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OUR LORD'S CHARACTERS

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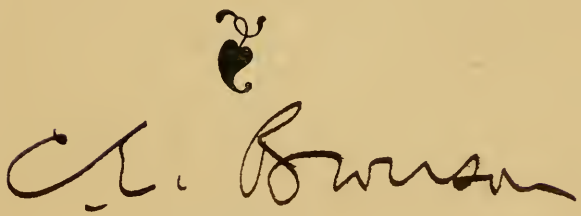
BIBLE CHARACTERS

OUR LORD'S CHARACTERS

BY

ALEXANDER WHYTE, D.D.

AUTHOR OF 'BUNYAN CHARACTERS'
'LANCELOT ANDREWES' 'JACOB BEHMEN'
'SANTA TERESA' 'SIR THOMAS BROWNE'
'RUTHERFORD'S CORRESPONDENTS'
'FATHER JOHN' ETC.



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BIBLE CHARACTERS

BY

DR. ALEXANDER WHYTE

First Series

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OUR LORD'S CHARACTERS

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OUR LORD'S CHARACTERS

I

THE SOWER WHO WENT FORTH TO SOW

NOT only in Jerusalem, and at the passover, but in Nazareth, and on days of release from labour, we may well believe that something like this would sometimes take place. "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." But He would answer to His mother,—"How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" So would His mother say to Him, and so would He answer her, as often as she sought for Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance; while, all the time, He was out in the fields; now with the ploughman, and now with the sower, and now with the reaper, and now with the husbandman who had his fan in his hand with which he was thoroughly purging his floor. And as He walked and talked with the ploughman, and with the sower, and with the reaper, the Spirit of all truth would descend into His heart and would say to Him that all that husbandry He had been observing so closely was in all its processes and operations, not unlike the Kingdom of Heaven

in all its processes, and in all its operations, and in all its experiences. Till, as He walked about and meditated, He would draw out to Himself the manifold likenesses between nature and grace; between the husbandry of the farm and the husbandry of the pulpit; when He would lay up all His meditations in His mind and in His heart, till we see and hear it all coming out of His mind and out of His heart in the teaching and the preaching of the text.

And, accordingly, nothing is more likely than that He had led His disciples to the sea-side that day along a way that was well known to Him. A way He had often walked as He went to watch the operations of the husbandman to whom that field belonged. And it being now the seed-time of the year, as the sower that day sowed, some of the seed fell under the feet of the twelve disciples, while flocks of hungry birds swooped down and devoured whole basketfuls of the sower's best sowing. And thus it was that no sooner had our Lord sat down by the sea-side than He forthwith pointed His disciples back to the field they had just passed through. And not only did He recall to their thoughts what they themselves had just seen, but He told them also all that He Himself had seen going on in that same field, year in and year out, for many spring days and many harvest days, when His mother could not make out where He was, or what He was doing. But all those observations and meditations of His now bore their hundredfold fruit in this great sermon so full of all kinds of instruction and illustration, and all taken from the

field they had just left behind them. And then, at the petition of His disciples, our Lord expounded His homely riddle about the sower and his seed, till we have both that riddle and its exposition in our hands to-night in this far-off island of the sea.

"The seed is the Word of God," says our Lord. That is to say, every true preacher sows the Word of God with both his hands, and he sows nothing else but the Word of God. The true preacher must put nothing else into his seed-basket every Sabbath morning, but the pure and unadulterated Word of God. The Christian pulpit is not set up for any service but one: and that one and sovereign service is the sowing of the seed of God in the minds and in the hearts and in the lives of men. The platform and the press are set up in God's providence for the sowing broadcast of His mind and will also: but the evangelical pulpit has an exclusiveness and a sanctification about it altogether peculiar to itself. Six days shalt thou read and write history, and biography, and philosophy, and poetry, and newspapers, and novels, but this is the Day the Lord has made. And He has made this Day, and has specially sanctified and hedged round this Day, for the sowing of that intellectual and spiritual seed which springs up, and which alone springs up, to everlasting life.

"And as he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside. This is he that heareth the Word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not." Our Lord was a man of understanding Himself, and He laboured continually to make His disciples to be men of under-

standing like Himself. And all His ministers, to this day, who are to be of any real and abiding benefit to their people, must labour first to make themselves men of understanding, and then to make their people the same. And if the people are void of understanding their ministers are largely to blame for that. There are people, indeed, in every congregation that our Lord Himself could not make men of understanding: at the same time, it is the ministers who are mostly at fault if their people remain stupid in their intellects and dark in their hearts. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" said Philip the once deacon, and now the evangelist, to the dark treasurer of Queen Candace. "How can I?" answered that wise man from the East. And Philip went up into the chariot and sowed the seed of the Kingdom of Heaven in the understanding and in the heart of that black but comely convert to the cross of Christ. And the first duty of every minister is to make his pulpit like that chariot of Ethiopia. The first duty of every occupant of a pulpit is to sow the Word of God and the Word of God only, and his second duty is to see that the people understand what they read and hear. "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of the people: for he was above the people: and when he opened it all the people stood up. And he read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused the people to understand the reading,"—till his reading was so distinct, and so full of under-

standing, that it brought forth fruit in some of his hearers an hundredfold. One of the last things that Sir Thomas Grainger Stewart said to me on his death-bed was this:—"Sometimes make them understand the psalm before you invite them to sing it, for we have often sung it in my time not knowing what it meant." It was a wise counsel and given in a solemn hour. But, then, there is no pulpit duty more difficult than just to say the right word of understanding at the right moment, and not a word too much or too little. Dr. Davidson of Aberdeen was the best at that one single word of explanation and direction of any minister I ever sat under. He said just one weighty word, in his own weighty way, and then we all sang in the West Church, as Paul made them sing in the Corinthian Church, with the understanding, and with the spirit also.

"And understandeth it not. Then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away the seed that has just been sown." There is a house I am sometimes in at the hour of family worship. In that house, after the psalm and the scripture and the prayer, the head of the house remains on his knees for, say, five or six seconds after he utters the Amen. And then he rises off his knees, slowly and reverently, as if he were still in the King's presence, with his eyes and his whole appearance full of holy fear and holy love. And I notice that all his children have learned to do like their father. And I have repeatedly heard his guests remark on that reverential habit of his, and I have heard them confess

that they went home rebuked, as I have often gone home rebuked and instructed myself. There is another house I am in sometimes, which is the very opposite of that. They have family worship also, but before he has said Amen the head of the house is up off his knees and has begun to give his orders about this and that to his servants. He has been meditating the order, evidently, all the time of the prayer. It must have been in such a house or in such a synagogue as that in which our Lord saw the wicked one coming and catching away the seed that was sown in the worshippers' hearts. I think I have told you before about a Sabbath night I once spent long ago in a farm-house up among the Grampians. Before family worship the old farmer had been reading to me out of a book of notes he had taken of Dr. John Duncan's sermons when they were both young men. After worship I got up and spoke first and said—"Let us have some more of those delightful notes." "Excuse me," said my friend, "but we all take our candles immediately after worship." The wicked one was prevented and outwitted every night in that house, and he has been prevented and outwitted in the houses of all the children who were brought up in that rare old farm-house up among the Grampians.

And, then, the stony places is he that heareth the word with joy, yet hath no root in himself. I do not know any congregation, anywhere, that hears the Word of God with such joy as this congregation. As for instance. All last summer, every Monday, I got letters full of joy over the preaching

that had been provided in this pulpit. And then when I came home, in every house and on every street I was met with salutations of joy over Dr. George Adam Smith's last sermon. The Professor's text was this,—"Lord, teach us to pray." Now, that is three weeks ago, and the seed has had plenty of time to take root. And I am sent here to night to ask you whether that so joyful hearing that Sabbath night has come, in your case, to any fruit. Have you prayed more these last three weeks? Have you been oftener, and longer at a time, on your knees? Have you been like Halyburton's mother—have you prayed more, both with and for your son, these three weeks? I did not hear the sermon, and I could not get anybody to tell me very much about it, beyond—O the eloquence and the delight of it! But some of you heard it, and God's demand of you to-night is,—with what result on your heart, on your temper, on your walk and conversation, on your character? Or, is it written in heaven about you since that Sabbath night,—'This is he who hears sermons with such applause, but has never had any root in himself. This is he who thinks that sermons are provided by God and man for him to praise or blame as suits his fancy.' And, then, to keep His ministers from being puffed up with such idle praise as yours, God says to them—"Thou son of man, the children of thy people are still talking of thee by the walls and in the doors of their houses. And they come to hear thy words, but they will not do them. Lo, thou art unto them as one that

has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument. For they hear thy words, and show much love, but they do them not. But the day will come when they shall give an account of all that they have heard, and then shall they know that a prophet of mine has been among them."

And then he that receiveth the seed among thorns is he in whom the Word of God is simply choked, till he becometh unfruitful. There is only so much room and sap and strength in any field; and unless the ground is cleared of all other things, the sap and the strength that should go to grow the corn will be all drunk up by thorns and briars. You understand, my brethren? You have only so much time, and strength, and mind, and heart, and feeling, and passion, and emotion, and if you expend all these, or the greater part of all these, on other things, you will have all that the less corn, even if you have any corn at all. The thorns in the fields of your hearts are such things as contentions, and controversies, and debates, and quarrels. All these are so many beds of thorns that not only starve your soul, but tear it to pieces as you wade about among them. And not thorns only, but even good things in their own places, if they are allowed in your corn-field, they will leave you little bread for yourself and for your children, and little seed corn for next spring. Rose-bushes even, and gooseberry-bushes, beds of all sweet-tasting, and sweet-smelling herbs, are all in their own place in your garden; but you must have corn in your field. Corn is the staff of your

life. And after corn, then flowers and fruits; but not before. After your soul is well on the way to salvation, then other things; but salvation first. Lest the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, entering in, choke your soul, till it is starved and lost: your soul and you.

We are indebted to Luke for many things that we would not have had but for his peculiar care, and industry, and exactness, as a sacred writer. And he reports to us one otherwise unreported word of our Lord's about the good ground that has its own lessons for us all to-night. "That on the good ground are they, which is an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." An honest heart. Now, there are honest, and there are dishonest, hearts in every congregation. The honest heart is the heart of the hearer who has come up here to-night with a right intention. His motive in being here is an honest motive. This is God's house, and that honest hearer has come to hear what God will say to him to-night. His eye is single, and this whole house has been full of light to him to-night. Already, to-night, he has heard words that he intends to keep to-morrow: to lay them up in his heart and to practise them in his life. He is an honest man, and God will deal honestly by him. But there are others, it is to be feared, in every congregation. They were in our Lord's congregations, and they are in ours. Hearers of the Word, with hearts that are not

honest. They are in God's house, but they are not here to meet with God, or to understand, and lay up, and keep, His Word. They are here to see and to be seen. They are here to meet with some one who is to be met with here. They love music, and they are here because the music is good. Or they have some still more material motive; their office or their shop brings them here. Now, when God's Spirit says, Thou art the man! Admit it. Confess it where you sit. Receive this word into a good and honest heart, and say, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. Say, this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. Say that God has been found of one man, at any rate, who did not come here to-night to seek Him. And come up here henceforth with that same good and honest heart that you have had created within you to-night, and you also will yet live to bring forth fruit thirty-fold, perhaps sixty-fold, and even an hundred-fold.

II

THE MAN WHICH SOWED GOOD SEED IN HIS FIELD, BUT HIS ENEMY CAME AND SOWED TARES AMONG THE WHEAT

THE Son of Man lived in obscurity in Nazareth till He began to be about thirty years of age, growing in wisdom every day, and every day saying to Himself—

> —What if Earth
> Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
> Each to other like more than on Earth is thought?

And one day in His solitary and meditating walks He came on a field in which blades of tares were springing up among the blades of the wheat all over the field. When, meeting the husbandman, He said to him, "From whence hath thy field these tares?" "An enemy hath done it," said the heart-broken husbandman. "While men slept, mine enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." It was a most diabolical

act. Diabolical malice, and dastardly cowardice, taken together, could have done no more. That enemy envied with all his wicked heart the husbandman's well-ploughed, well-weeded, well-sowed, and well-harvested, field, till he said within himself, Surely the darkness shall cover me. And when the night fell he filled his seed-basket, and went out under cover of night and sowed the whole field over with his diabolical seed. And when our Lord looked on the wheat-field all destroyed with tares, He took that field, and that husbandman's faith and patience with his field, and put them both into this immortal sermon of His. And here are we to-night learning many much-needed lessons among our tare-sowed fields also: learning the very same faith and patience that so impressed and pleased our Lord in this sorely-tried husbandman. And at the end of the world, when he is told about us, as we have been told about him, that husbandman will say, It was well worth a thousand fields of wheat to be the means of teaching a little patience and a little long-suffering even to one over-anxious and impatient heart. For, what that husbandman knew not about his field when he bore himself so wisely beside it, he will know when the harvest is the end of the world, and when the reapers are the angels.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house; and His disciples came unto Him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. And He gave them an interpretation

of His parable, which was to be the authoritative and the all-comprehending interpretation from that time to the end of the world. At the same time, and in and under that interpretation of His, there are occasional, and provisional, and contemporaneous, interpretations and applications of this parable, that are to be made by each reader of this parable, according to his own circumstances and experiences. I will not take up your time, therefore, with the Donatist controversy in the days of Augustine; nor with the great struggles for toleration and liberty of thought recorded for all time in the Areopagitica, and in such like noble arguments. Only, there will no doubt yet emerge and arise new Donatist debates, and new demands for toleration of opinion, even of erroneous opinion, and with that, new calls for the utmost caution, and faith, and patience, especially in church censures, and in church discipline. Occasions will arise, and may be at the door, when we must be prepared, both by knowledge and by temper, to play our part in them like this husbandman in his field. Occasions and opportunities when the discretion, and the patience, and the long-faith of this wise-hearted husbandman, will be memorable and will be set before us for our imitation and our repetition.

Occasions have often arisen in the past, and they will often arise in the future, when a great alarm will be taken at the new discoveries, the new opinions, and the new utterances, of men who are under our jurisdiction, as the tares were under

the jurisdiction of the servants in the parable. Now, for what other purpose, do you think, was this parable spoken to us by our Master, but to impose upon us patience, and caution, and confidence in the truth, and to deliver us from all panic, and all precipitancy, and all sudden execution of our fears? This is a very wonderful parable. No parable of them all is more so. Very wonderful. Very startling, indeed. Very arresting to us. For, even when the wheat-field was all covered with real, and not doubtful, tares, the wise husbandman still held in the hands of his indignant and devoted servants. Even when, demonstrably, and admittedly, and scandalously, and diabolically, an enemy had done it,—No! said this master of himself, as well as of his servants,—No! Have patience. Let the tares alone. Lest while you gather up the tares, you root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together till the harvest. And then I will give the reapers their instructions myself.

My friends, if any one but our Lord had said that, or anything like that, in the presence of any actual instances of real or supposed tares, what would we have said to him, and said about him? I will not, for reverence sake, repeat what we would have said. But if our Divine Lord actually uttered these great and wonderful words, full of such calmness, and such patience, and such toleration, and such endurance; such endurance even of evil,—shall we not take His wonderful words to heart, and humbly and believingly apply them, where it is at

all possible; even erring, if err we must, on the safe side; and leave it to Him, when we at all can, to give His own orders about His own field at the end of the world? And, if we leave it to Him, it will be a sight on that day to see how He will vindicate our patience and His own parable.

Look back for a moment at what He Himself here calls some of the "scandals" in His Kingdom, and you will be fortified in your toleration of many things of that kind in time to come. Everybody has heard of the scandal of Galileo, to the shame of the Church of his day. And we are not without our own scandals in our own day. The highest dignitary now in the Church of England was, not very long ago, all but rooted up, as all but tares, both he and his beautiful writings. Whereas now he is where he is by universal acclamation. In Fitzjames Stephen's brilliant four-days' speech before the Court of Arches, that learned and eloquent counsel said,—"My Lord, such differences have always existed in the Church. I might quote in favour of the accused party, some of the highest names in the Church of England. Hooker was charged, in his day, with subverting the authority of Scripture. Cudworth was called an atheist. Tillotson's life was embittered by persecution. Bishop Burnet, whose work afterwards became a theological text-book, was actually twice censured by the Lower House of Convocation. . . . My Lord, the one party viewing history, and criticism, and science, accept these results with gladness,

and with candour, and the other party tremble before them. The one party would say with Hooker that to detract from the dignity of these things is to do injury even to God Himself, who being that Light which no man can approach to, has sent us these lesser lights as sparkles, resembling, so far, the bright fountain from which they spring." I will not quote what Stephen said about the other party. But he went on to say, "That, my Lord, is the real scope, tendency, and design of this prosecution, and that, as I said before, is its explanation, but not its justification."

And a greater than Fitzjames Stephen, the Golden-mouth of the English Church himself, says in his Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying—"Let all errors be as much and as zealously suppressed as may be: but let it be done by such means as are proper instruments for their suppression; by preaching and disputation, by charity and sweetness, by holiness of life, by assiduity of exhortation, by the Word of God and prayer. For these ways are the most natural, the most prudent, the most peaceable, and the most effectual, instrument for the suppression of error. Only, let not men be hasty in calling every disliked opinion by the name of heresy. And if men will say that in saying this I persuade to indifferency, there is no help for me; I must bear it as I can. And I am not without remedy, for my patience will help me, and I will take my course."

And on the same subject a greater than either Stephen or Taylor has said: has sung—

> Let not the people be too swift to judge,
> As one that reckons on the blades in field,
> Or ere the corn be ripe. For I have seen
> The thorn frown rudely all the winter long,
> And after bear the rose upon its top:
> And bark, that all the way across the sea
> Ran straight and speedy, perish at the last,
> E'en in the haven's mouth.

But all that will only the more provoke some of you to retort on me and to demand,—Do you really mean to say, that so and so are to be tolerated, and tolerated where they are? Now, I will not answer that which you put so passionately; for I am not debating with you, but am teaching to the teachable among you, a little of what I have been taught myself. And, moreover, what I have acted on more than once as I had opportunity, and have proved it to be true and trustworthy teaching, and have never repented it. And if, instead of debating about it, you also will receive it, and will act upon it, you also will live to prove it true. Now, with all this, I have not gone out of my way one inch to-night to seek out this wonderful parable, and its so timeous interpretation. Not one inch. For it met me in the very middle of my way to you. And, all I could examine it, and excogitate it, and go round about it, and look at it in every light, and indeed try to escape it—I could make nothing else out of it than what I have now said. But the day will declare both the eternal truth, and the present truth, about this parable of the wheat and the tares. On that day, He who preached this parable will winnow out, and will burn up all

false interpretations of it, and mine among the rest. Only, may you and I be judged more tenderly and forgivingly by Him on that day than we have many a time judged other erring men!

The whole field of letters, also, is more or less like this husbandman's tare-tangled field. You can get at the pure truth in print scarcely in anything. You can with difficulty get a book of the past, and much less a magazine, or a journal, or a newspaper of the passing day, that is not all sown over with the author's own seed-basket; all sown over, now with partiality, and now with antipathy. That field in Galilee was a study in malice to our Lord: and there are fields all around us to-day of the same sickening spectacle. You are a public writer; and so many are the collisions of interests, and ambitions, and pursuits, and competitions; and such is the pure malice, sometimes, of your own tare-filled heart, that we cannot get from you the naked and real truth about that cause or that man. You simply will not let us get at the real, unadulterated, unvarnished, untampered-with, truth. And, besides, such are the resources and appliances of civilisation in our day, that you can sow your evil seed under cover of anonymity, and your best friend will never know whose hand it was that stabbed him in the dark. You are reviewing a book by tongue or by pen. The author is not liked by you, or by your party, or by your employer; or, you are an author yourself, and the writer of the book before you has run away with your popularity and your profits. You would need to be a saint to review his new book

aright. You would need to be an angel to say in your paper about him and about his book, what you would like him to say in his paper about you and about your book. And, indeed, considering what this world is, and what the human heart is, there is far more of such angelic saintliness abroad in it than you would expect to see, unless you were actually on the out-look for it. But, fair writing, and true writing, and loving writing, or no, we have no choice. We must act like this wise husbandman; we must take our history, and our biography, and our politics, and our art, and our law, and our criticism, and our morning and evening and weekly newspapers, as they are—tares and all. Lest if we forbid the tares entering our house we shut out both truth and love with them. Let them grow together until the harvest; and, meantime, make them all so many means of this and that grace to you. In one of his noblest papers Dr. Newman vindicates the study of the great classics—Greek, Latin, and English—in spite of the basketfuls of impurity that are sown so broadcast in some of them. And the old scholar and saint argues that in the interest of the very purity of mind and heart that we fear sometimes are so early poisoned in those shining fields. And now, before leaving this point, I will add this—I am not an author, nor a journalist, but a preacher, and I will therefore add this—that he is a happy preacher who has lived through many times and seasons of temptation, and has never sown some of the tares of his own temper, and of his own partial mind,

in his preaching, and even in his prayers. And I, for one, am not that happy preacher. Thomas Boston used to say, that of all men who needed the imputation of Christ's all-round righteousness, preachers and pastors were those men.

