual essence of human nature, the authority of a law transcending utility, or the fact of the immortality of the soul; it is most significant that He simply, quietly assumes the validity of these doctrines as though the contrary were unthinkable or undeserving of thought—He assumes them as the eye assumes the light, as the light assumes the eye. If otherworldliness is an error, the greatest Teacher that the ages have known is chiefly responsible for it. He began His ministry with unearthly doctrine: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." And never does He descend below the skies. The teaching of Jesus and the theory of secularism are absolutely antagonistic and irreconcilable.

Christianity *stimulates* the upward-seeking instinct. It not only sanctions otherworldliness, it sets itself steadily to develop to the utmost the spiritual instinct. It appeals to us by an immense supernaturalism which stirs and stimulates the soul to its depths. The Christian faith is pervaded by the idea of resurrection. As Christ rose from the

dead, left an empty sepulchre, showed Himself alive by many infallible signs, so are we exhorted to shake ourselves from the dust, to awake from cryptic nightmares, to walk in newness of life. The doctrine of ascension is the doctrine of Christ. "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty"; and He calls upon all His disciples to follow Him even now into the heavenlies—their thoughts, their principles, their citizenship being in heaven. The faith of Christ is the faith of immortality. His teaching everywhere is coloured by considerations drawn from the eternal sphere, and the teaching of the apostles finds its main inspiration in the deathless life. Everywhere the New Testament intensifies our sympathy with the supernatural, prompts our soarings into the unseen. Just as the anthropologists tell us that the powerful stimulations and attractions of nature acted upon the brain of primitive man until the troglodyte was competent to leave his cave to dwell beneath the sky and to comprehend the mysteries and splendours of the universe, so the truths and hopes of Christianity are now working on the soul, eliciting its latent faculties, and rendering it capable of visions and delights that it has not entered into our heart to conceive.

Christianity *defines* the upward-seeking impulse. There is confessedly deep mystery about the nature and design of this instinct; the profoundest philosophers have been perplexed by it, wondering as to its precise signification. But in Christ the mystery is practically solved, the vague splendour after which we blindly grope becomes definite.

“Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God.” That is, contemplate all the higher truths in the light of the risen Christ, and in the strength that He gives work up to those truths. The character of God is to be contemplated in Him. All the scattered rays of the revelation of the Divine are focused in Him, and He unseals new fountains of the divine splendour of power and wisdom, compassion and love. The law which is holy, just, and good finds its final, supreme expression in Him and in His gospel. The glorified Lord vindicates the essential greatness of humanity. The whole secret of salvation is disclosed in Him who died for our sins, who rose for our justification, and who ever sitteth at the right hand of God to complete the vast design. He sends forth the Spirit of grace and recovery. And the vague, dim hope of the future which has puzzled generations becomes a clear vision in Him that liveth and was dead, who is alive for evermore, and who holds the keys of death and hell. No longer are we doomed to unfruitful speculations about the unseen; Christ has made the supreme truths concrete, definite, positive, apprehensible, full of saving influence. He is the sun of righteousness, the rainbow round about the throne, the bright and the morning star. Thus as all animals and plants strive sunward that they may unfold themselves in the golden light and put on the utmost glory of which they are individually susceptible, so, says the text, must we strive upward to the living God as revealed in Jesus Christ, that we may finally be clothed with the beauty and greatness of ideal humanity.

II. WHY WE SHOULD LIVE THIS HIGHER LIFE. —“Not on things on the earth.” Why should we turn away from the terrestrial, the obvious, the immediate, and concern ourselves so deeply with the spiritual, the heavenly, the eternal?

I. It is only thus *that we attain personal perfection*. It may be true that respectable character has been attained without any direct action of spiritual belief, but it is certain that the highest character is reached only through fellowship with the things that are above. A star cannot be imprisoned in a shed, it demands a sky; and to attain perfection and fully display its glory the soul demands a sky. There is no supreme character except through a supernatural creed. Cryptic mosses are in a sense complete and beautiful, but in fulness and splendour they are inferior to the rare flowers which unfold in the tropical sun; and although in a secular life men reveal admirable moral traits, it yet remains true that the ideal lives are those of spiritual men and women. We know that this line of argument is often met by the objection, There are many men and women who do not believe a bit in so-called higher things—atheists, agnostics, positivists, and secularists, and yet they are personally and socially irreproachable. And the confident inference drawn from this fact—for we cordially acknowledge it to be a fact—is that high character is independent of the stimulations of a spiritual faith. Much, however, must be considered before we can justly draw such conclusion. What are the two great words of modern science familiar even to the man in the street? Heredity and environment. How,

then, do these famous doctrines bear upon the case under consideration?

How far are the moral sceptics in question indebted for their boasted moral qualities to a religious ancestry? Some plants flower in the night, and their splendid blossoms fill the darkness with perfume; will, therefore, anyone adduce this fact as evidence that solar stimulations are unnecessary and may be dispensed with? That plant was all day steeping in the light, it is saturated with sunshine; and although it blooms at midnight, it owes the whole of its beauty and sweetness to the sun equally with the roses of July which redden in the meridian beam. It is much the same with these sceptical modern moralists—they are saturated with religious influence, and owe far more to it than they are ready to acknowledge. The father of that moral agnostic was a Methodist, his grandfather was another, whilst his great-grandfathers for many generations were Anglicans, Puritans, and Catholics. Does not all this count for something—nay, does it not count for much—in the moral fibre of the unbeliever? He has been steeping in the white light of Christianity for a millennium, and if there is any truth in heredity it has played its part in determining the curve of his skull, the set of his brain, the quality of his bone, blood, and tissue, and, indeed, his whole character. It may be said, Yes; but the moral sceptic has now emphatically disavowed the spiritual creed. What! does a man jump out of his skin when he changes his opinion? We repeat, if there is any validity in the orthodox doctrine of inheritance, the moral atheist may well

consider whether he is not largely indebted for his moral quality and idiom to the age-long action of that supernatural faith which he has been foolish enough to renounce.

The other great word on everybody's lips is our second one—environment. That is, we are powerfully influenced by our surroundings; we are to no inconsiderable extent moulded by our circumstances. What, then, is the environment of our moral atheist? The influence of a spiritual faith pervades the whole atmosphere that he breathes. Christian truth is distinctly and powerfully expressed in our laws, institutions, manners, language, and literature; indeed, it affects us every day at a thousand points. We can no more free ourselves from its vital influence than we can evade the circumambient air. As one of our popular writers puts it, "Do what you will, you cannot escape Jesus of Nazareth. His life and death underlie our institutions as the alphabet underlies our literature."¹ Does our moral atheist owe nothing to this fact? May he not owe to it much of the best that he is and has? If the doctrine of environment means anything, it means that the virtue of contemporaneous unbelief is deeply indebted to the shining character of Jesus Christ and to His pure teachings, which ring us round on every side as with a wall of transfiguring fire. In nature we have vegetable robbers which practise their craft underground; their rootlets feel out for and seize on the roots of other plants, and then their flower-stems rise above the ground looking as if they were perfectly independent and bore all their

¹ *Robert Elsmere.*

blushing honours honestly out of their own roots. It is largely thus with the secular virtue of our Christian civilisation; all kinds of hidden suckers draw life from religious grounds, and enable wild and barren stems to bear alien blossoms. "Boast not thyself against the root, for thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." The true test would be to take infidel ethics quite outside all Christian influences, to plant them on severely natural grounds, and to give them time to declare themselves. Happily this cannot be done; but we feel quite sure of the disastrous consequences were such an experiment possible. If night-flowering plants are kept in continual darkness they cease to flower, their leaf sickens as their memory of the sun grows dim; and if every beam of heavenly light were shut off, and atheism doomed for an age or two to its native darkness, it would once more produce what it always did produce—the apples of Sodom and the grapes of Gomorrah. It is one of the less considered evidences of the marvellous power and grace of the faith of Christ that it makes atheism itself respectable.

There is no supreme character without a supernatural creed. As we have already acknowledged, a cryptogamic plant has its beauty; but a plant grown in a cellar is one thing, and an orchid cherished into unearthly beauty in the light of a tropical sun is another thing. "The glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another." Who among all the sons of men has given us the highest expression of human character? Without contradiction, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian Church,

however it may be impeached, has in its charge the most perfect human character we have yet known ; or, to speak more correctly, the highest character we have yet known has the Christian Church in charge. Theodore Parker somewhere observes that Christ is the grandest character that we have seen, but He is not the grandest that we may expect to see. Admirable! When men are shut up by history they take refuge in prophecy. Enough for us that He *is* the grandest character. When a greater comes we will consider him—only we look not for another. And—for this is the point—all the moral glory that the ages reverence in Jesus Christ was the result of spiritual inspirations. The Rose of Sharon, whose incomparable perfection, whose unearthly beauty and sweetness have drawn the wondering eyes of two thousand years, was rooted in eternity. Of all men our Lord was least a secularist. He was never ashamed of otherworldliness. He was the most spiritually-minded of men; He continued in fellowship with His Father, He walked quite on the verge of heaven, and out of this spiritual root sprang the Plant of Renown, whose lustre and perfume delight the world. “We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

And since Jesus Christ the rarest character has unfolded under the heavenly light. If to-day you seek the whitest purity; the gentleness, meekness, and patience which are at once lovely and strong; the spirit of magnanimity, pity, and forgiveness in its last delicacy and perfectness; stern integrity or spotless honour; charity with a heart as big as the

world ; sublimest self-denial and self-sacrifice,—if you seek these, you will find them not on the stony grounds of secularism, but in the Church of Christ, which is the garden of God. Whatever weeds grow there, the choicest flowers of virtue are indigenous there, sparkling with the dew of heaven. Whenever the world resorts to pure secularism, it will, we suppose, substitute *Poor Richard's Almanack* for revelation, but those excellent maxims will hardly breed supreme character. It is only as we live under a wide sky, only whilst we reflect like a mirror the glory of the Lord, only as we are sustained by the powers of the world to come, that the noblest, purest, and loveliest attributes of character are possible to us.

2. We should live this higher life because *if we do not we shall not get this world*. “Not on the things that are upon the earth.” No text exasperates a modern congregation more than this. The secularist temper now so popular is ready with familiar objections : We give too much attention to the things that are above, or to the things that are presumed to be above ; we waste time, thought, and energy on the unverified and unverifiable : let us concentrate ourselves on the here and now ; let us make the best of practical things—education, government, science, arts, trade, patriotism, and the humanities, the balancing of capital and labour, the housing of the working classes, the pressing questions of taxation and sanitation, the general welfare and happiness of the people. This world at the best may not be much, but it is surely wise to make the best of it that we

possibly can, and not waste the precious energies of intellect and heart upon what most likely will prove splendid fictions. After all, the bird in the hand, although it may be one of the two sold for a farthing, is worth a whole sky of azure, crimson, and golden phœnixes. This line of argument is quite familiar to our generation, and it certainly sounds like the language of common sense. Nevertheless, the text has a great deal to say for itself.

The astronomer is a ready example of the fact that very frequently the condition of getting a thing is that you look away from it. What, perhaps, strikes us most when inspecting a telescope is that it shuts out so much. We cannot survey the landscape with it; it will not, like an opera-glass, enable us to distinguish forms and faces in which we are interested; it possesses none of the virtue of the microscope which exposes our secret foes; it does not discover ships at sea; and there is no side-window in it opening into markets and streets. It looks away from city, landscape, and sea, and the crudely practical critic might with great show of reason infer that an instrument so utterly unearthly, centred on a few points of brightness in an empty sky, can have very little to do with mundane knowledge and the material welfare and progress of mankind. He can see at a glance the immediate and immense advantage of the plough, the locomotive, or the loom, but what special profit is secured by the speculative star-gazer and his hollow tube does not so immediately appear; in the opinion of the practical the astronomer is a dreamer, and the telescope one of the playthings of the childish. We,

however, know that it is not so. The astronomer shuts the earth from his sight, not because he does not care for it, but that he may better understand it and realise its possibilities. He who looks away from the planet on which he lives best comprehends it. He it is who sets the clock, constructs the almanack, furnishes the seamen with charts, regulates the train service, and determines the yard measure, so that our very clothes are cut astronomically. At a thousand points he affects most influentially the life and action of mankind. Would anything be gained if in the pretended practical interests of the people the telescope were tilted the other way, and employed to search streets and sewers instead of suns and stars? We are sure of the contrary. Men did not know the shape of the earth until they looked into the sky; and the astronomer who has spent his years in considering the heavens has, by giving us the knowledge of celestial and terrestrial laws and forces, put us in the front rank of civilisation.

Now, in the light of this illustration consider this chapter whence we take our text. "If ye then be raised together with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God." The secularist despises such language as visionary and impracticable. "For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Says the man of the world, Mere mysticism. "When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory." Hysterical, indignantly protests the sordid soul that can see nothing beyond time and sense. Why, he inquires angrily, did not the apostle direct his attention to

the several questions which painfully press on the million? Why did he not give us leading on the problems of health, capital, social economy, national and international politics? It is in the highest degree unreasonable and provoking to indulge in this mysticism and hysteria, and to ignore the painful riddles of daily life, to make no attempt to guide us to just conclusions on social, physical, and political matters. But has the apostle forgotten the here and now, has he so lost himself in transcendental things as to ignore the present time, its claims and purpose? Read on. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, the which is idolatry." "But now put ye away all these; anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth; lie not one to another." "Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any." All this is practical enough. "Wives, be in subjection to your husbands." "Husbands, love your wives." "Children, obey your parents in all things." "Fathers, provoke not your children." "Servants, obey in all things them that are your masters." "Masters, render unto your servants that which is just and equal." All these advices are practical. The apostle is not mystical, metaphysical, or ecstatic only; he is intensely personal, domestic, and social, concerned with flesh and blood on this earth, dealing with things as they are, and as they ought to be.

The truth is the astronomer knows that this planet is bound up with the vast system of worlds, and that we can understand its constitution and laws only as we study them in the light of the infinite firmament; therefore does he patiently work amid far-off suns and stars that he may put us into possession of the treasures and forces which are at our feet; and that our knowledge and mastery of the earth may be complete, by delicate photographic films he takes into his reckoning the witness of unseen suns and stars. Thus the apostle in the first verses of this chapter withdraws our eyes from earth and fixes them on the eternal world, not that he is indifferent to human circumstance and happiness, but because he knows that only thus are we fitted to inherit all things. Extremes meet, and the lowliest life is better lived, and the lowliest duty is better done, because of the consciousness of eternity. Every great problem which concerns individual and social freedom, wealth and happiness, will be solved in high character, and revelation sets our mind on things above so that we may secure the personal, practical righteousness which at last inherits the earth.

That a spiritual faith is necessarily unpractical is one of the glaring errors of secularism. We boldly aver that because of their spiritual vision and enthusiasm devout men are all the more effective in the practical sphere. Scherer says of the valour of the Puritan soldiers: "It would seem that, certain of the reward which awaits them, they carry into mundane affairs all the freer spirit and all the more entire devotion."¹ Newton's eye was not

¹ *Essays on English Literature.*

dimmed by looking into a brightness above the brightness of the sun. The penetration of Boyle and Dalton, of Clerk-Maxwell, Lord Herschel, Adam Sedgwick, Young, Joule, Faraday, and a score others of the greatest names in science, was not blunted by their piety. The religious sincerity of Sir James Simpson and Sir James Paget did not doom them to mediocrity. Many of our greatest statesmen and lawyers have been as devout as they were illustrious. The faith of Tennyson and Browning did not choke their utterance. Spiritual reverence did not steal the azure and gold from the pages of Ruskin. And our princeliest merchant princes find the fear of God no bar to opulence and honour. Divine grace makes the best of a man, and a man at his best makes the best of the business of life; other things being equal, everything follows character. Time and chance happen to all, but, granted fair play, the life that now is is ours equally with that which is to come. Christian men are to the front in literature, arms, law, medicine, government, science, and commerce; they shine among their peers as the Milky Way shines in the heavens, and yet they would rise in any assembly and humbly acknowledge God as their Father, witness to Christ as their Saviour, and express their hope of the life everlasting. That the faith of Christ is inimical to a practical career is a stale heresy that a self-respecting secularist will be ashamed to repeat. Godly men know exactly how to prize secular success, yet they get their full share of it in all spheres and enjoy it for all that it is worth. The manifestation of the sons of God is

not here and now, but already they rehearse in faint scenes and symbols the great part they are destined to play; according to the breadth of their forehead they enjoy a mimic coronation on earth, being liberally adorned with the gilded leaves of worldly honour and felicity as an earnest of the amaranth and gold of consummated victory and kingship.

It is in the power of Christ alone that we can live this higher life. "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above." The death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ are first *grand facts* of Christian history; if they are not facts our whole faith and hope are vain. Mirages have been photographed, but the photograph of a mirage is a thin affair indeed; and the spiritualisation of a myth is a thinner and more unsatisfactory affair still. These facts have then great *moral significations*. As Christ died, so must we die. Wilberforce died to fashion that he might live unto humanity; Ruskin died to gold that he might live to beauty; Darwin died to society that he might live to science; and every man's higher life begins in a death. "For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus." Living unto God, the love of sin, the power of sin, and the tolerance of sin are at an end. As Christ rose from the dead, so also do His members rise from the death of sin to a life on the highest plane, a life in heavenly places; their thoughts, principles, and aspirations being heavenly and holy. They are strong to

resist the magic of carnality. They live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. But the death and resurrection of Christ have not only a moral signification, they have also *an inspiring and transforming power*. Through the risen Lord comes the grace by which we die to the world, and by which we ascend to heavenly places. "Because I live, ye shall live also." Let us in life through living faith identify ourselves with Him, and He shall make us dwell in heavenly places of character, experience, and hope. Let us in death identify ourselves with Him, and He shall show us the path of life and secure to us the fulness of joy. If we once get our souls into the heights, our bodies will follow. All is impracticable without the grace of God in Christ Jesus; all is possible with **it**.

VII
SELF-DESTRUCTION

He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul.—PROV. viii. 36.

VII

SELF-DESTRUCTION

BY the personal pronoun "me" Wisdom is intended, the ultimate and full meaning of which word in the Old Testament is the knowledge of God and of His holy will; so that no violence is done to the text when we proceed to argue that he who sins against God wrongs himself. Two points in the text demand attention: first, the reaction of sin upon the transgressor; and secondly, that this reaction is what we have most to fear.

I. THE REACTION OF SIN UPON THE TRANSGRESSOR.—Two directions are suggested in which we may wrong ourselves even as we wrong God.

1. *We may wrong God by unbelief.* The text may more closely be translated: "He who misses Me wrongs his own soul." "He who finds Me finds life, and he who misses Me wrongs himself." Sin is conceived of as a failure to hit the mark; and to fail to find God is to miss the golden goal, the supreme object and prize of life. "He who misses Me, does not find Me, ignores Me, leaves Me out of his thought, lives without Me, wrongs his own soul."

Many in these days are known as agnostics; they hold that the wisest thing we can do is to leave the thought of God altogether outside our creed and life. Everybody knows about the reputed man in the moon. By imagination's aid the fanciful suppose that they discern in the moon the figure of a man; whilst others entirely fail to trace the declared outline, and dismiss the whole thing as a fable. Whatever may be the ultimate truth about the man in the moon, practical men leave him altogether outside their consideration; they have so many immediate cares that they can afford to give little attention to the mysteries of moonshine. The man in the moon is quite immaterial to us, we therefore ignore him without suffering the least detriment. Agnosticism teaches that we must regard God and treat Him as we do the lunar image. The great majority believe that they discern a divine Shape in the sky, a veiled yet living God, who made all things, by whom all things hold together, and by whom all souls will be judged. But the atheist fails to trace this awful Form; in his opinion it is nothing more than a fantastic shadow projected by a childish, superstitious imagination. Then the agnostic steps in and offers his counsel. Seeing that the existence of God is a subject so mysterious and doubtful, let us neither affirm nor deny, but simply leave Him altogether out of our thought, and apply ourselves to the clear, practical business of life. Now, can we exclude God from our reckoning after this fashion? Is it possible to leave Him out of our creed, and be none the worse for the omission? The teaching of our text, as indeed

the teaching of the whole of revelation, condemns this agnosticism. It declares that to miss God, to take the thought of Him out of our creed, the love of Him out of our heart, the fear of Him out of our life, is to do the deepest injustice to our whole being. "God is great"; "God is light"; "God is love"; "God is a spirit"; and belief in Him, fellowship with Him, imparts to us loftiness, reasonableness, love, and righteousness; to miss Him is to doom ourselves to littleness, selfishness, sensuality, and hopelessness. What would our literature miss if it missed the thought of God? our government? our character?

It may be objected, Our fathers needed the thought of God to restrain and inspire, but in this age of intellectual development we have discovered substitutes for God, a new basis for morals, new guarantees for public order, new inspirations for civilisation and progress. Brethren, it is an easy thing to find substitutes for God: can we find an equivalent for God? In the botanical world an interesting experiment has recently proved successful. In the past it has been impossible to bring to this country certain Oriental plants; they were so exceedingly delicate that if they were brought upon the ship's deck the cold killed them, and if they were kept between decks they withered away in the darkness. The difficulty has now been overcome. The plants sheltered in the hold of the ship are kept alive by the electric light. Yet no one will infer from this experiment that the electric light is an equivalent for the sun. If in the future flowers are painted and harvests ripened by the

electric light only, rest assured that we soon shall be sadder and hungrier than we ever were before. So unbelieving men reason that we can put nature, nationality, humanity, in the place of God, and be none the worse; we shall be all the worse. We had better take the sun out of the sky and substitute electricity, than take God out of our creed and substitute such words as nature, nationality, or humanity. God means more to a human soul than the sun means to a rose. Here and there an agnostic may seem to do very well for a time without a spiritual faith, as those flowers lived in the electric light, but not for long. To miss God is to lose the ideal, the divinest law of conduct, the master impulse of the highest life, the sure ground of our largest hope. What is required to spoil a flower? A thunderstorm, hail, floods? Simply take the rose out of the sun, and it forthwith cankers and swarms with vermin; so will a soul shut out from God, so will a nation, so will the race. To live without God and without hope in the world is to lay the axe to the root of the strength, glory, and blessedness of humanity.

2. *We may wrong God by actual disobedience.* By positive breaches of the divine law we anger God and do injustice to ourselves. In some directions this fact is most obvious. If we break certain physical laws, our body is immediately injured and punished—it suffers in strength and comeliness. A recent writer in the public paper affirms, “You rarely or never see a handsome face in a prison.” Vice defaces the physique, covering it with inglorious scars. And

just as inevitably it plays havoc with the intellectual powers. When about thirty years of age Byron wrote :

I am not what I once was,
And my visions flit less palpably before me.

His days and nights of licence had dulled that fine fancy, that imperial imagination, those splendid powers which astonished and delighted the world. Ruskin was never weary of insisting on the fact that no great artist ever violates the moral law without his wickedness marring his artistry. "It is of course true that many of the strong masters had deep faults of character, but their faults always show in their work." By a mysterious law, the fumes of wine, the lust of gold, the stain of debauchery, impaired their genius, and left on their masterpieces spots and shadows. All this is bad enough, but the most tragical consequences of transgression declare themselves in the spirit of the offender; he is injured in that which constitutes his essential greatness and glory. Sin debases, disfigures, and destroys the soul. It outrages the conscience, diminishing its sensitiveness, its discriminativeness, its forcefulness. Meissonier, the great artist, had peculiarly delicate and beautiful hands, to which he paid unremitting attention: each morning they were carefully shampooed, the muscles exercised, and in riding or driving the painter wore thick gloves, so that the tactile sensibility of his fingers should not suffer. Is not the conscience more delicate still, as it is infinitely more important; and how watchful we ought to be lest its sensibility should be impaired! That divinest faculty suffers from every evil deed that it records.

Sin confuses and dims the spiritual understanding, at length rendering it blind to the great truths of the moral and spiritual universe. Sin injures the heart, despoiling us of the fine emotions and sensibilities on which so much depends, rendering us narrow, cold, and callous. As Burns scrowfully confesses :

It hardens all within,
And petrifies the feeling.

Sin implies the decadence of the will, reducing and destroying the native force of resolution and resistance. It deprives us of the magnificent power of setting our foot down; and when the glorious will-faculty is paralysed, what remains of the majesty of manhood? By wounding, sapping, depreciating, and shattering our noblest powers, we render ourselves incapable of the glory and gladness of life. When, listening to pride and passion, we violate any law of God, we too often regard our lawlessness as a merely regrettable incident, and fancy that its consequences will be superficial and confined to a narrow range. We forget that the universe is one, that all things, mental and material, are linked together by subtle electric chords, and that it is impossible to break any sovereign law without precipitating terrible and interminable retribution.

Remember, too, that not only are we dishonoured and destroyed by gross and fleshly sins, but licentious imaginations, evil thoughts, unjust and ungenerous feelings, unkind and untrue words, also kill morally all who cherish or utter them. Indecency of fancy, licence of language, violent speech, mar the integrity

of the spirit ; wrath, jealousy, fretfulness, and sadness injure its state of sovereign beauty. Violent acts are not necessary to spoil the soul. Take a famous violin and infinitesimally change a curve or an angle, and in all probability the magic of the instrument is lost. The fact is, the grander anything is, the more easily it is spoiled. It may not be easy to injure one of those pictures on the public walls or in the railway station, but in the National Gallery the scratch of a thumb-nail can make a nation poorer. Human nature is the grandest work of God, and it is astonishing how its strength and pride may be lost in an hour. It does not require many vicious or foolish acts to ruin us. A single act of unkindness, impurity, or dishonesty may finally mar the integrity of the soul, and spoil the music of a life. Professor Turner tells us that the astronomer uses mechanism of such exceeding delicacy that it requires months to perfect it ; and if a visitor admitted to view the beautiful machine incautiously touches it with his finger, however gently, the accuracy is lost and can be restored only by months of painstaking labour. When shall we once learn the unutterable delicacy of the soul, and the need of hourly vigilance lest an unholy touch, or breath, or fancy should mar it, and render it incapable of fellowship with the highest heaven !