And then to come still closer to ourselves than even that. Such is the versatility, and the spirituality, and the inwardness, of our Lord's words in this wonderful parable, that they apply with the very greatest support and comfort to the heart of every sinful man also under his own all-searching sanctification. The heart of a great sinner, under a great sanctification, is the field of all fields. All other fields are but parables to him of his own field. And in nothing more so than in Satan and his satanic seed-basket. And worst of all, and saddest of all, that satanic seed is here almost part and parcel of the very field itself. For, from the beginning, that poisonous seed was, somehow, insinuated, and was already buried deep in the very original ground and soil of the soul; and so insinuated, and so rooted, that with the best husbandry it is never got out of the soil of the soul in this world. It is like those poisonous weeds in his best fields that so vex the husbandman's heart. Let him plough and harrow, and plough and harrow again; let him change his seed, let him rotate his crops; with all he can do, there is the accursed thing always coming up, choking the wheat, drinking up the rain and the sunshine from the wheat, and mocking all that the husbandman and his servants can do; mortifying and indeed break-

ing his heart. But here also,—and startling and staggering to read it,—our Lord here again advises patience. *Why* he does not cleanse the honest and good ground with one word of His mouth, He knows Himself. But that He does not so speak the word, and so cleanse the ground, all His best saints have learned to their bitter suffering, and their heart-breaking cost. And among all the counsels and comforts He speaks to our tare-tortured hearts, this wonderful, this even staggering, counsel is heard in and over them all. 'Be patient with thine own sanctification, as with some other things, till I come. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth. Be ye also patient; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. And then the Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend. And then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

III

THE MAN WHO TOOK A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED, AND SOWED IT IN HIS FIELD

UR LORD'S parables are all so many applications of what we sometimes call the Sacramental Principle. That is to say, in all His parables our Lord takes up something in nature and makes it a lesson in grace, and a means of grace. The kingdom of heaven is like that, He said, as often as He saw a field of wheat all sown over with tares; or a vineyard with a husbandman working in it; or a lost sheep; or a prodigal son; or a marriage procession; or a few little children playing at marriages and funerals in the market-place. Our Lord so lived in heaven: He had His whole conversation so completely in heaven: His whole mind and heart and life were so absolutely absorbed in heaven, that everything He saw on earth, in some way or other, spoke to Him about heaven, and thus supplied Him with His daily texts, and sermons, and parables, about heaven. There are

some men who are full of eyes, as Scripture says. They are full of eyes within and without. Now, our Lord was one of those men, and the very foremost of them. He was full of eyes by nature, and, over and above nature, He had an extraordinary and unparalleled unction from the Holy One. And thus it was that He discovered the kingdom of heaven everywhere and in everything. Already as a child He had deep and clear eyes both in His mind, and in His imagination, and in His heart. As a child He had often sown the least of all seeds in Joseph's garden, and had watched that mustard seed springing up till it became a great tree. And with what delight would He see the birds of the air building their nests in the branches of His own high mustard tree. And how He would feed them, and their young ones, with the crumbs that fell from His mother's table. And as He grew in wisdom and in stature, He would come to read in that same mustard tree yet another parable about His Father's house and His Father's business. Or, as we sometimes say, in our book-learned way, He would see in that mustard tree another illustration of that Sacramental Principle which was ever present with Him.

Now it was not so much the great size of the mustard tree that took such a hold of our Lord's imagination. It was rather the extraordinary smallness of the mustard seed. And that was a very fruitful moment for us when that small seed first fell into our Lord's mind and heart. For there immediately sprang up out of that small seed

this exquisite little parable. This little parable, so exquisitely beautiful in its literature, and so inexhaustibly rich in its applications and fulfilments in no end of directions.

To begin with, the kingdom of heaven in Old Testament times was like a grain of mustard seed in its original smallness, and then in the great tree that it ultimately became. Take the very first of all the mustard seeds of the kingdom of heaven on this earth,—the call of Abraham. What could be a smaller seed, at the time, than the emigration of the son of Terah out of Ur of the Chaldees and into the land of the Canaanites? Again, what seed could well be smaller than that ark of bulrushes, daubed with slime and pitch, and hidden away among the flags by the river's brink? And, then, what less likely to spring up into all the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs of the Church of God than those little snatches of sacred psalmody that a shepherd boy sang to his few sheep on the plains of Bethlehem? And to come to Old Testament institutions and ordinances also. What more like a mustard seed than those few drops of midnight blood sprinkled so stealthily on the lintels and the door-posts of those slave-huts in the land of Egypt? And yet all the passover-days in Israel, and all our own communion days in the Church of Christ, and the marriage supper of the Lamb in His Father's house, have all sprung up, and will yet spring up, out of that small mustard seed. And in like manner, all our divinity halls had their first original in that small school which Samuel set up

on his father's little property at Ramah. Our own Oxford, and Cambridge, and Edinburgh, and Aberdeen, and many more such like schools of the prophets, are all so many great trees that have their long roots struck away back into Samuel's little mustard seed. As also when the carpenters of Jerusalem made a pulpit of wood for Ezra and his colleagues, standing on which they read in the book of the law distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused the people to understand the reading. There you have the first small seed out of which ten thousand pulpits have sprung up, down to our own day, and will spring up, down to the end of all evangelical time. Our Lord Himself stood upon a pulpit of the same wood; and so did Paul, and so did Chrysostom, and so did Augustine, and so did Calvin, and so did Thomas Goodwin, and so did Matthew Henry, and a multitude of pulpit expositors of the Word of God which no man can number.

Our Lord, you may depend upon it, had all those Old Testament instances in the eyes of His mind when He spake to His disciples this so charming and so instructive little parable. But, always remembering His own mustard-seed beginning, and always forecasting what was yet before Him, and before the whole world through Him, our Lord must always have looked on Himself as by far the most wonderful mustard seed that ever was sown. Would you see with your own eyes the most wonderful mustard seed that ever was sown in all the world? Come and look at that Holy Thing

that lies in the manger of Bethlehem, because there is no room in the inn. Which, surely, was the least-looking of all seeds, but is now the greatest among herbs. And, then, what a seed of the same kind was the call of the twelve disciples, and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and the conversion of Augustine, and the conversion of Luther, and Wesley, and Chalmers, and General Booth. Paul's first mission to the Gentiles also, and the first missionary that landed on our shores, and the first printing-press, and the first sailing of the *May-flower*, and so on.

But it is time to come to ourselves. And among ourselves that small mustard seed is eminently a parable for all parents. For every little word that a parent speaks to his child: every little action of a parent in the sight of his child: every little attitude even, and movement of his: every glance of his eye, and every accent of his voice—are all so many mustard seeds sown in the little garden of his child's mind and heart. Every little Scripture lesson learned together: every little prayer offered together: and, especially, alone together: every little occasional word to explain, and to make interesting, his child's little lesson and little prayer every wise little word spoken to his child about his own and his child's Saviour—every such small seed dropped by a parent's hand will yet spring up to his everlasting surprise, and to his everlasting harvest. Let all parents, then, and all nurses, and all tutors, and all schoolmasters, and all who have little children in the same house with them, lay this

little parable well home to their imagination and to their heart. Let them not despise the day of small things. Let them have a great faith, and a great assurance of faith, in such small things as these. Let them have a great faith in Him, and in His wisdom, and His love, and in His faithfulness, who is continually, both in nature and in grace, folding up the greatest trees in the smallest seeds. And never more so than in the way He folds up your child's whole future in your little acts of faith, and prayer, and love, and wisdom, and patience, and hopefulness, done at home. Despise it not, for a great tree is in it. A great, a fragrant, and a fruitful tree, under which you will one day sit rejoicing in the shelter of it, and in the sweet fruitfulness of it.

Long before your son is ready to read Butler for himself, he will be a daily illustration to you of Butler's great principle of acts, habits, character. A little wrong act, another little act of the same kind, and another, and another, and another, and another, and all of them so small, that not one parent's eye in a thousand can so much as see them, the thing is so infinitely small, and the child himself is still so small. But, oh! the tremendous and irreparable oversight for you and for him! Read Butler for yourself till you have that wisest of Englishmen by heart. And as soon as your son is able to read his father's best books, buy him a good Butler for himself; and, some day when you are taking a long holiday walk together, have a good talk with him about that

great teacher, both hearing your son's mind, and giving him in return your own mind, on that great man.

Thomas à Kempis's genesis of a fatal temptation is another instance of a mustard seed. An evil thought; the smallest seed of an evil thought, is, somehow, sown in our minds. In a thousand unforeseen ways such small seeds are being continually insinuated into all our minds. And if they are let enter our minds; if they are for a single moment entertained in our minds; evil thoughts, especially if they are of certain kinds, will immediately spread themselves out in our imaginations, and will so colour, and so inflame, and so intoxicate, our imaginations, that our wills, and even our consciences, are completely carried captive before we are aware, till another deadly work is finished in body and in soul. A thought, says the old saint, then an imagination, then a delight, then a consent, and then our soul is sold for nought. The kingdom of hell also is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is grown, all the obscene birds of the bottomless pit come up and breed in the branches thereof. As the children's hymn has it long before they understand it,

> So our little errors
> Lead the soul away,
> From the path of virtue
> Far in sin to stray.

But, blessedly, there is another side to all that.

There is a genesis and a genealogy of things far more joyful to dwell on than that. A little thought of goodness, and of truth, and of love, will be sown in the garden of the soul. A little thought, as it looks, of God, of Jesus Christ, of heaven, well watered and shone upon by the Spirit of God. And then that little thought will open and will spread out into visions of beauty that will sanctify and fortify the soul, till the young soldier of Jesus Christ will step forward and will say like the brave man in John Bunyan—Set down my name, sir! When the heavenly watchers, seeing all that, will raise their songs over him, and will sing—

> Come in, come in,
> Eternal glory thou shalt win!

And all from a small mustard seed of one good thought sown in a good and honest heart.

And so on, in a thousand other regions of religion and life. But I will close, with what will come home to us all,—how to make our own home happy. For, what is the real secret of a happy home: a life-long happy home? What but little mustard seeds of love, and of loving-kindness? What but little acts, and little habits, and then a great herb of character? A little act of forethought. A little act of respect. A little act of reverence. A little act of honour. A smile. A glance of the eye. A word of tact. A word of recognition. A word of praise. A word of love. A little gift. A little flower in a little glass of water. And many more

things too small to put into a sermon for grown-up men.

With smiles of peace and looks of love
Light in our dwellings we may make,
Bid kind good-humour brighten there,
And still do all for Jesus' sake.

Little deeds of kindness,
Little acts of love,
Help to make home happy
Like the heaven above.

IV

THE MAN WHO CAST SEED INTO THE GROUND AND IT GREW UP HE KNEW NOT HOW

DR. BRUCE is by far the best expositor of this exquisite little parable. Dr. Bruce is always himself. That is to say, he is always autobiographical, always experimental, always scientific, always masculine, always full of bone and blood, always strength itself, always satisfying. "A man's capacity," he says, "to expound particular portions of Scripture depends largely on his religious experiences. For here it holds good, as in other spheres, that we only find what we ourselves bring. The case is the writer's own. And therefore the parable to be studied has been to him for many years a favourite subject of thought, and a fruitful source of comfort. Viewed as a repetition in parabolic form of the Psalmist's counsel,—Wait, I say, on the Lord." Dr. Bruce's book on the Parables is, to my taste, his best book. And then the exquisite little parable now open before us, shows Dr. Bruce, as I think, at his very best. So much so, that if there

is to be anything of the nature of harvest to you to-night, let it be well understood that Dr. Bruce was the man who first cast the seed into the ground, but who fell asleep before the seed had sprung up in you and in me.

At the same time, the originality, and the freshness, and the force, of Dr. Bruce's exposition, is all to be traced back to the originality, and the freshness, and the force, of the parable which he so excellently expounds. You sometimes say to me that you do not know what style is. You have never been taught, you complain, to recognise style when you see it. And you ask me never to pass a piece of what I would call real style without stopping and calling your attention to it. Well, learn this little parable by heart, and say it to yourselves, till you feel the full taste of it in your mouth, and till you instinctively spue out of your mouth everything of a written kind that is not natural, and fresh, and forceful: everything that is not noble, and beautiful, and full of grace and truth, like this parable. "For the earth bringeth fruit of herself: first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." A little child might have said it. And He who did say it makes us all to feel like little children, with the naturalness, and the simplicity, and the truth, both to nature and to grace, of His exquisite words. The style is the man.

If we only had the eyes to see it, there is not a little of our Lord's teaching and preaching that is autobiographical, and experimental, and is consequently of the nature of a personal testimony.

For, in all He went through, He went through it all because He was ordained to be the Firstborn among many brethren. He was in all points put to school, and taught, and trained, from less to more, like as we are. He was Himself so led as to be made in due time the Leader and the Forerunner of the whole body of believers. Till He is able at every new step in His heavenward way to turn round and say to us,—"Follow Me. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life." I like to look for our Lord's own footprints in every sermon of His, and what I look for I almost always find. As here. For, as it is in so many of His sermons, and as it is in so many of His parables that illustrate His sermons, this fine parable has, as I think, its first fulfilment in our Lord Himself. The seed of the kingdom was cast into the good ground of His own mind and heart also, and that from a child. And the seed that Mary, and Joseph, and the doctors in the temple, and the elders in the synagogue, all cast into that good ground sprang up, they knew not how. Till, when the sickle was put in for the first time, there was already such a harvest of grace and truth that they knew not what to make of it. Yes. It was so in Himself also: there was first the blade. For did He not grow up before them as a tender plant? And was He not subject to them as a little Child in the Lord? And was it not so that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon Him, they knew not how, till He began to be about thirty years of age? Matthew Henry sees our Lord Himself in

this parable, and I am glad to have that great commentator's countenance in dwelling, as I so much love to dwell, on this delightful side of this delightful scripture.

And what was true of the Holy Child Jesus, will be true, in their measure, of your children and of mine. And if God the Father submitted His Son to His own divine law of gradual growth, and slow increase, and an imperceptible ripening, then we must not grudge to submit both ourselves and our children to the same divine ordinance. We must not torment ourselves with too much solicitude and anxiety about our children. We must not look for old heads on young shoulders. We must not thrust in the sickle on the same day as we sow the seed. We must not expect our sons to come all at once to the stature of perfect men, any more than we did ourselves. We were not perfect patterns at their age any more than they are. We were not by any means so deep in the divine life when we were young men as we now are. With ourselves also it was first the blade, then the ear, and only a long time after that, the full corn in the ear. We really must not embitter our own lives, and our children's lives, because they are not as yet run into all our mould, and are not shaped as yet into all our form of doctrine and manner of life. We must not demand of them that they shall sit up at night to read our favourite authors. They are still young, and they have their own favourite authors. Enough, if, say thirty or forty years after this, they are come to their full intellectual and spiritual

manhood. Enough, if, when we are no longer here to enjoy such masterpieces with them, they are by that time discovering the hid treasure, say, of Rutherford's *Letters*, and Guthrie's *Saving Interest*, and Baxter's *Saint's Rest*, and Marshall's *Gospel Mystery*, and William Law's immortal treatises, and are winding up every night with Bishop Andrewes's *Private Devotions*. By the time that we are done with those great guide-books of ours, and are distributing our choicest treasures to our children, we will write their names under our own names in our favourite copies, and will leave it to God to see that they write their children's names one day on the same revered pages. It was only after He was more than thirty years of age that we come on the Son of God Himself giving up whole nights at a time to secret prayer. Be you patient, therefore, brethren. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Be you very thankful for the smallest signs of grace in your children. Despise not the day of small things. Look at that green blade in the spring field stealing its way so timidly round the obstructing clods and stones, and lifting up its hands towards the sunshine and the rain. And look for the same thing in your own house, and be thankful. For, in your house also, there will be first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. You may not live to see it. You

will most likely have fallen asleep before you see it. But you will be awakened to see it. And you will see no sweeter sight that sweet morning than the seed you sowed on earth at last come to its full ear in heaven. Yes, so is the kingdom of God. For when the fruit is brought forth, immediately He putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

And, then, what a heart-upholding parable this is for all over-anxious ministers. It should be called the parable for all impatient parents and pastors; pastors especially. Our Lord is so bent upon consoling and comforting His ministers that He almost staggers us with what He here says about the unbroken peace of mind that every minister of His ought to possess. At all hazards, our Lord will, once for all, pluck up all over-anxiety, and all impatience with their people, out of the hearts of His ministers. So much so, that He startles us with the state of security, and almost of absolute obliviousness in sleep, that He would have all His ministers to enjoy. What a courageous comforter of His over-anxious ministers is Jesus Christ! Cast in the seed, He says, and take no more trouble about it. Sow the seed, and be secure of the harvest. Look at this wise sower how he sleeps, says our Lord to us. Imitate him. For so is the kingdom of heaven. It is as if our Lord came into this house and said:—So is this congregation. It is as if the ministers should preach, and hold their prayer-meetings, and teach their classes, and visit

their sick, and should then wait in confidence till the seed should spring up, they know not how. And so it is as a matter of fact. We cast the seed of God's word into the earth, and the earth takes it, that is to say, God takes it, and it springs up, no man knoweth how, and the sowers of the seed least of all. Comfort My ministers, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to My ministers, and say to them that the earth bringeth forth her fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. There is another side, of course, to supplement all that; but one side is enough for one sermon of His, in our Lord's manner of preaching the kingdom.

I chanced upon this in my reading only last night. "Nothing great," says Epictetus, "is produced suddenly, not even a grape or a fig. If you say to me that you want a grape or a fig *now*, I will answer you that you cannot have it; a grape takes time. Let it flower first, then it will put forth its fruit, and then ripen. And would you have the fruit of a man's life and character all in a moment? Do not expect it." And again, "Fruit grows in this way, and in this way only. If the seed produces the fruit before the jointed stem, it is a product of the garden of Adonis. That is to say, the thing is for show only; it has no root in itself. You have shot up too soon, my man. You have snatched at fame before your season. You think you are something, but you will come to nothing. Let the root grow, then the first joint, then the second, and then the third, and then the fruit will come forth of

itself." So Epictetus taught the young men in his Greek lecture-room. God never leaving Himself without a witness.

When a sinner first sets out on his sanctification, he begins already to sharpen his sickle, and to bind and stack his sheaves. He confidently promises himself and other people both sweet and strengthening bread to eat immediately out of his harvest. But both he, and all who have to do with him, soon find out that that is not at all the way of the kingdom of heaven. Not at all. In the kingdom of heaven, and in the sanctification of its subjects, it is first the blade here also, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. And sometimes, indeed, it threatens as if it were to be all blade in this field and no ear at all. Ay, and far worse than that: the very blade, with all its promise in it, will sometimes seem wholly to wither and absolutely to die. Why is it that I am so slow in growing any better? Why is my heart as wicked as ever it was, and sometimes much more so? You pray, in a way. You watch unto prayer, now and then. You study all the great authorities on sanctification that you can hear about, or can lay your hands on. But as soon as your secretly besetting sin is again suddenly let loose upon you, that moment you are down again in all your old agony of guilt and shame. Ah, my brethren, the kingdom of heaven is a very different experience from what you had at one time supposed it was. In our Lord's experimental words about it, the

sanctification of the soul is first in the blade, then in the ear, and it is never, in this world, any more: it is never in this world the full corn in the ear. Whereas, poor soul, you thought that it was going to be the full ear with you all at once.

A great and a genuine sanctification, you must know, is the slowest work in all the world. There is nothing in heaven or earth so slow. The thing is sure, indeed, but the time is long. It would need to be sure, for oh, yes, sirs, it is long, long. And it is as sore, and as sickening, as it is long. There is a true description of it in our great Catechism. It is described there as "dying daily." And so it is. That is your case, is it not? It is dying by inches, is it not? It is having the two-edged sword driven daily into your heart, and never in this life healed out of your heart. Death is a process of pain, and shame, and ignominy. All possible pain, and suffering, and all manner of humiliation to mortal man, is collected up into the idea of death. But our everyday death is not true death at all, compared with the pain, and shame, and ignominy of death unto sin. And it all seems such a stagnation of sin, sometimes, and to some men. As, for instance, to the man who expostulated thus—"O my God, the more I do, the worse I am!" And to the man who first sang thus—

> And they that fain would serve Thee best,
> Are conscious most of wrong within.

Till, you may depend upon it, our Lord had His eye and His heart on His saints who are undergoing a

great spiritual sanctification when He spake this many-sided and most comforting parable. He spake it first of Himself, and of His own growth in strength of spirit, and in wisdom, as well as in all manner of Messianic perfection. And then He spake it of parents and their children, and then of ministers and their people. But above all, He spake it of all those elect souls who are being kept for all their days under a slow but sure sanctification. There is first the blade of true holiness, He said, after that the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately He putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

V

THE WOMAN WHO TOOK LEAVEN AND HID IT IN THREE MEASURES OF MEAL

BEING the first-born son in His mother's house, it would fall to the Holy Child Jesus to perform the part laid down for the first-born son in the feast of unleavened bread. And thus it was that after Joseph had struck the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that was in the basin, and after the whole family had hurriedly eaten each a portion of the pascal lamb, and a piece of the unleavened bread, at that appointed moment the eldest son of the house came forward and said, Father, what mean you by this service? What mean you by the blood, and the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs? And Joseph would say, It is the LORD's passover, because He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses. And Joseph, and Mary, and Jesus, and James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas, and their sisters, all bowed

their heads and sang the Hundred and Thirteenth and the Hundred and Fourteenth Psalms. And once every year till the Holy Child came to the full stature of the Christ of God: every returning passover He entered deeper and deeper into this great ordinance, both hearing Joseph and asking him questions. Till He came to be of more understanding about the feast of unleavened bread than all His teachers: and understood both the blood, and the bread, and the bitter herbs, far better than all the ancients.

As long as He was still a child, He spake as a child, He understood as a child, He thought as a child. And the *great haste* that the unleavened bread signified, was enough for His imagination and His mind and His heart as long as He was a child. But then, as time went on, He would watch His mother at her housewife-work, and would observe how her leaven *spread* till her three measures of meal was all leavened. And as He meditated on the process going on under His eyes, He would again see in the leaven and in the meal another parable of the kingdom of God. And He would lay up the leaven and the meal in His mind and in His imagination and in His heart for some of His future sermons. And thus it was that on that great day of teaching and preaching when He sat by the sea-side, He had already given out parable after parable, till any other preacher but Himself would have been exhausted; but He still went on as fresh and as interesting and as instructive as when He began in the morning. "I am full of matter," said Elihu. "The spirit within

me constraineth me. I will speak that I may be refreshed." And our Lord was like Elihu in that. For though He had already that day illustrated and applied the kingdom of God by a long and splendid series of parables, His mind was still as full of matter as ever. And the more He tried to put the kingdom of God into this and that parable, the more He saw other things in that inexhaustible kingdom for which no parable had as yet been provided. And thus it was that at this point, and as if to teach them to keep their eyes always open for their own future preaching, their Master suddenly turned to His disciples and asked them whether any of them had any light to cast upon the subject in hand. As if He were asking some of them to help Him out with His great subject, He said to them—"Whereunto shall I go on to liken the kingdom of God?" And when none of them had a word more to say concerning the inwardness, and the hiddenness, and the all-assimilating power, of that kingdom, He called to mind a former reflection of His own which came to Him one day beside His mother's kneading-trough. He remembered that day her three measures of meal, and the way that she took to turn that raw meal into wholesome and palatable bread. "And so is the kingdom of God in some respects," He said. "It is in some respects like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened." And here are we to-night, and in this church, suddenly transported back into Mary's little kitchen in Nazareth, in order to learn

there yet another of her Son's parables about the kingdom of God.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, He said to His disciples on one occasion. Now, what did He mean by that saying, do you suppose? What would you say was the leaven of the Pharisees? I do not know any more than you do, but I will tell you what I think. Leaven, to begin with, is something that is hidden and inward, and then it works inwardly and secretly, till it works its way through the whole surrounding measures of meal. Now, what was the leaven of the Pharisees? It must have been something inward and hidden, to begin with. And then it had by that time worked its way through their whole heart and character till they were the Pharisees who were bent on our Lord's death and destruction. Well, a little lump of leaven that a woman can hold in her hand does not look to be much, nor to have much power in it. But wait and see. And a little self-esteem in a young man's heart is not very much to be suspected or denounced, is it? But wait and see. Let that young man set out on his life with that little lump of self-esteem in his secret heart, and, as sure as he lives, this will be his experience, and the experience of all who have to do with him. So many and so unavoidable are the oppositions, and the contradictions, and the collisions of life, that if his self-esteem is not by means of all these things, and by means of the grace of God co-operating with all these things, chastened and subdued and cast out, then all these collisions, and corrections, and

contradictions, will only the more increase and exasperate his self-esteem, till he will end his days as full of self-righteousness, and pride, and hardness of heart, as very Lucifer himself. On the other hand, humility, that is to say disesteem of a man's self, is so much good leaven hidden in a good man's heart. These are the words of well-known master in Israel,—"Humility does not consist in having a worse opinion of ourselves than we deserve, or in abasing ourselves lower than we really are. But as all virtue is founded in truth, so humility is founded in a true and just sense of our weakness, misery, and sin. So much so, that he who rightly feels and lives in this sense of his condition lives in humility." That is to say, he who at all rightly knows himself is done for ever with all self-esteem. There is not left in all his inward parts so much as a single ounce of that leaven of the Pharisees. But that sect in Israel were so set against all introspection, as they called it: their doctors of the law so denounced that sanctifying habit of mind and heart, that their scholars ended with crucifying the Lord of Glory. To such a lump of villainy and wickedness will a little leaven of self-esteem grow under the fit conditions, and in the fit heart, and left fitly alone. Now our Lord saw, only far too well, that evil leaven already at work in His twelve disciples. I do not take it upon me to say how far it is at work in any of you. I will not insist that your self-esteem is eating through your whole heart and is destroying your whole life and character. I will not fall out with you about that. I will not

insist on what you call introspection, but I for one both feel and confess the truth of His words when my Lord says to me—Preacher, Beware! lest having discoursed so beautifully on humility to others, you yourself, through your self-esteem, should be a castaway from the kingdom of God. Till it has to be my prayer, with the candle of the Lord in my hand continually—Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any of this wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

The Apostle Paul also has this on this same parable: "Purge out therefore the old leaven. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Now, what is malice and wickedness? We have seen what self-esteem is, and how it works till it leavens the whole lump. But what is the leaven of malice? You may be old enough to know without being told. You may have enough of it in yourself, and you may have suffered enough from it in others; but there are new beginners in self-esteem, and in malice, and the word must be rightly divided to meet their case as well as yours. Now, you who are new beginners in morals and in religion—what think you is malice? For you cannot purge it out, nor keep it purged out, if you do not know it when you see it. Well, malice also is like leaven in this. Its first beginning is so small as not to be

worth speaking about in a dignified pulpit. You do not like some one. Nothing is so common, surely, as that. Already, at school, at college, in the office, in the workshop, in the house, you do not like some one. Well, that is your first half-ounce of the leaven of malice. And your feelings toward that man, and your thoughts about him, and your words about him, and your actions toward him, are like the three measures of meal with the little leaven at its heart. You just dislike that man—that is all as yet. But then full-grown men are so leavened with that same dislike that they actually come to hate one another. And—"hates any man the thing he would not kill?" You see then where you are. You see on what road you are travelling. You are travelling on the road of the Pharisees. You are travelling on the road to hell. And there is no surer, no shorter, and no more inevitable, road to hell than hatred, which is just dislike, and umbrage, and a secret grudge, come to their three measures of meal. Malice is bad blood, as we say. It is ill-will. It is resentment. It is revenge. Till it is in God's sight very murder itself; hidden, as yet, it may be from your introspection in its three measures of surrounding and smothering-up meal. And it is while this red-handed murder is still at its early stages of dislike, and antipathy, and animosity, that Paul beseeches you to purge it out. But in order to purge it out, you must take a candle like this to the work. A clear candle like this. You have a neighbour. He may at one time have been a friend. He may never

suspect but that he is a friend still. He may be befriending you all the time. But at heart you are not his friend any more. Something has happened to you. Something that you must search out and admit about yourself. However humbling, however self-condemning, however self-hating, it may turn out to be, you cannot be a good and a true man any more till you have found yourself out. Your friend forgot you on some occasion. Or he preferred some one else to you. Or he took his own judgment and conscience for his guide in some matter in which you demanded to dictate to him. Or he got some promotion, or praise, or reward, that you had not humility and love enough to stomach. Track out your heart, sir! Heaven and hell hang on your tracking out your heart in that matter. No. Hell does not hang upon it, for hell has possession of your heart already. That wicked heat in your heart at the mention of his name, that is hell. That blackness which we all see in your very look, that is the smoke of your torment already begun. Purge it out, implores Paul. Ah! it is easy saying purge it out. Did Paul manage to purge it out himself, after all his most earnest preaching about it? No: he did not. No more than you and I. And it was when he had lighted all the candles he could lay his hands on; and when with them all he could not get down to all the malice that was still hiding in his heart, it was then that his Master had mercy on His miserable servant, and said to him, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

And though Pharisaic self-esteem and diabolical malice are all the instances to which our Lord's parable is applied first by Himself and then by His best Apostle, yet the parable is equally true of all the other leavenings of the devil that are insinuated into our souls. A little of the leaven of pride—think it out, with home-coming illustrations, for yourself. A little of the leaven of anger —think it out, with home-coming illustrations, for yourself. A little of the leaven of suspicion, and of jealousy, and of envy—with illustrations and instances taken from yourself. A little of the leaven of sensuality—"the inconceivable evil of sensuality"—as Newman calls it—with a whole portfolio of illustrations taken from yourself. A foul thought, a foul hint, a foul innuendo, a foul word, a foul image; a foul-mouthed boy in the playground; a foul-mouthed man in the workshop, in the office, in the bothy; a foul-mouthed woman in the workroom, in the kitchen, in the field; a foul book, a foul picture, a foul photograph in a shop-window in passing,—think it out, with a thousand illustrations taken from your own experience, and you will be wiser in this universal leaven of sensuality than all your teachers. You will yet be a master in Israel yourself in such sickening, but at the same time necessary, self-knowledge.

It is surely very striking to discover that while our Lord says so plainly that the kingdom of God is like leaven, yet both He, and His best Apostle, descend into the kingdom of Satan for all their best instances, and all their most pungent appli-

cations of the leaven. They would seem in this to leave it to ourselves to apply and to verify the parable in its application to the things of the kingdom of God. Whereunto shall I liken it? He said to His disciples. As much as to say—find out more and better instances, and illustrations, and verifications, for yourselves. And His example, and Paul's example, would seem to say to all preachers—give your people one or two illustrations taken from things they are only too well acquainted with already, and then leave them to prosecute the parable further for themselves. Would, said Moses, that all the Lord's people were prophets! And I will leave this parable where our Lord and His Apostle left it, only saying over it and over you, Would that all the Lord's people were expositors and preachers, and that out of their own observation and experience!

VI

THE MAN WHO FOUND TREASURE HID IN A FIELD

IT was good stories like this in His sermons that made the common people begin to hear Him so gladly. There was not a carpenter's shop, nor a village market-place, in all Galilee where such stories of treasure-trove were not continually told. Stories of the same kind are not altogether unknown in our own land. But in the East, and to this day, such great finds as this man made are not at all uncommon. In times of commotion timid men will hide their treasures sometimes in the walls or under the floors of their houses, and sometimes they will bury them in their gardens and in their fields. And it will sometimes happen that the owner will die and will leave his secret treasure wholly undisclosed. And then some lucky man will come on that buried treasure some day in the most unexpected and accidental way; like this lucky man. He was ploughing one day in his master's field; or, was

he digging deep with his spade and his mattock? When, suddenly, he reeled with joy at the sight of the glittering hoard that his ploughshare had laid bare. In one moment his resolve was made. Carefully covering up the shining spot, before the sun had time to set, he had already sold all that he possessed, and had made such an offer for the field that it was handed over to him, with all that it contained, before he slept. All the old books of the ancient world are full of such intoxicating stories as this. Perhaps the most famous of all those stories is that which Tacitus tells us about Nero. How a bold imposter hoaxed the emperor about an immense mine, full of all kinds of precious treasure, that was to be found in a distant part of his dominions. And Nero believed the wild tale till he became the laughing-stock of the whole world. But this was no hoax, this true find in that field of Galilee. Our Lord would seem to have known the fortunate ploughman, and to have had his happy story from his own delighted lips. But the barest outline of the rich story is all that Matthew's pen has here preserved to us. We would far rather have had the whole sermon that our Lord preached from that fortunate man's find than we would have had all his furrow full of gold and silver. For the word of our Lord's mouth is becoming more and better to us than thousands of gold and silver. But it has seemed good to the Holy Ghost to have this man's story told to us in the shortest possible way, and then to leave us to find out all its heavenly likenesses for ourselves.

Well, the first and foundation likeness between this parable and the kingdom of heaven is surely this. Just as our Lord is the Sower in another parable, and just as He is the Planter of the mustard seed in another, and the Good Shepherd in another, and the Good Samaritan in another, so He is the happy ploughing Man in this parable. And as the field was the world in a former parable, so is it here. And the kingdom of heaven, says our Lord, is like treasure hid in the field of this world. And the first man who found the treasure that lay hid in the field of this world was the Son of man. All the world knows that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. All the world knows how that being in the form of God, He humbled Himself, and made Himself of no reputation, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. All of which, taken together, was the price He paid for this field, and for the treasure hid in this field. Our Lord bought this world, so to say, for the sake of the elect souls that lay hidden in it, till He was able to say,—"As thou, Father, hast given thy Son power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given Him."

Incomparable Thomas Goodwin,—incomparable to me, at any rate,—says that Paul will be the second man in heaven, the Man Christ Jesus being the first man. And every one here will already have thought of Paul as soon as this fine little parable was read out to him. For, if ever any man could be said to have had every letter of this fine

little parable fulfilled both in him and by him, that man was Paul. If ever any man, after the Man Christ Jesus, sold all that he had that he might buy the field, that man was the Apostle. Which field, in his case, was nothing less than Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus Christ Himself, with His justifying righteousness, held in Himself like hid treasure. This so fortunate ploughman in our Lord's sermon sold his little cottage in Capernaum, with its little garden full of fruits and flowers, and with all its vines and fig trees, under which he was used to sit after his hard day's work was done. He determined to sell all those dear possessions and delights of his for the sake of the treasure his eyes had once got sight of in that enriching and entrancing field. And Paul, in like manner, was ploughing at his daily task, when, lo, his horse's foot suddenly sank out of sight into such a wealth of unsearchable riches, that he straightway counted all things but loss in order to buy that field. Yes, truly. If Jesus Christ was the first ploughing man of this parable, then, surely, Paul was the second.

But the kingdom of heaven is such a rich and various kingdom that there are many other fields with hid treasure in them, lying all around the central field. And in some of those adjoining fields there is no little treasure still lying hid and waiting for the first fortunate ploughman to lay it open and to make it his own. You are not ministers. But you cannot fail to see what a rich field, and full of what treasure, every evangelical pulpit is, with its pastorate of the same character

spreading out all around it. Only, here again, that minister who would possess himself of the hid treasure of his pulpit and his pastorate must sell all he has in order to buy up those two gold-filled fields. "At his first coming to his little village, Ouranius felt it as disagreeable to him as a prison, and every day seemed too tedious to be endured in so retired a place. He thought his parish was too full of poor and mean people that were none of them fit for the conversation of a gentleman. This put him upon a close application to his studies. He consequently kept much at home, writ notes upon Homer and Plautus, and sometimes thought it hard to be called to pray by any poor body's bedside when he was just in the midst of one of Homer's battles." "Mr. Kinchin," says George Whitefield, "was minister of Dummer in Hampshire, and being likely to be chosen Dean of Corpus Christi College, he desired me to take his place and officiate for him till that affair should be decided. By the advice of friends I went, and he came to supply my place in Oxford. His parish consisting chiefly of poor and illiterate people, my proud heart at first could not well brook it. I would have given all the world to be back in my beloved Oxford. But upon giving up myself to prayer, and reading Mr. Law's excellent Character of Ouranius, my mind became reconciled to such conversation as the place afforded me. I prosecuted Mr. Kinchin's plan, and generally divided the day into three parts; eight hours for study and meditation, eight hours for sleep and meals, and eight

hours for reading prayers, catechising and visiting the parish. The profit I reaped by these exercises was unspeakable. I soon began to be as much delighted with their artless conversation as I had previously been with my Oxford friends, and I frequently learned as much by an afternoon's visit as in a week's study. I remained at Dummer till a letter came from Mr. John Wesley in which were these words: 'Do you ask what you shall have in Georgia? Food to eat, and raiment to put on, and a house to lay your head in, such as your Lord had not. And a crown of glory that fadeth not away.' Upon reading this, my heart leaped within me, and as it were echoed to the call."

As I was saying, a minister who would dig up the hidden treasure out of his pulpit and pastoral fields must sell all his time and all his tastes; all his thoughts by day and all his dreams by night. He must spend and be spent. He must be the servant of all men. He must become all things to all men. He must not strive. He must have no mind of his own, but the mind of Christ only. Both his books, and his table, and his bed, must all go to the hammer. But then, by that time, he will begin to have a people about him of whom he will be able to say—"What is my hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" And then that all-surrendered minister will be summoned forward at the coming of his Lord, not any more to shame and everlasting contempt, but his Lord

will say to him on that day when He makes up His jewels—'That jewel is yours,' his Lord will say: 'for that soul and that would have been lost to Me, but for your self-denying ministry.' And then, on that day, the poorest parish in all Scotland, and the meanest mission-field in all the world, will be seen to yield up treasures that will dazzle the eyes of men and angels to see them. Then they that be wise in time shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

And on the other hand, such a minister's ministry is the all-enriching field of his understanding and discerning people. A scholarly, studious, able, evangelical, experimental, preacher every Sabbath day; and then all the week an assiduous, unwearied, ever-mindful, all-loving, pastor,—what a field, and full of what treasure to his people, is such a minister and such a ministry! What treasures of grace and truth lie hid there for the proper people. Ay, and lie hid, sometimes, even from his very best people. For how can any one know, or even guess at, what God has done so as to enrich them and their children in His fitting up and furnishing of their minister's whole life and experience? Ten thousand personal and ministerial providences and experiences have all befallen him for their sake. As also his ever sleepless labours for their understanding and edification. The half of which could not be told, and would neither be believed nor understood, even if it were to be told. Only, sometimes you will hear of one man in a thousand;

sometimes you will meet with one rare and remarkable man who has sold not a little, in order to become possessed of that minister and his ministry. The multitude in every congregation stumble about lucklessly and unprofitably even among the richest of fields. But, here and there, and now and then, another manner of man will sometimes be met with. One happy man in a thousand runs his ploughshare down into the treasure-trove of that pulpit, and then takes action accordingly. An old office-bearer of this very congregation told me long ago, how he had lately summoned a conference of his whole household in order to make a great family choice and decision. He put it to his wife, and to his sons, and to his daughters, whether he would build a house for them away out of Edinburgh, with a park and a garden and stables, and all that. Or whether he would buy a house in a west-end Crescent so as to be still near this church, and so as to let him remain in the session, and so as to let his family continue to sit under Dr. Candlish's ministry. And the eyes of that happy ploughman of Capernaum did not glisten with tears of greater joy than did that old elder's eyes when he told me that he had determined on a house within reach of the pulpit to which he owed his own soul, and his children's souls. And his wife had been in Dr. Candlish's ladies' class. Things like that do not happen every day. But that is, largely, because there are not pulpits every day like Dr. Candlish's pulpit of those days.

And, then, all the more because you are not

ministers, you have the gold-filled field of your Bible always before you. If you had been ministers you would have had a constant temptation in connection with your Bible that, as it is, you have clean escaped. If you had been preachers you would have been tempted to read your Bible almost solely with an eye to good texts. And, better not read your Bible at all, than just to make sermons out of it. What a promise! you say as you read alone, and you read no more that night. What a consolation! you say. What a psalm! and you say and sing it all that week after, and at all times and in all places. What a name for you is the Name of your God! you say. And, like Moses on the Mount, you make haste and bow your head and worship, and say,—Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance. Moses did not say—What a text for next Sabbath! And you have no temptation to say that either. There is nothing of that kind to come in between you and your immediate application of the rich grace of God's word to the needs of your own soul. Yes. What a field of fields to the right reader is the word of God! What a grace-laden field is the Psalms. And again, the Gospels. And again, the Epistles. What solid gold lies hidden in all these several spots of this rich field. Happy ploughmen! O, my brethren, search deep in the Scriptures. For they are they which testify to you both of yourselves and of your Saviour.

And then the field of prayer. O, the milk and honey of which every rig and furrow of that field

is full! He maketh me to lie down in the green pastures of it. He leadeth me beside the still waters of it. And then, the treasure hid in it. And then, the enterprise of prayer, the exploration of it, the ventures in it, the sure successes of it. Surely this is the field in which there is a vein for the silver, and a place for the fine gold. Iron is here taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone. The very stones of it are the place of sapphires, and it hath its dust of gold. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price of it. This is a field that cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it cannot be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of pearls; for the price of prayer is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it. Neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

VII

THE MERCHANT MAN WHO SOLD ALL THAT HE HAD AND BOUGHT THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

THIS is one of those travelling jewellers of the East who compass sea and land in their search for goodly pearls. He is never at home. He is always on the look-out for more and more precious pearls. Till one day his long search is signally rewarded. He is engaged in exploring a certain market of precious stones, when suddenly his eye falls on a pearl the like of which he had never supposed to exist. Its great size, its perfect form, its exquisite beauty, its dazzling light—he had never expected to see such a gem. Ascertaining from its owner the great price of the pearl, the merchant man forthwith sells all that he possesses, and buys up on the spot that pearl of great price. We get a well-known word from the honourable name that is here given to this enterprising merchant man. Our Lord calls him an *emporium* man. And so he is. For he has spent his whole life in the search for the

very best pearls, till his emporium is famous for the size, and the beauty, and the value, of its pearls. And his famous emporium is now more famous than ever because of this splendid purchase he has made on his last enterprising journey.

Now, the world of books, to begin with, is not unlike a merchant man seeking goodly pearls. For every really good book that a really good judge of books discovers becomes a pearl of great price to him. Till as his reading life goes on, he as good as sells all his former books for the sake of this and that pearl of books which he has discovered in the course of his reading. A new beginner in books reads everything he comes across. All printed matter interests him, and a poor and passing book will for a time satisfy him, and even entrance him. But as time goes on, and as the real use of a good book, and the real rarity of a good book, become revealed to him, the true reader will be found giving up all his reading time, and all his reading outlay, to the really great and life-long books of the world, and to them alone. As, for instance, Dr. Chalmers.