Some entertain the strange notion that it is possible to live a kind of dual life, being guilty of immoral behaviour and yet retaining the clearness and integrity of the innocent soul. A novel was recently written to set forth how a woman can for certain ends voluntarily surrender herself to an

immoral life, and yet all the while look down upon her licentious acts, unaffected by them, unblinded, unstained, and undestroyed by them. Now, all this is a miserable delusion. Any theory will work in a romance, but practical life is another thing. The soul inevitably deteriorates from the first moment of meditated evil. Scales begin to form on the eyes, ideals sink, the tenderness of the conscience abates, a creeping paralysis withers the nerves of the will. We cannot sin without being in some sense weak, blind, and base; and the evil thus wrought makes us in turn weaker, blinder, and baser still. A patient inhaling ether may resolve to maintain consciousness in spite of the soothing, lulling power of the strange element; for a little while he may seem to succeed, but he soon falls a victim to the stupefying vapour, and is entirely at the mercy of the operator. "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin," and we might more easily inhale chloroform and preserve a cloudless mind, than submit to a vicious moral atmosphere, and retain the vision, strength, and purity of a soul that walks in light. Whether sin is coarse or subtle, momentary or habitual, public or secret, it means self-destruction; it signifies the greatest of all tragedies—the dishonour, the mutilation, and the suicide of the soul.

II. THE REACTION OF SIN ON THE TRANSGRESSOR IS WHAT WE HAVE MOST TO FEAR.—The mischief that self-will, pride, immoderation, revenge, and other evil qualities and passions work in the soul is sin's most terrible consequence. True, the effects of unrighteousness are seen in many directions—painful and ghastly effects—yet it is in the

degradation of the sinner himself that we behold its most direful consequence: not in its physical, commercial, or social result, but in the revenge that it wreaks upon and within the spirit of the transgressor. One evil effect of sin is poverty: it clothes a man with rags, it drives him to the workhouse; but this impoverishment is not its chief penalty; the thing to think about is, that sin will convert you into a workhouse, rob you of the true riches of purity and peace, inflict a pauper soul, degrade you into a moral bankrupt and beggar, even though you live in a palace and are decked with purple and gold. Sin entails disease and suffering: there are, however, worse maladies than consumption, leprosy, and rottenness of the bones; there are fierce maladies of mind and heart, an interior foulness and anguish that eat out the very life of life. Sin may consign you to the asylum, but, far worse, it will make an asylum of you, a victim of irrationality, the saddest of madmen; for the insanity of the soul is infinitely more terrible than any blackness of the brain. Sin dooms men to prisons and scaffolds; but its more terrible vengeance is expressed in the fact that it converts your own personality into a prison, the iron enters into the soul, the revolving planet becomes a treadmill. The wages of sin is death; but the death we ought most to dread is not the death of feet, hands, and eyes: the death of purity, the death of peace, the death of honour, the death of hope, the extinction of the life of God within, is the supreme catastrophe. The ghastliest wreck of humanity exposed in the Morgue is merely the halting metaphor of a murdered soul.

This is the light in which to view sin, its truest and most terrible light—the recoil of transgression on the heart and life. We often think, although not too often, of the incidental losses which attend disobedience—losses in health, money, or reputation—we, however, fail to remember that the most essential and terrible issues of unrighteousness are found in the wounded, suffering, and outraged nature of the sinner himself. There is usually a notice in the railway station to this effect: “It is extremely dangerous to attempt to cross the line; penalty, forty shillings and costs.” What astonishing people we English are! Nothing seems effectual except the dread of financial retribution. We mentally count over the forty shillings one by one, tasting the bitterness of death in each; then we cross the bridge. Surely sensible men never trouble about forty shillings and the vague terror of costs; they shudder to realise the costs that the “Wild Irishman” or the “Flying Dutchman” levies when it surprises trespassers on the forbidden path. Forty shillings and costs is virtually an absurdity. But in relation to sin we are always insisting on the forty shillings and costs, the lesser penalties of iniquity, whereas the main thing to fear is the dishonour, the darkening, the loss of the soul itself. If we discuss the statistics of crime, the inconvenience and costliness of it are the chief items of consideration; we enlarge upon the police tax, the poor rate, and so forth. If social purity is the theme, we put in the front questions of health and reputation. The great argument in the temperance crusade is the financial gain of sobriety. And, indeed, generally when we consider the question

of personal virtue, we decide it on material and utilitarian grounds. Let us go far beyond all these thoughts of mere policy and utility. The physical, the social, the temporary effects of disobedience are as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor compared with the darkening of Heaven's light, the dulled conscience, the chilled affections, the wreck of our nobility, the loss of God's peace, the breaking forth of hell in the soul. To outrage my health, lose my money, tarnish my name, or lower my credit, is to injure the setting of a jewel: to deprave the soul changes a diamond into a cinder. To injure my circumstances is to mar a golden frame: to debase the soul is to blacken and destroy the immortal masterpiece. Sin not merely wastes estates, impairs the body, blasts reputations, digs graves; but, far above and beyond all temporary and accidental forfeits, lawlessness inevitably provokes spiritual and everlasting calamities which no arithmetic can appraise. "For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life?" If we were to insist more upon the ruin that ungodliness and disobedience work in the sinner himself, we should set sin in the most awful light, and tempted men would less readily yield to its seductions. The great argument of Christianity against disobedience is not that it will blot our purple, scatter our gold, or scratch our skin; its great argument is that the fear of God is life, and that ungodliness and disobedience are death, the death of every great quality, attribute, experience, and hope of our humanity. Those who reject instruction do violence

to themselves, wrong themselves, and, hating the source of life, love death.

Some, however, may interrupt with the objection, It is rather late to address us thus, alas! we are already sinners; every mouth is shut, and the whole world is guilty before God. Let us rejoice that we need not finish our sermon with our text, but take to our great consolation the larger teaching of this holy book. Listen to another voice, to a promise and an inspiration that may raise the very dead: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help" (Hos. xiii. 9). All our destruction is from ourselves; all our salvation is from God. Thy captivity, Israel, is from thee; thy redemption from Me. Thy perishing is from thee; thy salvation from Me. Thy death is from thee; thy life from Me. Thy evil from thee; thy good from Me. Thy misery from thee; thy bliss from Me. Thy damnation from thee; thy salvation and beautifying from Me.¹ In Him alone is help. Arise, call on thy God. Plead the redeeming work of the Son of God, the great and precious promises of the word of God, the infinite grace of the Spirit of God, and out of the deepest, darkest gulf of condemnation and misery shall spring a light and promise of glorious hope. Instead of conviction, reprobation, perdition, you shall attain the sweet consciousness of pardon, adoption, heaven. By the grace that now waits upon you repent, put your whole trust in the New Testament message of reconciliation, welcome into your heart every comforting and strengthening influence of the Holy Spirit, who has long

¹ Pusey.

striven with you, and you shall live. "Evil shall slay the wicked"; but the grace of God in the Lord Jesus proves to slay yet penitent souls the resurrection and the life. "These sinners against their own souls" shall have restored to them the years that the caterpillar has wasted. Claim the fulness of the Saviour's mercy and power, claim it now, and there shall be joy in heaven : This our brother was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found.

VIII
THE QUEST OF LIFE

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls : and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.—MATT. xiii. 45, 46 (R. V.).

VIII

THE QUEST OF LIFE

I. WE OUGHT IN LIFE TO SEEK THE NOBLEST.

The merchant sought for *pearls*. No one can readily believe that a creature so marvellously gifted as man was designed for base uses—that, endowed with glorious talents and inheriting the riches of the ages, he is justified in living to trivial ends. Our Lord warns us not to cast pearls before swine. No, swine have nothing to do with pearls; to them belong the husks, and they know it, and they are sorely outraged when anyone attempts to mock them with jewels. But men have to do with pearls; indeed they have to do with nothing else, they ought to concern themselves only with noble things. Alas! in this particular they are unlike the swine, less wise and discriminative, for they are ready to be cheated by what is coarse and base, and to fawn upon those who insult and mock them. The trivial, the vulgar, and the impure are utterly alien to our nature and calling.

The merchant sought for *goodly* pearls. Pearls of whitest lustre, largest size, and loveliest form were the objects of his quest, and he could not rest content until the supreme gem of all the markets had

become his peculiar treasure. Here is the moral of the parable—we must not only seek the high but the highest. Moralists remind us that most people have many things in which they desire to succeed, innocent in themselves, except when they interfere with a higher aim, a worthier purpose; and it is this conflict of aims, this gradation of duties, that makes life often seem so complex and difficult. The perplexity does not originate in our having to choose between the good and the bad; the alternative lies between the good and the better, between the better and the best. The duty of every man is therefore to say to himself, Is this aim I set before me the highest I can reach? Is the end I propose not merely a desirable end, but the most desirable?¹ Here is the guiding-line of duty. We must aim at the best and highest; everything must be subordinated to the chief good, and, if needful, sacrificed to it.

What, then, is the noblest thing, the truest life, the most desirable aim? Ages ago Job pondered the problem, and saw with wonderful clearness the character of the supreme prize—that it was not derived from any natural source, that it was in no sense carnal, but essentially spiritual and divine. “But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The deep saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir,

¹ Lccky.

with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. Gold and glass cannot equal it: neither shall the exchange thereof be jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal: yea, the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? . . . God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof. . . . And unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job xxviii. 12-28, R.V.). The highest good is not physical, social, or intellectual; it is of quite another quality, and is derived from an altogether distinct source. "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Through the knowledge of God to attain mastery over evil, and strength to keep the divine law, is the crowning of life. The psalmist expresses the same conviction: "Many there be that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than they have when their corn and their wine are increased" (Ps. iv. 6, 7, R.V.). The consciousness of the divine favour exceeds all affluence and indulgence. The cold philosopher agrees in the conclusion of the glowing poets: "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles. xii. 13, R.V.). The New Testament enforces the same doctrine—that godliness and righteousness are the cardinal things. On this question our Lord

sums up the whole teaching of revelation in His solemn and ever-memorable words: "For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Matt. xvi. 26, R.V.). It is an act of the highest reason, says our Lord, to renounce all worldly advantages whatever, and even life itself, rather than to lose the soul through faithlessness, selfishness, or sensuality.

A particular point in this parable of the pearls is the absolute value of divine things as contrasted with the relative value of every earthly treasure. Thousands are deeply dissatisfied with revelation because it says so little, makes so little, of the good things of earth; they feel that this is a serious defect with revelation throughout, and the defect is specially exaggerated in the faith of Jesus Christ. Are not gold, purple, and palaces good things? Are not corn and wine and oil rare blessings? Are not pictures, books, music, jewels, brocades, and the thousand delights of culture eminently desirable? Are not love, friendship, comradeship, and the humanities flowers for our pathway in whose fragrance is an excellent virtue that we ought not to miss? Are not the pleasures of sense and society real and legitimate? Is not the New Testament seriously in error in practically ignoring these just and important accompaniments of human life? It has not rightly trimmed the balance between the heavenly and earthly, it has failed to preserve the true perspective, the just moderation and proportion. Let us not misunderstand. This parable recognises that there are many pearls of differing worth,

practically it acknowledges the beauty and preciousness of the natural, social, and artistic things we have mentioned; but the grand design of the New Testament is to enforce upon us the fact that there is a pearl of great price, a blessing that includes all other blessings and consecrates them, the sense of the love of God enriching the whole character and making life throughout a sacred and glorious thing. Personal godliness is absolutely indispensable, all the rest being more or less important; personal godliness is essential, all the rest being more or less convenient or desirable. Terrestrial enrichments are desirable as occasion may determine, or we can dispense with them altogether; but to stop short of the love, holiness, and peace of God is to forfeit life itself, whatever golden ornaments or flowery garlands grace its funeral. This truth which we need to have wrought into our soul by the power of the Holy Ghost is—that whilst all things belonging to the worldly life are relative and incidental, the fear of God belongs to an altogether different order, and is vital, urgent, imperative. When men complain that the Christian creed does not estimate the relative importance of heavenly and earthly things, the true answer is, There is no relative importance. True religion utterly disclaims all perspective, proportion, or moderation—nothing can be valued with it, or equal it, or be compared with it. Perspective is the science of finite situations and things, there is no perspective in the infinite; proportion is justly observed in determining the competing interests and pleasures of earth, but there is no proportion between the spiritual and the worldly; moderation

is rightly exercised in deciding the conflicting claims of time, but there is no place for moderation in adjusting time and eternity. Our Lord states this strongly and finally when he asks, What is a man profited if he gain the world and lose his soul? The one pearl is reckoned solitary, unique, and incalculable; and religion stands isolated from a thousand worldly relations and interests as the one thing needful—the supreme, essential, incomparable, and overwhelming concern of the soul. Alas! how rarely do we look at religion in this light. Some regard it as being one important thing amid many important things; others rank it as a matter of prudence and policy; others consider it mainly a question of taste, a sort of fancy fringe to the raiment of life; whilst crowds disdain it as a spurious gem or painted pebble not worth the attention of merchants intent on solid treasures. True religion acknowledges no rival pluralities; it claims with absolute sovereignty the whole thought, the whole heart, the whole will, and the whole life for God and eternity; and the kingdom of heaven can become ours only on condition that we are prepared joyfully to surrender for its sake every earthly treasure. The seed pearls are not of the essence of life; the peerless pearl is. He who has heartfelt experience of the things of God has grasped the crowning prize, whatever else he gains or misses; but he who acquires a thousand exquisite and coveted jewels of sense, and is not rich towards God, is poor indeed. “For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life.”

II. IN CHRIST WE FIND THE NOBLEST.—

“One pearl of great price.” According to the idea contained in the parable, there exists only one such. Surely here we must understand that Christ Himself is the peerless pearl, the One in whom the kingdom of heaven is revealed, in whom is found that fulness for which all men consciously or unconsciously sigh and strive.

I. In Christ is *the fulness of truth*. The fulness of the truth which saves, guides, and perfects our highest nature. It was just here that the Jew stumbled. He felt, and felt truly, that in the law-givers, psalmists, and prophets of Israel he inherited a splendid string of shining pearls not lightly to be bartered away. And Christianity did not attempt to depreciate the old Scriptures as spurious; it came publishing the glad tidings of a full and vital salvation. “God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son.” It was a question of superseding the many pearls by the one. A dispensation that was made glorious yielded to one of excelling glory. As the morning dispenses with the stars, so in Christ came that fuller knowledge of salvation in which was swallowed up and consummated the ancient lights which ruled the night. The position of the Oriental nations toward Christian truth is to-day much the same. India, Persia, Arabia, and China boast their sacred books replete with noble teaching; and the missionary calls upon these gifted people to accept the Christian revelation, not on the plea of the worthlessness of their sacred literature, but because he is privileged to introduce

to them One in whom are all the treasures of moral and spiritual wisdom and knowledge. The superlative jewel of light, which includes all that they possess, with a far excelling mysterious merit of its own, solicits the acceptance of the Oriental world. And this is the position of many of our intellectual fellow-countrymen. We do not deny that literature, science, and philosophy are pearls; we do not depreciate them as counterfeit and contemptible; but we do emphatically protest that in the knowledge of Christ is a diviner science and philosophy, "even the word of God; the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to His saints."

The truth disclosed in Christ has a singular and measureless virtue, and therefore we claim for it pre-eminence over all the wisdom of this world. The Word made flesh can lead us to God, can fill our understanding, conscience, and heart with the light of life. Cicero tells of a prisoner who having spent his entire life in a dark dungeon, and knowing the light of day only from a single beam filtered through a crack in the prison wall, was full of distress when he understood that the wall was to be pulled down because it would rob him of his gleam of light: he did not know that the destruction of the wall would bathe him in noontide splendour, and gladden him with the infinite glory of the wide world. So the Jew feared the pulling down of the middle wall of partition, so philosophers ancient and modern resent any criticism of those systems which let in light through chinks which time has made; but in truth the faith of Christ discredits other sources of illumina-

tion only in the sense that it swallows up the dim and partial light in a splendour of spiritual knowledge with which it floods the disimprisoned soul. In the face of Christ we see the glory of God, and in His life the shining path of immortality.

2. In Christ is *the perfection of beauty*. As the Jew stumbled when called from initial doctrine to the fulness of truth in Christ, so the Greek was dismayed when summoned from a lower beauty to adore and emulate the infinite perfection of our Lord. Many were the pearls of the Greek—temples, palaces, statues, vases, pictures, embroideries; he was rich beyond compare in all artistic treasures. He was also surpassingly rich in intellectual pearls—poems, orations, dramas, philosophies, and histories. The pearls of the Greek even in their deterioration and disrepair are the choice treasure of the nations, the glory and delight of the men who know. But when St. Paul preached to the Greeks he set before them a spiritual excellence transcending all physical, sensuous, and intellectual perfection. Lovers of loveliness, he unveiled to them the Reality of which hitherto they had seen only broken beams. In the righteousness of God revealed in His Son they beheld a great white Pearl whose soft, searching lustre was the ultimate, eternal beauty they so passionately sought. Fine large pearls are exceedingly rare, and character approaching perfection has been rarer still, yet before the Advent the world had admired and revered noble lives; but our Lord showed a new wonder—as a pearl, at once faultless in colour, form, texture, transparency, and lustre, He surprised the world with a goodness

altogether divine. The highest thing that men or angels know is purity of heart revealing itself in beauty of character, and in this crowning glory Christ stood alone—without flaw, speck, or stain.

Here again Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life.” He alone imparts deep purity, absolute sincerity, serene strength, and that mysterious loveliness which at once convince and delight. There is always something most pathetic about manufactured righteousness. The wonderful polish of a fine pearl, that which constitutes its value, has never yet, we are told, been even passably imitated: some tricks have been attempted in mother-of-pearl, but they deceive no one; and no ingenuity and sacrifice of self-culture can ever attain or passably imitate the righteousness of God. This righteousness is possible only in the mercy, grace, and triumphant power of our Redeemer. The pearl is one of the few things with which we may not tamper; it will not suffer any human manipulation. Diamonds are cut, silk is dyed, gold is refined, but the pearl must be accepted just as the diver brings it snowy and shining from the depths of the sea; art and man’s device only cloud and spoil it. And so the righteousness of God is the gift of God; it can be ours only by the action of the free sovereign Spirit changing our very soul into essential holiness. The pearl has suffered a sea-change into something rich and strange, and only in the alchemy of Christ’s love, grace, and fellowship are we made partakers of the divine nature.

3. In Christ is *the secret of peace*. The heavenly gate is “one pearl.” Is not that a metaphor of the

truth that Christ is the door through which we enter into abiding peace and blessedness? Various doors and gateways stand invitingly open. We read of doors covered with gold, but not in wealth lies the secret of life. Solomon built a "porch of pillars"; but the trinity of "glory, honour, and peace" reside not in palaces. A door "enclosed with boards of cedar," where hands dropping myrrh are upon the handles of the lock, invites us; but satisfaction is not in sensual or sensuous indulgence. "The King's gate," through which none may enter "clothed in sackcloth," promises much; but gems, flowers, fashion, and all the tricks of selfish joy do not banish satiety and despair. And there is a "gate called Beautiful" which many seek with hearts beating high in hope; but even superb intellectual entertainments do not quiet the soul's mysterious hunger. If through the ages men have proved one thing so fully that nothing can ever be added to the proof, it is that deep and final satisfaction does not reside in natural things, relations, and pursuits. "By Me if any man will be saved he shall go in and out and find pasture." Christ is the door of salvation opening up the within and the without, the spiritual and the natural, and giving us in both the peace unspeakable. He leads into green pastures of spiritual truth and love and vision; and then again, reverting to natural life, we are delighted to find that even the wilderness is green also, and that all human relations and experiences have acquired a depth and sweetness beyond past years. Plants which are annual in one country become perennial in another, trees which

shed their leaves in one climate transplanted to a more genial sphere become evergreen; and as soon as disappointing human life is lifted into the ampler air, and lived in the power of Christ's Spirit, its branches flower like paradise, and its leaf does not fade. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." And tens of thousands of His people testify that His witness is faithful and true. We are complete in Him; satisfied, satisfied for ever. He shows us the supreme pattern of character; He supplies the essential principle of morals; He endows with the master energy; He finds the basis for the largest, brightest hope. Everything we want is here; everything at its best.

III. LET US BE READY TO MAKE EVERY SACRIFICE THAT WE MAY ATTAIN THE NOBLEST. —"And having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Here, indeed, occurs one of the severest trials that happens to us, the situation that requires the renunciation or transcendence of good things for the sake of what is better. The case is comparatively easy when the alternative is between the good and the bad, the true and the false, the beautiful and the monstrous; there is then no perplexity and no justification in holding to the egregiously wrong, the manifestly pernicious; but to forego things confessedly costly and admirable, true and beautiful, in the name of something excelling, suggests the most subtle and severe of dilemmas. Our common say-

ing is also a deep one: "The good is often the enemy of the best." It is a common sight to see men cling to good things until they miss the better and the best. But this fatal conservatism is, perhaps, more frequently, as it is more painfully, exemplified in the moral and religious life than it is anywhere else. One man is living a life of gain and ambition. When the spiritual life appeals to him, he confidently responds, Are not wealth, honour, and power good and legitimate objects of desire? It must be acknowledged that they are; yet the vital point is that there is something better than gold and purple, and gold and purple must not be permitted to keep us out of that better thing. Another is living a life of pleasure, and his answer to the heavenly calling is, If a life of social and sensational excitement is pure it cannot reasonably be denounced. That may be so; but there is something higher than social and sensational pleasure, and if the lower makes the higher impossible it must be sacrificed. A third person pursues an intellectual career, and when challenged by the claim of the devout life replies with assurance, Literature, music, pictures, the stars of heaven, the flowers of earth, the splendour of the sea, are glorious things. We joyfully acquiesce in this judgment; yet science and taste must not deny the vision and delight of the soul in the still higher realms of godliness and holiness. Another man is careful to live socially irreproachable, and confidently trusts in his natural virtues. We most cheerfully recognise the great value of such meritorious character, but even then we must be careful that social and constitutional

graces do not prevent us realising the diviner righteousness which is the gift of God in His Son Jesus Christ. When Goethe said, "Our blessings are our greatest curses," he meant that we cling to the lesser good until it becomes a curse by making us indifferent to, or incapable of, the larger, rarer, higher thing beyond. And this is, perhaps, oftener true on the upper range of life than it is on the worldly. We are so enamoured of the good, the legitimate, and the desirable that we become blind to the "more excellent" way and goal. Truths eclipse the truth; the good is the enemy of the best; virtues exclude holiness; colours prejudice the sunshine; our spotted, misshapen, inferior pearls cheat us out of the pearl of great price.

We are quite familiar with the principle of sacrificing an inferior thing on behalf of what is more valuable and effective. It comes out constantly in trade. The mill may be filled with excellent and expensive machinery; but at whatever inconvenience and loss, it must be sold as old iron if a more effective loom or roller is invented. The manufacturer knows well that everything depends upon his stern resolution to make serious and timely sacrifices that he may work with the best. At all costs candlesticks are exchanged for lamps, lamps for gas, gas for electricity, and electricity in its turn must ruthlessly be rejected for whatever new stars science may light. The astronomer is delighted to renounce excellent lenses for telescopes still more lucent or powerful; the picture-lover readily gives up many charming canvasses for a Raphael or Titian; the musician parts smilingly with favourite

violins for a Cremona; and for the sake of a rare orchid of consummate splendour the enthusiastic florist would strip his conservatory. We are all seeking for the ideal thing, the perfect thing, the one thing, and we think the expensive worthless, the lovely coarse, and the magnificent mean, the moment they are seen in the light of the surpassing and perfect. In all spheres of the natural life he is ruined who delays to make sacrifices for the best.

Shall we not stand ready to make every sacrifice that we may be true disciples of the Lord Jesus, and taste the fulness of His salvation? every inward sacrifice of opinion, prejudice, and desire; every social sacrifice of credit, friendship, pleasure, and interest? Whatever comes between us and purity of heart and life, whatever disturbs conscience and robs us of peace, whatever distracts our thought and energy from the highest things, whatever tends to spoil our whole-hearted consecration to our Master, let us immediately and cheerfully subordinate or sacrifice. The only rational position is that of St. Paul: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And be sure that whatever sacrifice we make for the main prize is more than restored in the main prize. The astronomer in his nobler glass beholds all his old

sky, and stars also that he had not seen before; the lover of beauty finds his whole lost gallery summed up in the one Raphael, with added lines and colours that his old pictures never knew; the master violin, whilst yielding all the lost music of meaner strings, gushes with transcending notes severely its own; and the true gardener knows that he has gained paradise in his one consummate flower. Whatever we lose to reach life's last ideal in Christ is in mysterious ways restored to us in fact and essence, and with such reclamations come emotions, insights, upliftings, foregleams, foretastes, which have not entered into the heart of the natural man to conceive. The light of the moon is as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days.

IX

THE CRAFT AND CRUELTY OF SIN

And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.—REV. ix. 8.

IX

THE CRAFT AND CRUELTY OF SIN

CONSPICUOUS in the Apocalypse are many strange creatures—locusts like horses, great dragons having seven heads and ten horns, a beast rising out of the sea having seven heads and ten horns, “and the beast was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion.” Now, we are not to dismiss these apocryphal beasts as we do the strange animals of mythology—the unicorn, the basilisk, the vampire, the sphinx, the chimera, the centaur, the harpies of the old poets. The grotesque imagery of the Apocalypse has a moral significance which, above all things, must be fully understood and applied. These mixed, bizarre, inconceivable creatures—exaggerated scorpions, red dragons, huge locusts, and serpents represent the various forms and powers of evil, and they must be so interpreted. These creatures are unnatural. “And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared for war.” Even geological ages knew no such monsters as are here depicted; they are utterly unlike any creatures that God ever made. God never made sin: it is a freak of fiends, a distortion, an exaggeration, a ghastly caricature of

the native aspirations, appetites, and passions of humanity; sin is monstrosity. Again, it will be seen that these dragons of the Apocalypse belong to the realm of madness and nightmare; they are the wild imagery of a diseased and deranged brain. So evil desires, ambitions, and hopes partake of the quality of madness; they are the offspring of insane imagination, fantasy, illusion: in other words, sin is always unreasonableness. Finally, these monstrous things are invariably venomous and destructive; horrible in aspect, they are also murderous. "They have tails like unto scorpions, and stings." "And their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it striketh a man." So sin always means injury, torment, and death. These morbid creatures, then, are the striking symbols of the monstrosity, unreasonableness, and destructiveness of that self-will which dares to violate the gracious and sovereign laws of the moral universe. We may leave the prophetic element in the Revelation to be treated by students possessing peculiar gifts; but we must not miss its spiritual and moral significance, its marvellous dramatisation of righteousness, sin, and judgment. Let us therefore expound the text in this special light, and broadly consider its teachings on the craft and cruelty of sin.

I. THE CRAFT OF SIN. — "They had hair as the hair of women." The soft, silken, shiny hair stands for the speciousness and persuasiveness of temptation. It is a commonplace that the wisest, strongest, and best of mankind have in all generations succumbed to the guiles of the sex; in other directions they have proved themselves not less than

heroes, penetrating and baffling the most tortuous policy, withstanding hosts, vanquishing subtle and powerful besetments,

Yet tamed by one sad hank of yielding hair.