During my Christmas holiday I have been renewing my acquaintance with that true pearl of a book, Dr. Hanna's *Memoirs of Dr. Chalmers*. And among a multitude of lessons I learned and laid up for myself and for my classes out of that treasure-house, Dr. Chalmers's ever-growing appreciation of the very best books was one of the best lessons I again learned. "Butler made me a Christian," said Chalmers, somewhat hyperbolically, to one of his

early friends. "Pascal's," he wrote to another friend, "is more than all Greek and Roman fame." Before his eyes were opened, and before his taste was refined to distinguish pearl from paste, Chalmers actually denounced John Newton, and Richard Baxter, and Philip Doddridge, from the pulpit, and as good as forbade his people to read them. But the day was fast coming when this great merchant man of ours was to sell all that he had in order to buy the very pearls he had so scouted in the days of his disgraceful and guilty ignorance. For as I read on I came on such entries in his private journal as these: "Began Richard Baxter, which I mean to make my devotional reading in the evenings." "Sept. 13.—I have begun Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, and intend it for circulation." And writing the same year to a younger brother of his, he says, "I look upon Baxter and Doddridge as two most impressive writers, and from whom you are likely to carry away the impression that a preparation for eternity should be the main business and anxiety of time." "Nov. 11.—Finished this day the perusal of Foster's *Essays*, which I have read with great relish and excitement. His profoundly evangelical views are most congenial to me. O my God, give me of the fulness of Christ! May I never lose sight of Christ, that through Him I may pass from death unto life." "March 14.—I am much impressed with the reality and business-like style of Doddridge's intercourse with God. O Heavenly Father, convert my religion from a name to a principle!" You may remember that there is

an old evangelical classic entitled *The Marrow.* Sell a whole shelf of your juvenile books and buy it, and you will be wise merchant men, if Dr. Chalmers is a good judge.—"Sunday, August 23.—I am reading *The Marrow*, and derive from it much light and satisfaction. It is a masterly performance. August the 24th.—Finished *The Marrow.* I feel a growing delight in the fulness and sufficiency of Christ. O my God, bring me nearer and nearer to Thy Son!" And of another masterpiece of another master mind, he writes—"Read Edwards on the *Religious Affections.* He is to me the most exciting and interesting of all theological writers." "Who taught you to preach in that way?" asked David Maclagan one day long ago at Dr. Rainy in the vestry behind me here. "John Owen," was all the answer. Now, writing to Dr. Wardlaw, Dr. Chalmers says, "I am reading Owen just now on *The Person of Christ.* May the Spirit more and more take of the things of Christ and show them to me." And again, "Have finished Owen on *Spiritual-Mindedness.* O my God, give me the life and the power of those who have made this high attainment!" And again, "Have you read Owen on the Hundred and Thirtieth Psalm? This is my last great book, and I would strongly recommend it as eminently conducive to a way of peace and holiness." And of the very Doddridge against whom he had at one time warned his parishioners, he now writes—"I have been reading more of Doddridge, and do indeed find myself to be a very alienated and undone

creature. But let me cleave to Christ so as to receive all my completeness from Him." And of another goodly pearl, whose title at least you all know, he writes, "I am on the eve of finishing Guthrie, which, I think, is the best book I ever read." And at a later date—"I still think it the best human composition I ever read relating to a subject about which it is my earnest prayer that we may all be found on the right side of the question." Romaine also, was such a favourite with Chalmers as he grew in years and in grace that I cannot begin to quote his constant praise of that fine spiritual writer. And to sum up with an extract from his *Journal* that bears on this whole question —"I breathe with delight in the element of godly books, and do fondly hope that their savour, at one time wholly unfelt by me, argues well for my regeneration." And at the very end of his saintly and splendid life—"I am reading Ebenezer Erskine on *The Assurance of Faith*, and I specially like it. Its doctrine is very precious to me." Such are some samples of the kind of books that Dr. Chalmers sold all in order to buy a taste for them, and a life-long enjoyment of them. Let every divinity student read Chalmers's *Memoirs* just before he is ordained, and once again every three or four years all his ordained days.

You may not be much of a merchant man in the world of books, and yet this parable may be found entirely true of you in some other world of your own. "I have no books," said Jacob Behmen, "but I have myself." And Apollo did not say, Know

many books. What he kept saying continually was this, "Know thyself." Now, you may be this kind of a merchant man that not some book, but some doctrine, of the kingdom of heaven may be to you your pearl of great price. The true and full doctrine of New Testament faith, for instance. What New Testament, and evangelical, and justifying, and sanctifying, faith really is. What its true object really is, and what its true acts and operations really are. The true nature of Gospel faith has been a perfect pearl of great price to some great men when at last they found it. It was so to John Wesley. "Preach faith till you find it," said Peter Bohler, Wesley's Moravian master, to him; "and then preach it because you have found it." And all the world knows how John Wesley sold, so to speak, every other doctrine in order to hold and to preach immediate and soul-saving faith, and with what immediate and soul-saving results. Another will find his pearl of great price in the spiritual doctrine of holy love, as was the case with John Wesley's English master, William Law. As Law did also in a whole world of doctrines, and habits, and practices, connected with secret prayer. And as George Whitefield, John Wesley's predecessor in field-preaching, discovered such unsearchable riches to him in the Pauline doctrines of election, and assurance, and perseverance to the end. And as so many men of the Owen, and Goodwin, and Edwards type have discovered in the deep, spiritual doctrines connected with the entrance into their hearts of the holy law of God, and connected with

the consequent sinfulness of sin, and then connected with the work of the Holy Ghost continually carried on within their hearts. And so on. Till every genuine merchant man has his own special pearls of divine truth; not to the denying or the despising of other men's purchases; but because his own pearls of great price have so attracted him, and have so enriched him.

But after all that has been said about pearls of great price and their purchase, every merchant man's own soul is his most precious pearl. And our Lord counsels us all to sell all our other pearls, good and bad, great and small, and buy up our own soul unto everlasting life. "What is a man profited," our Lord demands of every man among us, "if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Our Lord was the last to undervalue the world which He had made, and of which He is the Heir, and yet He says that if any man should have this whole world in one hand, and his immortal soul in the other hand, he will be a fool of the first water if he holds to the whole world and lets go his immortal soul. Yes. The pearl of all pearls to you and to me is our own immortal soul. And we do not have to compass sea and land in search of this pearl of great price. We have it in our hand already, and all we have to do in order to be the richest of merchant men, is to keep a good hold of it. Unless, indeed, we have already lost hold of it. As we have. Alas, as we all have. Oh, what a fatal market is that which goes on all

around every man who has a soul to sell to his everlasting loss, or to keep to his everlasting enriching. Oh, what a mad market that is in which men's souls, worth more than the whole world, are sold away every day for nought, and for far less than nought. And thus it was that our Lord was not content with warning us as to the value of our souls; but He entered the soul-market Himself, and bought back our souls at a price that has for ever put His immense estimate upon them. He who alone knows the exchangeless value of our immortal souls, He came and redeemed our souls at a price which was worth far more than the whole world, and all our souls to the bargain. For He redeemed our souls at the price of His own precious blood.

But then all that only ends, as every parable of His has ended, in making our Blessed Lord Himself THE PEARL of all pearls to us. All these partial, and, as it were, preliminary, pearls take their value to us entirely from Him. They all run up their values into Him. All good books are really good books to us, just in the measure that they speak to us about Jesus Christ. If they speak not to us about Him—take them away. Light the fire with them. They are not worth their house-room. All our doctrines also of whatever kind; doctrines of science, of politics, of letters, of art, of theology, of morals—all are sound and safe for a man to go by himself, and to teach his children to go by, only in the measure that Jesus Christ is in them. It was really, and all the time,

the Preacher Himself who was the goodly Pearl of that sermon and that day. "To whom can we go," said Peter when he was under the illumination of the Father,—"but unto Thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life." All of you, then, who are seeking for goodly pearls, whether in the world of books, or of doctrines, or of any other kind of good things; here, under your very eye; here, to your very hand, is the greatest and the best Pearl in all the world. For Jesus Christ gathers up into Himself all the truth, and all the beauty, and all the satisfaction, that your heart has for so long been seeking in vain. He is the Father's Pearl of great price. He is the one perfect Chrysolite of heaven on sale on earth. Who, then, on the spot will sell all that he has, and will be for ever after the wisest of merchant men? Nay, who will take away with him to-night God's greatest Pearl as God's free gift, without money and without price? For the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

VIII

THE MAN WHO WENT OUT TO BORROW THREE LOAVES AT MIDNIGHT

FOR thirty years and more our Lord had been laying up materials for His future sermons. And He had started to collect His materials with something like this as one of His guiding principles:—

> What surmounts the reach
> Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
> By likening spiritual to corporal forms,
> As may express them best; though what if Earth
> Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
> Each to other like, more than on Earth is thought?

Our Lord knowing that to be the case, and taking that for one of His guiding principles in His preaching, it came about that what we call His parables, were, in reality, not so much parables of His at all, as they were His observations of human life, and His experiences of human life, with His divine intuitions of grace and truth irradiating and illuminating them all. In our artificial and superficial way we think of our Lord as making up

His parables as He went on with His sermons, and throwing them in just as they occurred to Him at the moment. But that was not His way of preaching at all. His way of preaching, and of preparing for His preaching, was a far better way than that. For, not seldom His parables were His own personal experiences, and His own immediate observations, collected and laid up in His mind and in His memory and in His heart, and to be afterwards worked up into His sermons. As we find them worked up with all the freshness and impressiveness and authority that personal experience always gives to preaching, whether that preaching is our Lord's own incomparable preaching, or such poor preaching as our own.

Our Lord, says the evangelist, was praying in a certain place. Our Lord was always praying, and in every place, and the evangelist knew that quite well. But he is a practised and a skilful writer, and what he here writes is written, every word of it, with an intended purpose. The evangelist here gives his readers this report of that day just as he had received it from an eye and ear witness of the occurrences of that day, and he introduces this most important narrative with a certain studied circumstantiality of style. There had been something quite out of the ordinary in our Lord's private devotions that day. He had been much longer absent from His disciples that day than was His wont. And, besides, when He joined them again there was something about Him that specially arrested the attention of one of His

disciples. Whoever he was, that disciple went up to his Master and said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as Thou Thyself so often prayest. And thus it was that that happy disciple, whoever he was, got on the spot, "Our Father, which art in heaven," as his Master's answer to his request. A great reward to him and to us for his holy boldness, and for his timeous petition that day. And not the Lord's Prayer only; but that richly-favoured disciple got for himself and for his fellow-disciples and for us also, what we call the parable of the friend at midnight. Our Lord not only taught His disciples that prayer of prayers that day but—to enforce the lesson, He told them a story out of His rich treasure-house of such stories; a story that has all the freshness, and all the lifelikeness, and all the pointedness, of a personal experience. "Which of you," He said, turning to the twelve, "shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and shall say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves. For a friend of mine on his journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?" Now there is only too good ground for believing that the carpenter's house was one of the poorest houses in all Nazareth and Capernaum. Sickness, death, suretyship, losses in business, and trouble upon trouble of every kind, had overtaken Joseph's household, till, with all their industry, and all their frugality, his household would seem to have been poor beyond any of their kindred or any of their acquaintances. So much so, that nothing is more likely than that Joseph had oftener than once

undergone the very indignity that is here so feelingly described. And not Joseph only, but He who here tells this touching story was found under Joseph's roof as one of his sons, and all His days on earth He was one of the poorest of men. No. Depend upon it, He did not make up the parable of the importunate poor man at midnight. He did not need to make it up. He was Himself in all points made like that poor and importunate man. Poor and importunate, not for Himself, but for men poorer than Himself who had thrown themselves upon Him. Our Lord was an experimental preacher. Just as He was and is an experimental priest.

It is a most pathetic, but at the same time a most amusing, story. It has been said sometimes that our Lord never laughed. Perhaps not. But we both laugh and weep at once over this scene as He here sets it before us. The well-supped churl is folded up in his warm bed and is just falling asleep, when a knock comes to his door so loud that it wakens the very dogs in the street. And then his angry denial is only answered with louder and louder knocking. Till we see that the well-fed and warmly laid down householder is completely at the mercy of that dreadful neighbour of his at the door. His very love for his bed lays him open to every knock that resounds through his well-supped and well-bedded house. I tell you I cannot rise! he shouts. Ay, but he will have to rise if the man at the door only holds on. Let him only hold on knocking loud enough and long enough, and as sure

as that householder loves his warm bed, so sure will the traveller in the other house get his supper. And not three loaves only. But once he is out of bed the sleepy man thrusts more loaves on the knocking man than he wants. His love for his bed makes him afraid that this noisy neighbour of his may come back again before the night is over. How many travellers did you say had come to you? And how many loaves will they need? Three? Take four. Take six. Oh, no, says the petitioner, three will do. Take four, at any rate, says the half-naked and generous-hearted householder. Take as many as you can carry, lest you should have to come back again. And he loads the man at the door with an armful of his best bread. Good-night! And he shuts his door and returns to his bed, glad at any cost to get rid of such an untimeous and unceremonious neighbour.

"Importunity" cannot be called a bad rendering exactly. Only it is not by any means the best rendering of the original writing. Nor does it by any means bring out to us the whole intended instructiveness of the scene. We must not water down our Lord's words, even when they are too strong for our feeble digestion. What our Lord actually said was not importunity but "shamelessness." "I say unto you because of his shamelessness he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." Think shame, man! the passers-by exclaimed as they heard him making that so disgraceful noise in the midnight street. The neighbours also looked out of their windows and shouted "Think shame!"

at him. And they were right. For it was nothing short of a shameless knocking that the determined man made. Indeed, it was the very shamelessness, that is to say, the lateness and the loudness, of the knocking, that was the success of it. To be shameless in that way and to that degree was the man's wisdom, and hence his utter shamelessness is our Lord's very point with His disciples and with us. Never mind who cries shame, says our Lord to us. Keep you on knocking, shame or no shame. Think shame, woman! the devil said to Santa Teresa. A woman at your time of life having to make such a confession. And presumptuously hoping for pardon for such shameless sins. Think shame! Or if you will still presume to pray for forgiveness, at any rate, wait a little. Do not go to God and you still reeking with such uncleanness. Wash in the holy water first. Perform a time of penance first. "The devil never so nearly had my soul for ever, as just after another fall of mine, and when he cried, For shame, O woman, for shame." These are her very identical words to us in this matter: "Never let any one leave off prayer on any pretence whatsoever; great sins committed, or any pretence whatsoever. I tell you again that the leaving off of prayer after sin was the most devilish temptation I was ever met with."

Importunity, then, and shameless importunity, and that in midnight prayer, is the great lesson of this scripture. Indeed, the whole point of the story here told by our Lord turns upon the untimeousness of the hour when the knocking took

place. The thing could never have taken place in the daytime. It is a story of midnight importunity, and it is told to teach us the great lesson of midnight and importunate prayer. Travelling, with all its accompanying incidents such as this, takes place mostly at night in the East, and importunate prayer in the West. And this lesson that our Lord gives us is quite as much to teach us to pray at night as it is to pray with importunity, and for excellent reasons. The Psalms, when we begin to attend to what we read and sing, are full of night, and midnight, and early morning, prayer. I was greatly struck, no longer ago than last night, with what I had never felt with such force before. I was reading the fifth and sixth verses of the sixty-third Psalm at family worship. I find that reading a single verse sometimes will impress our hearts at home more than a whole Psalm. Well, I was reading to them those two verses, and it occurred to me to turn them round and read the sixth verse first and then the fifth, in this way: "When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches; my soul, as often as I do that, is always satisfied again as with marrow and fatness." As much as to say—'When my soul thirsteth for Thee; when my flesh longeth for Thee; when my soul is like the man in the parable who had a hungry traveller in his house, and had nothing to set before him; then I remember the Lord. I remember His name and all that His name contains. I remember His merciful and gracious name, and I call like that

loud-calling man upon His merciful and gracious name. I meditate and remember, and remember and meditate, and that in the night watches, till my soul is again satisfied as with marrow and fatness.' The sixty-third Psalm is just the eleventh of Luke before the time. The eleventh of Luke is all in the Psalms. As soon as we get all the best teaching of the New Testament about prayer, we return and find it all already in the Psalms. We would not have found it in the Psalms but for the New Testament; only, once we have the whole doctrine of New Testament prayer taught to us, we come to our full astonishment at David and his companions in prayer. With David, then, and with David's Son, both teaching us to pray, we ourselves should surely come to some success and proficiency in prayer. With these, and with such a wealth of other experiences and testimonies and examples of praying men as we possess, and of praying men at night, we should surely learn to pray. Take this home with you from Father John of the Greek Church. "When praying at night," he says to his people, "do not forget to confess with all importunity, and sincerity, and contrition, those sins into which you have fallen during the past day. A few moments of importunate repentance, before you sleep, and you will be cleansed from all your iniquity. You will be made whiter than the snow. You will be covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, and again united to Him. Often during the day I myself have been a great sinner, and at night, after importunate prayer, I have gone to rest washed and restored, and with

the deepest joy and the most perfect peace filling my heart. How needful it will be for our Lord to come and save us in the evening of our life, and at the decline of our days! O save me, save me, save me, most gracious Lord, and receive me at the end of my days into Thy heavenly kingdom."

IX

THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW

ITH all his ungodliness and with all his inhumanity, there was a widow in that city who brought the unjust judge to his senses. His boast within himself was that he neither feared God nor regarded man, but there was a widow in that city who made him both fear her and regard her. There were many widows who had adversaries in our Lord's land and day, and He must have known more than one of them. His own mother Mary may very well have been one of them. Who knows but that she herself was this very widow with an adversary? Nothing is more likely. At any rate, whoever this widow was, by this time she was driven all but beside herself with adversity and oppression and robbery. She had spent all her living on daysmen and mediators, but the unjust judge was a companion of thieves and he would not hear her advocates. And, had it not been for her fatherless and fast-starving children, she would soon have been laid out of sight and out of hearing in her dead husband's forgotten grave. It was her

orphaned and starving children that made their mother to be like a she-bear robbed of her whelps. Avenge me of mine adversary! She stood in the way of the unjust judge's chariot all day and cried out, Avenge me of mine adversary! She burst in upon the business of his court and cried, Avenge me of mine adversary! She stood under his window all night and cried out, Avenge me of mine adversary! And he would not for a while. But after that day when this wild woman suddenly sprang in upon him with a knife hidden away among her rags—after that day he said, Because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. There is a tinge of blood in the original ink that is lost in the tame translation, because there was a gleam of blood in the widow's wild eye on that last day of her warning and appeal to the unjust judge. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect which cry day and night to Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.

Now it is not by any means every woman who has the making of a "widow indeed" in her. And it is not by any means every soul under sanctification who cries for victory over sin day and night. There are many—even gracious souls among us—to whose case this Scripture does not by any means answer. But there are some other souls who say unto their Lord as soon as He has spoken this about the widow and her adversary to them: Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no parable. Now we are sure

that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee: for by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God. Such souls are sure that He knows all things about them, at any rate; and by His knowledge of them and of their adversary they believe that He has come forth to them from God. And, like one who has come forth from God and who knows the secret things of God, He here announces to us who are God's elect among us, and who are not. Every elect soul, He says, is like that widow in that city. For every elect soul is poor, and downtrodden, and dispossessed, and desolate. Is, or ought to be. As that widow had an adversary who had done all that to her, even so, every soul, elect to a great salvation, has an adversary who has done all that to it, and far more than all that. I do not know, and I cannot tell you, the name of that widow's adversary in that city. But if you do not know I will tell you the name of the universal adversary of all God's elect in this city. It is sin. This widow had only one adversary, and so it is with the elect. You never hear from their lips a demand for vengeance against any adversary of theirs but one. And all elect souls have one and the same adversary. And this is as good to them all as the seal of their election, this, that their only and real adversary is sin. Now you would all like to be assured, would you not, that you are among God's elect? You would all like to get a glimpse, for a moment, into the book of God's decrees, so as to read your name there. But you do not need to climb up to heaven

in order to make your election sure. Who is your adversary? Who makes your life a burden to you? Who persecutes and oppresses and impoverishes your soul day and night continually? Against whom is it that you, almost demented, cry without ceasing, Avenge you of your adversary? Sin is the spot of God's children. Sin, and the woe it works in the soul, is the seal of God's elect. Have you that spot? Have you that seal? Has your sin dispossessed you, and beggared you, and driven you beside yourself? Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal. Now, are you such? Look well into yourself and see. Among all your adversaries, who is it that drives you day and night to God, like this woman to the judge? Do you think that our Lord counts you up among His Father's elect? I think He does? I am sure He does, if your adversary that you cry to be revenged upon is sin.

Avenge me! the widow cries. Her heart is full of her great wrongs. Her heart is full of a great rage. Her heart is full of fire. And she here puts her hot words into our mouth. She teaches our sin-tortured souls how to pray. She says to us, Remember me. Imitate me. I got vengeance done at last on mine adversary. Take no rest until you have got vengeance done on yours. She being dead, yet speaketh. Let us imitate her. Let us call on God as she called on the judge. Let us dwell day and night before God on our great wrongs. Let us keep ever repeating before Him what we have suffered at our adversary's hands. Tell Him

that it is past telling. Tell Him that you are beside yourself. Tell Him that all He can do to your adversary will not satisfy your fierce feelings. O sin! O sin! How thou hast persecuted my soul down to the ground! How thou hast robbed and desolated my soul! How thou hast made my life a burden to me! How thou hast driven me sometimes beside myself with thy cruel and bitter bondage! How my soul sometimes seeks death to escape from thee! O thou foul and cruel tyrant, I will surely be revenged upon thee yet!