So evil circumvents us with deep and delicate snares, until even those who walk warily hardly walk surely. Sometimes it affects the guise of *love*. The diameter of the heavens stretches between sacred and profane love, one belonging to the highest universe, the other to the bottom; but the base passion often comports itself as if it were the nobler sentiment whose home is with God: in poetry, romance, and life the filthy thing lies ambushed in white roses glossed as the lovely messenger of Heaven. It is grievous, it is terrible to think to what a vast extent the purest and divinest passion, which holds together the highest universe as with chains of gold, and which gives this world its redeeming beauty, has been profaned in literary, artistic, and actual life. In no inconsiderable section of our popular literature does the lust of hell by a supreme hypocrisy affect the names, charms, and ornaments of the queenliest grace. We should be horrified at the thought if we were not so familiar with the spectacle. The fiery darts of the wicked are being constantly mistaken for Cupid's gilded arrows. Sin often identifies itself with *beauty*. In past ages the leper came along in sackcloth uttering aloud the warning cry, Unclean, Unclean; but the essential leprosy walks the world clothed in the rainbow, working the potent spells of beauty. We know that in fact all sin is ugliness, deformity, repulsiveness, monstrousness, yet eloquence and taste

effectually disguise its native lineaments. It does not appear as a locust, but as a butterfly; not as a hornet, but as a humming-bird; not with the vulture's filthy, blood-fouled feathers, but with the peacock's train. A recent writer describes the strange, seductive splendour of the beds of anemones which carpet the depths of some Oriental seas. These sea-roses look like blossoms from the garden of paradise, so delicate and brilliantly coloured are they; but in fact they are rapacious scoundrels, for let a poor fish only touch them, and a thousand poisoned threads are protruded which cling to the victim's body, and directly the incautious creature finds itself in the stomach of the "blossom." Really the cleverest and gayest snares of the paradises of land or sea are blundering and beautiless compared with the cunning loveliness of the deadly things of civilisation.

Evil often assumes the *festal aspect*. We have a passion for social life, and much that accompanies that life is most captivating, and properly so. In many ways temptation takes advantage of this social element, essentially so noble, and plays upon it skilfully and fatally. We are called to comradeship, fellowship, festivity; and lusts which war against the soul steal upon us singing songs, drinking wine, and scattering roses. Sin often glides in as *fashion*. It appeals to our love of change, display, and distinction; it is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. We libel certain creatures as vermin, we call them "dirty," and if they approach us we shriek; yet if we carefully notice these shunned creatures we discover that they are really handsome,

exquisitely clean, and entirely harmless. Exactly the reverse is often true in society. People with fine feathers, whose friendship is eagerly courted, are not rarely selfish and base ; much on the surface of social life that seems polite, gallant, and exquisite, is insincere, loathsome, and harmful in the extreme. Not long ago a naturalist hunting for butterflies in Epping Forest was sadly bitten by an adder. How many have been fatally stung by a deadlier serpent whilst chasing the gaudy butterflies of fashionable life ! Sin is sometimes incarnated as *glory*. "If a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her." That which in essence and working is deadly evil solicits us as greatness, dominion, privilege, liberty, heroism. On the heads of these locusts "were as it were crowns like gold." Every life has its potentiality of greatness, and to that instinct of greatness temptation appeals. How often are infatuated mortals cajoled into sins of covetousness, pride, and ambition by the lure of envied coronations ! Finally, sin appeals to us in the guise of *virtue* and *religion*. In pagan lands the utmost debauchery is associated with the worship of the popular religion. The master-stroke of evil is to play itself off as holiness and devotion. It is, of course, well-nigh impossible that iniquity should in this land thus directly identify itself with sacred life, although our law courts occasionally furnish strange cases of prostitution glossed as piety ; but with us also base things and practices contrive to steal heavenly sanction. The deadliest sins don their Sunday clothes, and are then most dangerous. The sacred name of friendship covers and excuses immoral re-

lations; the lust of power is gilded with the sentiment of patriotism; cruel selfishness smiles and smiles whilst yet a villain; and the red hand of war grasps the sword still playing with the olive branch. So in various ways evil becomes fascinating, flattering, mesmeric; it is full of diplomacy, legerdemain, hypnotism; it betrays "with studied, sly, ensnaring art." When we are once mastered by it, when it grasps us by the throat, grinds us under its heel, it no longer appears in fair colours; then it takes its native shape of brutishness and repulsiveness which fills us with horror: but when first it courts us it is cunningly transfigured and essays its perjured arts. In delicate and blushing disguise it descends upon innocent youth; it introduces itself to pure and honourable men and women in highly respectable forms; and with speciously regulated innovations tampers with a moral and religious civilisation.

Yet whilst we thus argue let us not for a single moment forget that the secret of sin's fascination is in the distempered soul itself. The brilliance and seductiveness of evil things and courses do not exist for the reasonable mind; untroubled and unclouded by irregular desire, the intelligence at a glance pierces all flimsy sophistries and trickeries, and knows things as they are in the honest daylight. The world of lawlessness has no attractions for a true conscience; such a conscience cannot be tricked by false loveliness, for it beholds with open face the eternal beauty of truth and holiness, and turns with loathing from painted things. And erotic love and licentious pleasure have no glamour to the pure in heart; they shrink from such illegiti-

mate sensationalism as ghastly and unclean. The chambers of impurity which to the licentious are redolent of roses disgust the pure as with the smell of chloroform. No; the secret of the splendour and power of wickedness lies in the distempered soul itself. The prismatic colours which transfigure the desires of the mind and the flesh are subjective rather than objective; they are diffractions caused by faults in the soul. An artist when asked how he mixed his colours to secure such brilliant effects, replied, "With brains, sir." But really all the colours of unrighteousness are so gorgeous and intoxicating because they are thus mixed; our imagination perturbed and perverted by passion invests forbidden things with characters of glory. The brain is the palette which furnishes the magic tints. The clown in Shakespeare avows, "I wear not motley in my brain"; the real fool and sinner, however, do wear motley in the brain, for the light which leads astray is neither the pure light of heaven nor a magic gleam of hell, but always the coloured light of a licentious imagination, of a human soul lacking integrity.

One of the commentators, speaking of the locusts crowned with gold, observes: "The feelers of common locusts, about three quarters of an inch long, may have suggested these crowns."¹ It may be said that it requires a bold imagination to see in the feelers of a locust, however coloured and twisted, the likeness of a golden crown! It does; and what a lively imagination it requires to see gaiety, glory, and gladness in the base elements of wickedness! Indeed, what a bold imagination all sin requires to

¹ Bleek.

conjure sensual mire, vulgar greed, and vain ambition into delightful and seductive forms! The disastrous transformation can be wrought only by the wild imagination of the insane, the delirious fancy of the dram-drinker, and in the opium-eater's monstrous dream. Sin is possible only in the insanity, stupefaction, and drunkenness of the soul; but let us once surrender ourselves to the power of unholy passion and desire, and we easily mistake a phosphorescent death's-head for the face of an angel.

II. THE CRUELTY OF SIN.—“Their teeth were as the teeth of lions.” The beguiling look hides everything that is terrible. Initially we are entranced by the flower-bound tresses and witching smile, the starry eyes and coral lips; but the gleaming teeth are soon in evidence. Sin comes like Jael in the Old Testament—with milk and butter in a lordly dish, but also with the fatal nail and hammer; it comes like Herodias in the New Testament—a dazzling creature, yet intent on blood.

How sharp and startling is the contrast presented in the text—woman's hair, lion's teeth! Yes; and how sharp and startling is the contrast between the beginnings and the endings of transgression! Think of the genesis and the retributions of sin as these affect the body: the beginnings — feasts, dances, plays, songs, coverings of tapestry, myrrh, aloes, cinnamon, and flowers; but ere long the ghastly endings of lust, gluttony, and intemperance. What teeth! Think of the beginnings of sin, and sin when it is finished, as these affect the fortune: for a while the gilded saloon, the flowing-bowl, the suave flatterers; then the forlorn prodigal is a-hungred in

the far country, and no man gives unto him. Teeth which tear purple and gold into shoddy! Think of the origin and consequences of sin as they affect reputation: the youth starting life with an honourable name, promising circumstances, and everybody's sympathy and goodwill; then the gaming-table and the racecourse, and in a few years the life once so rich in promise ends with ignominy, contempt, shame, and oblivion. Teeth worse than those of a lion mangle and devour great names and reputations! In corporeal suffering and humiliation, in a pauper's coffin, in a blasted name, even the blindest and most careless spectator can see the terrible teeth-mark of the devil. But when our sins are not coarse, and their consequences not open and terrible, they are not less real or less cruel. Take the sin of pride. How enticing it is, and yet how vengeful! "He is eaten up by pride," we say. Discriminating criticism, truly: eaten up, devoured as by a wild beast. Take the jealous temper. The sympathetic biographer of Doré says "that he never heard of any other artist's success without brooding over it jealously and unhappily. He was ever on the *qui vive* of jealous excitement, and lived with the constant fear gnawing his vitals that any day someone might suddenly come to the front and eclipse him." "Gnawing his vitals"! Teeth in a tender place. Take malice and uncharitableness. "Ye bite and devour one another," says the apostle. The ambitious and envious man is graphically described as "eating out his own heart." And the covetous, irritable, and impatient, with exquisite rhetoric, are said to "worry themselves": as a wolf worries the sheep, so they

mangle themselves, bleeding inwardly. Sins of this more mental and emotional order are known by mild names, they justify themselves by specious pretexts, for the most part they are covered up in the silence and secrecy of the soul, but in fact they are cruel fangs full of wounding and torture. The appalling effects of transgression on the body are patent to all; but who can paint its tragic effects upon the soul itself? The relics of Jezebel—the skull, the feet, and the palms of the hands—show what it is to be devoured by dogs; but none may adequately depict a soul pierced and peeled, torn and bleeding with the demon-teeth of sin.

There is no cruelty like the cruelty of sin, and no suffering like that which it occasions. The violence of nature often shocks us. Beasts, birds, and insects rend one another; the parasite eats its victim piecemeal; and in many directions the creatures appear as ruthless and consuming as a flame of fire. Yet a somewhat redeeming light falls upon the throes and slaughter of the animal kingdom; the violence of nature has a compensatory side: it eliminates the weak, the cowardly, the mangy, and the unfit; it tends to keep the various species up to perfection's mark. But the cruelty of sin has no redeeming feature: it is absolutely gratuitous and purposeless; it simply destroys the great, the noble, the precious, the divine—leaving only irremediable degradation and woe. Wolf, tiger, crocodile, vulture, and leech melt with tender mercy compared with the action of sin on sinners, compared with the conduct of sinners one to another. The cruelty of society has often been unutterably fierce and sad. It was

so in ancient times, in mediæval ages, and it has often been repeated in comparatively modern days. Recently a collection of instruments of torture was exhibited in some of our cities which revealed the strange inhumanity of man to man. Every conceivable instrument of torture was displayed—pincers, screws, spiked crowns, collars, masks, manacles, pillories, cages, guillotines, braziers, gallows ; machines to stretch, to pierce, to crush ; ropes, blocks, axes, swords. The fiendish ingenuity displayed in the construction of these instruments, so that they should inflict the greatest amount of pain, shows how the question of suffering must have been well thought out, and that the inventors of the terrible engines entered heartily into their infernal work. But, after all, no methods of torture devised by bloodthirsty inquisitors or executioners are so subtle and awful as the natural processes of retribution which fulfil themselves within the personality of the transgressor. “Unto the locusts was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.” Aghast at these hideous instruments, the Saviour’s solemn warning comes with added emphasis : “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

I. Let us believe in *the reality and seriousness of spiritual peril*. Strange as it may sound, it is not easy to believe in the fact, in the imminence, and in the awfulness of sin ; and few do thus believe. The Bible everywhere gives vivid pictures of the presence, methods, and effects of the mystery of iniquity ; but we have come to the conclusion that we who live in

modern times are not exposed to the same temptations and perils. The scientist reminds us that we are living in an altogether exceptional period of the earth's history; the hugest, fiercest, and strangest zoological forms have disappeared, and it is a much better world now they have gone. Then, again, we who live in thickly populated districts are freed from the presence of nearly all the surviving dangerous creatures; there are no crocodiles in our rivers, no wolves in our forests, no sharks in our seas, no serpents in our fields, no scorpions in our gardens; indeed, we enjoy nearly absolute security. And living in a state of high civilisation, we come to a corresponding conclusion respecting our moral life. It seems as if the more formidable possibilities of temptation and disaster had disappeared, or, at least, as if they were very remote from us; and this sense of fancied security explains many a melancholy fall. But such a sense of immunity is entirely wrong: the world of evil compasses us on every side; all the old temptations and threatenings beset us. We may neglect the warnings of revelation, we may not have time to read a chapter before we go forth to the world; but every morning the newspaper, the bible of the street, secures a reading, and it gives us abundance of modern versions of all the old crimes and tragedies. Fresh stories of sin—of the reality of it, the sorcery, madness, and malignity of it—persuade us that hell is nigh, even at the door, and that its terrors are not one whit abated. The names of the wrong-doers vary: instead of the wrath of Cain, the adultery of David, the treachery of Judas, and the lies of Ananias, we read of the disgraceful and

ruinous conduct of Brown and Jones, of Smith and Robinson; only the names, localities, and surroundings are changed. It is difficult to believe that we, here and now, stand in jeopardy every hour. We need to get the sobering thought into our heart, and we shall get it into our heart if we live much with Christ. He had ever a vivid sense of the neighbourhood, the subtilty, and the blighting power of evil, and He inspires His disciples with the same gracious, protective fear. "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

2. Let us seek *salvation in the spirit and grace of God, made manifest in Jesus Christ*. "And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads." Those who are not specified as servants of God, who belong to this world in opposition to the kingdom of God, are the prey of the powers of darkness. Our safety from the dissemblings and wrath of sin is found in our participation in the divine nature, in our consciousness of the divine favour, in our enjoyment of the divine presence and blessing, in our living a truly godly life. Such is the power of evil in the world, and such the guile of our own heart, that we can never successfully deal with temptation by mere knowledge and natural firmness. We must be illuminated, inspired, and fortified by the Spirit of God freely acting through our whole being. The

mystery of iniquity can be checkmated and mastered only by the mystery of godliness. Sin partakes of the nature of the supernatural, and a greater supernaturalism can alone subdue the less. Just as divine truth and righteousness, love and beauty fill our soul, do we see through every deception and triumph over every assault of evil; it is only then that the wicked one toucheth us not. We have already pointed out that the magic of sin is not in something exterior to ourselves, but rather in our foolish and morbid imagination; that the power of sin is not in evil agents, scenes, and instruments about us, but much rather in the weakness of the soul itself; and that the penalties of sin are not inflicted from without, but are levied automatically and spontaneously within the guilty personality of the offender. We repeat, it is all a question of the integrity or defect of the individual soul; we ourselves supply the glare which transfigures the universe of evil; it is simply the lurid reflection of our diseased fancy, our kindled passions, our insane ideas and desires. The vermilion that disguised the bitterness of Eve's apple was not the honest painting of the sun, but, as with all forbidden fruit, it was powdered by the rainbow dust of a wanton fancy; and the song of the Syren is ever the weird echo of our own intoxicated thought. How utterly unattractive and contemptible was the whole paraphernalia of temptation to our Lord! It was reduced to a ghastly and absurd spectacle when He looked upon it with pure eyes. In the noontide light of His perfection the devil's fireworks made a beggarly show. And in a world of temptation He makes us immune, because

He has made us partakers of His holiness, because He has made us to think His thoughts, to see what He sees, to know His Father's love, and to taste the powers of the glorious universe of real beauty, greatness, and joy. Thus the world of evil becomes to us revolting and insufferable as it was to Him. "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." He shall dwell in a light that makes illusions, mirages, and misdirections impossible; he shall possess a virtue of health and purity that insures against all contagion and disease. "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

X

THE HIGHEST EDUCATION

Learn to do well.—ISA. i. 17.

X

THE HIGHEST EDUCATION

WE hear much of primary, secondary, and higher education, but the text reminds us of a sphere yet beyond, of that highest education which concerns all, and which it is the main end of life to secure. Moral culture does not necessarily follow intellectual power and culture. Some distinguished writers have argued that this *must* be so. They contend that the intellectual includes the moral, and that whatever intellect men have is always proportioned to their moral qualities. Any limitation of moral sympathy is sternly attended by a corresponding limitation of intellectual power; any enlargement of intellectual power is accompanied by a similar increase of moral sympathy. The two faculties must always go together and shine with equal brightness. But history abundantly proves that it is *not* so. Alas! scores of men and women of surpassing talent are inferior in conscience, character, and conduct to thousands of the illiterate poor. We might as reasonably argue that saintly peasants totally incapable of any literary or artistic work are proved by their moral superiority to be really Miltons and Shakespeares, as contend that great artists, conquerors, orators, and poets, despite their

sensuality, brutality, and corruption, are essentially moral. It is to confuse distinct spheres. The intellect may be brilliant whilst the conscience is atrophied and the heart rotten, and in ten thousand instances this has been the case. Astronomers have recently made very interesting discoveries respecting what are known as binary or companion stars. They tell us that the two stars are in close proximity; indeed, they are so close together that no telescope could separate their images; and yet one of them is dark and the other brilliant. The two orbs are intimately related, and revolve around each other at slight distances; yet whilst one is bright the other is dark, and the dark star is perpetually eclipsing its luminous companion. It is often thus with the intellectual and moral organs; they are so closely related that it is impossible to think of one without the other, they are linked together in indissoluble fellowship; and yet, whilst genius is resplendent, the companion conscience is dark and depraved, the bad life throwing upon the dazzling intellectual powers the shadows of a deep and sad eclipse.

Moral culture is even more imperative than intellectual development. Certain philosophers urge strenuously that the expansion and elevation of the mind is the supreme and positive virtue. We must with equal determination resist this mischievous assumption. Each part of our complex nature is to be respected and cultivated, yet in due order and subordination. It is of the highest consequence that we form a just conception of the rank and order of our faculties. Infinite mischief would follow the conclusion that the development of the body is the supreme and

positive virtue, and that, therefore, the athlete is more than the astronomer, the pugilist than the poet. In the order of thought the importance of memory, imagination, and reason must rank before and above the discipline of the muscles, or civilisation is at an end. And we must be at least equally resolved to maintain the pre-eminence of our moral and spiritual faculties as compared with intellectual cleverness. It would mark a lamentable degeneration if we agreed to rank the pugilist before the poet or philosopher; it will mark a more disastrous revolution still if we once consent to the assumption that the expansion and elevation of the mind is the supreme and positive virtue. Let us go back to the greatest Teacher of all, who best knew the importance of putting first things first, and who best knew what were first things: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Observe—

I. THE NECESSITY FOR THE MORAL LEARNING DEMANDED BY THE TEXT.—Numerous definitions have been given of man, but he might justly be defined as the being who learns. Other creatures can scarcely be said to learn; whatever pertains to their species they do instinctively, immediately, perfectly. A lark builds its first nest as skilfully as its last, a spider's first embroidery is as exquisite as anything it spins in adult life, whilst a bee constructs its first cell and compounds its first honey with an efficiency that leaves nothing to be desired. Birds and insects are not required to go to school; whatever perfection pertains to their order is displayed by them from the beginning. Naturalists are not

altogether agreed on this point, some denying in these creatures the learning-stage which others profess to discern; but without question instinct substantially dispenses with the laborious and protracted process known as learning. It is altogether different with the human creature: we must perforce go to school, having everything to learn; knowledge, power, and skill are attained only through attention, diligence, and perseverance. It is thus with mental proficiency, with manual dexterity, and with moral excellence. If we are "to do well," taking that phrase in its largest and noblest sense, we must "learn" to do it, acquiring the splendid power through attention, repeated endeavour, and manifold sacrifice. If the supreme joy of high moral character is to be tasted by us, we must cultivate the graces as scholars do their intellectual faculties, only with excelling vigilance and earnestness.

Take, for example, the virtue of contentment. Contentment with the dispensations of divine Providence is eminently reasonable; in our best moments we feel that fretfulness and ingratitude partake of the nature of blasphemy; yet the repinings and soreness of the soul are subdued only through repeated failure and discipline. It is as impossible to teach many of us real, practical, habitual contentment in one lesson as it would be to teach us French in one lesson. Take the virtue of sincerity. This virtue, if it be not rather of the essence of all virtues, we all, to some extent, require to learn, many, however, finding in the learning of it the chief task of life. It seems paradoxical to say

so, but some men are naturally theatrical; the temptation is always to act a part; they constantly catch themselves making postures; they will appear better than they are or worse than they are, cleverer than they are or, when that is possible, more foolish than they are; but they will be seen and felt; their life is vitiated and disfigured by endless pretence, affectation, and unreality. One may give way to this tendency until it becomes almost impossible for him to discern his real motives and true character. Through repeated and bitter castigations of the soul men master this passion for masquerading, and attain sincerity, simplicity, and thoroughness of life. Take the virtue of veracity. We have much to learn here—to speak the truth, to act the truth, to live the truth. We prevaricate, suppress, distort, exaggerate, colour and discolour; we equivocate and deceive through prejudice, interest, carelessness, pride, and fear; we do so in politics and professional life, in trade and friendship. We should be outraged were society to accuse us of falsehood, yet all the while we must know how seriously we are lacking in a profound and delicate truthfulness of language and life; for once at least we speak the truth and sorrowfully confess before God that the truth is not in us. How much correction and endeavour are necessary before we become accurate in statement, honest in purpose, sincere in demeanour, candid in word and action! Take the virtue of temper. There is a faculty of wrath in nature, and from time to time wrath becomes noble men; but to harmonise this faculty with reason, and be at once high-spirited and gentle,

is a problem whose solution may demand years. We are often sent to the bottom of the class when good temper is the lesson of the day. Or take the virtue of kindness. We pass through much self-reproach, scourging, and shame in striving to reach the beautiful ideal; the Spirit of God has to repeat the great lesson in season and out of season before the inborn injustice and selfishness of our nature are mastered, and we become patient, loving, and gentle one to another, as God is to us. We have really to learn the various virtues which constitute great character as we have to learn writing, reading, arithmetic, drawing, or music.

St. Paul bears witness of himself, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," and the grammar of the original language in which he makes this declaration implies a completed act rather than a process; in some privileged moment he learned the great lesson once for all. This is true of every perfection of spirit and conduct. There is a gracious moment or season when the soul awakes to the beauty of holy things, when it fully surrenders itself to the will of God, when it glows with an unwonted enthusiasm for whatever is just and true, when it becomes fully assured that He who has promised will also do it; and in that moment it renounces all sin and learns the secret of all righteousness. Yet it is no contradiction to add that actual personal virtue remains to be realised through watchfulness and persistent endeavour in daily life. Little is done in the way of the highest education without this initial repudiation of sin, this awakening within the soul of a new passion for

holiness, this profound surrender of the will to God, and the experience of His justifying and sanctifying grace; "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and all attempts at self-culture are therefore attended at every step by deep dissatisfaction, and from the beginning are doomed to pathetic failure. But, on the other hand, when we have seen the heavenly vision, when from our deepest heart we have said Amen to it, and when we have become the happy subjects of the divine grace, it still remains that we take infinite pains with ourselves, and amid the discipline of life fulfil all righteousness alike in what we are and in what we do; one by one as the years pass the royal graces must through striving and experience become definite in our character and conduct until we are complete, lacking nothing of our Master's beauty. The actualisation, the individualisation, of the grace received in the converting hour is the great business of life; what we then saw in large vision and sanctioned in general sympathy must be worked out in golden detail in solitude and society, amid daily joy and sorrow, as the mosaicist, enameller, and jeweller with loving, patient care reproduce the glowing pictures of the brain.

Let us remember in the training of our children that virtue is acquired much as intellectual excellence is. We are sometimes greatly pained when we detect in our young children pride, cruelty, falsehood, dishonesty, selfishness, avarice, and other vices; but it is a mistake to lay this fact too much to heart and to begin and prophesy evil concerning them. Beginning with the piano, children make sad work

of it; when they first try a pen the characters are exceedingly ambiguous and the page liberally blotted; and when for the first time they essay some task in art the work of their pencil is utterly grotesque. But we do not therefore despair of them and write bitter things against them; they were sent to school to learn, and we reasonably hope that by and by their senses will be exercised and developed, that they will shed their barbarisms, and take a worthy place with scholars and artists. They must learn goodness as they learn music, mathematics, languages, and art, and we need not be unduly alarmed and disheartened if their first efforts in virtue leave a good deal to be desired. And in justice to ourselves we may remember the same fact to our great consolation and encouragement. We start life with everything to learn and with everything to unlearn: goodness is profound, lofty, comprehensive, delicate; and through years of thought, endeavour, prayer, and discipline we attain those beautiful and noble virtues of which we caught the first glimpse at our mother's knee.

II. CONSIDER THE METHOD OF THIS MORAL CULTURE.—Three things are essential to the liberal education of the soul, to full mastery in the sublime art of living, and these are found in their perfection only in the school of Christ.

1. We need a *pattern*. To learn to do well, we must see well-doing, see it in its highest perfection; we must fix our mind on what is lofty and pure, fill and stir and charm it with the images of truth and nobleness. We are fully aware that this is not the order and method of moral culture favoured by

some ethical teachers of our day ; what is known as naturalism is the fashion in certain quarters, and these teachers fondly hope that we shall forward the cause of virtue by keeping before men the repulsiveness and horror of vice. Many novelists follow this method, and with a view to the elevation of our morals they flood us with physiological romances in which every brutal feature and devilish trait of human nature are delineated. The drama is fond of holding up the mirror to nature, as the phrase goes, and very ugly reflections they commonly are ; one might think that the stage existed in the interests of the doctrine of original sin. Newspapers assume to foster purity by raking in the kennels, and journals with religious and moral pretensions go to an extreme in exhuming and exhibiting repulsive incidents in individual and social life. And the pulpit is given to elaborations of the vices it reprobrates, the linked horror being, with the best intention, long drawn out. The method is altogether false and contrary to that of revelation. Revelation has to deal with human nature on its diseased side ; its very mission is determined by the morbid and ghastly elements which taint, disfigure, and destroy the soul. Napoleon in arranging his library put the Bible into the political department, but he might more justly have put it into the medical, for it is wholly pathological ; yet how delicately the sacred book treats the painful theme, everywhere veiling the leprosy that it seeks to cure ! Take the chapter in which we find our text. The desperate corruption of the Jewish nation stands revealed in crimson lightning flashes, but there is no

inclination to reproduce unclean and revolting details, as is too often the habit of the journalism, sermonism, and fiction of our age. If we refer to the corresponding chapter in the Epistle to the Romans, where the Gentile world is impeached, the apostle observes the severest reserve consistent with a faithful recognition of the terrible facts. This reticence is characteristic of revelation throughout; it dwells with delighted iteration on the lofty, the holy, the divine, but with averted eyes deals with things sensual and devilish, hating even the garments spotted by the flesh. "Let not such things be once named among you."

An ancient king, designing to warn his subjects against intemperance, showed them a drunken slave, so that they might see how horrible the vice really is, and henceforth hate and avoid it; but this mode of ethical teaching was essentially unphilosophical. When a certain state of mind has been produced in us, the sight of evil may produce loathing; but as a grand rule human nature is not converted to a love of purity and righteousness by any spectacle of vice. Teachers do not train their pupils in composition by familiarising them with specimens of bad grammar and spelling; they do not teach music through falsetto; nor do they create the sense of art by fixing the student's eye on misshapen images and inharmonious colours; they occasionally, with undisguised contempt and ridicule, refer to the false and ugly, but in the main they seek to educate their scholars by setting before them the truest and noblest instances of intellectual perfection. It is the greatest error to suppose that the vision of sin

will help us to holiness ; the vision of the sweet, the pure, the beautiful transforms us into the glory we covet. And such is the conspicuous method of revelation. The great, general, pervasive idea of the Old and the New Testament is that of purity ; the dominant theme of prophets, lawgivers, statesmen, poets, evangelists, and apostles is that of the clean heart and beautiful life ; and in the midst of all the radiant shapes and ideals of revelation stands Jesus, like the angel of the Apocalypse, clothed with the rainbow.

One of our writers says : " There is no approaching the idea for the masses except through the human life—through one much loved, much trusted soul to some eternal verity." The masses are incapable of appreciating the pure, abstract truth ; they have not the imagination and strength of understanding to seize the ideal thing in verbal definition and description ; they can only get at the great idea when it is expressed in one whom they have reason to trust and love — then the pure or the mighty thought is interpreted to them and captivates and saves them. And even men exceptionally gifted, who have in special degree the power to realise pure thought, are all the more deeply affected by love, truth, justice, pity, or sacrifice when these eternal verities are brought down from the third heaven and glow and palpitate in the actuality and experience of a human life. This fact finds its supreme illustration in the character and life of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him divine truth, goodness, and beauty become concrete, find actual embodiment and representation. Eternal perfection in human situations and familiar conditions appeals to

our eyes, compels our understanding, charms our heart. He is "clothed" with the rainbow; the ethereal, metaphysical beauty and truth of the highest universe are humanised, brought home to our business and bosom in One who was tempted in all points like as we are, and who in all points displayed the strength and loveliness of absolute perfection. "Looking unto Jesus." Ah! He is the supreme Pattern. Said a distinguished artist, "I would give everything I have to see Velasquez paint for one week, for one day." But the splendid privilege is granted us to behold the Lord Jesus live through years! "Learn of Me," says the Master as He passes through manifold and contrasted situations, and a loving, thoughtful glance into the New Testament every day is a lifelong vision of perfection. "Learn of Me." Yes, let us learn of Him in joy and sorrow, in work and leisure, in strength and weariness, in popularity and neglect, in success and failure, in life and death. He is the One great teacher of the art of life.

2. To learn well we require *power*. Learning is largely a question of capacity, ability, genius. It is not enough that we listen to wise lessons and see exalted models; we must possess the mysterious power of acquisition, or the rarest privileges are vain. In the great art galleries are painters who spend years in reproducing the works of the immortal masters; but these copyists themselves do not become real artists because they lack perception, sympathy, power of assimilation and creation. We can never be much the better for the presence of the highest patterns except as we possess a certain

faculty and genius, and this is as true in respect to goodness as it is in regard to excellence in knowledge and art. Thousands of pupils in art and knowledge study under the most brilliant masters without attaining any distinction whatever: they have no inborn faculty to be elicited by the rare opportunity granted them; and thousands more who in this Christian age are privileged with the rarest conditions of spiritual and moral life continue miserably poor and disappointing in experience and character because they fail to lay hold of and to appropriate the splendid examples, truths, and influences which act upon them—they are weak, incapable, unblessed. “When I would do good, evil is present with me.”

The power of intellectual acquisition is largely determined in the mystery of our constitution. From birth men differ immensely in their ability to see, apprehend, and master. Some are simply wonderful in insight and creative power—they impress us as magicians do; whilst others are painfully slow, dull, and ineffective. It is always impossible to say how much capacity and power lie latent in the most backward scholars, but, judging by all the facts before us, it seems that some are naturally greatly inferior to others in intellectual susceptibility and energy. And if our genius is feeble and infirm, there is no possibility of remedying the defect, whatever we are willing to give or suffer.

This, nor gems, nor stores of gold,
Nor purple state, nor culture can bestow;
But God alone, when first His active hand
Imprints the secret bias of the soul.

And the learning of high moral and spiritual perfections is dependent upon a certain sensitiveness, acquisitiveness, and aspiration of soul, and without these qualities we toil in vain to emulate great examples. Throughout the New Testament stress is laid upon this inward spiritual ability as the secret of moral education. We can never become holy except as we have a genius for holiness. And the New Testament lays equal stress upon the fact that this genius—this power of moral acquisition—is imparted to the sincere soul only by the Spirit of Christ. "But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. . . . Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. . . . For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." Yes; it is only as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto" us a "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" that we see "the hope of His calling," and that we are able to realise and live in the power and joy of full and habitual holiness. This genius of holiness is not, as intellectual fire and force, reserved for chosen breasts, but the Father of glory will grant it richly even to those who seem the feeblest and most unpromising. The power richly to learn the highest wisdom is the gift of God.

Do not many of us fail here? We find it hard to be really good, almost impossible to learn to do well,

because of the lack of inward susceptibility and acquisitiveness. We know more of the life of Christ than we do of the Spirit of Christ, more of His example than of His indwelling and inspiration. This is the real secret of our failure. The world is full of people who are ambitious to become poets, painters, musicians, or orators, but, despite wearisome and pathetic application, they never do anything really first-rate; the masterpiece is not forthcoming; they find supreme music, art, or eloquence so difficult as to be, in fact, practically impossible. What do these baffled aspirants really need to make their work easy, and to secure them the rapture of triumph? Give that despairing musician an atom of Mozart's melodious brain, that halting poet a spark of Shakespeare's fire, that struggling painter a nerve of Turner's colour-sense, that stammering orator a lick of Demosthenes' tongue, and bitter failure will be at an end; there will be no more exhausting difficulty and delay, only the intoxicating sense of mastery, progress, and delight. More power in the learner is what is needed, and every difficulty is vanquished, every aspiration fulfilled. So we experience repeated difficulty and disappointment in the pursuit of holiness, because the power of Christ does not sufficiently rest upon us. "Christ *in* you the hope of glory"—not the glory of the future only, but the glory of character here and now. Let us plead for more inward vision, receptivity, and responsiveness, for more of the Spirit that worketh mightily in fully surrendered souls, and all things fair and perfect shall become possible.

3. To learn we need *practice*. We learn to do

well through doing well. In many branches of knowledge a double education is necessary—an education of the understanding and of the hand; we must have theoretical knowledge and technical mastery, or we are not artists. And the best teachers in the schools of art require that the hand shall keep pace with the theory and knowledge of academic law. They are satisfied that information is nothing without work. “Do! Do! Do! Let your picture go, and do another!” said William Hunt to his students, when they asked him a thousand curious questions about lines, colours, and effects. In doing, they were to know and excel. And the teachers of science specially demand that all theoretical knowledge shall go hand in hand with experiment. The student must keep on applying his knowledge; only by repeated appeals to the facts of nature does he learn the truth and become a real philosopher. We know only through doing, and through doing ever do better. The famous physician John Hunter used to say to his pupils, “Don’t think, try.” So it is in character: we can never be perfected by abstract knowledge of the highest truth and beauty, precious, and indeed essential, as that knowledge is; we must act out what we know as best we may, for only through actual obedience does the disciple arrive at perfection of thought and life.

Is not one main cause of our slow progress in higher things our lack of practice? We think that we shall effect what we desire through getting at the true theory, and, therefore, whilst ever learning, never come to the knowledge of the truth. We hope to understand and realise the virtues through thinking

about them, praying about them, discussing them. "Do, do, do!" replies the teacher, when the student asks curious questions as to theory and method. In some sort of doing, mysteries become clear and mastery is acquired. The teaching of the sanctuary is important, but learning in practical life must accompany it or eminence of character is impossible. There is no way to self-control except through practical temperance, no way to magnanimity of soul except through acts of self-denial, no way to honesty except through paying our debts or refusing to contract them, no way to liberality except by giving, no way to good temper except through biting our tongue. We cannot think ourselves into perfection, we must act ourselves into it. "This I had because I kept Thy statutes," says the psalmist; he had the power to keep them because he kept them.

In all this practising of the virtues we shall often lose patience with ourselves. The young musician is in despair when he hears Joachim or Sarasate play; so is the young vocalist when she hears Patti sing; and we are in a still deeper despair when we behold the beauty of our spiritual Master. But He stands by full of sympathy, quietly ignoring our failures, whispering peace into our disquieted heart, inspiring us with hope, strengthening us to do all things; and thus the magic and persistence of His gentleness make us great.

XI

THE PRESENT BLESSING

For Moses writeth that the man that doeth the righteousness which is of the law shall live thereby. But the righteousness which is of faith saith thus, Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down :) or, Who shall descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart : that is, the word of faith, which we preach : because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved : for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness ; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be put to shame.—ROM. x. 5-11 (R. V.).

XI

THE PRESENT BLESSING

WHATEVER difficulty the commentator may find in this adoption by the apostle of the words of the lawgiver, the evangelical import of the passage is both clear and rich. It is a text full of instruction and encouragement to those who are seeking the way of life. The redemption in Christ is set forth with marvellous plainness and power. Note the three leading characteristics of His great salvation.

I. IT IS MARKED BY CLEARNESS.—Referring back to the words of Moses, we find that this thought was in the mind of the lawgiver. “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee” (Deut. xxx. 11). “It is not too wonderful for thee,” *i.e.* it is not too hard to grasp, or unintelligible. St. Paul’s words imply the same thought. “Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? . . . or, Who shall descend into the abyss?” This is the language of one confused and bewildered, of one who does not know which way to look. “What *shall* I do to be saved?” The apostle teaches that there is no reason for this perplexity; that the way of salvation in Christ is plain and intelligible; that, like the

language of the law, it is not too wonderful, too hard to grasp. The ninth verse gives the true Apostles' Creed. "Because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Trust in the risen Christ, who shall make effective for ever the sacrificial work of Christ crucified. It is a *definite* creed. All have heard of the lament of the dying German metaphysician: "Only one man in Germany understands my philosophy, and he does not understand it." But the message of Christ does not call upon us to grasp abstruse and incomprehensible speculations; only to accept simple, definite, historical facts. "To confess Jesus as Lord" is to believe in His incarnation, His atoning death, His resurrection from the dead, His reign at God's right hand dispensing grace and peace to all who trust in Him. It is a *short* creed. Finding that it would require fifty years to satisfy himself on all points of divinity, Dr. Porson renounced theological studies. His conduct was not very reasonable. If he had taken fifty years to satisfy himself on all points of divinity, the result would have justified the toil. Could life be devoted to a worthier end than that of mastering the supreme science, the science which involves our highest nature and destiny? How long would he have required to satisfy himself on all points of language or history, of geology or astronomy? We shall not satisfy ourselves on all points of divinity in fifty years—or, perhaps, in fifty millenniums—yet a few hours may suffice to grasp the truth which saves the soul. It is a *simple* creed. Does anyone

object, "It is anything but a simple creed, it is full of mysteries; the greatest of mysteries is here." This is true, but we are called upon to rest in the facts, not to understand the mysteries. That God will one day cause us to understand more clearly the philosophy of redemption we may fully believe; our present duty, however, is to postpone the mysteries, and simply to take Him at His word. All that is essential to life is felicitously plain. Believe that in your lost estate God did not cease to love you; that He worked out the problem of your salvation in Christ; that if you confidently rest in His merit and power God will not confound you. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." This is not "hidden from thee," too obscure or wonderful; it is no pagan mystery or riddle of philosophy; here the wayfaring man need not err. Intellectual curiosity grows grey in satisfying itself, but few and simple are the doctrines which bring peace and purity to the sincere seeker.

"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Here is the grand point too often overlooked. We approach religion as though it were a science to be dealt with intellectually, as other sciences are, whereas it is in a special sense the sphere of the heart. The heart has perceptions, intuitions, aspirations, appreciations, and experiences as valid as any inferences of the intellect or testimonies of the senses, and more and more it is being, and will be, recognised as an organ of the higher and most trustworthy illumination. "God is great and we know

Him not" is an unqualified truth so long as we seek to know Him through the processes of science and logic. He is great—mysteriously, inscrutably great—and we can never lift the veil and behold the Infinite Power, the Absolute Beauty, the Eternal Life. So the agnostic concludes that we must be content to go on thinking, feeling, suffering, rejoicing, hoping, and fearing, leaving God entirely out of view. He is the Unknowable, and it is crowning ignorance and insufferable pride to lift up our eyes to the place of Majesty. And very much indeed is to be said for the agnostic if we have no source of knowledge except the intellect. "The world by wisdom knew not God." But the agnostic ignores the mysterious insights and apprehensions of the heart—the vision and appreciation of love. John Bunyan had a blind child who was his constant companion, and of whom he was particularly fond—"he wouldn't let the wind blow on her." She never saw her father's face; she could only most dimly and imperfectly recognise his marvellous genius; she knew next to nothing of the facts of his wonderful history; and she was pathetically incapable of reading the immortal dreamer's pages. Yet will anyone affirm that that child did not know John Bunyan! She did not know him visually, intellectually, or historically; she did not know him technically, logically, or critically; but if anyone in the wide world ever knew John Bunyan it was his little blind daughter. She saw right into the heart of the great poet, and knew him as no biographer, historian, or critic ever knew him; she knew *him*—knew him truly, deeply,

blessedly. Our knowledge of God partakes much of the same kind and quality. We are His blind children who feel about Him in the darkness—we know the touch of His hand, the music of His voice, the pulsation of His heart, and the strengthening virtue of His enfolding presence. “God is great and we know Him not.” Astronomic spaces, geological periods, moral splendours make our head to swim, our spirit to despair. “God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.” Great as He is we know Him in faith and love; we know *Him* whom to know is eternal life. Love has penetrating eyes, swift feet, a tremulous heart, and hands that neither life nor death can unclench. Society rests on the heart infinitely more than it does on the intellect; we know each other through affection and sympathy far more than by any other interpretation; and thus with the heart we find God in the darkness, and, trusting Him like a child, know the child’s assurance and peace.

“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” As we know God chiefly through our heart, so with the heart we must understand and appropriate the salvation which He has wrought out for us in Christ. Let none stagger at this. How do we behold and appreciate nature? Is it by science that we first become aware of the splendour of the world? Is the knowledge of geology, entomology, botany, or astronomy essential before we can feel the mystery of the sky and the glory of the grass and flower? We know that it is not. In due time comes the scientist, laying bare the secret workings of matter and life, and his teaching

is precious beyond language to express; but the poet and painter, utterly destitute of the technical knowledge of nature, know it as truly as any scientist, and they commune with it in unutterable wonder, affection, and delight. Tens of thousands of men, women, and children enjoy the sunshine without knowing anything of astronomy; their heart leaps up when they behold a rainbow in the sky, although they are strangers to optics; they thrill with pure admiration and joy at the music of the bird and the colour of the butterfly, although they never heard of ornithology and entomology; and they rejoice in all the lustre and sweetness of the summer, while knowing nothing of the science of the flower. It is all the better when the scientist and poet are united in one personality, but it is undeniable that we can richly appreciate and enjoy the material universe in the power of childlike imagination and sympathy. It is much the same with gospel truth. As science gives a reasoned and systematic view of phenomena, theology supplies a reasoned and systematic view of the facts of revelation; only let not the theologian in his elaborations lose sight of the sovereign virtue of simple faith, as the scientist in his specialism sometimes depreciates the vision and faculty divine of poetry. We are saved by simple faith in the word of God spoken in the Lord Jesus, and not by the reasoned view, however profound or logical it may be. Let the seeker after God and His peace keep close to the New Testament. When we look into the sky it is vast, luminous, and majestic indeed—the sun, the moon, and the host of stars shine forth in simple and sublime splendour;

but when we look at a picture of the heavens in an astronomical or astrological treatise, the celestial scene has suffered a bewildering change; the constellations have resolved themselves into fantastic imagery — dragons, dogs, dolphins, swans, wolves, and whales—and the sweet face of heaven is obscured—

With centrick and eccentrick scribbled o'er
Cycle and epicycle.

So opening the New Testament we at once behold the thoughts of God wide as the firmament, the words of God bright as the stars; but theological systems may easily perplex us as the astronomical or astrological sky does, when we are not quite sure that it is the sky at all. Let God speak for Himself, and listen to Him, so shall He make you wise unto salvation. There is no intellectual impossibility or difficulty. He has “hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes.” We cannot write an *Iliad* or a *Principia*, but we can believe that God loves us, and that for Christ’s sake He blots out our sin. The problem has been solved in Jesus Christ. “Say not, Who shall ascend into heaven?” Believe in the easy, artless, unencumbered plan; receive the soul-quickenings words, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

II. IT IS MARKED BY NEARNESS.—This was certainly in the mind of Moses when he first used these words: “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven? . . .

Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us? . . . But the word is very nigh unto thee." Moses desired to impress the mind of the Israelites with a sense of the favour that God had shown their nation in giving them a special revelation of Himself. They need not go beyond the bounds of their own land to obtain a knowledge of the true God and of His will; He had been pleased to vouchsafe to them that knowledge. He was a "God nigh at hand, and not afar off." St. Paul repeats the words of Moses with the same emphasis on the nearness. Just as God gave to the Jews a special revelation of His law, so has He now come near to Jew and Gentile in a special revelation of His grace. What was true to Moses in the divine nighness is far more intensely true to us. A poet sings:

A man's best things lie nearest him,
Lie close about his feet.

In daily life the best things lie near to us, are within reach, although we may often be unconscious of the fact. The things a long way off or inaccessible are the things that we can chiefly do without. This is specially true of what is best of all—spiritual treasures and balms. The peasantry are fond of arguing that we never need have recourse to foreign drugs, for they say that God has planted in each locality—on mountain-side, by stagnant mere, by flowing river, or in marshy plain—the very plants which can heal and cure the diseases of that special locality. "Why," say they, "did God put such and such a plant that heals sore throats by

the riverside? Simply because in that place sore throats will be; and where the bane is, the antidote is." Let this be as it may, it is well to know that close by the direst bane of all is the most availing antidote, the plant of renown, the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

"Who shall ascend into heaven? Who shall descend into the abyss?" We are not left to wrestle for the secret of our deliverance in nature. Some act as if it yet remained for science to reveal the true method of salvation from the sins and sorrows which afflict us; they appear to think that in the perfecting of natural knowledge lies our escape from moral evil and all the ills that it implies. The astronomer searching the distant heavens; the analyst discovering in his alembic the mystery of matter; and the physiologist with marvellous microscopes peering into the abyss and worming out the secrets of organisation hidden from the foundations of the earth, are expected to throw a final light on the radical defects of human nature, and open to us a path of real salvation. We need wait for no such discovery. "The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me." Through ages the sinning and suffering race has vainly sought in a more profound and perfect philosophy a specific for its guilt and woe, and still many pursue the hopeless quest. We must look elsewhere. The secret hid from ages has been made known in Christ, and the precious word of salvation that we vainly seek in the stars of heaven and the abysses of earth and sea has already been spoken by His gracious lips. One reading of our text is: "It is in thy hands."

Yes; the New Testament in our hands discloses the secret of forgiveness, purity, and peace, which nature never discovered, and which it never can discover. To seek after the truth of salvation as if it were something distant, which had not yet appeared among men, is an ignoring of Christ and His Almighty presence.

“Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us?” During recent years our scholars have paid much attention to the sacred literature of India, Egypt, Persia, China, Arabia, and other far-off lands; but whatever may be the interesting ends they propose, they need not cross the sea to seek the vital truth. A modern traveller relates that some of the Algerian tribes firmly believe that Europe is little better than a waterless waste, and that Europeans go to Africa chiefly for the sake of the wells and cooling springs of the oases. No; with our flowing rivers, brimming reservoirs, gushing fountains, weeping skies, and landscapes of everlasting green, we hardly seek Arabian deserts for cooling spring or velvet patch; and still less do we who are so rich in the living waters and green pastures of a divine revelation need to explore the moral wildernesses of the East. We cross the seas for many things, but there is no occasion to dare its waves and storms to find salvation; that we already possess in the fulness of the truth which brings light and peace. When winter arrives many of our rich and leisured countrymen leave for milder climes. Some go to Algeria or to Italy, others to Malta, Egypt, or to the South of France; but the poor, the busy, and

the infirm of necessity remain at home and endure as they may the fogs of London, the rawness of Lancashire, or the fierce frost and snow of the farther North. But neither rich nor poor need cross the sea for spiritual healing and salvation. I am already in the zone of health and life. The blue sky of Italy stretches over me; I bathe in the warm sunshine of Algiers; the winter roses of Malta and the myrtles of Madeira bloom around me; the palms of the Nile give me sweet shade; and the violets, primroses, and anemones of Southern France are at my feet. "Say not, Who shall go over the sea for us?" The world of health and blessing is around us; we may in this very hour drink in life at every pore.

"It is in thy *mouth*." This comes nearer still. All the great words summed up in the one word "salvation" are in our mouth, and have been in our mouth since our earliest days. They are, indeed, the most familiar of household words. In our childhood we were taught the solemn and blessed truths—the facts and meanings of the gospel story were made clear to us. A thousand times we have repeated the Lord's Prayer, recited the Apostles' Creed, and chanted the *Te Deum*. The great texts of the New Testament are at our tongue's end. We sing the songs of Zion. The music in which we most delight enshrines the name above every name, and powerfully emphasises the essential facts of redemption. Our great pictures give us ever-recurring visions of the incarnation and all-atoning sacrifice. Repeatedly we discuss the doctrines of the evangelical faith. We observe the festivals of the Christian year. With multitudes of the yet unsaved

the most commonplace words are those which relate what Christ was, and what He did for us men and our salvation. Those words are often used almost unconsciously, we speak them with extreme levity, we converse as if we discussed a mere fable or speculation, we sing as if the noble music were wed to frivolous words, nay, often we treat the sacred language that we use with scorn and contempt; nevertheless, know ye that the kingdom of God has come nigh unto you, its watchwords being on your lips. If we neglect so great salvation the Judge may justly retort upon us, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee." We need to pray that we may awake and realise our most commonplace religious language. "Life is spent in learning the meaning of great words, so that some idle proverb, known for years and accepted perhaps as a truism, comes home, on a day, like a blow."¹ This is peculiarly true of words and phrases which enshrine religious ideas; we utter them carelessly perhaps for years, having never understood their tremendous import, until in some memorable hour their infinite signification is suddenly revealed, and fear and trembling come upon us as upon Eliphaz when a spirit passed before his face. Very wonderful is it when the Spirit of God interprets the familiar text, song, confession, or prayer, and the personal and infinite meaning flashes out! Ask not for new and wonderful words, seek not strange signs or symbols in the heavens or in the depths, plead that the divine Interpreter may give you eyes to see and a heart to feel all that is implied in the words so long

¹ *Style*, Walter Raleigh.

spoken by you unthinkingly, glibly, contentiously, derisively. The spiritual universe, the new man, the new life, eternal life are wrapped up in those expressions which seem so stale and bald, if it once please God to expound them to your intellect and heart, and you are ready to hear. "The word is in thy mouth."

"And in thy *heart*." Here lawgiver and apostle bring the matter to our very bosom. We must know not only that the word of God is in our hand and in our mouth, but in our heart. This leaves all that is merely external and verbal, coming nearer than hands or feet. The God of mercy is already with us in unspeakable intimacy. The Holy Spirit strives with us—pressing the law upon our conscience, the truth upon our understanding, the grace upon our heart. We need not gaze into heaven or peer into the abyss; God is already within us, seeking to effect the purpose of His will. The doctrine of salvation is being expounded daily to our conscience and affections, the grace of God unceasingly persuades our heart to faith and righteousness. The Redeemer is not distant geographically or historically; He already knocks at the door of our heart, we hear His voice, feel His drawing, are most conscious of His presence, power, and purpose. The energy necessary to save and perfect lies even now latent, dormant within. Inward turn your eye, and heed God's working. That is a very picturesque and illuminating phrase in the third verse of this chapter as given in the Authorised Version: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted

themselves unto the righteousness of God." "*Going about*," agitated, restless, weary of vain and repeated endeavour, ever trying fresh experiments. A plant does not gypsy about looking for the sunshine, the dew, the rain, the bee, and the butterfly; they all come to it; it is circled about by every agent and force necessary to its perfection; and all that it has to do is to bare its heart and take in the store of precious influences waiting upon it. So with relation to man's salvation and the perfecting of his whole life. The truth that directs, the faith that surrenders and assimilates, the grace that saves, the love that purifies, the power that makes complete and perfect in the will of God, wait only the openings of our heart to take them in. Do you not feel this to be so? The difficulty is not to find Christ, it is to avoid Him; the difficulty is not to get Him into our life, but to keep Him out. "God is in this place, and I knew it not." The word of salvation is in thy mouth, the power is in thine heart; therefore believe it, evoke it, act upon it, and thus stirring up the gift that is in thee thou shalt prove that the Saviour is nigh at hand, and not afar off.

III. IT IS MARKED BY FREENESS.—"For Moses writeth that the man that doeth the righteousness which is of the law shall live thereby. But the righteousness which is of faith saith thus, Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend," etc. Israel was summoned to a difficult, nay, to an impossible task when it was called upon to fulfil in a true sense the requirements of the spiritual commandment; but now all difficulties and impossibilities are at an end, and in the strength of grace we triumph-

antly keep the divine law. The argument of the apostle here is that no painful doing is exacted from the seeker of peace; everything has been already done, and what remains is gratefully to accept the pardon, purity, and peace pressed upon us. We need not go down into the abyss; Christ has already descended for us. We need not attempt the impossible task of climbing the sky; Christ in our name has taken possession of the heavenly place. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." God is unutterably willing to bless, and all we are required to do, all we can do, is to take the grace so freely given, and in the power of it walk in newness of life. Justification is a free gift, out of which springs righteousness, out of which, again, springs eternal life.