And He spake this parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray. Not once; not twice; not seven times; not a thousand times. But always till we are avenged of our adversary. We are not to pray against a besetting sin for a time, and then to despair and let it have its own way with us. We are to pray always. We are to pray on till we need to pray no longer. No sooner is one such prayer offered than we are to begin another. No sooner have we said, Amen! than we must say with our very next breath, O Thou that hearest prayer; to Thee shall all flesh come. No sooner have we risen off our knees than we must return to our knees. No sooner have we opened the door to come out of our closet than we must shut the door again, and return to our Father who seeth in secret. To whom else can we go? To whom else can we tell it all out, how our iniquities still continue to prevail against us?

Always, or as it is rendered in the seventh verse, day and night. All day and all night; the first

thing in the morning and the last thing at night. The first thing in the morning and then all the day. When you open your eyes, and before that, always say this, When I awake, I am still with Thee. When you rise off your bed always say, Awake, my soul, and with the sun thy daily stage of duty run. When you wash your hands and your face say, Wash Thou me, and I shall be clean. When you bathe your whole body say, There is a fountain filled with blood, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. When you dress yourself say, He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness. And then when you go forth to your day's work say with David when he went forth to his day's work, On Thee do I wait all the day. What is your occupation? Whatever it is say as you again enter on it, The kingdom of heaven is like this, and that, more than on earth is thought. Are you a carpenter? say So was He. Are you a mason? say Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid. Are you a laundress? say His raiment was shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. Are you a cook? When you burn yourself, then say with Brother Lawrence, Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? And say with him also, Even the dogs eat of the crumbs. Are you a preacher? say Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. Are you a physician? say Physician, heal thyself. And say Esculapius

healed many, but at last he succumbed himself. And say at every patient's door with Sir Thomas Browne, Peace be to this house, and health from the God of their salvation. Are you a banker? say to yourself, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. Are you an aurist? say He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? Are you an oculist? say He that formed the eye, shall He not see? Do you own horses, or ride or drive, horses? say Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle. And are you not good at driving? Then say like the English clown: I have driven into the ditch, O Jesus Christ, take Thou the reins! When on the street you see a prisoner in the hands of his jailor, say There goes John Newton, but for the grace of God. No, it was when John Newton saw a scaffold that he said that. And, speaking of John Newton, if you are a shoe-black, say If only for the credit of Christ, I will be the best shoe-black in the parish. When you meet a funeral, take off your hat and say The sands of time are sinking. When you meet a marriage, say Behold, the bridegroom cometh! When the sun sets in the west, say There shall be no night in heaven. When you lay your head down on your pillow say, if only out of respect to your sainted mother, This night I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. When you cannot

sleep, say At midnight will I rise and praise Thee. And when you awake in the morning, say Nevertheless, I am still with Thee. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.

There is a well-known system of medicine that, most paradoxically as one would think, for a cure prescribes a little more of that which caused the sickness. I do not know whether that is sound science, or whether it is what its enemies call it. That is not my field. But this is. And I am safe and certain to say that whether homœopathy is sound medicine or no, it holds in divinity, and especially in this department of divinity, unfainting prayer for sanctification. If you are fainting in prayer for sanctification I recommend and prescribe to you Samuel Hahnemann's dictum *similia similibus curantur*. Only not in small doses. The opposite of that. Small doses in prayer will be your death. The very thing that has caused your whole head to be sick, and your whole heart to be faint,—hitherto unanswered prayer, answered or unanswered, pray you on. The answer is not your business. It is importunate and unfainting prayer that is your only business. And, always, more and more importunate and unfainting prayer. *Similia similibus.* Mix up your medicine with every meal. Make your whole meal upon your medicine. Have it standing ready at your bedside all night. Take it the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning. And if you hear the hours striking all night, betake

yourself to your sure febrifuge and sleeping draught. In plain words, when you faint in prayer for a holy heart continue all the more instant in that prayer. Pray always for a holy heart, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance. The next time you feel your heart ready to faint in that kind of prayer, call to mind Who says this to you, and where He says it. This, that men ought always to pray against this adversary, and not to faint.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find such prayer on the earth? I do not know. I cannot tell. The earth is too large for me to speak for it, and too far away from me. My matter is, shall He find such prayer in me? Shall He find me in my bed, or on my knees? Shall I be reading this parable of His for the ten thousandth time to keep my heart from fainting? Shall, Avenge me of mine adversary, be on my lips at the moment when the judgment-angel puts the last trump to his lips? And shall I be found of him on my knees, and with my finger on this scripture, when the trumpet shall sound, and I shall be changed?

X

THE PRODIGAL SON

CERTAIN man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. The country-bred boy had been told stealthy and seductive stories about the delights of city life. 'A young man with a little money,' he had been told, 'can command anything he likes in the great city. A young man who has never been from home can have no idea of the pleasures that are provided in the city for young men whose fathers have money. The games, the shows, the theatres, the circuses, the feasts, the dances, the freedom of all kinds; there is absolutely nothing that a young man's heart can desire that is not open to him who brings a good purse of money to the city with him.' All these intoxications were poured into this young

man's imagination, and he was but too good a pupil to such instructions.

How long will my father live? he began to ask. How long will that old man continue to stand in my way? It is not reasonable that a young man should be kept so long out of what really belongs to him. It is not fair to treat a grown-up man as if he were still a child. "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." It was a heartless speech. But secret visions of sin will soon harden the tenderest heart in the world. *Cogitatio et imaginatio*, according to À Kempis, are the two first steps of a young man's heart on its way down to the pit. Keep a young man's thoughts and imaginations clean, and he is safe, and will be a good son. But once pollute, by bad books or bad companionships, a young man's mind and imagination, and nothing in this world will hold that young man back from perdition.

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. Let one who lived for a long time in that far country describe it. "A darkened heart is the far country. For it is not by our feet, but by our affections, that we either leave Thee or return to Thee. Nor did that younger son look out for chariots, or ships, or fly with visible wings, that he might go to the far country. Unclean affections, and a God-abandoned heart, that is the far country. This was the world at whose gate I lay in imagination, while yet a boy. And this was the abyss of my vileness when I was

cast away from before Thine eyes. Who was so vile before Thee as I was? I was vile even to myself."

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. "A mighty famine" is perfect English. It is one of those great strokes of translation that sometimes surpass the original. "A mighty famine" puts a perfect picture of that far country before us. Now what chance, in the midst of a mighty famine, had a prodigal son who had already wasted all his substance with riotous living? What hope was there for him? What could a penniless spendthrift do? Till, covered with rags, and with all his bones staring till they could be counted, he threw himself upon a citizen of that country, and said:—'Only give me one crust-of-bread and water, and I will do anything you like to command me. I have a father at home, but that is far away. Oh, for my father's sake, and he will repay you, give me something to eat.' And he sent him into his fields to feed swine. "Did I see a boy of good make and mind, with the tokens on him of a refined nature, cast upon the world without provision, unable to say whence he came, or who were his family connections, I should conclude there was some secret connected with his history, and that he was one of whom, from one cause or another, his parents were ashamed." Such is Dr. Newman's picture of the human race, as it is fallen away from God, and gone into a far country.

"AND WHEN HE CAME TO HIMSELF."—Underline these words. Print these words in capitals. En-

grave these words in letters of gold. For up till now sin has abounded, but henceforth grace is much more to abound. And already the abounding grace that the prodigal son is so soon to be met with, is beginning to drop from His lips Who here tells the prodigal's sad story. Look at the beautiful way in which the terrible truth is softened in the telling. Every word is so tenderly, and almost apologetically, chosen. You do not upbraid a son of yours when he is brought home to you safe and sound from the asylum. Whatever he may have said or done during his illness there, you refuse to listen to it. You say, My poor possessed child! You say, My son at that time was not responsible. And you shut your ears to all the heartless tales they tell about what he said and what he did when he was still beside himself. You rebuke his cruel accusers. You tell them that nobody reckons to a recovered man the things that would be reckoned and punished to an entirely sound-minded man. These grace-chosen words, "When he came to himself," already prepare us for the speedy return and complete restoration of this unhappy son, whose infirmity and affliction, rather than his sin and guilt, are the subject of his history as it is here told to us.

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." And we see him. Our Lord sees him, and He makes us see him. Look at him! Look how he runs! He runs like a man running for his life. He forgets his bleeding feet and his hungry belly. He outstrips everybody on the same road. He runs as he never ran before. But when he

comes to the first sight of his father's house his strength suddenly fails him. He stands still, he sinks down, he beats his breast. He cries out as with an intolerable pain till the passers-by hasten on in fear. The man is possessed, one says to him. How long wilt thou be drunken? says another. But he sees them not. He hears them not. The only thing he sees is his father's house through his tears and his sobs. And all that any of the people in the fields or on the road could make out from him was always this: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight!"

And, then, all this long far-country time, his father's grey hairs were being brought down with sorrow to the grave. His father had never been the same man since that evil day when his son had left his father's door without kissing his father. He had ever since that day gone up and down his house a broken-hearted man. His very reapers had wept for him as they saw him walking up and down alone in his harvest fields. Every night also he sat and looked out of his window till the darkness fell again on all the land. And all through the darkness he listened all night for a footstep that never came. But, at last one day,—That is none other than my long-lost son! And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

And now, among many other things, our Lord, I feel sure, would have us learn from this family history such things as this—The unspeakable evil of a mind early stained with the images of sensual

sin. This young man was at one time as innocent of this sin, and was as loyal to his father and mother, as are any of your sons or mine. But on a fatal day some bad man told him a bad story. Some one whispered to his heart some of the evil secrets of Satan's kingdom. And then, as the *Imitation* has it, there was first the sinful knowledge, and then there arose out of that a sinful imagination, a picture of the sin, and then the young sinner's heart took a secret delight in the knowledge and the vision, and then he sought for an opportunity, and the opportunity soon came. A bad companion will do it. A bad book will do it. A bad picture will do it. The very classics themselves will sometimes do it. It is being done every day in our bothies, and in our workshops, and in our schools, and in our colleges. A bad story will do it. A bad song will do it. A bad jest will do it. Indeed, it is in the very air that all our sons breathe. It is in the very bread they eat. It is in the very water they drink. They cannot be in this world and clean escape it. For myself, one of the saintliest men I ever knew once told me certain evil things, just out of the evil fulness of his heart, when I was not asking for them. Evil things that I would not have known to this day but for that conversation. Supply me with a knife deep enough and sharp enough to cut that corrupt spot out of my memory, and I will, from this moment, cast it out on the dunghill of the devil for ever—as we had, at last, to cut off and cast him. It was some one like my early friend

who polluted that young man's imagination till nothing could keep him back from becoming the prodigal son of whom our Lord here tells us all these things for our warning and for our rebuke.

The very finest point in all this history full of fine points, is this,—"When he was a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him." And there is nothing more true in our own history than just this, and nothing more blessed for us to be told than just this, that our Father also sees us when we are yet a great way off from Him, and has compassion on us. When we are just beginning to remember that we have a Father; when we are just beginning to repent toward Him; when we are just beginning to pray to Him; when we are just beginning to believe on Him, and on His Son Jesus Christ our Saviour; when we are still at the very first beginnings of a penitent, returning, obedient, pure, and godly, life; ay, when we are yet a great way off from all these things, our Father sees us, and has compassion on us, and comes to meet us. I do not know a sweeter or a more consoling scripture anywhere than just this,—"When he was yet a great way off." For, what grace is in that! What encouragement, what hope, what comfort, what life from the dead is in that! Blessed be the lips that told this whole incomparable story, and added to it these words of gold —"a great way off."

And, then, to sum up. This whole story, in every syllable of it, has its exact and complete fulfilment in ourselves every day. A prince of Scripture

exposition holds it to be doubtful whether our Lord intends under this family story to set forth the first conversion of a great sinner, or the repeated restorations of a great backslider. But the truth is, our Lord intends to set forth both; and much more than both. For not one, nor two, nor three, but all the steps and all the stages of sin and salvation in the soul of man, are most impressively and most unmistakably set before us in this masterpiece of our Master. From the temptation and fall of Adam, on to the marriage supper of the Lamb —all the history of the Church of God, and all the experiences of the individual sinner and saint, are to be found set forth in this most wonderful of all our Lord's histories. John Howe warns us that we must not think it strange if all the requisites to our salvation are not to be found together in any single passage of Holy Scripture. But, on the other hand, I will take it upon me to say that all the incidents and all the experiences of this evangelical history are to be found together in every soul of man who is under a full and perfect salvation. In a well-told story like this, all that the prodigal son came through, from first to last, must of necessity be set forth in so many successive steps and stages: the one step and stage following on the other. But that is not at all the case in the actual life of sin and grace in the soul. The soul is such that it is passing through *all* the steps and *all* the stages of sin and salvation at one and the same time. Some of the steps and stages of sin and salvation may be more present and more

pressing at one time than at another time, but they are all somewhere or other within the soul, and are ready to spring up in it. We speak in our shallow way about the Apostle Paul being for ever out of the seventh of the Romans and for ever into the eighth. But Paul never spoke in that superficial fashion about himself. And he could not. For both chapters were fulfilling themselves within their profound author: sometimes at one and the same moment. Sometimes the old man was uppermost in Paul, and sometimes the new man; sometimes the flesh, and sometimes the spirit; sometimes the law and sin and death had Paul under their feet, and sometimes he was more than a conqueror over all the three. But, all the time, all the three were within Paul, and every page he writes, and every sermon he preaches, shows it. And so it is with ourselves, so far as this history, and so far as Paul's history, is our history. For, like the prodigal son, we are always having lewd stories told us about the far country. We are always dreaming of being at liberty to do as we like. We are always receiving our portion of goods, and we are always wasting our substance. We are always trying in vain to fill our belly with the husks that the swine do eat. And we are always arising and returning to our Father's house. In endless ways, impossible to be told, but by all God's true children every day to be experienced, every step and every stage of the prodigal's experience, both before he came to himself, and after it, is all to be found in the manifold,

boundless, all-embracing, experience of every truly gracious heart. In His unsearchable wisdom, God has set both the whole world of sin, and the whole world of salvation, in every truly renewed heart. And that, not in successive and surmounting steps and stages, but at one and the same time. And that accumulating, complex, and exquisitely painful, state of things, will go on in every truly regenerate heart, till that day dawns when the greatest prodigal of us all, and the saddest saint of us all, shall begin to be merry.

XI

THE MUCH FORGIVEN DEBTOR AND HIS MUCH LOVE

WE will sometimes ourselves be like Simon the Pharisee. We will sometimes invite a man to come to take a meal with us when we do not really mean it. We were in a warm mood of mind at the moment when we asked him to dine or sup with us. We met him in circumstances such that we were led into giving him the invitation when we did not really intend it. So much so that when the man comes we had quite forgotten to expect him, and we can scarcely hide our vexation at the sight of him. Now it was something not unlike that with Simon the Pharisee that night.

We must put out of our mind all our modern ideas and all our sound doctrines about our Lord. It is not easy for us to do that, but we will never read a single page of the four Gospels aright, unless we go back in imagination to the exact circumstances of that extraordinary time. We must accustom ourselves to return to those early days when our Lord

was still half a carpenter of Nazareth, and half a preacher at the street corner. Some men holding Him to be a prophet come from God, and some holding that He was just Joseph's son gone beside Himself. It was in these circumstances that our Lord was sometimes invited to dine or to sup, His hosts sometimes forgetting that they had invited Him, and sometimes heartily wishing that He would not come, and, when He did come, positively not knowing what to do with Him. Such exactly was Simon's case. He had undoubtedly invited this so-called prophet to sup at his house that night. But when He came at the hour appointed, Simon was wholly occupied with looking after much more important people. When we arrive at any man's door on his distinct invitation and see that we are not expected; when nobody knows us or pays any attention to us; when the head of the house sees us quite well, but has not so much as a moment or a nod or a smile to spare to us,—it is all we can do not to put on our hat and go away home again. And if we do go in and sit down at his table, we are in a most sour and unsocial state of mind all the evening. But Simon's neglected Guest was quite accustomed to that kind of treatment. Every day He put up with incivility, and said nothing. No insult ever angered Him. No openly exhibited or plainly intended slight ever embittered Him. And thus it was that He went in and sat down at Simon's supper-table that night, with a quiet mind and an affable manner, and was the best of neighbours to all who sat near Him.

But who and what is this? For, behold a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she saw that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now, when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner. 'I have made a great mistake,' said Simon within himself. 'I am always far too precipitate with my invitations. I might have known better. What a scene! I will never hear the end of it. I will never forgive myself for it. I should never have had him across my doorstep. I was warned against him and against his followers, and I see now that they who so warned me were right. Whatever he is, he is not a prophet. If he were a prophet he would at once have put a stop to this scandalous scene.'

Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered, and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest

me no water for My feet: but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

From that scene, then, at Simon's supper-table, we are to learn this to-night. The less forgiveness, the less love: the more forgiveness, the more love: no forgiveness at all, no love at all: but, nothing but forgiveness, then nothing but love. And then love is always love. Love, in short, is always like that woman. If you would see love at its very best, just look at that woman. Simon, being neither a publican nor a sinner, had needed so little forgiveness that he had not love enough to provide his Saviour with a bason and water wherewith to wash His feet. Simon had neither love enough, nor anything else enough, to teach him good manners. I am afraid for Simon. For, even a very little forgiveness, even fifty pence forgiven, even five pence, even five farthings, would surely have taught Simon at least ordinary civility. When I see any man among you hard and cruel to another man, discourteous and uncivil, not to say intentionally and studiously insolent, I say to myself, either that man has not yet been forgiven

at all, or he has been forgiven so little that he does not feel it any more than a stone. The truth is, grant forgiveness enough and you will soon convert the greatest churl among you to be the most perfect gentleman among you. Nothing else will do it, but forgiveness enough will do it. Grant forgiveness enough, and love enough, and you will have all considerateness, all civility, all generosity, all gratitude, springing up in that man's heart. Would you have a true gentleman for a friend, or for a lover, or for a husband, or for a son? Then manage, somehow, to have him brought to Simon's Guest for a great forgiveness, and the thing is done.

This, then, was the whole of Simon's case. He called our Lord Master, in as many words. He had our Lord at his table that night; but, all the time, he loved our Lord very little, if any at all. In other words, Simon had been forgiven by our Lord very little, if any at all. Simon did not need much forgiveness, if any at all, and in that measure Simon's case was hopeless. Simon, in short, was a Pharisee, and that explains everything concerning Simon. I know nothing more about Simon than I read in this chapter. I know nothing of his past life. I suppose it was, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But, blameless or no, I am sure of this about Simon, that the holy law of God had never once entered Simon's heart. All Simon's shameful treatment of our Lord, and all his deep disgust at that woman, and all his speeches to himself within himself, all arose from

the fact that the holy law of God against all kinds of sin and sinners, and especially against himself, had not yet begun to enter Simon's hard heart. My brethren, to make the holy law of God even to begin to enter your hard heart would be the greatest service to you that any man could do to you. Only, no man can do you that service. No mere man, as the Catechism says, but that Man only who sat that night at Simon's supper-table and said to him,—"Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." Your minister may preach to you till he is old and grey-headed, but he will be to you as one that plays on an instrument; you will not take him seriously. You will pay no attention to him, till after the law enters. And just to the depth and to the poignancy with which the law of God enters your sinful heart, just in that measure will you possess in your broken heart a great or a small forgiveness, and will manifest before God and man a great or a small gratitude. Let no true preacher then be brow-beaten by all the Pharisees in the world from labouring to make the law enter the innermost hearts of his people: both the law legal, and the law evangelical.

Then they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? He and they had up till now been talking in the most friendly way together as they ate and drank. They had been talking over the latest news from Rome and Jerusalem: over the gossip of the town: over the sudden deaths of last

week, and over the foul and fair weather of last week: when, suddenly, their talk was cut short by the unaccountable conduct of that woman. Some of them who sat at meat with Him had for months past been much exercised in their minds about Him. At one time they had thought one thing about Him, and at another time they had thought another thing about Him. Some could scarcely eat their supper for watching Him, how He ate, and how He drank, and how He talked, and all what He said and did. Till, when He spoke out, and told the story of the creditor and his two debtors, and then wound up the story with such a home-thrust at Simon, they wished themselves seated at another table. They wished that they were well home again. And then when His voice rose to a tenderness and a solemnity they had never heard in any man's voice and manner before, it was no wonder that they said within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

Now, listen to this, my brethren. Listen, and receive this. That same Man who forgiveth sins is here also. Here, at this moment, in this house. And He is here on the same errand. He is here seeking and saving sinners. Come to His feet then as that sinful woman came. Come if you are as unspeakably vile as she was, and with the same unspeakable vileness. Come if she is your sister in sin. Up till to-night a Pharisee like Simon; or up till to-night a harlot like this woman; equally come. And come all the more quickly. This woman was on her way to throw herself into the pond when she heard our Lord preaching one of His

sermons of salvation: and before He had done with His sermon she was at His feet. Come even if you are intending to take your own life to-night. A woman once had the arsenic bought on a Saturday night, when she said to herself that she would go once more to the church before she took it. The text that morning was this: What profit is there in my blood? She told me her whole story long afterwards. Come if you have the arsenic in your pocket. Come and cast it at His feet.

And then He will have in you the wages for which He worked; for how you, for one, will love Him! Jesus Christ is not easily satisfied with love; but He will be satisfied, and to spare, with your love. And every day on earth will add coals of fire to your love to your Redeemer. And no wonder. For He will have to say to you ten thousand times this same thing: Thy sins, which are still many, are all forgiven thee. Again, and again, and again, He will have to say it, for, having begun to say it to you, He will say it to you to the end. Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace, He will say.

Samuel Rutherford was wont to set this riddle of love to the old saints in Anwoth: Whether they would love their Saviour more for their justification or for their sanctification? And some said one thing and some said another thing. And some wary old ones said both things. Oh yes! What a love, passing all earthly love, will He be loved with to all eternity! By some men and some women, that is. All His redeemed

will love Him, but some will love Him more than these. To have been frankly forgiven such a fearful debt, and then, as if that were not enough, to have been washed whiter than the snow, and from such unspeakable pollution. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love Him most? I suppose that they to whom He forgave most. Yes; but what about those to whom He did both? Both frankly forgave them their fearful debt; and also, though their sins were as scarlet: though they were

> From scalp to sole one slough and crust of sin,

made them as white as snow; and though they were red like crimson, made them to be as wool. Let Rutherford take that woman for his answer. For no better answer will ever be given to his riddle of love in this world. Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.

> When I stand before the throne
> Dressed in beauty not my own
> When I see Thee as Thou art,
> Love Thee with unsinning heart,
> Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
> Not till then how much I owe.

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe.

XII

THE TEN VIRGINS

EVERYTHING that our Lord saw on the earth immediately made Him think of the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord was of that angel's mind who said to Adam,—'What if earth be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein each to other like, more than on earth is thought.' And thus it was that when our Lord and His disciples were called to that marriage where the original of this parable took place, as soon as He saw the five wise virgins admitted to the marriage, and the five foolish virgins shut out, He turned to the twelve and said,—The kingdom of heaven is just like that. It would have been well, and we would have been deep in their debt, had some of the twelve said to their Master at that moment: Declare to us the parable of the ten virgins also. It would have been a great assistance to us if, over and above the parable itself, we had possessed our Lord's own exposition of it. For, who and what are the ten virgins, and why are they so called? Why are they exactly ten, and why are they so equally divided into five and five? What are their

lamps also, and what are their vessels with their lamps, and what is the oil that the wise had, and that the foolish had not? What does the tarrying of the bridegroom mean, and what the slumbering and sleeping of the whole ten? And then who are they that make the midnight cry, Behold the bridegroom cometh? And then the hurried trimming of the lamps, with the going out of the lamps of the foolish,—what is the meaning of all that? The request of the foolish for a share of the oil of the wise, with the refusal of the wise to part with any of their oil,—what are the spiritual meanings hidden under all that? And specially, who sell the oil, and where do they sell it, and at what price? And then the shutting of the door? And then what it is to be ready? as well as what it is to watch, and when we are to watch, and where? It would have been an immense service done to us all had the disciples petitioned their Master for His own authoritative answer to all these questions. As it is, we are left to our own insight into the things of the kingdom of heaven, and to our own experience of its mysteries, to find out for ourselves and for others the true key to this parable.

The wisdom, whatever it was, of the five wise virgins is, plainly, the main lesson set to be learned out of this whole parable. All the rest of its lessons, however good and however true, are subordinate to that. All the rest is, more or less, the framework and the setting of that. Other lessons, more or less essential, more or less interesting, and more or less instructive, may be extracted out of this

remarkable parable, but its supreme and commanding lesson is the richly rewarded wisdom of the five wise virgins. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

Now if you would fain know what, exactly, this oil is of which so much is made in this parable, this oil the possession of which made the five virgins so wise, just look into your own heart for the answer to that. What is it that makes your heart to be so dark, and so sad, and so unready, sometimes? Why is there so little life and light and joy in your heart? Why is your religious experience so flat and so stale, when it should be as full of gladness as if your whole life were one continual making ready for your marriage? What is really the matter with you and with your heart? In plain English, and in few words, it is the absence from your heart of the Spirit of God. It is God's Holy Spirit Who makes God Himself to be so full of Life and Light and Blessedness. It is God's Holy Spirit Who makes our Lord Himself what He always is, and what He always says and does. The fruit of the Holy Spirit in God and in man, on earth and in heaven, is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness. Now, that is the whole of the matter with us all. It is the lack of the Spirit of God that makes all of us to be the lump of darkness and death that we are. If we had God's Holy Spirit shed abroad in our heart we would make every house in which we live, and every company into which we enter, like a continual marriage supper. Our very face would shine with

heavenly light, and we would shed abroad life and love and beauty everywhere we go. No question, then, what this oil is, nor why we are such children of the day when we have it, and are such children of the night when we have it not. Fix this firmly in your mind, that the Holy Ghost is this light-giving and life-giving oil, and you will have in that, not only the true key to this whole parable, but at the same time the true key to all your own light and darkness also.

"Not so: lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." You go to the oil-sellers when your oil is done, and when the long and dark nights are coming on. And, in the very same way, you must go to God for the Holy Spirit. God the Father is the real seller of this Holy Oil. The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father. The Son Himself had the Holy Ghost, not of Himself, but of the Father. When the night fell the wise virgins had the oil already in their vessels. They had been at the oil-sellers in good time, and before the darkness fell. Go you in good time also. Be beforehand with the darkness. Have the Holy Ghost already in your heart, and then you will not walk in darkness, nor be shut out into the darkness, however suddenly the Bridegroom may come.

And then this is the remarkable law of this oil-market. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." That is to say, as soon as in prayer you ask the Father for the Holy Spirit, immediately believe

that your prayer is answered. Immediately begin to live in the Spirit. Immediately begin to walk in the light. Do not put off walking in the light till you feel your heart full of light and love and joy and peace and all such holy illumination. But begin at once to live in the Spirit, and He will begin to live in you. As soon as you begin to ask for the Spirit of love and joy and peace to be shed abroad in your heart, begin yourself to shed that Spirit abroad in all your life. Let all your words and deeds, let all your moods of mind, and all your affections of heart, be full of love and joy and peace, and He will not fail to work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. This is a most wonderful oil, and a most wonderful oil-market, and a most wonderful oil-merchant! Go all of you to Him who sells, and buy for yourselves, and you will soon be wiser in this divine marketry than all your teachers. Were I to enter on all the times, and all the places, when and where, this holy oil is bought and sold, I would have to say of it that there is no time and no place when and where you may not buy this oil. At the same time there are special seasons, and special spots, when and where, as a matter of experience, that oil is specially dispensed to all buyers. Olive oil, and all other kinds of oil, are to be bought in the oil-shops. And the Holy Ghost is best to be bought, is only to be bought, in secret prayer. Oil merchants advertise their oil; its qualities and its prices and where their place of business exactly is. And here is a copy of the heavenly advertisement: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall

find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." And again: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Could anything be clearer? Could anything be plainer? A wayfaring man, though a fool, could not miss where this oil is to be had. "What," demanded his Master, in shame and pain at Peter's sloth and indifference in this very same matter, "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" Watch and pray for the Holy Spirit, He means. For it was just this heavenly oil that Peter needed above all things that dark and sudden midnight. And had Peter but spent that one hour with Him who hears prayer and thus sells His oil, he would have played a far better part all through the thick darkness of that dark night, and all through the still thicker darkness of to-morrow and to-morrow night. It is still the old story, my brethren. There is no getting past the old story. You had better yield and surrender at once. That "hour" of prayer, which is now so haunting you, will never all your days let you alone. It will follow you wherever you go and whatever you are doing. Not till the door is shut will that secret "hour" of prayer give over pursuing you. Not till it ceases pursuing you and says, Sleep on now, and take your rest!

Though it is literally true that this holy oil is to be had for the asking, at the same time, and as

a matter of fact, what amounts to a tremendous price has to be paid down for it. As Seneca says, "Nothing is so dear as that which is bought by prayer." A man may buy oil for his household lamps to last him for a whole winter, and yet may not be sensibly the poorer for his purchase. He may pay his oil bill, and yet have plenty of money left wherewith to buy wine and milk for himself and for his family. But not in this oil-market. To buy the Holy Spirit is as costly to a sinner as buying Christ Himself and all His righteousness. And you know how penniless that purchase left Paul. Indeed, ever since Paul's day the price of Christ and His righteousness has been a proverb of impoverishment in the Church of Christ. And had the apostle been led to tell us how much he had to lay down to win the Holy Spirit, it would just have been the same all-impoverishing story over again. Not one penny had Paul left. Not one farthing. And so is it with every man who once really enters this same oil-market. If you do not follow my argument, just take an hour to-night in that market for yourself, and tell me to-morrow morning how you get on in it. Tell me how much you have left to call your own after you have once bought this priceless oil. See what it will cost you so much as to enter this oil emporium. There are some places of sale, bazaars and such like, where a great income is made just by the entry-money. Tell me how much is demanded of you before you are able to shut your door upon God and yourself alone to-night, not to speak of what He will charge you for

the oil after you are in. You will see how everything you have hitherto valued will have to go. No wonder that only the half of the ten virgins had the heart to make the impoverishing purchase. For my part, I often wonder there were so many.

Our Lord does not explicate, point by point, all this parable to us, but He is most emphatic, and even alarming, in His application of it. Watch, therefore, He warns us, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh. He may be here, and your time may be at an end any moment. And then, it takes far more time than you would think to buy this oil and to have it always ready. Even to get well into the place where this oil is sold takes time. To get your money ready takes time. To get your vessel well filled takes time. And to make due allowance for all the obstacles and accidents by the way, and for all the unforeseen interruptions and delays in the market, —all that, taken together, takes up more time than any one would believe beforehand; immensely more time and trouble than any one would believe who has not gone through it all. And thus it is that our Lord is always pleading with us to give an hour to it every night. Better too much time, He argues with us, than too little. You may get through the transaction quicker than some others, He admits. But then there is this also, that it may turn out to take much more time in your case than you have left to give it.

And, once more, watch, for the wisest are sometimes to be found playing the fool, like the foolish,

in this tremendously precarious matter. The five wise virgins slumbered and slept when they should have been employing their spare time in trimming their lamps, and in keeping both themselves and their fellows awake and ready. And had it not been that they were, all the time, much wiser than they seemed to be, they would have been shut out with the rest. But as it turned out they had oil, all the time, in their vessels with their lamps. And that made all the difference when the bridegroom came so suddenly. Now, where, and how, will the same difference come in among ourselves? It will come in, and you will see it, this very night, and in this very way. To-night some here will hasten home as soon as the blessing is pronounced. They will try to escape their talkative neighbours at the door. All the time of supper and prayers at home they will be hiding this terrible parable in their hearts. And then when the house is quiet, the true business of this whole day will begin with those wise men. I have told you before, but not once too often, of a Sabbath night I once spent long ago in the Alrick with old John Mackenzie. After supper and prayers I petitioned for another half-hour's reading of the notes he had preserved of Dr. John Duncan's Persie sermons. "Pardon me," said the old saint, "but we always take our candles immediately after prayers." The difference will be that the foolish among us will sit to-night and talk and talk till they extinguish this parable and all its impressions clean off their minds and their hearts, while the wise among us will take their candles.

XIII

THE WEDDING GUEST WHO SAT DOWN IN THE LOWEST ROOM

IT is my deliberate opinion that this wedding guest who sat down in the lowest room was none other than our Lord Himself. I think I see enough to justify me in believing that this parable was no parable but was an actual experience of our Lord Himself. I feel as sure as if I had seen Him do it, that He sat down in the lowest room when He entered that supper chamber. The two sons of Zebedee chose out the chief rooms for themselves, their mother encouraging them to do it. Go up yonder, she said. There are two seats at the head of the table, go up at once and take them. And they went up, their mother pushing them up. But Mary and her Son sat down at the foot of the table. The more I imagine myself present at that marriage, the more convinced I become that our Lord was that humble-minded man Himself. At any rate, whether our Lord only invented and composed this parable, or actually Himself experienced it, at any rate, it has all been

performed by Him and fulfilled to Him by this time, in every jot and tittle of it, first in His earthly life, and then in His heavenly life. For did He not sit down in the lowest room in the over-crowded inn? And as His birth was so was His whole life on earth down to the end of His life in the lowest of all this earth's low rooms. Till a Voice came from the head of the table, which said to Him, Friend, come up higher. And now, as this parable says, He has worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with Him. Yes; I for one am to delight myself, and impress myself, and instruct and rebuke myself, with believing that our Lord's whole earthly life, and now His whole heavenly life, was all enacted, in small, at that wedding supper to which He was called and with Him His twelve disciples.

"A new commandment give I unto you," said their Master to His disciples at the last supper of all. But at this present supper now spread before us He gives both His disciples and us this new commandment of His also. "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, go and sit down in the lowest room." And then, like the Shorter Catechism, He annexes His reasons, which, when drawn out, are such as these. No man can ever say to you, Give this man place; no man can ever say to you, Sit lower down, if you have already chosen for yourself the lowest seat. No man can humiliate you and clothe you with shame if you are always clothed with humility. But on the other hand, if you are always and everywhere exalting yourself:

if you are always scheming for yourself, and are always choosing out the best seats for yourself, depend upon it you are laying up shame and humiliation for yourself. If you are constantly pluming yourself on your own performances, and on your high deservings of praise and what not at all men's hands, depend you upon it your humiliation will not tarry. You will be disappointed, superseded, over-looked, over-stepped, and over-ridden, absolutely every day. It will seem to you, and not without good grounds, as if all men were in one plot against you, for so they are. If they can help it, you shall with shame begin to take the lowest room. But if I were you, I would outwit them. I would lay this wise commandment of our Lord's to my heart if I were you, till I had completely outwitted them. When you are next bidden to anything, begin to sit down in the lowest room; yes, in the very lowest room you can get. Begin at once to humble yourself everywhere, and in everything. Put on the sackcloth of humility immediately and always. Set less and less store by your own talents, attainments, performances, and deserts; and set more and more store by all other men's talents, deserts, and performances. Pooh-pooh your own heart when it says to you,—What a grand man you are! When it says to you,—What a grand sermon that is you have just preached! What a grand book that is you have just published! What a grand run in the race-course that was with all men's eyes upon you! And what a grand leap that was, leaving

all your rivals far behind you! Turn upon your puffed-up heart and tell it that nobody is thinking about your grand sermons, or your grand books, or your grand runs, or your grand leaps; nobody but yourself. Only, all your competitors in preaching and in leaping, *they*, indeed, are thinking almost as much, and almost as often, about you as you are about yourself. Only, in a very different way. And in a way that, if you knew it, would make you take down your top-sail, as Samuel Rutherford says. My friends, expect nothing for yourselves and you will not be disappointed; demand nothing for yourselves and you will be continually surprised how praise and promotion will pour in upon you, and that at the most unexpected times and from the most unexpected people. How does Jupiter occupy himself on Olympus? asked Chilo at Æsop. In humbling the high, was Æsop's answer, and in lifting up the low. Just as Peter has it, who was present at that supper-table. "Yea, all of you be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

Only, there is humility and humility. And the best kind of humility is that kind which Thomas Shepard, so far as I know, was the first to call "evangelical humility." Jonathan Edwards has now made this borrowed phrase famous in some of the golden pages of his *Religious Affections*. Hear then, what this master in Israel says:—"Evangelical humility is the sense that a Christian man has of his own utter insufficiency, utter despicableness, and utter odiousness: with an always answerable

frame of heart. This humility is peculiar to the true saints. It arises from the spirit of God implanting and exercising supernatural and divine principles: and it is accompanied with a sense of the transcendent beauty of divine things. And then, God's true saints all more or less see their own odiousness on account of sin, and the exceedingly hateful nature of all sin. The very essence of evangelical humility consists in such humility as becomes a man in himself exceeding sinful but now under a dispensation of grace. It consists in a mean esteem of himself, as in himself nothing, and altogether contemptible and odious. This indeed is the greatest and the most essential thing in true religion." My brethren, you will not be long troubled with *that* guest choosing out the chief rooms for himself. If you would have all the chief rooms to yourselves, and to your children, frequent those feasts, and engineer to get your children invited to those feasts, to which none but Thomas Shepard's disciples are invited.

Parents are terribly perplexed at present as to what is the proper education for their children; and for their sons especially. Shall they take the ancient or the modern side of the University? Shall it be the classics, and almost nothing else, as was the old way? Or shall it be a commercial education almost exclusively? And one adviser advises the one way, and another adviser advises the other way, till many anxious parents are driven distracted. Whichever side you determine on, be sure that your sons take Moral Philosophy in the

curriculum. If it is Latin and Greek, and the old culture, that you decide on, be sure they take Æsop with it as above. Or if it is a military or a commercial education, still take Æsop as above, even if it is only in translation. Whether they are to be men of all literature, or men of one book only, and that the ledger, see to it that they mix all their books with humility. That will make your sons true gentlemen, whichever side they take in education. And that will make your daughters true ladies, whatever school and college, whatever course you decide on for them. Housewifery, like their mothers and their grandmothers, or a degree, like their fathers and their brothers. I will not quarrel with your choice for them if only you mix it well with humility. If your sons have the head and the heart to read Shepard and Edwards—and it will need all the head and all the heart you can give them to read those two masters—then I will prophesy your sons' prosperity from either culture; the ancient or the modern. And if you bring up your daughters to respect the servants and to share their work; to rise early in the morning, to make their own beds, to decorate their own rooms, and to brush their own boots, then they can add a University degree to that with the applause of all men, both young and old. If they are but popular downstairs, I will read their names in the *Scotsman* and the *Times* with a pride almost as much as your own. Only begin their education while they are yet infants; or, at any rate, little children. It so happens that just as I am composing these lines for

you I have come in our morning worship on this children's hymn for your children and mine:—

Day by day the little daisy
  Looks up with its yellow eye,
Never murmurs, never wishes
  It were hanging up on high.

And the air is just as pleasant,
  And as bright the sunny sky,
To the daisy on the footpath
  As to flowers that bloom on high.

God has given to each his station;
  Some have riches and high place,
Some have lowly homes and labours;
  All may have His precious grace.

"All our humility on earth will come to its head in heaven," says Samuel Rutherford. Till the only difficulty at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be to get the chief rooms at that Supper to be filled with their proper guests. It will be somewhat like that Highland Communion at which I was present. Friends, come up higher! the minister pled with his people. But with all his authority, and with all his promises and pleas, he could not overcome his people's shame and pain of heart that day. And all the assisting minister could do, with all his fresh promises and pleas and encouragements, it was long before the Lord's Table was even half filled that day. And so, somewhat, will it be with ourselves at the Lord's Table above. Our eyes will seek for them, and, as soon as we enter the supper-room, we will see men and women already seated

there, the sight of whom will so awaken and inflame our old sin and shame, that we will turn to flee: only, by that time, escape will be impossible, for the door will be shut. The sight of the Table and of Him who sits at the head of the Table, and of some of the guests already in their seats there, and a thousand other things, will all rush in upon us till we shall fall down as dead. "And he laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not: I am the first and the last. I am He that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen: and have the keys of hell and of death." Friend! He will say to us, as He lifts us up in glory as He used to do in grace. Friend! and this word of His will at once revive us. And we will sit down humbly just where He seats us. No one else will have taken our place. Wherever at His Table our place is it will be ours alone, and no stranger will intermeddle with it. And, to borrow a word from this night's scripture, it will be with shame that we will sit down in the place prepared for us. Only, it will be with a sweet, holy, heavenly, blessed and beatific shame. Friend! He will say, go up higher. Then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

XIV

THE BIDDEN TO THE GREAT MARRIAGE SUPPER AND SOME OF THEIR EXCUSES

YOU are all bidden to this great marriage supper. The invitations sent out to our marriage suppers have to be limited to the more intimate friends of the bride and the bridegroom. Our largest houses would not hold the half of the friends we would like to see with us on such happy occasions. But there is no such limitation here. You are all bidden to this marriage. And the only limitation to-night lies entirely with yourselves. What, then, is your answer to be to-night?

This is a most extraordinary marriage and marriage supper. And therefore you must not measure what is now to be said about this marriage by what you have seen or heard of the marriages of this world. For there are far better worlds than this world, and there are far better marriages than this world has ever seen. Indeed, this marriage that is in your offer to-night is the only real and true and perfect marriage that has ever been made in this

or in any other world, or that ever will be made. You have been dreaming about marriages all your days, but a marriage like this has never entered your most extravagant imaginations. For this is nothing less than the marriage of the Eternal Son of God with your own immortal soul. You, sitting there, are the bride, and Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom. And the Father of the Bridegroom has His heart so much set upon this marriage that he has sent His servant to-night to say to you that all things are now ready. Some of our marriages take a long time to get all things ready. And this great marriage has not by any means been made ready in a day. This marriage was actually proposed and planned for and the preparations began to be made for it before the foundations of this world were laid. You like to read and hear about marriages, and the arranging of marriages, and how the course of true love did, or did not, run smooth. Well, I, like you, have read many love romances in my day, and have delighted in them in my day; but this great love, and the sometimes smooth, and sometimes stormy, course it has had to run, quite out of sight eclipses all other romances to me now. So much so, that I have for long wholly given up reading anything else except about this everlasting love. But this is the immediate and the main point that all things are ready now. All things that the bride needs to make herself ready are ready now. And all things that the Bridegroom needs are ready now. The Father is ready to receive you. The Son stands ready to be for ever united to you, and

to have you united to Him. And the Holy Ghost stands beside the Son ready, and book in hand like the minister, to pronounce you the Lamb's wife. And it only remains for you to say yes, or no. It only remains for you to say that your heart within you is as the chariots of Amminadib in the Song of Solomon, and your marriage is consummated, or will be consummated immediately.