Strangely this very fact of the nearness, easiness, and freeness of the gospel salvation prejudices men against it. It has been well said that "no religious or moral system ever lost favour with men on account of the strictness of its moral requirements. Stoicism found favour with its lofty demands; Pharisaism with its wearisome minutiae of service; asceticism with its severity of self-mortification. Christianity is not prejudiced by its severe requirements of virtue and self-denial. Any system, however severe, finds favour so long as it is a system of self-sufficiency, and permits man to regard himself as the source, the law, and the end of his own endeavours. Christianity is opposed because it is a system of redemption and of faith; because it casts

men upon God, and demands that they look to Him for salvation." The graciousness of the gospel arouses more opposition than its austerity. Say what we may, human nature at bottom does not like a gift, and it has always plenty of subtle sophistry at hand to prove that a gift is not a gift, and that any notable work achieved is purely a matter of personal merit. Yet when we learn that in the moral world faith, which is another word for righteousness, is the gift of God, we must remember that this is exactly God's method of operation also in the intellectual realm. We cannot work ourselves into high intellectual rank by any amount of industry and sacrifice. We may toil and spin, strive day and night, know well the theory of the particular art pursued, and strictly observe the rule and order which underlie perfection, but all is to little purpose if we are not "gifted" men. It was not by a slavish following of the laws of metre that Milton became a poet; not by servile striving after dramatic unities that Shakespeare became a dramatist; not by plodding patience in literary composition that Bunyan became a dreamer; not by drudgery along the lines of academic law that Canova became a sculptor and Gainsborough a painter. These immortals were gifted, they were inspired; that is, they found themselves in possession of unbought, unmerited powers, and had they not possessed that operation of grace called genius they would only have wasted ink, paint, and marble to the end of their days. Genius is God's free gift to certain individuals, bestowed on them for reasons best known to Himself, for reasons known only to Himself, and

the power of purity is similarly God's free gift to penitent and obedient hearts ; and we might just as soon forge our way by daily drudgery of learning to the intellectual perfection of Plato and Bacon, as hope to attain by any efforts of outward mechanical obedience to true righteousness of spirit and life. The free sovereign grace of God alone makes possible the highest state of human nature. Genius, however, is for the few, whilst in the redemption of the soul the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon Him. Some of you have long sought in self-sufficiency to fulfil the law, and have miserably failed ; you could not climb the heights of moral perfection or penetrate its depths ; but once find in Christ abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness, and you shall delightfully fulfil the commandment in its exceeding breadth.

“ With the heart man believeth *unto righteousness.*” It is a stock objection to the doctrine of free grace through faith in the atoning Saviour that we have sought to set forth, that it is not sufficiently jealous of practical righteousness, and that in fact its tendency is immoral. Its critics are frank enough sometimes to allow that those who hold and teach it with vehement insistence are personally virtuous, often indeed being very good and saintly. Their doctrine is false and vicious, but happily they are illogical and inconsistent, and prove themselves practically better than their creed. The secularist argues that otherworldliness is an error that must render those who hold it unpractical and unsuccessful men of the world ; yet strangely enough the spiritual are conspicuously effective. The sceptic argues that

the fear of the future must destroy all the brightness of life ; and yet the serene peace of religious men is beyond dispute. And again the theologian, whose creed is more a philosophy than a religion, is satisfied that the doctrine of justification before God by simple faith alone is essentially immoral, and then he is surprised to find that those who live by faith are saints. So illogical and inconsistent are we, so much better than our creed. Let there be no mistake. Men are not thus illogical, they are not better than their creed. An individual may be better than his opinions, and, for a while, even better than his convictions ; but communities are not better than their creed, nor is their character or conduct for long really inconsistent with it. A stern logic works alike in nature and society, keeping everything and everybody true to their ideal, and before long a false ideal or a false doctrine inevitably reveals its falseness in the distortions and corruptions of actual life. A community which for nearly two thousand years has taught the doctrine of salvation by faith alone has not been saved from chronic immorality by a lucky illogicity. It is time for the rationalising theologian to reconsider his position, and to ascertain whether his views of the scriptural doctrine are just. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." He who for Christ's sake counts us righteous in that very act makes us so, and out of that renewed nature springs all good works. Faith in Christ means union with Christ, and grafted into the true Vine wild shoots and bitter clusters are not the due

sequence, but the golden fruits of light and righteousness. It is a great mystery, that simply resting in the divine love, simply guaranteed by the unbought grace, we should be constrained to every good word and work ; but so it is. In mythology we read of one of the gods fettering a terrible wolf with a thread of silk ; with the softer, more ethereal thread of faith working by love Christ tames the wildness of our nature, and winsomely leads us along the liliated pathways of purity and peace.

We do not offer a salvation far off, but *here*. Christ abolished pilgrimages, He annihilates space. He is here ; the cleansing Spirit is here ; the door of heaven is here. We do not offer a salvation far off, but *now*. The poet speaks of running back to fetch the age of gold, but we need not traverse nineteen centuries to find Christ ; He has annihilated time, and stands at our side mighty to save. We do not offer a salvation on hard conditions, but *thus* by simple faith in the offered mercy. “ How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ? ”

XII
SUBPŒNAED WITNESS

For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.—DEUT. xxxii. 31.

XII

SUBPCENAED WITNESS

WITH a "rock" the Orientals associated the three ideas of defence, rest, and nourishment. In danger "the munition of rocks" was the best security; in weariness, the shadow of a great rock was specially precious; in hunger, honey out of the rock was most grateful. When Moses speaks of a rock he intends that in which men seek security, repose, and refreshment. By "*our* Rock" he means the living God in whom the saints trust: He is the impregnable strength of His people; amid the weariness of life, He is the rest of their soul, and in Him they find sweet delight. By "*their* rock" Moses means the idols, the religious systems, the worldly things, the lying vanities in which the natural man places his hope. In the fourth verse of this chapter the great lawgiver declares that our Rock is the better: "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." But in the text Moses daringly constitutes his enemies judges in the controversy, and declares that they award the verdict to Israel. Much the same is true to-day. The outside world in many ways concedes the superiority of the

Christian hope. The verdict given in our favour by worldly and unbelieving men is not always verbal and direct, it is often unintentional and unconscious, implied and indirect; yet such concessions have a real and great value—in some respects they are more significant than direct and verbal testimonies. And there is another objection that we may anticipate. It may be said that the testimony of worldly and sceptical men to the superiority of the Christian faith can have little sincerity in it if they do not follow up their admission by accepting that faith. This objection, however, is not serious. A creed may have the sanction of a man's understanding and conscience, and yet he may refuse to adopt it. There is the power of prejudice and of worldly interest, the tyranny of passion and appetite, the pride of life, the want of inclination to believe and obey, and the unwillingness of men to pay the price of a great ideal. Alas! we are far too familiar with the fact of men sanctioning truths and courses they do not follow, to feel any surprise at the spectacle of thousands giving their verdict in favour of Christianity and yet personally and practically ignoring its claims. But whatever may be the inconsistency of our enemies, the importance of their admissions and testimonies in our favour is real and great. Notice, then, several directions in which they accredit us. There are

I. THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF WORLDLINESS.—The million trust in gold, pleasure, or position, and in certain hours and moods they are most confident and scornful. The rock of pleasure is the true rock; the design of life is the gratification

of the senses; sunshine, roses, and song are the desirable things. To others the golden-veined rock is the true one. Everything we wish, they affirm, is found in the shadow of that magical shelter; safety, leisure, honour, greatness, and the fulness of joy being guaranteed by the golden reef; laying up treasure in heaven is a silly illusion of the saints. Others declare for the rock of position. He who builds a palace has reached life's hope and glory; there is no religion except the religion of success, and the children of advantage and renown look with pity on men whose only distinction is goodness and faith. Yes, there are days in which sensual and worldly men realise the full assurance of their faith. Flushed with pleasure, intoxicated with health and wealth, blinded by the pride of life, they frantically cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Yet the days come when they think very little of Diana. Having served fame, pleasure, appetite, pride, or mammon, they complain that they have been betrayed and mocked, and look sympathetically and longingly to the religious life so sadly neglected. The lament of Wolsey, "Had I served my God as I have served my king He would not have left me in my grey hairs," is so vividly remembered and is so often on the lips of men because it expresses such a deep and general experience, because in one form or another it is the bitter confession of millions of cheated and disenchanted men and women. Godly men in trying hours do not feel that their Rock disappoints them. In a day of deep tribulation Paul could testify to a king, "I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day,

were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." That was the language of a man who felt that he was sheltered by the true Rock; although greatly wronged and suffering, he was infinitely content, and could only wish for all men the faith, hope, peace, and gladness which filled his own heart. The universal experience of the saints is that Christ is a bright reality; of Him they make their boast, and in His cross they glory. But in a thousand ways worldly men betray their discontent with their choice. They listen to passion, prejudice, and pride, and stop short of the Christian life; yet in the confessions of lucid hours and by significant acts in life and death they confess the absolute superiority of the Christian faith. They do not find under their rock the sweetness they expected; in the days of health, of opulence, of pleasure, they are strangely disappointed; its honey is poisoned, and its waters are bitter. They extol the apple of Sodom, and make a face while they eat it. They do not find the rest for which they hoped. Life is a weariness, the burden and heat of the day are too great to be borne. They do not find the security and peace they desire. They quarrel with their rock while they live; and they mistrust it at the grave, for in their lips is the cry of Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Modern philosophers attach immense importance to experience; they think less and less of speculation and inference, and more and more recognise the vast importance of the common experience and consciousness of mankind; the facts of consciousness

and experience are accepted as facts of primal importance in determining ultimate truth and reality. Here, then, is a great fact to reckon with. The people of God in all ages and places, in life and in death, have expressed satisfaction with their faith and hope, whilst the worldly and unbelieving millions are full of discontent and despair. "Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

II. THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF UNBELIEF.

1. The sceptical world makes *intellectual* concessions to our creed. Notice one of these admissions, and a very striking and significant admission it is. We confess the superiority of what we imitate; to copy a thing is to recognise its excellence. In our day we have witnessed a great sight in the sceptical world; a famous sceptic has made a new rock, and we have seen that when it was finished it was a slavish copy of ours. No one can study that most wonderful modern system of secularism known as Positivism without being struck by its close resemblance to the Christian doctrine, worship, and hope. One of our painters having painted a picture with a fine rock in it went to see the work of a brother artist in which also a rock was a prominent feature; immediately the visitor saw it he broke out, "He has stolen my rock, he has stolen my rock." Reading the French sceptic's multitudinous pages, the same cry escapes our lips, "He has stolen my Rock, he has stolen my Rock." Of course I soon find that it is not *my* Rock, not the granite foundation, not the Rock of Ages, but plaster of Paris only on which no house of salvation can be built.

Nevertheless it is a great concession to Christianity that unbelief should thus closely follow its lines, imitate its dogmas, worship, fellowship, and hope. In nature there is a phenomenon known as "mimicry." One class of insects or birds acquires the characteristics of another class, and by subtle modifications these imitative creatures come closely to resemble those with which they have no affinity. But it is always the weaker and inferior creature that apes the stronger and higher; the superior never simulates the inferior. So it is usually with imitation in all directions—the feeble and inferior copy the characteristics of the powerful and splendid. After infidelity has scoffed at religion for ages it discovers two things: first, that the race cannot do without a religion; and secondly, that that religion is the most likely to meet the case which most closely copies the truths of revelation, and the great features of the Church of God.

From another section of the world of unbelief comes a most sincere and pathetic testimony to the need and blessedness of a spiritual faith. "No one is happy who has not a deep, firm faith in some ideal far beyond this world, in some law of majesty, beauty, goodness, harmony, superior to the apparent meanness, ugliness, evil discord of the present dispensation. How difficult it is to live the life of the spirit thoroughly, to be permanently interested in the eternal things, the durable relations. This is why so many of us are not happy. I have a great deal of faith in my soul, vague, not reduced to a creed. But what I have sustains me in the obscuration of my energies. To this I owe my happy

moments—to the support I draw from nature, books, and art—the imperishable thoughts of men, the everlasting mysteries and glories of the world—finally, from that, whatever that is, which underlies all this, and is the real reality, the truth and unity of the whole. Those who are not ‘tenoned and mortised’ upon something indestructible must be rendered wretched by the changefulness and barrenness of daily life. . . . It is wonderful that we are at all contented with the transitory interests and trivial occupations which fill up the inexorable years—each year leading us, at so short a distance, to the bourn of death, and after death, if anything, then either endless change or continuity of eternal being. In either case the soul needs a refuge from the things that pass like a show, to some reality above them and beneath them. This I feel with all the force I have. The all but mortal blow which prostrated me three years ago has taught me so much. The misery of scepticism, of intellectual doubt, of worldliness, of mental indolence and moral inactivity, consists in this—that men have to suffer cares, ill-health, ennui, and often the greater evils of life, without a calming prospect, without any hope that the wrong will be made right, the broken pieces joined into a perfect whole hereafter. . . . If the world is to live without faith and to become conscious of the vanity of things—that is, if men take to seriously thinking upon the facts of this life without a religious trust in God—a simultaneous suicide might almost be expected.”¹ What is this but the plaint of Job, “Oh that I knew where I

¹ I. A. Symonds.

might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!" Is not this the cry of the sorrowful father, "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief"? At any-rate it is an eloquent repudiation of scepticism by a sceptic; it is a candid and touching acknowledgment of the necessity and infinite satisfaction of a spiritual faith, such a faith as that which we exercise in God and in His Son Jesus Christ. These confessions are by no means rare; the one just given is simply typical. The general reader knows that they are common; and they carry with them a strange power. Wrung from the very soul of the unbeliever, they more profoundly convince and move us than do the laboured and logical arguments of Christian apologists. We lay down the volume of the doubter, who is at once so full of discontent and aspiration, declaring with Moses, "Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

2. Unbelief makes many *practical* concessions to our creed. We note a few of these, although, in fact, they are being made continually.

Such an acknowledgment of the preciousness of our faith comes from the *domestic circle* in the unwillingness of unbelievers to make sceptics of their families. Men do their best for their families. It is pathetic to see the sacrifices and sufferings that a noble man will endure on behalf of his wife and children. He is in haste to give them the best that he has, and to do for them the best that he knows. But as a grand rule the sceptic shrinks from disturbing the religious faith of his wife, sister, or child. If the Christian faith were the false and evil thing that scepticism assumes, the

sceptic ought to exert himself night and day to deliver his loved ones from such a superstition; yet he cannot bring himself to do anything of the sort; he is unable to suppress the feeling that it would be unmanly, unjust, and cruel to spoil their dreams and hopes, to rob them of the consolations and strength of their faith. Herein the sceptic betrays distrust of his rock. A pathetic and tremendous struggle is going on in many a sceptical parent. His blundering logic denies the doctrine of God, he has lost faith in the divine government, and renounced the great hope of immortality; but whilst his false logic discredits Christian doctrine, his better instinct is still with it, he feels in a vague yet powerful way its truth and beauty, and he hesitates to impart to his family the dark and painful sceptical speculations which perplex his own intellect. His brain is against spiritual doctrine; his heart, however, is for it, and his family gets the benefit of the heart's casting vote. Being evil, he knows how to give good gifts unto his children. Christian men suffer no such qualms about communicating their ideas and hopes to their dear ones. They feel it to be their solemn duty to teach the great articles of their faith to their children. But, even then, it is something more than a duty—it is a delight. Nothing gives them greater gladness than to see their sons and daughters embrace the truth of Christ and enter on the life of godliness. Without hesitation or reservation the Christian parent recommends the faith that has proved the strength of his own life, and his joy is full when his offspring enter into his views and join him on the path to heaven. "Their rock is not

as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

In another particular the unbelievers and prodigals of Christian households pay striking tribute to the faith they verbally or practically disavow. The wonderful testimony that Robert Burns gives to the beauty and efficacy of family religion in "The Cottar's Saturday Night" can never be forgotten; Matthew Arnold's "Rugby Chapel" is a similar testimony to the divinity of the faith confessed by a noble sire; and there is a most pathetic passage in Carlyle in which he relates how he stood in the darkness outside the lowly cottage, and listened reverentially whilst his father conducted family worship. Yes; most of the sons who "stand outside in the darkness" regard with veneration and wistfulness the faith and worship which made sweet and sacred the home of their youth. They *say* much against the faith of their fathers, but somehow they feel that the bad root bore a sweet flower, that it consecrated and hallowed in a wonderful way those they loved best, and their deepest soul does it reverence.

Such an acknowledgment comes from the *business* world. Scepticism by literary circles may be considered a virtue, but it is not accepted as such in the practical world, even by irreligious men. I saw once an advertisement for a clerk: "Freethinker preferred." I do not know what kind of business was transacted in that office, or what came of the advertisement, but how strangely it sounded! I saw it only *once*—significant fact! We need not hesitate to affirm that such an application would

be badly received in almost every quarter of the practical world. On paper men justify or excuse atheism and the free views of property, marriage, and conduct which usually go with freethinking, but they are extraordinarily shy of atheism realised in flesh and blood in actual life. We do not mean for a moment to affirm that men of business seek their servants directly from religious circles, or confide in them because they make a religious profession; to do this masters would lay themselves open to the wiles of the dissembler and hypocrite. The great question in business is character, that a man is steady, industrious, true, and trustworthy; the measure of a servant's cleverness is often an essential consideration, but his moral character is a matter that can rarely be neglected. We do not hesitate to say that thousands of masters who themselves give little attention to religion nevertheless pay it real homage in their appreciation of the moral qualities of their dependants. Often they may not be aware of the fact, but it is none the less significant for all that. The Old Testament contains striking instances of devout servants occupying honourable positions in pagan households, and history repeats itself in modern times. The mass of masters know that, other things being equal, an earnest religious character is a real and considerable guarantee of a servant's fidelity. The experience of the community counts for something, it counts for a great deal, and where one man of affairs would approve of the unique advertisement just mentioned ten thousand would decline to be bound by it. Merchants do not seek their servants in infidel clubs; whatever their own opinions

may be, they prefer those of whose Christian character they are assured. The verdict of the practical world is with the Christian faith. "Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

Such an acknowledgment comes from the *political* sphere. The validity of religion is denied in theory, but the very men who deny its truth and authority confess that politically it is useful, nay, indispensable—they agree to regard it as a useful and necessary superstition. Gibbon, arch-infidel that he was, attacking the Christian religion with learning, eloquence, and satire, yet went to church, because he confessed that government and order would be impossible unless the common people were awed by the supernatural. Gibbon the statesman attending church is the best answer to the infidel historian. He who wrote the history of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ought to have known what empires need to give them stability and permanence, and by significant action he confessed that to build on scepticism is to build a house upon the sand. When a later rationalist, like Edmond About, said, "What France needs is ten millions of Protestants," he gave utterance to the same conviction—that a spiritual faith is essential to order, civilisation, and progress. Many able unbelievers of late years have looked with the deepest misgiving on the spread of infidel opinion—they believed that the negative doctrine was correct, yet that socially and politically it was perilous. To discredit religious faith was to loosen the bands of order and government. To use the words of François Coppée: "We

see a favourable omen in the evident uneasiness of the enemies of God, who seem now themselves frightened by the consequences of their baneful work." But it is said that religion is useful only as an illusion is useful. Much nonsense is talked about the utility of illusions. Our scientists do not believe in their utility: they strive energetically to expose illusions touching natural things, laws, and forces; it is their firm conviction that all superstitions are pernicious, and arrest the progress of the world. Our politicians do not believe in the efficacy of illusions: they know that the wealth of nations is best secured and conserved by true views of the currency, protection, representation, arbitration, and so forth. The commercial world does not believe in illusions—it strives to base itself on facts and figures; the illusions of the Stock Exchange do no one permanent good, only harm. The fact is that sensible men everywhere are dead against the opium trade—dreams, illusions, superstitions;—they know that severe truth best serves the world's safety, growth, and happiness. And how can religious illusions aid civilisation? The conviction of the whole thinking world is against sceptics who profess to believe that false theological doctrines can be politically useful. A speculative builder sometimes builds a house with illusions; he tries to show us Shakespeare's baseless fabric of a vision, and we all know what comes of that experiment in physics: can we then build a stable civilisation with illusions? No, indeed; the spiritual truths at the base of our civilisation are as deep as eternity. The inconsistent sceptic who after writing against religion goes to church declares, by

action that speaks louder than words, his profound conviction that we cannot build an empire on irreligiousness, ungodliness, and immorality. The rock of materialism, of atheism, or of pessimism is being perpetually discredited by those who profess to trust in it. "Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

III. THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF HEATHENISM. —Just as in the Old Testament the worshippers of Baal and Dagon and other idols from time to time acknowledge the superiority of the God of Israel, so the heathen of to-day are often surprised into confessions of the superiority of the Christian faith. Many such confessions might be adduced; we will, however, content ourselves by naming two.

1. The heathen are deeply impressed with our superior *civilisation*, which has its roots in our faith. We do not go to them with an abstract faith, but with a creed attested by many powerful and conspicuous demonstrations. We possess a marvellous science, a vast commerce, a splendid literature—power, wealth, culture, liberty almost unexampled. Christianity can say with its Author, "Believe Me for the very works' sake." This spectacle of a supreme civilisation in many ways affects the thoughts of the pagan when he considers the claims of our faith. He looks round on the backwardness, weakness, ignorance, poverty, and subordination of his own land, and feels that something is seriously amiss with his gods, temples, and scriptures. "Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

2. The heathen are deeply impressed with our

philanthropy, which is also a fruit of our faith. In a recent article on "The Amelioration of the Condition of Hindu Women," which appeared in a native newspaper in India called the *Hindu*, occur these words: "We by no means approve of the attempts of the evangelists to Christianise India. We believe in the vitality of the Hindu religion, and in the suitability of its doctrines to the people of this land if not to those of other lands. But it is impossible not to admire and not to feel thankful for the good work the missionaries are doing. It is a matter of standing reproach to us that we are not able to do for our own country men and women half as much as the Christian missionaries are doing for us. Where are the hospitals for Hindu ladies founded by the Hindu religious organisations? Where are the Hindu women who, influenced by their religion, are willing to devote their lives to the service of their sisters? Let us be thankful that women born in England, whose customs, manners, and everyday lives differ vastly from ours, cheerfully sojourn amidst us and spend years, not in assisting their own kith and kin, not in making money, but in teaching all classes of Hindu women, in nursing them when they are ill. Let anyone who is sceptical only visit the scenes of work of these ladies, and they will be satisfied with the highly disinterested nature of the good work that is being done." What a concession is this! The humanity, unselfishness, and sacrifice springing out of our creed extort their admiration and praise. They profess to believe in the vitality of the Hindu religion and in the suitability of its doctrines to the people of their land, yet they feel

something is wrong somewhere when the Christian missionary does for them costly and generous work which they fail to do for themselves. They are constrained to give the verdict to our Rock.

“And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: . . . How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes, which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar-trees beside the waters” (Num. xxiv. 2-6). And the enemies of Israel in all ages are visited by these strange seasons, in which their eyes are open, and in which they bless altogether what, in their blindness, they thought to curse. The Spirit of God comes upon them, and they are surprised into the vision and acknowledgment of the truth.

Let us duly estimate these undesigned and often unconscious testimonies to the validity of our Rock. All kinds of witnesses bear record to the reality and blessedness of the Christian faith, and the gratuitous and sincere evidence of the outsider and foe is not least in the volume of testimony. Let us confidently cling to the truth and hope of the gospel; nothing else is real. “Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock.”

XIII

THE FREEDOM OF THE PURE

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Everyone that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin. And the bondservant abideth not in the house for ever : the son abideth for ever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.—JOHN viii. 34-36 (R.V.).

XIII

THE FREEDOM OF THE PURE

THE Jews felt acutely their sad political state ; they writhed under foreign dominion, and again and again broke out into rebellion, seeking an external freedom by casting off the hated Roman yoke. It was intolerable to them to be considered the slaves of Cæsar, and the most horrible scenes attended their several patriotic uprisings. The purpose of our Lord was to convince them of an underlying slavery, which accounted for their political servitude, and to confer upon them the spiritual liberty which contains the potency and promise of all freedoms. "Everyone that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin." "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Very crude indeed, in our day, is the general use of the words "freedom" and "slavery"; they are chiefly employed to express an unhappy external condition, with little reference to the intellectual or spiritual life of the prisoner or exile. Yet the essential slavery is interior; political coercion may imprison the body or intellectual error degrade the mind, but the most abject and fatal bondage by far is that of the soul under the dominion of ignorance, passion, and wilfulness. Let

us attempt to show the real nature of this deeper tyranny, and how the truth and grace of Jesus Christ give the captive soul sweet relief.

I. THE BONDAGE OF THE MIND.—This is one source and method of the essential slavery, the bondage of the mind being the tyranny of materialism. Our Lord often speaks of sin as unbelief, unbelief in the spiritual universe—blindness to God, to the spirituality of the law, to the rewards and retributions of the life beyond; and this unbelief, blocking out the spiritual universe, leaves us slaves of the senses. We are caged in by the body, limited by the bars of circumstance, victims of the material, the worldly, and the temporal. The carnally-minded may fancy themselves possessed of a large liberty, but earth and time at their widest are narrow to the spirit. A recent writer upon the London Zoological Gardens refers to “the spacious aviary” provided for the eagles. Spacious aviary! One would like to know what the eagles think of that. Surely the amplest artificial horizon is narrow and the loftiest dome mean to creatures born to range the skies and seek the sun. The noble birds must feel in dull, strange ways the loss of their native heaven; the most spacious aviary can only grievously and mysteriously fret them. So the world, and the things of the world, painfully cramp the creature in whose heart God has set eternity—his cage is narrow even when the stars are its gilded wires. It is said that a bird of the north, confined in a yard, and longing for his arctic haunts, has been known in spring to migrate from the southern to the northern side of his narrow confines; and however men doom them-

selves to the straitened life of sense, the instinct of eternity pathetically asserts itself within absurd limits, and distracts the soul with morbid repinings. Who can fathom or describe the unspoken melancholy of the soul, its insatiable longing, its inconsolable discontent, and its incurable restlessness when shut up to the material life—its infinite aspirations being denied and mocked! Nay, is not the suppression of our divine instincts and aspirations the greatest sorrow of existence? Is not the dumb grief of an unfulfilled soul more terrible than all the sufferings involved in its manifestation and activity? The seed of a right noble vine that sprouts and rots in the darkness moves our pity more than the tree that bleeds under the knife, that is blighted by the frost, or that is broken by the tempest; the abnormal brain that clouds the reason is sadder than any intellectual sorrow; and the gross worldliness and sensuality that close the soul's windows on immortality and shut its door on God, entail suffering beyond all that flesh is heir to. The buffetings from without are little compared with the pain of stifled promptings, which are as deep and strong as eternity. The love that never finds an object, the genius that never finds a sphere, and the greatness that never finds a mission, suggest a pathos beyond that of martyrdom; but life that fails to find God is the most terrible experience of all. He need fear no other sorrow who has lost sight and touch of the heavenly universe. The soul buried alive, gasping and struggling in its narrow coffin, is the real tragedy.