This very same message and invitation was once sent to a congregation of people just like yourselves; and they all, with one consent, began to make excuse. We can scarcely believe it about them, but it must be true, else it would not be recorded against them to all time, as it is here recorded. Come, said the servant to those that were bidden: Come, for all things are now ready. But they all, with one consent, began to make excuse. The first said unto the servant, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go to see it; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. You are sometimes like that yourselves among the dinner and supper invitations of our own city. You hear with apprehension sometimes of certain dinners and suppers that are soon to come on. Your hearts are not in those intended entertainments, and you would give anything not to be invited to them. And when you are invited you are at your wits' end how to answer so as not to give an unpardonable offence. You sit at your desk and you bite your

pen over your excessively difficult answer. You try one form of answer and you tear it up; the lie is too transparent. 'Thank you,' you at last answer, 'but I have an engagement already on my hands for that very evening. I have done my best to get out of it, but it is impossible.' Or you try this—A friend of yours, that you have not seen for many years, has offered you a visit on that evening on his way through the city and you cannot put him off; or, you have a most important meeting down for that evening and for that hour, at which, indeed, you are already advertised to take the chair. 'Accept my most sincere apology,' you add, 'and convey my best respects to your honoured guest.' The dinner belongs to another political, or ecclesiastical, or civic, party than that to which you belong. There are old sores in your mind against your proposed host as well as against some of the guests who are sure to be there. In short, you cannot and you will not go. Even at the risk of your absence being misunderstood, and taken in ill part, you will not go. 'We will not trouble him again,' say the host and the hostess to one another over your transparent subterfuge; 'he will come the next time he is asked to any dinner of ours.'

Those were clever enough excuses that your predecessors in Israel made. Indeed, they were entirely true excuses, rather than merely clever. For the real truth was they had no heart for that invitation. All their treasure, and consequently all their heart, was elsewhere. The first man's treasure was his newly-bought piece of ground.

The second man's treasure was his five yoke of oxen. While the third man had the best treasure and the best excuse of all. For he had a young wife at home, and the dinner was never dressed that would draw him away from her side so soon. Now what is your excuse to-night? You have an excuse that you have sent up as your answer before now; often before now. Is it to be the same excuse and answer to-night again? It is as if an angel had come straight from heaven to you with an invitation addressed to you in his hand. There he is, standing in the passage at the end of your pew. Yes, there he is. It is not the first time I have seen him standing impatiently there. But to-night it may be the last time. When he goes home to-night empty again his Master may well be so angry this time that He may swear that your invitations shall be no longer. 'He is joined to his ground, and to his oxen, and to his wife—let him alone.' And, then, what will all these things do for you against the anger of Almighty God, and against the wrath of the Lamb? Whereas, say Yes! and all things are yours, and you are His, and He is God's. Wait one moment, then, O impatient angel: wait, just wait one moment! And then speed up with your answer to your Lord.

But even that sufficient danger and disaster is not all. There are more men involved in your salvation or damnation than yourselves. Your ministers are almost as much involved as you are. O light-hearted students, go and make your piece of bread in some much safer calling. For God lays this same awful order on all His ministers,—Go, He says, and

compel them to come in. Compel is His very word. That is your minister's ordination oath, and if you are lost: if you go on to the end making excuses and refusals, your lost eternity will be at your minister's door, as well as at your own. Your minister must compel you therefore, if he is not to be involved in your ruin. 'Did you do all that it was commanded you to do?'—it will be demanded of him on that day! 'You knew quite well that that man there, and that woman there, were no more saved than were the seats they sat on, and what did you do? Did you let them fall asleep while you delivered my message to them? Did you tell them plainly how it would end with them? Or were you afraid to offend them, and lose their approval and their patronage? Did you demand of them every Sabbath day what provision they had made against death and judgment? Did you preach every sermon of yours as if it were your last and their last? And as if you and they might be summoned before the great white throne at the end of your sermon? Did you compel them to see that there were only two things possible before them—the right hand or the left: heaven or hell: the wrath of the Lamb, or His everlasting love? If you did all that, then you are clear of their blood. But if you did not do all that, and that continually, you are no minister of mine.' O men and women! Be not so inhuman as to drag down your minister with yourselves. Say, at any rate, to God's angel that your minister is not to blame. Say to him that your minister did all that mortal man could

do. Say to him that your minister's hands are pure of your blood, and that you alone are without excuse.

This parable, it is much to be feared, will have a very visible fulfilment in this house during the next fortnight. For this day fortnight the marriage supper of the Lamb is to be made ready here. And from to-night onward this call will go forth to all this congregation,—The Lord's Supper is again made ready. Come and partake of it. Prepare yourselves in the ways appointed you, and then come to the Lord's Table. But when the two days of special preparation are come, what will we see here? We will see the church on the Thursday evening, and on the Saturday afternoon, not one-fourth full: till your ministers will be ashamed to have brought two of God's servants to preach to your empty pews. So many intending communicants will, with one consent, begin to make excuse. One will say, The hour is so late. Another will say, The weather is still so unsettled. Another will say, Those services are getting antiquated and out of date and so few people attend them. Another will say, To tell the truth I had wholly forgotten about the communion, and my wife and I have a dinner-party in our house that evening. Another will say, The young people are at their lessons on Thursday night, and they need fresh air on Saturday afternoon, and are away out of the town on their bicycles. And then the ministers and the elders will get such a refreshment and such a preparation from those two services that they will look round

and will say to themselves:—Oh, why were so and so not here? What a blessing they have lost. What can they have got elsewhere to make up to them for the loss of such a preparation-service as this has been? And then those who so excused themselves on the Thursday and the Saturday will come up so unprepared on the Sabbath that when the King comes in to see the guests it will be impossible for Him to wink at the state of matters between Him and many who will intrude themselves that day. Till in very faithfulness He will say to them, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? But be not speechless to-night. Come to-night. Say yes to-night. For all things are now ready, wedding garment and all.

XV

THE MAN WHO HAD NOT ON A WEDDING GARMENT

SUPPOSE this. Suppose you were commanded to sup with King Edward the Seventh on this day week. Then what else than that command would you think about all the intervening six days and six nights? I feel sure you would think about nothing else. The great invitation, and the coming supper in the king's palace, would never be out of your thoughts for a moment. You would discourse about your high honour all day, and you would dream about it all night. But at the same time, you would rejoice at the prospect with trembling. And you would do this. You would seek out those in this city who had sometimes been at court. You would apply to those ministers, or other highly honoured men, who had dined or supped with the late Queen, his Majesty's mother, and you would beseech them to tell you all about the palace and its royal rules and regulations. You would interrogate them about a thousand

things, from the way in which you should reply to such a command, down till you were safely back again in your own house. You would be in such mortal terror lest in your inexperience and ignorance you should fall into some awful mistake. You have never been much in good society, not to say in such society as a crowned head keeps, and it would not be to be wondered at if you scarcely slept with anxiety till it was all over and you were safely home again. And if there was any book of palace etiquette and court ceremonial to be had for love or money, you would sit up all night over it; you would set your very Bible aside night after night in order to give all your mind to the Court Guide. Your Bible could wait, but not your preparation for the great event of your life. And if in studying its directions you came on any expressions and descriptions you did not understand, you would go back again to the king's chaplain rather than risk the smallest misunderstanding or mistake. And if you could accuse yourself of neglecting the very utmost precaution, and thus fell into some disgraceful blunder at court, you would never forget it, and you would never forgive yourself, to your dying day. And who would blame you for all that solicitude? Who would say that you were anxious over much? We would all envy you for your high honour, but we would all be thankful that we had not to go through your ordeal. And as often as we thought of your certainty to make some terrible mistake, we would say to ourselves—Better him than me.

Intending communicants! Your own hearts have

already interpreted to you what I have been driving at all this time. For this day seven-night you are all commanded to be ready to present yourselves before your Lord in His Father's house. Now what are you intending to do all this week with a view to the Lord's Supper? With whom do you intend to take counsel? Do you know, in all your circle of acquaintances, any one you feel sure is at home in such matters? What books will you read this week, and what books will you judge it impertinent, and unseasonable, and unbecoming, to read this week? How do you intend to lay out your nights especially? In short, what steps do you intend to take to secure and guard yourself against some awful slip or oversight when you are ushered into the King's presence? Have you any plan? Have you any programme? Six days and six nights look a long time in which to prepare. But they will all be past and gone before you know where you are. For one thing, I have a great faith myself in the proper books. I shall owe my own soul, if it is saved at last, to the proper books. And if your soul is lost at last that catastrophe will be accounted for largely by your persistent reading of unseasonable and unbecoming books, and especially in the night-watches of the communion week. Some intending communicants will do something like this. To-morrow night they will take time and will read again all about the institution of the Passover in Israel, and they will apply all the lessons of the Passover to their own hearts, and to their own lintels and

side-posts. On Tuesday night if you went in on them late you would find them deep in the Fifty-first Psalm. And on Wednesday night deep in the Fifty-third of Isaiah. On Thursday we used to have all the shops shut, and all the churches open; and we still have our communion books, if we choose, that no one can shut as they have shut the churches. And all Thursday night they will be still deeper in the arrest and the trial and the cross of their Redeemer. What else, in the name of sin and salvation, would you expect to find them reading on such a night and in such a week! And all the week they will have among their choicest books some classic on the communion, say like Robert Bruce, and they will work their soul-saving way through that great book again. Robert Bruce's book is not in the circulating library, and it is too dear for you who are laymen to be expected to buy it. But if there is any divinity student here who hopes one day to be a good minister of Jesus Christ, let him get his hands somehow or other on Bruce before to-morrow night, and master one of "that stately Presbyterian divine's" sermons on the Sacrament every night all the week. I have not read Bruce so often, I am ashamed to say, as Jowett had read Boswell. But I read him for the first time forty years ago, and I read him again last week. And in the strength of many readings of that great Edinburgh preacher I will venture this prophecy that if you begin Bruce at this communion, you will still be reading him forty years after this, and you will be liking him better and better at every

returning communion in your ministry,—a sure mark of a masterpiece.

But with all that, you must not sit at home and read your Bible and Bruce on the Sacraments all the week, and do nothing else. "Therefore we must," says Jeremy Taylor, "before every communion especially, remember what differences or jealousies are between us and any one else, and recompose all such disunions, and cause right understandings between each other. Offering to satisfy whom we have injured, and to forgive those who have injured us." And so on, in his heart-searching and eloquent treatise. As for instance. One of our own elders on the Sabbath before one communion heard a sermon on the text, "Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Now that elder had long ago had a miserable quarrel with a man in the same profession as his own, and whose office was in the same street as his own. And on the Monday before the communion, as if it were to-morrow, he left his own office-door and crossed the street and rang his enemy's bell. He felt, as he told me himself, that he would almost as soon have faced a lighted cannon as rung that bell. But he did it. And when he stood before his old foe he did not speak. He only held out his hand. The two estranged men looked at one another. They shook hands and parted without words. But a load of anger and hatred and wickedness that had lain like a mill-stone on both their hearts was from that

moment removed. And the two men came to the table next Sabbath reconciled to God and to one another. Will you do that same preparatory act to-morrow forenoon? Or still better, will you do it to-night on your way home from the House of God?

And then when the communion day dawns this day week, rise early. Be like Moses that morning when he was hidden in the cleft rock, and when he first heard the Name of the Lord. And have something suitable in your mind the last thing on Saturday night that you are to say the first thing on Sabbath morning. Have this: When I awake I am still with Thee. Or this: I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness. Or this: This is the day the Lord hath made. Or this: He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Or this: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. And then finish up with this: I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. And, all the morning hours, let your mind go back to that first Lord's day morning. Think you see Mary Magdalene while it is yet dark. Think you hear what she says to her Risen Lord, and what He says to her. Go through their dialogue with them. And open and read the journey to Emmaus, and think you are one of them, till your heart burns within you. And be up here in good time. We will have the doors open in good time. Come so as to have a quiet half-hour to yourself. Do not come late and agitated with getting ready. Have a good

half-hour to read and think and pray. And enter at once into the stream of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and make melody in your heart to the Lord. Follow the action-sermon with your whole attention. Miss nothing that is said. I think it will suit you next Sabbath. And then at the table rise to your best faith, and to your best love. And if your heart has resisted all the preparations of the week and you are ready to sink into the earth when the elders bring forward the elements, then give vent to your heavy heart in such ejaculations as this: I am not worthy, Holy Lord. And this: Then will I to thine altar go. And this: Just as I am. And this: Cleft for me. And then when the King comes to see the guests He will find you singing in your heart to Him and to yourself this acceptable song:—

> O let the dead now hear thy voice:
> Now bid thy banished ones rejoice,—
> Their beauty this, their glorious dress,
> Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness.

And then take a moment or two at the Table to pray for those who are as dear to you as your own soul. For those you love as Christ has loved you. And, after your own flesh and blood, then for those you love almost as much, your choicest and most select friends. And wind up with the man you were reconciled to last week. For that is the best friendship, and that is the surest reconciliation, that is sanctified and sealed at the Lord's Table.

And then, when your Saviour says to you after supper, Know you what I have done to you? you

will have your answer ready. My blessed Lord, you will say, I know only too well what Thou hast done for me. I doubt, in all Thy great doings for sinners, if ever Thou hast done for mortal man what Thou hast done for me. Many men call themselves the chief of sinners; but I know, and Thou knowest, better than that. If I do not know all Thou hast done for me, keep the full knowledge of it back till I am able to bear it. For I am not able to bear any more to-day. Oh! the past, the past! you will cry in your agony of remorse mingled with faith and love. For you see your past sins and your present sinfulness at every returning communion blacker and blacker. Yea, Lord, Thou hast redeemed me. Thou hast substituted Thyself for me. Thou hast borne my sins in Thine own body on the tree. Thou hast come after me, and Thou hast been full of unparalleled long-suffering with me. Thou hast endured me far past all other men. No man has provoked Thee to the uttermost as I have done. And yet, you will say,—I am not in hell, but at the Lord's Table!

And then, with all that possessing your heart, you will go home from the Lord's Table a new creature. You will go home at peace with God and with your own conscience through the sin-atoning death of the Son of God. At peace also with all men, and full of love and prayer for all men. And you will henceforth walk with a far more perfect heart before your house at home. And you will henceforth possess your heart with a holy patience among all the crooks in your lot, and under all the crosses

that God sees good to lay upon you. And amid all these things you will henceforth be one of the most watchful, and prayerful, and humble-minded, and easy to live with, of men. A miracle to yourself, and a wonder to many. From one day to another living for nothing else so much as to perfect holiness in the fear of God. And God every day more and more perfecting in you what He has begun in you, till the day of Christ. Till that day, that is, when He shall come in to see the guests, and to go no more out.

XVI

THE PHARISEE

DR. PUSEY has said somewhere that a Pharisee was just a Jew with divine light but without divine love. And that saying of Dr. Pusey's is just the thirteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians put into an epigram. Paul was once a Pharisee himself, and in the beginning of that famous chapter to the Corinthians he describes himself as a Pharisee to perfection. Every finished Pharisee, he tells us, had not the tongue of a man only, but the tongue of an angel. In some instances the Pharisee had the gift of prophecy also, and could understand all mysteries, and all knowledge. There had been Pharisees known to Paul who had a faith that could actually remove mountains. While others again had been known not to give a tenth only of all that they possessed, but who positively bestowed all their goods to feed the poor. While some went the awful length of giving their very bodies to be burnt. Our hearts bleed for the Pharisees. Our hearts bleed within us for men who could do and endure all that, and yet

after all that were complete castaways from the kingdom of heaven. Who then, my brethren, can be saved?

In answer to that staggered exclamation of ours, the Apostle, who was one of them and one of the very best of them, goes on to accuse the Pharisees with such unanswerable accusations as these. With all that, says the Apostle, the finished Pharisee was wholly without love in his heart. To come to particulars and instances of that, says the Apostle. The true Pharisee entirely lacked large-heartedness and brotherly-kindness, he entirely lacked appreciation and admiration for other men. He vaunted about himself in everything, he was puffed up with himself in everything. He took no pleasure in hearing other men praised for their talents, or for their performances, or for their conduct, or for their character. The true Pharisee took no pleasure in the pure truth about other men. Nay, he had no better pleasure than in all unjust judgments and in all harsh censures concerning all other men. When he heard a back-biter he delighted in him, and he was a partaker with busybodies. He wholly lacked liberality of mind and hospitality of heart. He wholly lacked trust and hope and love. In Dr. Pusey's short and sharp way of it the true Pharisee of our Lord's day had plenty of divine light in his head, only he was wholly lacking in divine love in his heart.

But let us go back again upon some of the Pharisee's good points. And that not only for his sake but for our own sakes. For the better a man

the Pharisee was the more solemnising will his history and his character and his condemnation be to us. If the Pharisees had been out and out bad men, their condemnation would not have been so startling and so solemnising to us as it is. Now when you study your New Testament well you will see how much there is to be said in behalf of the Pharisees. Compared with the Sadducees, for instance, the Pharisees were men of a high religious character. They loved the Bible. They knew the Bible by heart. They sanctified the Sabbath day. None of you better. They observed the Fast days, and all the other church ordinances, with what we would call a Puritan scrupulosity and self-denial. In short, all the best people in Israel in our Lord's day belonged to the party of the Pharisees.

But, with all that, the Pharisee was all wrong in his heart. The true Pharisee's heart was not a broken heart; and thus it was that nothing was right that the Pharisee ever said or did. This sounds a hard saying that nothing was right he ever said or did, but it is the simple truth. In one of the most powerful of his Roman Catholic sermons, entitled "The Religion of the Pharisee," Dr. Newman brings out this about a Pharisee's unbroken heart in his own incomparably powerful and impressive way. I will not water down the passage, but will give you the enjoyment and the profit of it just as it stands. "The characteristic mark of the religion of Christ," he says, "is a continual confession of sin, and a continual prayer for mercy. What is peculiar to our divine faith, as to Judaism

before it, is this, that confession of sin enters into the idea of its highest saintliness, and that its pattern worshippers, and the very heroes of its history, are only, and can only be, and cherish in their hearts, the everlasting memory that they are, and carry with them into heaven the rapturous avowal of their being, restored transgressors. Such an avowal is not simply wrung from the lips of the neophyte, or of the lapsed; it is not the cry of the common run of men alone, who are buffeting with the surge of temptation in the wide world; it is the hymn of saints, it is the triumphant ode sounding from the heavenly harps of the Blessed before His throne, who sing to their Divine Redeemer, Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God in Thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And what is to the saints above a theme of never-ending thankfulness is, while they are yet on earth, the matter of their perpetual humiliation. Whatever be their advance in the spiritual life, they never rise from their knees, they never cease to beat their breasts. So it was with St. Aloysius, so it was with St. Ignatius, so it was with St. Philip Neri who, when some one praised him, cried out, Begone! I am a devil, and not a saint! And who, when going to communicate, would protest before his Lord that he was good for nothing but to do evil. Such utter self-prostration, I say, is the very badge and token of the servant of Christ; and this indeed is conveyed in His own words when He says, I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And it is

solemnly recognised and inculcated by Him in these words: Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and every one that abaseth himself shall be exalted. Could contrast be greater than between that and this? God I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. No; contrast could not further go than that between the true penitent, and the true Pharisee."

The very name that the Pharisee took to himself condemned him to his face. To be a "Pharisee" was to be a self-selected and a separated man. Now, while all good and true men must sometimes, at whatever cost, separate themselves from all bad men, and from all bad causes among bad men, at the same time, all good and true men will make the separation with great humility, and will make it as short as possible. They will not flaunt abroad their separation like a flag. They will not lay their separation like a foundation stone, and they will not build their church upon it. Now that is just what this true Pharisee was doing in the temple all that day when our Lord discovered him and denounced him. He was flaunting his flag of superiority and separation in the face of God and man. He was taking up his stance on this standing-ground before God and man, that he was so much better than all other men. He must be correctly reported, and if he is, he here puts all other men on one side, and separates himself from them all, and thanks God for it. 'Stand by,' he

says to every other worshipper in the temple. 'Come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.' You have the true Pharisee in all ages, and out of his own mouth, in that speech of his. You have here that detestable spirit of sectarianism and schism that tore to pieces the Church of God in Israel, and that is tearing to pieces the Church of Christ to this day. Wherever you see any man, high or low, great or small, dwelling continually on his superiority over all other men, and on the superiority of his church over all other churches, there speaks the true Pharisee. Especially when you see him labouring by tongue or pen or purse to keep open the running sores in the Body of Christ, to dwell upon those sores, to exasperate them, to spread them, and to perpetuate them.

Now, to apply all that to the topic of this day—Christian Unity—and to our own part in the topic of this day.