We must be governed from above or from below,

and according to the rule to which we submit ourselves are we free or enslaved. Some philosophers maintain that the environment into which we are born, and the time in which we live, exactly and inevitably determine our character, moods, and actions, as meteorological changes determine the thermometer and barometer on the wall. Man also, they aver, is an upright column enclosing a thread of nimble quicksilver fancifully called a soul, which is as absolutely governed by the exterior world as is the glass of science. The human soul obeys circumstance as the obedient silver responds to climate; the inner world simply reflects the outer; mind, conscience, and will are inferior in force to the accidents of time and place; character good or bad, moods exalted or despairing, conduct noble or base, are the necessary sequence of natural temperament and worldly fortune: the chief difference between the two registering instruments being, that the living one carries the bulb at the top, whilst in the weather gauge it is placed at the foot. Now, the amount of truth in this illustration is precisely this: we *are* governed; we are not independent of the universe in which we find ourselves; we are and must be subject to law, our character and action being determined by the motives and attractions of the sphere in which we elect to move, whether it be the higher or the lower, the spiritual or the worldly; we must be governed either from above or from beneath. How much it means that the bulb of the flesh and blood organism is at the top, that man carries his head in heaven! It was the primitive design that we should be governed from above; and

cordially to recognise the divine will as the law of life, to be actuated by the pure and large considerations of eternal truth, love, and righteousness, and to aspire to see the face of God, is to be really, delightfully, and eternally free. True freedom is not freedom from law; he is a slave indeed who obeys only force, fatalism, and caprice. Freedom comes with the knowledge of law and harmony with it; and he who consciously and sympathetically fulfils the highest law of his being is "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." But to be governed from below is the essential slavery. To obey only animal impulses, to seek sensuous pleasure, to hope for nothing beyond social promotion, to find our motive and end in earthly things, and, in a word, to surrender ourselves to the fatalism of circumstance, is an infinitely worse slavery than to be bound hand and foot. In this cruel bondage thousands live and die without one great thought, principle, or hope in their maimed and fettered life.

Christ emancipates us from the thralldom of materialism by opening our eyes to the spiritual universe, harmonising us with its law and filling us with its power. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Christ saw God everywhere and always, and by cleansing our heart and purging our vision He makes us to see all things in the same light of a pure spirituality. He saw and felt the spirituality of nature. The birds of the heaven, the lilies of the field, and the sun shining in his strength, were not the boundary of His vision; the heavenly

Father fed the birds, arrayed the lilies in their splendour, and made the sun to shine upon the evil and the good. Too often in studying the material universe we become the victims of sense and mistake the curtain for the picture. Christ never did that; but passing beyond the visual, the scientific, and the æsthetic sense, He saw God and recognised the dominant spirituality of the world. Most fully also did our Lord recognise the spirituality of human society and life. "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." How this prayer brings us into the full presence of the spiritual universe—the divine Father, the divine kingdom, the divine will, the divine grace, the divine and everlasting goal! Oh, how the walls of the prison-house of grossness would quite close in upon us were it not for Jesus Christ! With this prayer on our lips and realised in our heart we know that there is something more than physiology, mechanism, and physical energy. We hear much about "free-thought"; but free-thought is realised only in Him who delivers from the illusions of time and matter, and persuades us of the real and abiding universe. He frees the understanding from the most fatal of errors. He opens our eyes that we may see; strikes from the soul the fetters of sense; cleanses our wings from the clogging bird-lime of earthliness; and for the first time we are free,

gloriously free like the eagle "ringed round with the azure sky."

II. THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL. — "Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Everyone that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin." All see what an awful tyranny sin is when it has once become the habit of life. Some kinds of sin are coarser, others less offensive, but thousands who have committed sin find themselves miserably incapable of shaking off its tyranny; they are victims of vanity, envy, covetousness, ambition, temper, impatience, or sensual indulgence, and they struggle unavailingly with the despotism which holds them down. He who unwittingly grasps the handles of an electrifying-machine soon writhes in pain and shrieks for deliverance. Why does he not let go the torturing thing? He cannot; he is at the mercy of the operator, and is the butt of the crowd. It is thus with multitudes who have committed sin: they are its slaves; they are astonished at themselves, ashamed of themselves, filled with grief and remorse, yet utterly unable to break the infernal spell. There is often more hope for the poor wretch agonising in the tentacles of the devil-fish than there is for some of these victims of vice. But even where a man refrains from the act of sin he is consciously a slave; the evil within asserts itself, bringing the soul into bondage, dishonour, and misery. A dog is not cured of the rabies by wearing a muzzle; a madman is not restored to reason by being put into a strait-waistcoat; a prisoner is not made honest by steel handcuffs; and the restraints and penalties of society do not make

us pure because they make us moral. The irregularity of desire, the inward defiance of the law, may exist in terrible force when the outward life is irreproachable. This is the subject of St. Paul in his great argument in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. He is not dealing there with acts and habits of evil, not with evil as it reveals itself in breaches of social or civil law, but as it exists in sympathy and purpose, as it riots in imagination, emotion, and desire. The root of rottenness defiles thought and feeling, conscience and will, although it may not betray itself in the life by one blasted leaf or blossom of dust, and the indwelling evil is the primal source and essence of bondage. Sin fastening upon and perverting the inmost life, the licence of the soul itself that the will is powerless to quell, is the fundamental degradation. He is a real slave who is a slave at heart, whose will is practically paralysed, who cannot delightfully follow out the noblest impulses and aspirations of his nature; and such slaves are we all. We bleed beneath the thralldom of the law of sin and death. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit that we may not do the things that we would. "For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." This is the profoundest and ghastliest of all slaveries. "No other species of bondage so enslaves man in his genuine nature, as the abandonment to the blind power of the impulses of that rational will of his, which was designed for communion with God."¹ It was bad enough to bleed under the tyranny of the centurion; but Christ

¹ Tholuck.

makes it clear that the subjection we ought most to dread is the despotic power of wickedness, the power of the devil.

It is this bitter consciousness of an ignoble compulsion that spoils human life even when it abounds most in the elements of happiness. In the Bay of Naples are several islands famous for their beauty. The sky of infinite depth and purity; the sea pure as the sky, and rivalling its manifold tints of ever-changing glory; the landscapes rich with the silver of the olive and the purple of the vine; the atmosphere full of the balm of flowers; and the horizon studded with picturesque spots, as a royal girdle with jewels, conspire to create a vision of delight. The Greek and Roman in their quest of loveliness and pleasure built their palaces here, and to this focus of colour and joy the modern lovers of beauty hasten as butterflies to roses. Now one of these fairy islands is the property of the Italian Government, and its only inhabitants are convicts. How little to them all this matchless scenery! Fettered, watched, driven, scourged, they can only be sickened by the splendour and irritated by the lavish treasures of earth and heaven. Is it not much like this with unregenerate man in regard to the blessings of life and the glory of the world? That we are not free to obey the best affinities and forth-puttings of the soul, that base passions coerce us, that we fall short of our glory, that a miserable discrepancy exists between our ideal and conduct, that we think great things and kind things and do mean and selfish things, that our past will never bear thinking about, that we are driven from one humiliation to another

as by a taskmaster's lash, and that there is no prospect of emancipation—is not the secret of our vague wretchedness in these melancholy facts? This sense of captivity to a dark power which continually thwarts and paralyses the enlightened will is the cause of our deepest unhappiness. The beautiful world, the beautiful home, and the life rich in the materials and opportunities of happiness, are all made hateful while selfishness, anger, impurity, jealousy, and their vicious kindred subjugate and scourge the soul.

Some think that freedom lies in the direction of the repeal or abrogation of the law. The late Miss Martineau relates that having got rid of Christianity she felt that she had emerged on "the broad, breezy common of nature." We can well believe it. Are breezy commons, then, so very desirable? The best things do not grow there; furze-bushes, brambles, and crab-apples are found in plenty, but the ripe orchards and the golden corn are not there. Breezy commons are not particularly tempting as places of residence; they are liable to be inconveniently breezy, and the picturesque parties usually camping there do not constitute the cream of the population. There was more truth in the lady's confession than she intended. To get rid of the doctrines, laws, and prohibitions, the hopes and fears of the Christian faith, is to emerge on a breezy common, the best things lost for ever. If Englishmen are to repudiate the discipline of Christ, the nation will soon emerge on that breezy common, to live and act as our Druidical fathers did before us. It has taken more than a millennium to get off that

common and find the goodly heritage of our present civilisation, and every step of progress has been through an acuter sense of law, obligation, renunciation, and subordination, fostered by the Christian faith. And Carlyle, although arguing from no theological standpoint, was never weary of insisting that religion is obligation, a command which binds men to duty, as something which they are compelled to do under tremendous penalties; he laughed to scorn the notion that we can establish universal freedom and leave each man to the light of his own conscience and his own will; such liberty is impossible. This is sternly true in regard to the individual life. Our hope lies in obligation, duty, discipline, and obedience. However much the circumscriptions of Christianity may fret the ignorant and foolish, they limit us for our perfection, which otherwise is impossible. Christ did not repeal the moral law; He did not abate its claim one jot or tittle; He did not in anywise soften it down to accommodate our weakness; on the contrary, He brought out with startling power its wide, deep, and imperative significance. He has rendered infinitely solemn the sense of obligation and obedience.

Christ ensures freedom by delivering men from the deceits and passions which betray and stultify the will. "I consent unto the law that it is good." Here is the attitude of the natural man; and in one sense this attitude and utterance are of sublime significance. The germ of good in man is acknowledged, although this germ is being held in the power of evil. The slave has a consciousness that this servitude by which he is degraded is unnatural,

that he was free born, and he looks towards freedom, sighs for it. Yet, after all, what a deplorable condition of the moral character this confession implies! "Consent." Was anything decisive or heroic ever done in this languid temper? Was this the state of mind of Columbus when he braved the Atlantic, of Napoleon when he crossed the Alps, or of Franklin when he attacked the problem of the North Pole? Was anything of moment ever compassed in a mood that is hardly distinguishable from mere passivity? Never. When we deal with formidable difficulties, confront serious opposition, encounter alien armies, we gird up the loins of our mind and put forth the full force of the soul; in such circumstances it is only through conviction, resolution, and grim determination that men achieve success. The very language used by St. Paul indicates a will that is infirm, apathetic, and ineffective, a sovereign power degraded into impotence; its attitude is still right, but how faint and feeble its fiat! It has so long been withstood and overborne, it has so rarely in the hour of temptation scored a success, it is so little exercised in the direction of righteousness, it has so repeatedly been coerced into treasonable decisions, that it is practically helpless in a ring of irregular desires, clamouring passions, and bad habits. "I *consent* unto the law that it is good." The finger points in the right direction, but it is the finger of a nerveless hand. Very different is the position of St. Paul in regard to volition after the power of Christ rested on him. He no longer merely consents to the law, he finds himself able to fulfil all righteousness. "I consent to the law" is the faint protest of

a cowed slave; but henceforth the apostle's words and ways remind us of the sound of a trumpet, the tramp of a conqueror, the shout of a king. His strength in overcoming the varied and tremendous difficulties of his outward strenuous career is far less wonderful than the sufficiency of his moral life, than the felicity with which he vanquished every temptation and moved on the highest planes of experience and character. The struggle seems over in the absolute victory of a pure conscience and a holy will. The things of the flesh are subdued and the things of the Spirit are realised in a very ecstasy of triumph. In him the power of moral determination has been recrowned, and the royal faculty exercises its full and delightful sovereignty. "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." And the same Lord can thus make us all His freed men, putting into our heart God's laws, and writing them in our mind; filling us with high, pure, and victorious enthusiasm; and making us to say with Himself, in His love and strength, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." Fellowship with Christ braces the whole moral nature, making the entire range of the virtues accessible. This is true liberty—to will the good; so to will that we may do it, and to do it with such sympathy and mastery that we find our heaven in the doing of it; and with this freedom Christ makes His people free.

III. THE BONDAGE OF THE CONSCIENCE.—
"Everyone that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin." The commission of sin defiles the conscience, and conscience degrades us into convicts and cowards. The sense of dignity, freedom, and

confidence is lost in the act of transgression, and with the consciousness of guilt comes fear and bondage. And is not life to the unregenerate man a harsh and gloomy servitude? We look upon God as "a hard master." Is not that the natural conception of God? The heathen look upon Him in this light and represent Him by terrible images in their temples, and although we do not set up ghastly idols our pessimistic conceptions of the world's Creator and Ruler are equally terrible. We think of Him, and are troubled. We look upon human duty as inequitable and exhausting, and fulfil our task with the discontent and bitterness of a slave. Finally, we look forward to the issues of life with deep misgiving. Through fear of death we are all our lifetime subject to bondage. At the bottom of all our pessimism, abjectness, and hopelessness is the consciousness of sin and guilt.

Never did Shakespeare write a greater, deeper line than the one he puts into the mouth of Hamlet—

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.

The unintelligible wretchedness of human life and the vague terrors which haunt us are not in any wise mental in their origin and strength and to be abolished by fuller intellectual light; they arise in the accusing conscience, and here primarily must our bondage and cowardice be dealt with.

By imparting the sense of forgiveness and purifying the conscience from its stains, does Christ first break the fetters of the soul. In the hour of deepest degradation and distress the psalmist cries, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Nothing is more surprising than that such an audacious hope should have sprung up in his soul, in the very moment that it touched the blackest depths of conscious sin! Yet the daring appeal was inspired by the Spirit of God, and the fullest response to it is made in the grace of the Lord Jesus. Newly fallen snow is not so pure as it looks. From snow just fallen Floegel, a distinguished scientist, has obtained living infusoria and algæ, bacilli, and micrococci, mites, diatoms, and great numbers of spores of fungi, also fibres of wood, mouse-hairs, pieces of butterfly-wings, skin of larvæ of insects, cotton-fibres, pieces of grass, epidermis, pollen-grains, rye and potato, flour, grains of quartz, minute pieces of roofing-tiles, and bits of iron and coal. But the divine grace makes *whiter* than snow—purifying the conscience thoroughly, and cleansing from all impurities of flesh and spirit. The grave nearest to the North Pole, dug in the everlasting snow, bears the pathetic plaint, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." A fine epitaph indeed, but we must not leave it for our gravestone; let us claim its fulfilment even now, and by virtue of His sovereign power He who rose from the dead shall cleanse our conscience from its foulness and fear, and the garment of the flesh and all the raiment of life shall be whiter than any fuller on earth could whiten them.

This is the only way to true strength and liberty.

What is the cage that shuts us in,
But our own sloth? but our own sin?
All outward limitations are
But cobwebs to such bolt and bar.

And instead of looking for the fundamental, final freedom in more propitious circumstance, let us expect it from within in the deeper regeneration of the soul itself. When the last mote and beam are purged from the inner eye, and we see the eternal world at least as clearly as we see this; when there is no more false bias inclining the soul to worldliness and egotism; when the will is once purified from wilfulness; when the perfect love of God frees our heart from idolatrous creature loves; when self is lost in thought and charity for others' good; when the holy law has the full sanction of our understanding and affection; when we seek God and His glory and the honour that cometh from Him; when we are really and fully delivered from the errors, prejudices, passions, and perversions which mar the integrity and working of our spiritual nature,—then shall we be free indeed although exiled with John, imprisoned with Paul, or slain with the martyrs. Let us not boast of freedom whilst we are in thrall to sloth, to selfishness, to self-will, to sensuality, but seek in Christ the pardoning, renewing grace that confers real freedom. We must be bondservants of sin, or, as St. Paul writes, bondservants of righteousness; we must yield to the tyranny of hell or the tyranny of heaven; but filled with purity and strength in the fellowship of Christ, we prove that His yoke is easy and His burden light.

Then all life shall be worked out in love and power. "The bondservant abideth not in the house for ever: the son abideth for ever." The slave has become a son, and the will of the Father is worked out in affection which is perfect liberty. There is

no longer even any sense of bondage to the letter of the law ; let us say that in the energy of love law is forgotten and obedience becomes delight. Ruskin was fond of telling this story about the late laureate. An intimate friend of the poet set himself to find out all the rules of Tennyson's versification, and collected from his poems an immense number of laws and examples. "Look here," said the friend, "what wonderful laws you observe!" "It's all true," replied the poet; "I do observe them, but I never knew it." A feebler poet would have known a great deal more about metrical rule and how painfully he managed to comply with it, but in the fulness of his genius Tennyson observed all the wonderful laws, being unconscious of them. It is much like this with believing souls filled with the power and love of Christ—almost unconsciously do they observe the highest law in its manifold obligations. The noblest impulses of the soul freely fulfil themselves, and in fulfilling themselves fulfil the law. The law gendereth to bondage, but in transcending love to God and man the law becomes the very poetry and music of life.

XIV
CUT TO THE QUICK

And by reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations—wherefore, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch.—2 COR. xiii. 7 (R. V.).

XIV

CUT TO THE QUICK

THE late Sir James Paget, the illustrious surgeon, in one of his lectures speaks of a class of sufferers who "are content, and often almost happy in their afflictions; they will talk of their agonies with calm or smiling faces, or with half-closed, quivering eyelids. Some seem proud in the immensity of their ailments; in some there seems an unbounded capacity for the enjoyment of suffering."¹ St. Paul reveals nothing of this morbid temper. He does not take kindly to suffering; he shrinks from it, he resents it, he does his best to get rid of it, he is a genuine lover of health and action, and frankly and heartily deploras the ills to which flesh is heir. It is most desirable that the saints should always preserve this sanity. Suffering is suffering, and He who inflicts or permits it expects that we should accept it as such. The greatest of sufferers prayed that the cup might pass from Him; and His chosen messenger, as our text shows, deeply wounded, besought the Lord thrice that his affliction might be healed. There is no necessity for grace to confuse nature; to call suffering by another name, to welcome it, to be proud of

¹ *Memoirs and Letters.*

our ailments, to develop a capacity for the enjoyment of pain, is no part of religious duty and no sign of personal perfection; we are to accept it just for what it is, and instinctively shrinking from it, as healthy souls must do, seek its sanctification. Let us, then, consider—

I. THE SPECIAL SUFFERING OF WHICH THE APOSTLE COMPLAINS.—St. Paul sustained a great fight of afflictions; but there is something manifestly unique in the affliction recorded in the text—it is special in kind, or extraordinary in degree.

1. It was *acute*. Froude says that all Carlyle's troubles were imaginary; and very many of our troubles are that, or little more. I have heard of a sleeper who in the visions of the night passed through a terrible experience. In his dream he found himself in a bitter, wintry clime, where he was compelled, with infinite suffering, to walk through interminable leagues of ice and snow; he suffered as Sir John Franklin suffered, he fought with frost and darkness as Nansen did; but on awaking in terror and exhaustion he found that his toes just touched the cold foot-board of the bed, and out of this small inconvenience nimble imagination constructed a whole Arctic tragedy. It is often thus in life. Out of scant material and passing disadvantage the morbid, unreasonable soul evolves a veritable martyrology. It is so with our physical ailments. Physicians are familiar with the gratuitous agonies of hypochondriacs and the diseases of nervous mimicry; they are perplexed by patients who are in a panic on account of some trivial aching, or who fancy themselves victims of diseases from which they

are entirely free. And many who are not to be classed with hypochondriacs have yet a streak of this gloomy egotism. Superficial bodily troubles, which sometimes arise from our luxury—as we are apt, gathering roses, to be pricked by a thorn—are magnified into absurd proportions. The same is true of our circumstances. Passing inconveniences are exaggerated into serious misfortunes, and we imagine the rich landscape to be a great and terrible wilderness because we have been stung by a nettle.

Yet we have real misfortunes and sorrows, and occasionally these are profound and acute. St. Paul was the last man to use exaggerated language about his personal sufferings, and when he speaks as he does here we feel how intense this special trial must have been. “A thorn in the flesh,” or, as the margin gives it, “a stake” in the flesh—he felt himself literally impaled. Among many trials which tried him, this cut him to the quick; just that, cut him to the quick. Many misfortunes scratch the surface; a few times at least in life they search the depths and sting the soul. Peculiar bodily defects, deformities and disfigurements, infirmities of utterance, hearing, and appearance, occasion untold suffering in men and women of a specially sensitive nature; we pass such people every day thinking little or nothing of their disqualification, but it is ever making itself felt in their pained consciousness. Business mistakes and misfortunes severely wound men, especially some men. Public life involves intolerable vexations and humiliations. Then again, those whom we love best stagger us by their inexplicable ingratitude and alienation. And great

bereavements leave us solitary and silent. We all have a specially sensitive spot, and one day that spot is touched. We must often be aware of a strange irony in life. The painter's right hand is paralysed ; the singer is silenced by a throat affection ; the handsome face is marred by a loathsome disease ; the orator's tongue is palsied ; the athlete is crippled ; and in a thousand other ways, far more subtle and painful, men are lacerated in the tender point of their strength, glory, pride, ambition, affection, or joy. The very thing they fear comes upon them ; the thing they most wish to retain is taken ; the tenderest spot is hit ; the most distasteful of all cups is given them to drink. The irony is so palpable that it startles us, and we pause to reflect. The apostle felt that his trouble was of this nature, and sooner or later we must all come into the fellowship of his suffering. Recently I noticed in a book catalogue a work entitled *Martyrs omitted by Foxe*. I have not seen this work, but if the subject is at all adequately treated, it must be immense ; it would seem rather to require a library. What an army of such martyrs every great city includes ! They are held in unrecorded durance, scorched by slow fires, fretted by invisible fetters, scourged by secret wrongs and sufferings, crushed by mean tyrannies, dragged through poverty and disease without being dragged into fame—they are real but inglorious martyrs, martyrs by the pang without the palm.

2. It was *unutterable*. St. Paul does not disclose the character of his special sorrow, and commentators have sought in vain to pick the lock and reveal the hidden skeleton. But the great lesson to be learnt

from the apostle's silence is this, that there are sorrows in life which cannot be expressed. Our highest experiences are unutterable. This very chapter declares it. The apostle had been caught up into paradise; whether he was in the body or out of the body he could not tell, but he had seen and heard things in heavenly places. He could not, however, tell the vision of his ecstasy; it was "not lawful," not possible "to utter." And we need not wonder at this, for we soon reach the end of language. We cannot by the most felicitous words convey any definite idea of the odour of flowers. If we wished to describe the scent of a strange flower, we should find that language failed to convey to another the impression that the flower had made upon us. A foreign naturalist informs us that he strove hard to get a just idea of the songs of British birds; he inquired of those who knew the bird music, and carefully read ornithological works, yet all his pains were fruitless—when at last he heard these singers, every song came as a surprise. We cannot with words give any idea of the sounds emitted by nightingale, blackbird, or skylark. And we may be very sure that words must prove inadequate to express the scenery and music of the higher universe, the brightest visions and sublimest emotions of the soul. Our supernal moments, soaring thoughts, lightning insights, and rapturous sensations of power and gladness defy expression. And this is equally true of our deepest, saddest thought. A German author writes, "The best and quickest mode of banishing a painful impression or a torturing feeling is to give it expression in

words." But tragic impressions and emotions often are, and must remain, unutterable. He who has ascended the heights of paradise has no eloquence to paint his rapture, and when he sounds the deeps of purgatorial pain he is equally dumb.

Superficial souls incapable of great grief will, upon the slightest provocation, fetch out their skeleton from its cupboard and dilate on its special features; but real griefs are sacred and noble men are reticent. The rivulet ceases its babble as it joins the wide sea, and the soul is hushed as it merges into some infinite deep of trial and pain. There is the silence of self-respect. We cannot speak of certain trials without compromising our just personal pride and dignity, and however much we humble ourselves before God it is undesirable to belittle ourselves before men. There is the silence of delicacy. God often veils His workings, they are hidden in silence and darkness, and fine, pure human feeling forbids the expression of many secrets of circumstance and experience. There is the silence of honour. We must suffer dumbly for others' sake; social life means much vicarious, unspoken suffering—husband, wife, and friend will endure martyrdom before they betray one another. There is the silence of affection. We never suffer more keenly than we do in the faults of those whom we love; but they are sacred, and it is impossible for the true heart to gain relief by exposing them. There is the silence of surprise and dismay. We are stunned, struck dumb, by the unexpectedness and magnitude of our disaster. There is the silence of necessity. Our emotions are too deep for either words or tears.

“As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth”; and there are occasions in all lives when those who share Christ’s noble nature imitate His silence. God has left an inviolable zone of life for exclusive transactions between Himself and the individual soul, and with our highest and bitterest moods a stranger may not intermeddle.

3. It was *incurable*. The apostle prayed thrice for the removal of the affliction, and then knew that it had come to stay. Most troubles are forgotten with time, nay, time often gives them a tender grace, and it is not altogether sorrowful to recall them. On Vesuvius is a plant-form peculiar to the desolate region. The *Lichen vesuvianum* is a moss which forms on the lava, and gives the first token of reawakening fecundity in the soil; it is first seen five or six years after the cooling of the surface lava. And just as this moss in due season vivifies and colours the scoriated lava which once destroyed the fields and vineyards, and which looked as if it must ever remain black and barren, so months and years soften cruel sorrows, invest painful memories with a pathetic grace, and make fruitful in peace and blessing the ashes of old catastrophes. But it is not thus with all our griefs; some of them are manifestly irremediable. An American naturalist tells how he found on the Atlantic coast the skeleton of an eagle with an iron trap clasping one of its feet. Hundreds of miles away the noble bird had fallen a victim to the cruel snare; then, weighted with anguish, it had flown across the country, until at last, worn out by the burden and the pain, it expired on the margin of the sea, the instrument of

torture still clinging to its relics. St. Paul himself was such a royal bird, a lover of sky, sun, and sea, tortured by a mysterious affliction which drank up his spirit. And there are many such into whose soul the iron has entered. In various ways they are hopelessly burdened, entangled, and punished; their eye, like that of the sick eagle, grows dim, their wings weary, and there is no discharge for them until they find it in the swoon by the eternal sea. There are physical disabilities we never outgrow—tainted tissues, shattered nerves, morbid growths, failing organs; there are mental maladies, poisoned or frayed brain threads, inherited and inevitable; there are infelicities of circumstance that time can only aggravate; disappointed and wounded affections which cannot bloom again; and domestic incompatibilities which must fret until death us do part. There are blighted hopes that will not revive, losses that are irretrievable, irreparable injuries, immedicable wounds.

All life is different, immensely different, when hope dies out of it; if we see any likelihood of recovery and restoration we can bear much, but when one day we are brought face to face with the fact that nothing is left to hope for—no renewal, no deliverance, no compensation—we know a new and overwhelming sensation. When we see plainly that the love we courted is missed for ever; when it is placed beyond question that, despite our struggles, we must die in embarrassed circumstances; when our beloved are taken from us, whose place none may fill; or when the physician honestly avows that our complaint is fatal, then a great silence settles

upon us. A spark is small, but when hope's last glint is extinguished the night is darker, the solitude deeper, and the dread more intense than it ever was before. The incurable ward has a pathos all its own. When that day and hour arrives, happy is the man who can confidently cry, "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee."

4. It was *malignant*. "A messenger of Satan to buffet me." There was an infernal quantity in the sufferings of Job. The prologue to that great story shows the intervention of the devil, and in all the strange darkness and inexplicable agony of his mighty trial the patriarch was conscious of this malignant presence and working. The psalmist is often distressed by some hidden, supernatural agency which occasions his deepest sufferings and sorrows; the enemy who afflicts him most is covered with darkness and shoots privily. Many of the psalms can be understood only on this assumption of secret, unintelligible malignity. In the life of our Lord the same obscure problem of evil emerges. Behind the temptations by which He was tried, the offences by which He was provoked, the treachery by which He was betrayed, lurked the power of hell, to which the Lord was painfully alive, and which from time to time He indignantly resented. St. Paul also discerned an infernal quantity in his trial, and this gave it the more pungent bitterness. The sense of this same malignant element frequently comes into our deeper tribulations. Many trials arise, so to speak, out of the simple, natural course of human life, but the keener trials are embittered by the sense of diabolism. It is consciously the

devil's touch that raises the boils, and they are the harder to bear because they are his infliction. In some of our physical and mental sorrows is a clear reminiscence of ancestral sin. Not rarely our most serious trouble arises out of the perfidiousness of those whom we have trusted. Sometimes our grief is occasioned by the black ingratitude of those whom we have befriended. Again we suffer from harsh treatment, cruel misrepresentation, or gross injustice. The pain is all the more acute when we are wounded by a poisoned arrow. A messenger of God, even with a sorrowful message, we may receive with resignation, but that a messenger of Satan is the agent of our affliction is intolerable. Of course much that is obscure goes with this kind of infliction, but suffering is immensely exaggerated the moment we detect in it the element of wickedness, the mystery of iniquity. True, all suffering primarily and indirectly springs from sin, yet when diabolical action becomes immediate and palpable we shrink from it with special horror and distress. We find most difficult to bear the sufferings which somehow make us most conscious of the presence and action of the powers of darkness.

II. THE DESIGN OF THE APOSTLE'S AFFLICTION.

I. It contemplated his *safety*. "Lest I should be exalted above measure." Was, then, St. Paul in any such danger? The great, gifted, strong apostle, in the very heights of vision and triumph! Could he who had just been caught up into paradise be cast down to hell? We learn that even such a man stood in jeopardy. The peril of worldly prosperity

is generally understood, that it may breed in once noble men and women pride and selfishness ; but it is not, perhaps, so well understood that high religious privilege, experience, and achievement imply serious danger. The most brilliant genius is divided from madness by a thin partition, and the partition is at least equally thin that separates the saint from moral failure. Rare visions, sublime hours, and lofty experiences of the things of God are attended by corresponding risks. It has been said, " We cannot have mountains without precipices " ; and privileged spirits standing on crystal peaks and snowy crests of Alpine purity and vision see dark chasms yawn at their feet. As Faber writes—

All human feeling grown to be intense
Comes nigh to sin.

And Newman only expresses the solemn teaching of history when he sings—

O man
Who never art so near to crime and shame,
As when thou hast achieved some deed of name.

Most subtle are the temptations of high spiritual estate ; hard by are pitfalls and the valley of the shadow of death. The peep permitted into heaven which informs us of the fact and nature of its great tragedy ought to instruct and warn us. Angels and archangels exalted in utmost power, glory, and bliss kept not their first estate ; pride climbed the golden seats and whispered itself into the hearts of sacred and sublime principalities ; even they yielded to an unthinkable ambition, counting it no robbery to be equal with God, and fell into everlasting infamy.

There is an insanity of the brain in which the sublimest intellectual powers having lost the fine poise of reason conceive the maddest visions, the wildest errors, and the most dangerous projects; and the saintliest souls are liable to a moral insanity which may breed the darkest deeds. It does not give us any solicitude to see Christ on the pinnacle of the temple, but the best of His followers may tremble to stand there. The nearness of the best to the worst is a great mystery, and the thought of it should lead the strongest and safest to watch and pray. Great is the sensitiveness of God touching our danger, and our salvation. He permits trials to happen to us of great severity, and any loss or suffering is light if it conserves or promotes the glory of the inner man, if it secures our sanity and salvation. Let this comfort us, even in the darkest hours, that God overrules the wrath of men and devils to the advantage of His people.

2. It designed his more complete *strength*. "My grace is sufficient for thee." "When I am weak, then am I strong." The canoe of the Indian is the frailest craft on the water, and because of its frailty it is safe where massive boats would certainly perish; owing to its extreme tenuity and elasticity it sustains the least damage from the rocks, and triumphantly shoots the rapids. So at dangerous points of human life the sense of weakness becomes the secret of strength and safety. The *Fram* escaped the perils of the North Pole because her commander built her wide at the decks, narrowing her down to the keel, so that she did not withstand the ice, but yielded to its

pressure. The terrible masses could not get a grip of the cleverly constructed craft. When the awful pressure came, so far from crushing the vessel, it lifted her clean out of the ice, and she rode triumphantly on the floes. This is the secret of safety. If we unyieldingly, defiantly, and proudly deal with life, it grinds us to powder ; but there is a wise passivity, an accommodativeness which conquers the sternness of things. Face the inevitabilities and fatalities of existence with stern pride and confident sufficiency, and they crush and leave you a miserable wreck ; meet them in humility, acquiescence, and resignation, and the grinding bergs of loss and suffering cradle you, enthrone you, and bear you as on a crystal chariot to the golden shore. God takes away our natural strength, chastens the pride of our understanding and will, deprives us of worldly confidences and hopes, that He may reveal in us a new and diviner strength. Paul became weak that he might be truly strong. Our Lord was crucified through weakness, but He liveth by the power of God.

3. It designed his larger *service*. St. Paul's profound afflictions were designed to make him a more effective minister of the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. We often see that through personal frailty and suffering men become more effective teachers of the highest truths—more pathetic painters, mightier poets, nobler preachers ; and through his personal sorrows the apostle was fitted for more effective service. It is impossible to read the epistles of St. Paul without being struck with the deep and tender sympathy of the writer. He is a supreme reasoner, delighting in high and logical argument ; but his

heart-throbs are everywhere felt, and his identification of himself with his afflicted brethren is delightfully complete. The depth of his sympathy, the tenderness of his spirit, the exquisiteness of the language in which he condoles with the sorrowing and seeks to inspire them with new hope and courage, is one of the most wonderful aspects of his immortal writings; in the very midst of his gigantic thoughts and reasonings spring the sweetest, loveliest bits of heart's-ease that ever greeted weeping eyes or brought fresh hope into despairing souls. How came the apostle to this excellence in the ministry of consolation except through the fact that he himself was a man who had seen affliction, and who was able to comfort others with the consolations wherewith he himself was comforted of God? And so all through the ages has the thorn in his flesh made him the most effective exponent of the sufferings of Christ, and the most effective comforter of Christ's suffering people. A while ago we stood in an old church in which the painted glass in the windows was the oldest thing the shrine contained—it had belonged to an older church which once stood on the same site. Brass, iron, stone had rusted, mouldered, and disappeared, but the brittle glass survived, transfiguring the whole temple with glowing pictures of the Nativity, of Calvary, of the Resurrection, of the Ascension of our Lord—for ages the frail transparency has set forth in brilliant hues and images the mysteries of the gospel. So St. Paul, reduced to weakness, became a translucent medium revealing through the ages the glory of the Incarnation, the merit of Calvary, the hope of the resurrection, and

the vision of immortality. As the apostle's affliction was bound up with "revelations," so through our bitterest trials does God give us acuter insights, tenderer sympathies, and stronger convictions, fitting us for truer, larger service. Tens of thousands of God's people know that the blow which shattered them, and reduced them to what the world calls weakness, was the very providence that awoke in them a diviner life, and fitted them for higher and holier service.

So let us take, humbly and hopefully, life's keenest sorrows. The messenger may be the messenger of Satan sent to buffet us; but the message is from God, and the executioner brings us glory, honour, incorruption, and eternal life.

XV

DEPTH IN CHARACTER

Everyone that cometh unto Me, and heareth My words, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock.—LUKE vi. 47, 48 (R.V.).

XV

DEPTH IN CHARACTER

LET us consider—

I. THE LIFE WHICH IS SIMPLY A SURFACE LIFE.
—Some lives are altogether shallow; they are animal, their chief joy being in the senses; they are childish, being wholly occupied with trifles; they are without one serious thought, feeling, or purpose. We might think it next to impossible to live such a life. To begin with, this is a thought-provoking world. To look upon the globe we inherit and the sky of glory which enfolds us, to ponder our mysterious existence, to confront the problem of the why and wherefore, to look before and after, would, one might suppose, render habitual levity of thought impossible. Our situation also is thought-provoking in the extreme, human life being full of occurrences and experiences, of joys and sorrows, which it would seem must move the soul to its depths. And the Spirit of God ever appeals to our sense of wonder and solicitude. Yet, despite these powerful provocations, many refuse to entertain a large or serious thought; they skim the surface, and their shallow-mindedness and little-mindedness are seen and felt in everything they are and do. Mark their

pleasures; they are simply wild on athletic and gymnastic exhibitions, pastimes and holidays, horse-racing, all kinds of sports, conjuring tricks, theatrical scenes and stars, dancings and shows. There is no reason why we should take our pleasures sadly; but a measure of seriousness is the salt of pleasure, and our amusements are contemptible and insipid without a spice of intelligence and higher purpose. Dress is the absorbing passion of crowds. They think of nothing, talk of nothing, and live for nothing except what is "put on." When we remember the vital part that coloration and ornament play in the animal world, we may well believe that fashion has also a part to play in the evolution of human society; but that the powder on our wings should constitute the absorbing passion of life is absurd. Popular literature reveals the extreme frivolousness of multitudes; it is pitiful to think of the time lost over silly pages. Absolutely oblivious of the rare jewels of deeper seas, these readers fritter away the golden hours sporting with the ephemera on the surface of the shallowest, muddiest wayside pool. Again, we are distressed at the superficiality of mind displayed in common conversation. The current talk is empty gossip, without a gleam of intelligence or earnestness, lightest chaff, which the wind driveth away. Judging by the vain chatter, we might suppose that there was not a serious thing in the world. And all the aims of life with vast numbers of our fellows are unspeakably contemptible—

Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw.

The active wickedness of men is sufficiently terrible;

but is it less afflictive to contemplate the emptiness, carelessness, and purposelessness of the lives of multitudes?

This painful superficiality is one of the marked characteristics of our age and nation. The Christian patriot may rejoice in the diminution of crime which in our fatherland has characterised the last few decades; the intense efforts of the Churches in evangelization, together with the spread of a more thorough education among all classes, have resulted in the improved practical morality of the community; and for such gain we must be devoutly thankful. But, on the other side, do we not witness a growing frivolity? The lack of seriousness in the nation strikes even those who do not at all consider things from a religious standpoint. Much has recently occurred to give us pause, yet in the very midst of calamities and humiliations the most popular of our poets has to scourge us for our extreme thoughtlessness. We have seen in other nations the terrible consequences of light-heartedness and heedlessness, yet we are fast drinking in their spirit and following in their steps. Political economists assure us that our commercial supremacy is jeopardised, and that unless we initiate a more patient and thorough education our star will set; yet the music-hall renders evening classes insignificant, and the recreations of the people must not be interfered with. Philosophers are insisting that national welfare and progress depend upon laws of self-sacrifice; but the general response to the arguments and appeals of these great thinkers is the most radical and manifold self-indulgence that this land ever

knew. Our statesmen warn us that unless we attend more closely and seriously to the affairs and defence of our nation the gem set in the silver sea will be stolen or spoiled; but we listen only for a moment, and the band strikes up. The Puritan element—the element of seriousness, reverence, and earnestness—is obviously waning. A game of football excites the masses more than the imminence or the loss of a serious battle. Cycling, golf, and tennis destroy for tens of thousands the sanctity of the holy day; indeed, that day is now openly desecrated by disgraceful carnivals which would have shocked the men who created our civilisation. Free libraries exist chiefly for the circulation of fiction lighter than foam. The racecourse is the national promenade, every third man buried in a sporting newspaper. The circus, the theatre, and all kinds of entertainments monopolise inordinate attention. The flippant temper of the public is everywhere manifest. Outrageous vice alarms us, but surely this prevalence of a gay heedlessness is hardly less to be deprecated. When the allies entered Paris after Waterloo, the audience in one of the great theatres insisted upon the closing of the doors, because the rattle of artillery over the pavement interrupted the enjoyment of the play; in a similar spirit of levity this generation yields itself to trifles light as air, and superciliously shuts out the disturbing signs which are at the door.

“History sees only the surfaces, but in reality there are only surfaces in humanity; they are the appearances, and, outside the pure scientific order,

human things are but mere appearances.”¹ Now if this were the case, that there are only surfaces in humanity, that human things are but mere appearances, that human society is only a spectral medley, little or nothing could be said against an entirely frivolous life. Bits of vapour, fantastically whirled about by cosmic weather, cannot be condemned for the lack of serious thought and enterprise. If everything is only skin-deep, if human beings are simply ridiculous wraiths chasing one another across the stage, if there is no reality and permanence in human life, nothing can be more agreeable to us and to our situation than the mood of thoughtlessness and the career of vanity; that we should perplex ourselves with deep problems, burden ourselves with great causes, and endure painful sacrifices for, poetically called, noble ends, is to take ourselves altogether too seriously. The whole history of our Lord, the whole contents of revelation, flatly contradict this detestable heresy. By the most significant acts and by the most profound and searching teachings our Lord opened up the infinite depths of human nature. He was not made incarnate in the interest of “surfaces”; He did not expire upon the cross in the interest of “appearances”; in His life, death, and doctrine He vindicated and set for ever beyond all question the mysteriousness, magnificence, and momentousness of human nature and its destiny. The human intellect searching out the secrets of the universe; the conscience discovering us as the subjects of eternal law; the will coercing fatalistic circumstance to its own high

¹ Ernest Renan, *History of the People of Israel*, vol. iii. p. 22.

ends; the heart finding God and responding to His love,—these are not the attributes of vapour played upon by the vagrant breeze. When Renan writes, "There are only surfaces in humanity," therefore be content with the rattle and the straw, he is guilty of a libel on human nature which is as dangerous as it is false. All the famous deeds of heroes, all the sublime sufferings of martyrs, all the great songs of poets, all the speculations of supreme thinkers, all the marvellous unfoldings of human history, all the raptures of saints and the agonies of sinners, nay, all the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears of the common million prove the unfathomableness of the human soul, and that nothing becomes it except what is high and deep, great and noble, solemn and abiding.

Anything is better than that we should spend life in chasing bubbles. We may sometimes be tempted to envy the light-heartedness of certain characters; they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued as other men; but really anything is better than a frothy mind and sterile life. We shrink from suffering, we are baffled by life's mysteries, we feel acutely the complicated trials which beset us, we grieve over our losses, we are overwhelmed by our bereavements, yet all is unspeakably preferable to superficiality of mind and heart. Better far the desolate oak on the naked heath, bowed by the storm and smitten by the lightning, if only it acquire depth of earth and strength of fibre, than the spreading green bay-tree rooted in the surface sod. We ought to be thankful for anything that knocks the nursery toys out of our hand, that ends our idiot

joy, that recalls our attention to the soul, that drives us inward and downward to the reality of things in the mind and will of God.

II. THE LIFE WHICH DIPS BELOW THE SURFACE AND YET DOES NOT REACH THE DEPTHS.—Many who consider themselves serious and deep-souled are not really so. There is an iron pillar at Delhi, a very ancient column, which was believed by the Hindus to have its roots in the centre of the earth; but when the European took to digging about it he found the foundation only twenty inches below the surface. There is an *intellectual* life which pierces the surface without sounding the depths. Scholars, full of intellectual power and penetration, who never find God in the visible universe, are of this order. One might think that the scientist who fathoms the depths of ocean, or the star-depths of the heaven, has gone deep; yet, in truth, with all his parade of dredges, telescopes, and spectroscopes, he has gone but twenty inches below the surface who misses the Almighty Spirit, of whom are all things, by whom are all things, and to whom are all things. Entirely superficial is that view of the universe which does not reach God! “Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands: they shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they shall all wax old as doth a garment: and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.” Here is the only worthy view of nature. It is the divine creation; the immanence of God is its unity and life; it discovers in all its

laws and workings the divine thought and will; and when it has accomplished its purpose in the divine government, it will be changed by Him who remaineth. An undevout science is superficial, built on the sand because it knows nothing but sand. Jesus Christ saw that the lily has its roots in eternity, and that its splendour is the reflection of the glory of God; and the grandest science is shallow until it finds Him who laid the foundations of the earth and reared the pillars of the sky.

There is a *moral* life which, going below the surface, fails to grasp the depths. The morality which finds its origin, reasons, sanctions, inspirations, and compensations altogether within the sphere of human society and temporal interests is rooted in the sand, whatever may be its eloquence and plausibility; there is an eternal truth, justice, and love, and laws of conduct not based on this eternal righteousness, whatever profundity or authority they may affect, are grounded in the dust and crushed before the moth. Many ethical students are dissatisfied with the place and treatment of morals in the New Testament; it is not distinguished by any marked moral originality, and the discussion of the virtues by Christ and the apostles is less full and definite than what is found in Plato and Aristotle, Epictetus and Seneca; the sacred writers propound no ethical system, nor do they figure out and analyse in any exhaustive way the various excellences which go to the formation of great and perfect character. The reply to these criticisms is that the New Testament chiefly concerns itself with the root of righteousness and the planting of that root in its

native soil of eternity; it leaves the branches, the exteriority, and technique of virtue, that it may make virtue a living thing by grounding it in the holiness of God. The special aim of Jesus Christ was, first, to impress upon the world the fact that righteousness must have a root. This teaching was loudly called for in Christ's day, and it is not less needful now. The wisdom of this world will persist to teach that righteousness is a superficial and arbitrary plant, reared and perfected from without by policy and philosophy—that it is purely a matter of convention, utility, and taste. No error could be more fatal. In the conservatory we find singular orchids, which have no root whatever; attaching themselves to a piece of wood hung on the wall, they continue to grow and bloom without soil or sprinkling, curious freaks that they are; but entering the vinery where the great clusters hang, and the orchards where precious fruits ripen, we find roots enough, to which the closest attention is paid. Pretty bits of fancy bloom manage to exist without roots, not the fruit-bearers which are the glory of the garden. It is the first great doctrine of revelation that a rich, fruit-bearing life must have depth of earth, that it must pierce to the vital soil of the spiritual universe, that in faith and love it must take hold of God. And having impressed upon our mind this fundamental truth, revelation next insists that the state of the root is the main matter. The old husbandman held an exaggerated notion of the value of pruning, and gave his chief attention to the branches of the tree; modern horticultural science, however, teaches a widely different

doctrine, holding that the tree must rather be treated in its roots. It says that the enemies of the rose are legion, but probably its worst foe is the ignorant operator who hacks and slaughters it, and if a tax were put upon pruning-knives it would save thousands of trees every year; consequently now the scientific gardener so lightly trims the branches that what he lops off can be carried in his waistcoat pocket. As the modern horticulturist has seen that the chief question is that trees must be fairly planted in a right soil and their roots duly enriched, so the New Testament maintains the same truth in character. How immense is the difference between philosophical and utilitarian moralists deriving all their motives and sanctions, rewards and punishments from social relations, material interests, and worldly happiness, and St. Paul, who finds the root of all pure and noble living in the depths of the spiritual world! "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Eph. iii. 14-19, R.V.). Here it is that Christianity places the emphasis, and alas for all who neglect to hide their morality with Christ in God! Peterborough

Cathedral went deep, but its builders stopped some inches short of the rock, and the tower fell; many a proud tower, both national and individual, has sunk because its moral basis did not reach the eternal rock.

There is a *religious* life that sinks below the surface without sounding the depths. A religious faith or life of almost any kind is in some sense below the surface, yet it may be fatally shallow. The Pharisees failed here—they thought that the sacred column to which they trusted went down to the centre, but Christ showed that it was only twenty inches in the sand. His words in the text may be regarded as specially addressed to them. They had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Winstanley at great labour and expense built on the Eddystone rocks his ill-fated lighthouse. It was in many respects a noble tower, the fruit of many sacrifices, but its architect gave too much attention to its adornment, and too little to its severity of outline and establishment in the rock; he ornamented it as if it had been intended for a summer-house, added fantastic projections, and made it altogether a picturesque object in the midst of the seas. Yet, notwithstanding that its builder was satisfied with its architectural features and convinced of its strength, when the terrible storm arose it swept away every vestige of the lighthouse, and Winstanley and the keepers perished in the deep. Was it not much the same with the ecclesiastical fabric of the Judaism with which our Lord came into contact? There the fatal neglect was that of spiritual reality. The sacred system was elaborate and picturesque,

it seemed part of the impregnable rock, it shed a divine illumination over wild seas, and its votaries regarded it with proud satisfaction and absolute confidence. But all the while it was not "tenoned and mortised" on the indestructible foundation. As our Lord showed to scribe and priest, they sought the honour that came from men and not the honour that comes from God; they drew nigh to Him with their lips, whilst their heart was far from Him; they respected the letter of the law whilst ignoring its spirit; their almsgiving was full of hypocrisy; they were proud of their own selfish righteousness, and ignored that divine righteousness which expresses itself in justice and mercy, humility and purity. Despite all appearances to the contrary, their ecclesiasticism was not based on spiritual truth, sympathy, and obedience, it did not follow the stern lines of true godliness, and when the black storm broke their house fell, and great was the fall of it. The ecclesiasticism that builds on the rock has much to say for itself. We are to build a house; unorganised spirituality has no sanction in the New Testament, but *mere* ecclesiasticism and denominationalism are scratches in the sand. We find the depths in religion only when we worship God in spirit and in truth. Nothing in our religious faith, worship, and action will stand except as it springs out of the heart-felt love and fear of God as He is made known to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the Church's one, only foundation, and doubly blessed are all they who in personal trust and devotion build there with silver, gold, and precious stones.

III. THE LIFE WHICH DIGS DEEP AND RESTS UPON THE ROCK.—The universe is not a theatre of dissolving views, itself a dissolving view. There is an eternal Being, an eternal world, an eternal righteousness, an eternal life, and he, and he only, digs deep who gets down to these central realities. In our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ do we find this rock. The unknown God is revealed in Him. He confers the freedom of the kingdom that cannot be moved; He bestows the everlasting righteousness; and the gift of God is eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Here is the Rock of Ages. The stone which the builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ.

Only as we build here do we prove *true satisfaction*. A deeper life means, in the first instance at least, a sense of strife and seriousness to which the superficial are strangers; deep thinking, feeling, and living preclude surface joy. "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord." All deep-souled men have been down there, and voiced that bitter cry. They descended into the depths of their own heart, and beheld its weakness and wickedness; they descended the depths of the world, and saw its hollowness and mockery; and in despair they descended into the depths of the grave, and cried out from its darkness. "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about; all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over

me." But out of these depths breaks forth the sunshine and the music. We never find the light of life and the peace that passeth understanding until they surprise us in the depths of self-despair. "Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head . . . yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came unto Thee, into Thine holy temple." God's people are ever ready to confess, "Thank God that I died, for in dying I found life; that I mourned, for I have been comforted; that I felt the horror of a great darkness, for thus the marvellous light broke in upon me; that I sank low, for so I mounted high; that my poor, shallow, childish life was shattered, for now He has given me gold tried in the fire, white garments, put a new song in my lips, and opened my eyes to visions of the glory of His goodness and promise." Getting into the deeper life of faith and service we become unconscious of worldly disquietudes in the power of an infinite contentment.

A distinguished traveller notes the curious fact that an earthquake occurred in California on the surface of the earth whilst the silver-miners working beneath knew nothing of it; and when our life is hid with Christ in God we are delightfully oblivious of earth tremors and surface disasters which sorely trouble worldly men. Many never know real satisfaction of life because, at best, we dip below the

surface only. Let us face the facts, however unwelcome they may be, and get down to the everlasting truths for the reason, the conscience, and the affections which are made known in Jesus Christ, and through sorrow we shall find joy, through poverty inherit the true riches, through humiliation ascend the seat of honour, and through death attain incorruption and eternal life. This is God's wonderful way of disclosing the great secret.

Only as we build here do we find *fulness and stability of character*. The Pharisee was absorbed with the surface and circumference of character, whilst our Lord ever insisted on its beginnings and springs, because only thus is strength and completeness attainable. Is not a certain defect and insecurity of character the most distinct distress of many Christian people? They consciously lack certain graces. Reading those charming catalogues of the fruits of light which from time to time make poetry of the New Testament, they are painfully aware that this or that lovely cluster is missing from their branches. And not only is there the regrettable absence of a given excellence; there is likewise a felt want of vigour in the graces they do display. We all know the difference between the fulness of life in the garden and orchard which declares itself in amplitude, richness, and bloom, and the scant life betrayed in meagreness and sickliness; and it is still more easy to distinguish between character full of rich and generous inspiration and character feebly struggling to maintain itself. The trees of the Lord full of sap are not to be confounded with the things ready to die. And the spiritual life and character of

many lack steadiness and constancy. There are fitfulness of mood and instability of purpose, fluctuations of faith and experience, perplexing alternations of fruitful and sterile seasons in character and conduct, and this intermittance makes impossible that last excellence and peace which mean so much. The explanation of all this is found in superficiality of soul; we do not bear fruit upward because we do not take root downward. How our Lord insists on the soundness and plenteousness of spiritual fruition! "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." And this fulness of blessedness of heart and fruitfulness of life is to be constant. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." But, as the Master shows, all this is possible only as we are one with Him, and derive from Him in deep, vital fellowship the secret and force of perennial life. "Abide in Me, and I in you." This direction is repeated again and again. Secular and philosophical morality know nothing of any such mysticism, they despise it; but He who knew most of righteousness knew that it was at best only partial or sporadic except as it was through faith and love, fellowship and obedience, rooted in Himself. Are not many of us specially and greatly lacking here? In solitude, meditation, and prayer

we need to deepen our spiritual life. Deeper reflection on the deep things of God, more whole-hearted love, more of the prayer that comes from the depths of the heart, more of the life hid with Christ in God, and our whole character would break into fulness of beauty. A more personal, inquisitive, sympathetic, and adoring knowledge of our Lord would vivify our whole being. "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me." This is foolishness to the natural man, but the spiritual know that here the roots of character strike and absorb eternal life and perfection.

Only as we live this deeper life is *our joy assured for ever*. The teaching of our Lord in this parable is, that whatever in character, satisfaction, and hope is not based on the deepest life, life in Himself, must be overthrown. In connexion with the principal palace at Babylon was a remarkable construction, one of the wonders of the world, known to the Greeks as "the hanging garden." Several tiers of arches formed an artificial imitation of a mountain, and on the top of this structure was a mass of earth on which grew flowers, shrubs, and trees. Where are these artificial elevations now? Gone, utterly gone, long ago, shaken to the earth, buried in the ditch. All around us we see the glory, the joy, and the hope of men resting like the "hanging gardens" of Babylon on an artificial basis, and any slight accident—a sickness, a loss, a death, any one of a thousand changes—wrecks the treasure and pride of life. But the natural gardens of the earth, those which rest on the granite pillars of the deep under-

world, bloom to-day as they did in the primitive ages—the grass as green, the flowers as sweet, the blossoms as gay, the forests as grand as in the morning of the ages. Building on Christ we build on the eternal reality, nor shall we suffer shame.

XVI

THE COMMON CORONATION

Honour all men.—1 PET. ii. 17.

XVI

THE COMMON CORONATION

ONE of the foremost duties of the Church of God is to vindicate the essential greatness of human nature. Everything depends upon having a just conception of our large capacity and high calling, and Christianity sanctions such a conception; in every possible way it proclaims, vindicates, and secures the splendour of the soul. Let us, then, attempt to show how in the light of certain facts and of the teaching of the Christian faith human nature is worthy of high honour, despite the existence of so much in human life that is calculated to provoke cynicism and contempt.

I. THE TRIVIALITY OF HUMAN CIRCUMSTANCE OBSCURES MAN'S ESSENTIAL GREATNESS.—A few privileged men move in splendid circles; they are actors in momentous scenes, and are destined to be writ large on the page of history. It is an instinct to honour this aristocracy. In association with the text stands the further injunction, "Honour the king," and it is an impulse of noble natures to respect greatness and authority. It is, as we say, an instinct to reverence the mighty, the gifted, and the famous. But the immense majority spend life

in the most commonplace scenes, an infinity of petty tasks consumes their time and strength, and there is absolutely nothing of distinction in either them or their status; the duties, incidents, and experiences which make up the life-story of the multitude are hardly important enough to find mention in domestic correspondence. The ready inference that many draw from this fact is, that we are creatures of no great consequence. When we see the fiery horses of the sun yoked to a dust-cart we begin to suspect their breed.

A little reflection, however, will show how far from the truth such an inference really is. Looking into history we are startled by the discovery that the very greatest of mankind lived once as mere mortals, having habitually to do with the smallest concerns and the most modest business of human life. For instance, Shakespeare writes of kings and conquerors, of battles and empire, of love and beauty, of the deep things of the intellect and heart, and he treats these high themes with such astonishing mastery and splendour of expression that a hush falls upon an intellectual assembly at the mere mention of his name; we associate nothing mean with Shakespeare—only supreme genius, unparalleled achievement, immortal fame. Yet when we read his last will and testament, and find him bequeathing a second-best bed, we become conscious that the great master had once, like the rest of us, to deal with very minor matters indeed. Going back to the annals of their times, to their autobiographies and correspondence, we find that the greatest artists whom the world has known were similarly immersed in mean trifles. Mrs. Oliphant reminds us that in

the contemporary records of Venice the names of the greatest painters of the ages—the Bellini, Titian, Palma, Tintoretto, Carpaccio—“are bandied about as if they were the names of a set of decorators.” They do not appear as inspired artists on poetic elevations, but in the homely light of honest workmen occupied with the routine and drudgery of daily life, living on their earnings, anxious about questions of bread and butter, and intent upon making the best of things. Yet to-day the cloud of trifles that once enveloped these gifted men is no more, and we see only the superb personalities and their dazzling workmanship. There is nothing small or mean about them now; their names are breathed with reverence, their work is the standing miracle and delight of the race. Do we not hence learn that genius may be associated with drudgery, that inspiration is not inconsistent with commonplace, and that a thousand trifles may for a while becloud greatness, not destroying or hurting it, but forming the very condition of its discipline and manifestation? The thing on which to fix our eye is not the paltry detail, the trumpery circumstance, but the intellectual and immortal achievement in literature or art which shines out illustriously when the mean associations of its origin have dropped away and are forgotten.

Just as the dignity of human life is vindicated by its great men in those intellectual masterpieces which were perfected in monotony and drudgery, so that dignity receives higher and fuller demonstration still in its good men in the splendid moral results which they attain by and through the paltriest circumstances. If we live lives of real

nobility, and effect our calling in faith and spirituality, it shall be with us in the great future as we now see it to be, on a certain plane and scale, with the sons of genius who did their work without a scrap of stateliness or romance. The intellectual result vindicated the poet and artist; the moral consequence shall vindicate us. We are now absorbed in positions and pursuits ridiculously insignificant, but eternal work is being wrought in and by us, and when in due season the cloud of vulgar commonplace disappears, the splendid principles and perfections of character which are being disciplined and matured in obscurity will shine forth in utmost beauty and grandeur. What we are pleased to designate trifles do not deny the greatness of the worker or prevent the greatness of the work, and we must not permit trifles to blind us to the glory of life. I refuse to look at the vulgar things, the petty things, the passing things which occupy so much of our thought, as if they were the essential things—the moral result is the essential thing. I will not morbidly scrutinise the littered workshop of the sculptor—the marble chips, the wooden mallet, the dust and débris, these are distinctly immaterial; rather do I fix my delighted gaze on the white statue which is being perfected by every blow. I will not dismally dwell upon the gallipots, the plastered palettes, and the various odds and ends which lumber the painter's studio; I prefer to contemplate the cartoon to which the artist adds a line of beauty every day. I will not vex my soul and waste time in making a dreary inventory of the rough scaffolding and vulgar stores of the

builder's yard ; I reverentially gaze upward to the rising temple as it ever more nearly salutes the sky.

The cynic looking over a great city is struck chiefly by the prevailing mediocrity and meanness of the vocation and circumstance of the million ; everything in their lot is so scant, pitiful, and coarse that he can regard the injunction to honour all men as simply farcical, and he alludes to them with a bitter smile. But give life its true interpretation, and we see the importance and large possibilities of the humblest lot. The supreme significance of life is spiritual and moral, and the superficial scorner regards the coarse shell only and forgets the pearl it fosters and conceals. We must not gauge the importance of human offices and events by the pomp and pageantry of their aspect, by the halo of romance and poetry they wear, by the large dramatic effect they produce, or by the felicitous way in which they lend themselves to picturesque history ; we know that the wealth of nations is created by obscure workers, and that the glory and grandeur of nations rest on the simple virtues of the cottage. He who appraises the worth and rank of the multitude by the triviality of their occupation, the meagreness of their circumstances, or the simplicity of their pleasures, judges by an utterly mistaken standard ; the point in question is, what are the moral qualities, the spiritual perfections, and the meetness for higher worlds, which this unostentatious discipline effects ? Faithfulness " in a few things " proves the modest steward a peer, and ensures him a vast inheritance. These light afflictions, these undistinguished tasks, these un-

poetical pleasures, these trifling services to the race, work in and for the despised workers an exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. When the rough screens of beggarly circumstance drop away, the marvellous moral artistry that God has wrought in dark corners will astonish men and angels. If all mortals were empalaced, if purple were the common habit, if the million were millionaires, if all could command gorgeous pleasure and splendid pageantry, the cynic, judging by appearances, would honour all men; but he does not know that, despite appearances, God never forgets our royal lineage, and that this stern economy of material, status, and colour is only His way of making us worthy to stand at His own right hand. Alfred in the neatherd's hut was still royal, seeking under rough raiment and mean ministries imperial ends; and so far he is a parable of the larger, diviner fact that God subordinates His children for a while to low estate to make them in the end altogether kings.

II. THE ESSENTIAL GREATNESS OF MAN IS OBSCURED BY HIS MANIFOLD SUFFERINGS AND HUMILIATIONS.—It is easy to honour men when they appear in the fulness of strength and beauty, in all the prime and pride of their best estate. Yet even here the painful limitations of human nature are not far to seek; we soon are reminded that even at his best estate man is a fading flower. “The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet.” So soon ends

the enchantment of the lovely, the glory of the great, the exaltation of the high. Magnificence is chequered with meanness, strength breaks down in impotence, greatness is chastened by pathetic humiliations, the paths of glory lead but to the grave; and when the satirist marks these eclipses of human pride—the humiliations of kings, heroes, millionaires, and beauties—it is easy for him to turn the whole show into contempt. But the great host of men have little more than the pains and the humiliations; they suffer sickness, weakness, deformity, want, decrepitude, loneliness, and misery, having the fewest relieving touches and compensations; they are diseased in the feet without the jewel on the forehead, they are lepers without being captains, they are victims of misfortune and disadvantage without being anything or doing anything worthy of record in the chronicles of the kings. The city teems with men and women who have been subdued into saddest colours by the accidents and severities of life; their circumstances are often distressingly cruel; and, indeed, the main features of the great majority of the population are pathetic. We may readily understand how the spectacle of the prevailing unloveliness and painfulness of society suggested the bitter reflection of the fierce cynic, that “the chief use of the mass of men is to make the spot green where at last they sleep.”

But we refuse to permit the fact of the enormous and manifold indignities suffered by human nature to affect our sense of its intrinsic greatness; nay, we contend that these very humiliations indisputably attest and evoke that greatness. It is absurd to

think meanly of us because of our painful estate; the truer test of what we are being the temper in which we deal with adverse circumstance. That temper is often heroic. The resolution and bravery with which man has encountered his hard and mysterious fate are simply marvellous; the more we think about it the more we must be impressed by the sublime elements within human nature which have enabled it to sustain and withstand the mighty and searching ordeals to which through ages it has been subjected. We have had to wage perpetual conflict with earth and sky. Nature is a cruel stepmother, and what with earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, frost and snow, famines, plagues and floods, she would long ago have broken the spirit of the race had it not been secretly invigorated by a breath of eternal power and hope. Time also works against us. Its effacing fingers soon despoil and annihilate what we create through infinite patience and sacrifice, and all must once more be done over again. In society and nationality are manifold, inherent, inevitable conditions which render unavoidable severest struggle and suffering. And the fact of our mortality is always painfully in evidence. The whole framework of things is exquisitely adjusted to involve us in difficulty and to breed in us discouragement and despair. Yet in spite of the whole sombre environment the mind triumphs over the weakness of the flesh and the adversities and mortifications of fatality. Think of the heroism by which men constantly and openly overcome the most afflictive humiliations. They emphatically and brilliantly vanquish profoundest calamity. With

dauntless courage, with intrepid resolution, with inextinguishable hope they meet and master the most ghastly trials that heart and flesh may know. In thousands of illustrious instances it is most clearly manifest that the sufferers are not so much the victims as they are the conquerors of misfortune. And the patience and endurance of men in the ordinary trials of life are not a whit less impressive. During the South African War one of the chaplains wrote: "We have heard much of the heroic deeds of our soldiers, but of their heroic endurance much remains to be told." The strain of the dark night, the soaking rain, the sand storms, the burning day, the freezing night, hunger and thirst, weariness, painfulness, and solitude, were as trying to flesh and blood as the fiercest battle, and these ordeals our troops sustained uncomplainingly. It is much the same with the race; nothing is more marvellous than its intelligent, manly, and hopeful endurance of dull, unromantic, and habitual trial. From generation to generation long-suffering man has bowed and bled, not with dull, stupid, despairing acquiescence, but with strong, dignified, intelligent valour and tenacity. "Six thousand years of suffering have not crushed the poetry out of him." Here and there we find pessimistic cowards who, having lost heart and hope, wail their monstrous melody to the moon; but the vast majority of the race, despising the sufferings of ages, undismayed by ten thousand catastrophes, enter upon a new century with songs, quenchless aspirations, eternal hope, and dreams of victory which shall not be confounded.

Years ago when visiting Vesuvius we pointed out

the remarkable manner in which pretty flowers spring from its lava and climb its dreary slopes. Leopardi remarks that the dread mount "delights in no other flower or tree" than the fragrant genista; but really flowers of many hues spring from its barren ashes and stones of darkness. Such is the vitality of nature, the pervasive world-force, the omnipotence of beauty, that, rooted in chemicals and breathed upon by the malefic breath of the crater, the beautiful flowers unfold their blossoms and shed their perfume. We too live upon a volcano; "under it is turned up as it were fire"; all kinds of subterranean shocks shatter our works, destroy our rest, put a period to our days; our sky is alternately eclipsed by sinister darkness or lighted by ominous glare; fiery showers bury our cities and civilisations, waste our vineyards and gardens, and turn our pleasant fields into dismal deserts; we are never secure from the fear of evil, for the rumblings of the abyss cease not, and go where we may there is the glare of the lava and the dust of death. We pity those unfortunate people who dwell at the foot of Vesuvius, and who are ever being alarmed and spoiled by their ruthless neighbour; but, in truth, we all live on a volcano compared with which Vesuvius is a mere smoking cinder. Yet look around and what lovely flowers deck the ashes of the ages—poetry, literature, humour, song, music, and the cult of beauty: patience, love, enthusiasm, cheerfulness, desire, and golden hope! Such is the divinity that works in us, such the indomitable strength and inexhaustibility of the soul, such the assertion of eternity within the consciousness, such the unconquerable

energy of innate hope, that the gloomy facts of suffering and mortality are half hidden by splendid and laughing flowers.

We honour the brave soldiers who return wounded from the battlefield—every scar is recompensed by a star; let us honour the undistinguished crowd who, without flag or trumpet, reward or renown, have nobly and triumphantly wrestled with the grim monsters, disease, hunger, loneliness, temptation, and despair. I refuse to allow the humiliations of humanity to blind me to its greatness. Sackcloth is on the skin, but scarlet is on the soul; battered out of shape by the shocks of doom, men are still gold. I think of the inexhaustible resources of the humblest, the conquering genius of the feeble, the real greatness of the obscure, the mystic wealth of the needy, the splendid victories of the uncrowned, and I honour all men.

III. THE ESSENTIAL GREATNESS OF MAN IS OBSCURED BY HIS MORAL FAULT.—Our sins obscure and degrade us in the most serious way and in the deepest degree; here, in fact, is the total eclipse of the essential splendour of human nature. It is easy to venerate men of illustrious virtue, but it seems almost unreasonable and impossible to honour those who have none. The cynic marks the selfishness, pride, greed, injustice, sensuality, and truculence of the licentious, and mocks at the idea of their great origin, nature, and destiny. They are no better in his eyes than are the beasts which perish, nay, he finds them less worthy of respect than his horse or dog. All the worst passions of the irrational creation are first found in man, and found in him in exaggerated forms. He is more bloodthirsty than

the tiger, more greedy than the vulture, more cunning than the fox, and even then the human law-breaker has a whole catalogue of ugly sins exclusively his own, and altogether without excuse. The moral critic avows that he can more easily respect the cattle than a vast section of humankind. It must be acknowledged that much may be said for such a verdict. Many of our fellows so entirely efface all the nobler attributes of our nature that nothing seems left of humanity but its shape. Yet, even in the teeth of such facts, we must persist to recognise in the most fallen the divine essence and calling of the race; we must not even suffer wickedness at its worst to blind us to the splendour of the soul.

In the most deeply degraded of our fellows we recognise *the action of conscience*. In the very depths of sin and shame this divine faculty asserts itself, and indirectly proclaims the grandeur of the sinner. Think of what conscience signifies—

A sky reflected in a sea !

The greatness of eternity mirrored in the greatness of human nature. Conscience hails us into the presence of the eternal Lawgiver, impeaches us on the ground of our having broken the supreme law, and threatens us with vast and mysterious retribution. Nothing can demonstrate more effectually our strange dignity than the action of this divinest organ linking us so intimately with the Highest. There is no more convincing proof of our supernaturalism than the pathetic sight of the sinner bemoaning his sin. What unfathomable depths, what mysterious heights are suggested by that sombre solemnity! “For the

arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me" (Job vi. 4). "And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed" (Ezek. xx. 43). "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath: neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure. For Thine arrows stick fast in me, and Thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me" (Ps. xxxviii. 1-4). "For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me" (Ps. xl. 12). "Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke xxii. 62). Royalty in sackcloth, but royalty still. Penitential grief and shame put a whole abyss between the sinner and the brute. The man of colour confessing, "I know that I am a man because I feel that I am a sinner," uttered a great truth. The consciousness of sin, the shrinking from it, the repudiation of it with shame and bitter tears, is at once the sad and sublime sign of the primal and essential greatness and holiness of the human soul—only a sun could thus hate darkness, only a rainbow could thus bewail defilement, only the snow that cometh down from heaven could thus resent the crimson dye. The fundamental and transcendent superiority of human nature is strangely

attested by its penitential agonies and protests. The sins of society are reflected in the irrational world, but their penitence finds no parallel there. The crocodile is said to weep over those it devours, and the lion to slink away ashamed when it miscalculates its spring and misses its prey; but in the whole range of the cunning, selfishness, and violence of the animal world there is no analogue to the sinner pricked to the heart. We cannot do other than censure the egotism, rapacity, inhumanity, and lust which dishonour our species; but when we loathe the fool and criminal we must remember also the sigh of their regret, the blush of their shame, the cry of their remorse, the tear of their penitence. Men fall far because of the height whence they fall; their sins are so revolting and torturing because of the holy image they deface. As Spenser sings—

The crow may bathe his coal-black wings in mire,
And unperceived fly with the filth away;
But if the like the snow-white swan desire,
The stain upon his silver down will stay.

Human nature in its deepest degradation is still *the object of divine, redeeming love*. The New Testament, although pronouncing the absolute condemnation of sin, yet just as clearly stands for the greatness of human nature even in its deepest guilt and misery. "Jesus believed in the absolute infinite worth of man, taken even at the lowest and meanest."¹ This is true, and Christ's appreciation of us was manifested in the most emphatic and convincing manner, and in every possible way. "But God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while

¹ *With Open Face*. A. B. Bruce, D.D.

we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It is easy to descant rapturously upon the merits of a Titian or Rembrandt sumptuously framed and installed in the stately chambers of the National Gallery, although it sometimes happens that the enthroned thing proves a counterfeit; but to discern a masterpiece buried in the rubbish of a cellar, even when the colours are overlaid with filth and the artist's signature blotted by darkness, is a veritable triumph of the artistic sense. So God in Christ recognised the divine lineaments and possibilities of human nature not in the prince but in the pariah, not set in glorious circumstance but eclipsed in the gulf of despair. The grand vindication of human nature is in Jesus Christ. How vast and mysterious is the worth of the soul, the secret glory of human nature, that it should justify the incarnation of the Son of God! He who redeemed us made no mistake about our worth; He who knows all the treasures of darkness saw the gleam of an immortal jewel in the fallen spirit of man, and in stooping to rescue it out of mire and despair eternal reason justified infinite grace. And through the whole earthly career of our Lord this special genius of redemption found abundant illustration. The way in which He put honour on the most abject and unfortunate men and women, the tenderness with which He addressed them, the encouragement He gave them, and the special distinguishing grace and aid with which He succoured their helplessness, are most wonderful and instructive. There is no cynicism in Jesus Christ. He was indignant when Pharisees overlaid the divine image with dirty oils and vulgar colours, but He

saw at a glance in the suffering and penitent sinner the similitude of God, and forthwith proved Himself the divinity to hedge the fallen king. This affecting feature of the gospel is equally conspicuous in the epistles. At that time the great majority of human beings were neglected and despised by the wise and learned, as well as dishonoured and oppressed by the rich and powerful and governing classes; but the apostles, like their Lord, do utmost honour to the pariah and slave. In their estimate of humanity all social distinctions are void, they recognise the fundamental grandeur of human nature even when it altogether lacks the outward and visible sign of golden ring or imperial diadem. The scorner loves to expatiate upon the meanness of splendid things. He takes a collection of jewels and attempts to evoke contempt by exposing the coarseness of the elements of which they are constituted. The ruby is only a bit of crystallised earth coloured with iron, the opal is so much silica and water, the diamond is charcoal, and, indeed, such substances as clay and flint form the basis of nearly all the precious stones. But does the sneering analyser discover the meanness of magnificence? Nay, rather does he demonstrate the magnificence of apparent meanness. He reveals the fact that clay, iron, flint, and water, when seen in a true light, are superb; that the stones of the street are precious, and that the dust of the earth is gold. Christianity ignores the ignoble features and conditions of terrestrial humanity, knowing these to be superficial and accidental; it declares the splendour of what is apparently mean and base; it passionately affirms the essential

divinity and greatness of that which for a while is compassed with infirmity; by its invincible grace it cleanses and renews the jewel that was lost; and lifting it into the light of eternity, the soul glows like a diamond in the sun. The cross is the touchstone that ascertains beyond question that human souls are the imperishable jewels of God, and it is the grace of the cross that makes them His for ever.

IV. THE ESSENTIAL GREATNESS OF MAN IS NOT QUESTIONED BY ANY DISCOVERIES OF MODERN SCIENCE.—It is almost a popular notion that the advance of modern knowledge has made it more difficult than ever to recognise the exceptional dignity claimed for man; but, fully considered, it creates no such difficulty. Science has demonstrated the unsuspected vastness and grandeur of the universe, and it is inferred that the insignificance of man is the necessary corollary of this demonstration. This, however, is by no means the case. “Such a contrast is entirely fallacious, and merely arises from the fact that we see the magnitude of matter, but cannot see the magnitude of mind.”¹ We must at once feel that whatever may be the immensity of the physical universe it does not for a moment impugn the supremacy of the soul. It were veritable barbarism to assign rank by weight or value by measure, and to permit ourselves to be bullied out of our self-respect by bulk. One grain of poetry, one throb of love, one perception of duty, one act of will, is infinitely more than all mechanism and immensities. Science has demonstrated the vast antiquity of the universe, and this once again is supposed to prejudice

¹ *Divine Immanence*. Illingworth.

our claim to special honour. When our fathers measured their fourscore years against the six thousand years of history it was easy for them to retain some measure of self-respect, but it is now supposed that vast geological periods finally humble us. Nothing can be more vain than to attempt thus to gauge the significance of human nature. God has set eternity in our heart; we are agreed that time is an arbitrary conception, the timepiece a mere box of astronomic tricks, and it were abject childishness to permit ourselves to be put out of countenance by the figures on a dial. The consciousness of a single moment of duration exalts us incalculably above and beyond matter which exists through eternity but without ever knowing the moment. And the story of our lowly origin, to which science has given its sanction, is confidently believed by some to have administered a fatal blow to our pride of race. Tracing our genealogy to paradise, our patent of nobility was clear; but that we sprang out of the lowest parts of the earth gives us pause. It need not, however, do so. We never greatly heed origins, only developments and consummations. We judge roots by the gorgeous blossom and the purple cluster; seeds are vindicated in their flowers; the acorn is proved in the glory of Lebanon; and the quality of human nature is settled not by gropings in the slime, but by Homer, Plato, and Shakespeare, by Isaiah, St. Paul, and by Him who is greater than them all, the Son of man. The very science that finds our roots in the mud declares most emphatically that humanity is the last and highest result of evolution, the crowning flower of creation.

The real truth is that the vast grasp and magnificent results of modern science bear fresh and powerful testimony to the unique and transcendent eminence of man. Next to the wonder of the Creator filling space with such glorious examples of His power, wisdom, and love, is the marvel of the creature who so audaciously and successfully penetrates the secrets of the universe. There are bold and ardent workers in all departments, and they never weary in searching out nature's hidden perfections. They descend into the abyss, scrutinise the ocean floor, and bring into the light strange and beautiful forms kept secret from the beginning of the world. Without wings they ascend the sky, without the angel's golden reed they measure the firmament, analyse the sun, and marshal the stars, visible and invisible, calling them all by their names. They discover the foundations of the earth, expound the Architect's mighty plan, weighing the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance. They divine the atmosphere and lay a wise and sovereign hand on its elusive forces. They demonstrate the master law of gravitation which rules matter, and the master law of evolution which moulds life. They unveil in every blade of grass and drop of water an apocalypse of wonders. The sky is their whispering gallery. From palm to pine they discover, interpret, and possess the glory and riches of the world. Unsatisfied, undaunted, they pursue their quest, and what further revelations a new century may witness the boldest imagination cannot predict. So far from the discoveries of science militating against the lofty pretensions of man, they only tend to complete his coronation and

confirm his prerogative. They declare the majesty of the human mind which can comprehend and master the creation, which can seize the great principles of its government, and which can exult in Him of whom are all things, by whom are all things, and to whom are all things, to whom be glory for ever.

We have just been furnished with new and striking evidence that the progress of science has in no wise discredited man's claim to sovereignty and immortality. Huxley spoke strongly of the insight into scientific method shown in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, and pronounced it to be quite equal to that of the greatest experts. Again the scientist writes, "Tennyson was the only modern poet—in fact, I think the only poet since the time of Lucretius—who has taken the trouble to understand the work and tendency of the men of science."¹ The opinion of Huxley on such a subject must be respected. What else was Tennyson beyond being the representative poet of science? Above all other poets he was the poet of immortality, his most serious work being full of the sense of man's great nature and destiny; and when he came to lay his noble head on the dying pillow he breathed his final hope that when he had crossed the bar he should see his Pilot's face. That the greatest poem on immortality should have been written by the poet who best understood and who was most in sympathy with modern science is a significant fact not to be forgotten.

¹ *Life and Letters*, ii. 337.

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