To begin with, if we are ever to take any true part in healing the grievous wounds in the Body of Christ, we must first of all have clean hands ourselves; that is to say, we must have clean hearts; that is to say, we must have broken, humble, contrite hearts. What kind of a healer would he be who came to you to bind up your wounds with his hands all dropping with all manner of taint or infection? You would say to him, Physician, heal thyself. And we must all look to ourselves before we begin to bind up the Body of Christ. It is our universal and incurable self-love and self-righteousness that is the real root

of all our sectarianisms and schisms and controversies, whether those controversies are carried on by the tongue or by the pen or by the sword. It is our pride and our self-idolatry; it is our contempt and scorn of all other men; it is not our love of truth, so much as our love of ourselves, that is the real cause of all our contentions and controversies. Paul was a tremendous Churchman and a tremendous sectarian controversialist as long as he was a Pharisee: that is to say, as long as his heart was unbroken. But look at him after he was born again and had become a new creature. What a contrast to his former self! What humility, what condescension, what geniality, what courtesy, what catholicity, what universal loving-kindness; in short, and in modern language, what a Christian gentleman! Coleridge says that while Luther was not perhaps such a perfect gentleman as Paul, he was almost as great a genius. And Luther gives us a taste both of his genius and of his gentlemanliness also in what he says about Paul after Paul had ceased to be a Pharisee. "Paul was gentle, and tractable, and peaceable, in his whole Christian life. Paul was meek, and courteous, and soft-spoken. Paul could wink at other men's faults and failings, or else he would expound them to the best. Paul could be well contented to yield up his own way, and to give place and honour to all other men, even to the froward and the intractable." So speaks of Paul the most Paul-like man of the modern world. And an English gentleman, if ever there was one, has said of Paul in more than one

inimitable sermon: "There is not one of those refinements and delicacies of feeling that are the result of advanced civilisation, nor any one of those proprieties and embellishments of conduct in which the cultivated intellect delights, but Paul is a pattern of it. And that in the midst of an assemblage of other supernatural excellences which is the characteristic endowment of apostles and saints." But then every fibre of that, if you search down deep enough for it, you will find it all rooted in such a soil as this: "Putting me into the ministry: who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious." And still more in this: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That is the true temper of Church unity, even as the Pharisee's prayer is the true temper of all separation and sectarianism and laceration of the Body of Christ. Only set the chief of sinners, and with broken enough hearts, as the earthly heads and leaders of all your churches, and the days of debate and division and separation are from that day doomed.

As you are my witnesses I am always beseeching you to work together with God in driving out of your hearts the seven devils of prepossession, and prejudice, and partyspirit, and narrowmindedness, and narrowheartedness. And that by reading the very best books, and especially by reading the very best of your enemy's books. I will repeat to you what I took it upon me to say on this subject last May in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. I had the honour, I told them, and the happiness,

to be one of Dr. John Duncan's students, that so catholic genius and true saint, and among the many lessons of truth, and grace, and genius, and rare Christian wisdom, he taught his students I always remember this. "If," he said, "I met a man from New England, I would say to him, Read the Marrow Men; and if I met a Marrow Man, I would say, Read the New Englanders." And, though I almost owe my soul to the great Puritans, yet, acting on Dr. Duncan's advice, I have read Hooker, the great opponent of the Puritans, till I have come to see that in many of their contentions Hooker was in the right, and Travers in the wrong. And this very morning, I told them, I counted seven very different authors all standing most amicably on my desk. There was Hooker at their head with his *Polity*, there was John Donne with his *Sermons*, there was Edwards with his *Affections*, there was Newman with his *Grammar*, and there was Dante with his *Banquet*. I had been making a banquet for my classes out of them all, and there they stood, not excommunicating one another any more, but rather supplementing, and supporting, and assisting, one another, and me. And not only do all those authors agree on my desk to-day, but they all agree themselves now where they now are. They are all reading one another's books now with an open mind and with an open heart. They are all blaming their own past prejudices now, they are all ashamed of all their past party spirit now. They are all rejoicing in their neighbour's truth now, and in his prosperity, and in his fame. In the pulpit of the

Heavenly Temple the forenoon no longer speaks Canterbury, and the afternoon Geneva. And not only the great masterpieces of the past, but to read the periodicals and the newspapers of other churches than your own will reward you, and that not only with information that you will not get elsewhere, but with a wider sympathy, a more catholic, and a more liberal and generous, temper. And that will be Christian unity accomplished already, as far as you are concerned. That will be heaven already, with its love and its peace, descended into you.

And on the other hand shun controversial literature of all kinds, unless you are very far advanced in all knowledge and in all love. If controversial literature must be written and read, I doubt if you are the man either to write it or to read it. You are not, unless your heart is far more full of love and its fruits than most men's hearts are. Richard Baxter, you must admit, has purchased a right and a title to speak to us all on this matter now in hand. "Another fatal hindrance to a heavenly walk and conversation," he says, "is our too frequent disputes. A disputatious spirit is a sure sign of an unsanctified spirit. They are usually men least acquainted with the heavenly life who are the most violent disputers about the circumstantiality of religion. Yea, though you were sure that your opinions were true, yet when the chiefest of your zeal is turned to these things, the life of grace soon decays within. I could wish you were all men of understanding and ability to defend every truth of God; but, still, I would have the

chiefest truth to be chiefly studied, and no truth to shoulder out the thought of eternity. The least controverted truths are usually the most weighty and of most necessary and frequent use to our souls." So testifies to us the seraphic author of the *Saint's Rest.* And, to wind up with, listen to a very different voice from that of Richard Baxter. Listen to what Homer says, who though dead yet speaketh through the mouth of Æneas to Achilles :—

> Long in the field of words we may contend,
> Reproach is infinite, and knows no end,
> Arm'd, or with truth or falsehood, right a wrong:
> So voluble a weapon is the tongue,
> Wounded we wound; and neither side can fail,
> For every man has equal strength to rail.

The God of peace did not leave Himself without a witness wherever even a Homer sang his immortal *Iliad.*

XVII

THE PUBLICAN

UR Lord was teaching and healing daily in the temple. And among the multitudes who came and went while He was so employed He paid special attention to a Pharisee and a publican. The Pharisee came up to the temple not caring who saw him or who heard him when he was at his prayers. He had nothing to say in his prayers of which he had any reason to be ashamed. Whereas the publican stood afar off, and would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven. But all the same, there was One teaching and healing in the temple that day who not only saw both the Pharisee and the publican, but who, without listening, heard them both pray, and read all that was in both their hearts. He needed not to leave His seat where He was teaching and healing, because at all that distance, and notwithstanding all that surging multitude, He knew in Himself what those two men were thinking and what they were saying. For,—I am He that searcheth the reins and the hearts. And I will give to every one of you according to your works.

The Pharisee need not detain us long. He is no

deep study to us. He is familiar to us. We have him among ourselves. There are multitudes like him among ourselves. At the same time, would that there were more men like him among ourselves. For he was a blameless man. He was a man of a spotless life. He was an upright man in all his dealings with other men. He was a corner-stone of the city. He was a pillar of the temple. There was no one in the temple that day who did not do him obeisance as he passed by. He was admired, and honoured, and praised, of all men. Yes. Would that there were more men like him in all our cities and in all our temples also.

It is the publican who is here brought forward by our Lord for our special learning. The publican is discovered to us for our very closest study. His name is familiar to us, but not his state of mind. There were few men of his state of mind in his day, and they are not many in our day. God be merciful to me a sinner! was what the publican beat his breast and said. *The* sinner! that was, in exact terms, what he felt and what he said. *The* sinner,—as if there was no other sinner in existence but himself. The publican was as possessed with his sinfulness as the Pharisee was possessed with his righteousness. The Pharisee thought that no other man in all the world was at all his equal in his righteousness, and that was exactly what the publican thought about himself in his sinfulness. The publican felt utterly alone in the temple that day. He felt utterly alone in the whole world every day. And the definiteness of the word that

he instinctively used about himself—*the* sinner, is to this day the best possible test of the state of mind of all who either read this parable or speak about it. Coleridge, when he is writing in one place about Santa Teresa, lapses for once into a stupidity that is unaccountable in a man of such spiritual insight and such spiritual sympathy. The saint had been speaking to herself about herself in her Journal, and that in the very same terms in which the publican spoke about himself in the temple, and in the very same terms in which Paul speaks about himself in his first Epistle to Timothy, when the great critic breaks out upon her for her insincerity and her extravagant language in a way very distressing to his admirers to read, and very unlike himself. Were it not such an exception to his usual insight and sympathy, I would be tempted to say that such a censure of such a saint is, to my mind, and I think I have the mind of Christ, a far worse sign of Coleridge than all the opium he ever ate, and all the procrastinated work he died and left unfinished. It was not that the publican was, speaking coarsely, the absolutely most immoral man in all the city. It was not that Paul was, stupidly speaking, actually the chiefest of all the actual sinners of his day. It was not that Santa Teresa was the very worst and wickedest woman in all Spain in her day. But to put this truth about them all in a somewhat homely way, it was something not unlike this. I have good reason to believe that other men than myself have suffered from toothache and rheumatism. Only, I have

never had the actual and personal experience of any man's excruciating pain but my own. And indwelling and secret sinfulness is the toothache, and the neuralgia, and the cancer, and the accumulated and exasperated agony, of each spiritual man's own soul. It was not what the publican had actually and openly done that festered like hell-fire in his heart and conscience, it was what he himself inwardly was, and inwardly was to himself alone. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, he would have said to Coleridge writing far too flippantly about Teresa. It was because Solomon's prayer, offered long ago at the dedication of the temple, was fulfilled in the publican. Which, said Solomon, shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and shall spread forth his hands toward this house. The whole of the publican's case is explained beforehand in that one profound petition of Solomon's prayer. O poor publican! O publican to be pitied both of God and man! God be merciful to all men everywhere and in every day who know the plague of their own heart!

Why did our Lord not say sanctified? Or, still better, why did He not say both justified and sanctified? Why did He confine Himself to justified? It was sanctification that the publican needed even more than justification, and our Lord knew that quite well. Whereas, He only said that this man went down to his house justified. Justification was but the half of the publican's prayer, and it was not the most poignant and most pressing half. For, if he is only justified to-day he will be back to the temple to-morrow nothing

better of having been justified but rather worse. If our Lord in His great mercy to the publican's misery had only said sanctified what a happy worshipper the publican would have been from that day! And what a happy house he would have had at home from that day! Now, why did our Lord not say the word? Why did He not both say it and do it to this poor wretch on the spot? He would need to have a good reason to show why He did not say sanctified. And no doubt He will have a good reason to show when He is judged. Though it is not always easy for us to see what His reason can be. Perhaps He tried to say sanctified that day in the temple and could not. Who can tell but that He was so carried away with pity for the poor publican that He said Father, if it be possible, let us send this miserable man to his house sanctified? And perhaps He had to submit and say, Thy will be done. For justification is an immediate act of the Father's free and sovereign grace. An act, on the spot, of God's own mind and heart and holy will. And therefore the publican went down to his house only justified. Whereas, sanctification is "an exceedingly complex work," as John Wesley used to call it. God is sending sinful men down to their own houses justified every day, but not sanctified. It takes a long lifetime, in most cases, to sanctify a sinner; and at the end it is the miracle of all miracles to the old sinner himself that he is ever sanctified. Both are miracles. Both justification and sanctification. Samuel Rutherford used to pose the saints of his day with this dilemma, which of the two miracles they will wonder most at to all

eternity, their justification or their sanctification? For what is justification? Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone. And what is sanctification? Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. And, as many of yourselves know, it takes many a visit to the temple, and many a far-off stand in the temple, and many a penitent prayer both in the temple and in your own house, and many a beat of the breast everywhere, before the exceedingly complex work of sanctification can be safely said to be begun in you, not to say finished in you.

Now, on this whole scene I will make this one more observation, and so close. You are not to suppose that this was the first time, much less the one and the only time, those two men had come up in that way to the temple to pray. You may depend upon it the Pharisee never neglected public worship, and by this time neither did the publican. And the oftener the Pharisee went up to the temple the more he went down to his house despising others. Whereas, on the other hand, the oftener the publican went up the more poignant was the pain in his breast. For if he went down every Sabbath day justified, as he did, the more all the next week he loathed himself in his own sight for his iniquities and for his abominations. And that went on till

at last God was merciful to him, and took him up to the heavenly temple where he was at last both sanctified and glorified as well as justified. He had often fallen back in the agony of his heart on such Scriptures as this: "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." But with that, and with many more Scriptures like that, to alleviate his agony, he had often charged God foolishly for the length and the depth of his misery. But when the shore was won at last, no more he grudged the billows past. For by that time he was like the prisoner in Plutarch who received a chain of gold with as many links in it, and each link as heavy, as had been that chain of iron, bound with which he had lain so long in prison for his exiled sovereign's sake. And you must learn not to grudge or repine at your lifelong visits to this temple in search of sanctification. The thing you so unceasingly seek is not here. At the same time, this is the way to it. And, meantime, you will every Sabbath day go down to your house at any rate justified. And while falling infinitely far short of a finished sanctification, you will find here many incidental blessings that will help to keep your heart from wholly fainting, till to you also it will be said, O thou sinner of all sinners, be it unto thee in this matter of sanctification also, even as thou wilt. And then for all your shame you shall have double, and for confusion you shall rejoice in your portion, therefore in that land you shall possess the double, everlasting joy shall be unto you.

XVIII

THE BLIND LEADERS OF THE BLIND

LL the same, the Scribes and Pharisees were quite right, as they often are. And our Lord's disciples were wholly in the wrong, as they often are. The disciples had no business to sit down to eat with unwashen hands, and the Scribes and Pharisees were only doing their bounden duty in entering their protest against such disorderly conduct. Moses never sat down to eat till he had washed both his hands and his feet. And the Scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat for the very purpose of seeing to it that the great lawgiver was obeyed and imitated in all things great and small that he had ever said and done. But, indeed, Nature herself should have taught the disciples to observe ordinary decency in all their habits at table, as well as everywhere else. And, though the complainers could not know it, they had our own John Wesley with them also. For Wesley was wont to preach this high doctrine of Moses, and of Nature herself, to the people called Methodists, this high doctrine of his, that cleanli-

ness is next to Godliness. And, more than all that, the Scribes and Pharisees had the Master of the disciples so far with them. If the beam had not been in their own eye He would have been wholly with them in pulling this mote out of the eyes of His disciples. You are quite right, He as good as said to the complainers. You are only doing your duty in what you say to My disciples. At the same time, why do you get yourselves into such a wicked temper about it? And why is it that you come down all the way from Jerusalem to do nothing else but to find fault about such matters as the washing of hands, and feet, and cups, and pots, and tables? Have you no washing to do yourselves at home? Wash your own hearts, you hypocrites. And with that He turned on them in a way that made Peter interpose and reprove Him. 'It is not safe; it is not wise,' said Peter, 'to speak to the authorities in that way. Such language will be sure to bring sharp reprisals on us all one day.' But instead of the timidity and the restraint the disciples would have had their Master observe to those men of such power, He all the more went on with some of the most plain-spoken words He ever uttered. "They be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." Till Peter's prophecy at last came true. And till His enemies took the most terrible reprisals on Peter's Master for His heart-searching eye and for the fearlessness of His speech.

Now, the great value of this passage to us lies in this, that we have two classes of preachers here

set before us for our learning. We have those teachers and preachers who are wholly taken up with the outside of things; with cups, and pots, and pans, and tables, and beds, as this passage has it. And on the other hand, we have our Lord who passes by all these things in order that He may get at once at the hearts of men. And it is a most fearful picture that our Lord here gives us of the hearts of men, and of the work that He and His successors in the Christian ministry have to do in the hearts of men. "For from within, out of the hearts of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." No wonder young Newman said that amid all his wine-parties, and all his musical evenings, and all his readiness and eagerness to join in any merriment, he was shuddering at himself all the time.

Generalia non pungunt. No. But there are no pointless generalities in our Lord's preaching. His preaching is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. "In the department of Christian morality," says John Foster, "many of our most evangelical preachers are greatly and culpably deficient. They rarely, if ever, take up some one topic of moral duty, such as honesty, veracity, impartiality, good temper, forgiveness of

injuries, improvement of time, and such like, and investigate the principles, and the rules, and the discriminations, and the adaptations, of such things. There is little, nowadays, of the Christian casuistry found in many of our old divines. Such discussions would cost labour and thought, but they would be eminently useful in setting people's judgments and consciences to rights." And Robert Hall, in an ordination charge addressed to a young minister, says, "Be not afraid of devoting whole sermons to particular parts of moral conduct and religious duty. Sometimes dissect characters, and describe particular virtues and vices. Point out to your people, and with unmistakable distinctness, both the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit." John Jamieson of Forfar, for one, would have satisfied both John Foster and Robert Hall. For, long before their day, he had preached and published fifty most powerful sermons on our Lord's present text, treating the text as our Lord returned to it and treated it continually in His sermons, and as Foster and Hall demanded that it should be treated in every pulpit worth the name. And even after those two clear-eyed volumes of heart-searching sermons, Jamieson is bold to assert that every hearer and reader of his, who knows the plague of his own heart, will admit that the half of the shame and the pain and the wretchedness and the downright misery of his heart has not yet been told him. And those fifty Gennesaret sermons delivered in Forfar dug the deep foundations on which more than a hundred years of great preaching has been laid in

Forfar, and is being laid in that privileged town down to this day. Would that every pulpit in Scotland had such Christian casuistry in it, and such unmistakable distinctness! But, then, that would not only cost the preacher labour and thought, as Foster admits, but, like the poet, such preachers would have to cease biting their pens for arguments and eloquence, and would have to look into their own hearts for all the arguments and all the eloquence of their sermons. It is the Spirit that quickeneth both you and your preaching, our Master is always saying to us preachers. And it is when our hearts are quickened to see in our own hearts all that He sees in them, it is then, and only then, that we shall be able to deal as He would have us deal, and as John Foster and Robert Hall would have us deal, and as John Jamieson actually did deal, with the hearts of his hearers. The Scribes and the Pharisees had eyes enough to preach against adultery and murder when these things once came out of the hearts of the people; but they were as blind as moles to the real roots of these things, as well as to the kindred roots of pride, and covetousness, and envy, and deceit, of which their own hearts, and the hearts of all their blinded hearers, were full. And these are the things that truly defile a man—evil thoughts, covetousness, deceit, an evil eye, and such like.

Are ye so without understanding also? demanded their Master of His still ignorant disciples. Without understanding, that is, of what it is that really defiles a man, and where it comes from. It is bad enough

to have some secret and deadly disease about you. But to have your physician stark ignorant of what is the matter with you, and how to treat you, that is simply despair and death to you. I was once summoned to a deathbed around which stood three of the most eminent doctors in the city. Surely it is not come to that, I said, as the dying man sent for me to bid me good-bye. It need not come to that, said the three doctors, if he would only rouse himself and determine not to die. You will see! said the dying man, smiling to me. He felt the hand of death on him, but his doctors were stark blind to what he felt, and why he felt it. They were without understanding, and so he was in his grave before the week was at an end. Tragedies like that will occur sometimes even with the best physicians, but such tragical cases are of every day occurrence with us ministers. The diseases of our patients are so deep down in their hearts, and we are so blind to our own hearts, and to the diseases of our own hearts, that such blood-guilty deaths take place with us every day. In the plain-spoken words of this very Scripture, we attend too much to the outside of things; to pots, and pans, and tables, and beds, and too little to our own hearts and the hearts of our hearers.

When the Pilgrim was making his progress through the valley of the shadow of death, his rare biographer tells us some things about the pilgrim's experiences that always speak home to my heart. About the middle of the valley was the mouth of hell, and it stood also hard by the wayside. Also he heard

doleful voices, and rushings to and fro, so that sometimes he thought he should be torn to pieces, or trodden down like the mire in the streets. Just when he was come over against the mouth of the burning pit, one of the wicked ones got behind him, and stept up closely to him, and whisperingly suggested many grievous blasphemies to him, which he verily thought had proceeded from his own heart. When Christian had travelled in this disconsolate condition for some considerable time, he thought he heard a voice of a man, as going before him, saying, Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Now, this Scripture at present open before us has much the same effect on me as that voice in the valley of the shadow of death had upon Christian. For, as from that voice he gathered that some one who feared God was in that valley as well as himself; so, from this scripture I gather that He who here searches the hearts of men, knows my heart down to the bottom, with all its wickedness, and all its wretchedness, and all its possession of the devil. Speaking only for myself in all these matters, but speaking honestly for myself, I confess to you that I find far more comfort just in this dreadful discovery of the hearts of men, and of my own heart, than I find in far more ostensibly evangelical scriptures. To me this awful scripture is as cheering sometimes as was the voice of that as yet unseen man in the valley of the shadow of death. And for much the same reason. I told you about the three doctors and their fast-dying patient.

Now, he died of sheer despair because his disease was so much deeper than his doctors' diagnosis. Had those three doctors put their finger on the deadly spot, and said, thou ailest here and here; and thou ailest with this kind of agony and that,—then that dead man would have been back at his work within a week. But as it was he was in his grave before the next Sabbath day dawned. And it is just because my great Doctor, Jesus Christ, puts His Divine finger straight on this agony of mine and that: it is this that makes me turn away from every other practitioner of the heart, and say to Him, To whom can I go but to Thee! And it is this same thing that makes me always go away back to John Bunyan, and to the other great specialists of his deep and true school. Almost all the doctors who stand round my bed in these days seem to me to be far too much taken up with the outside of things; while, all the time, I am dying of a heart like the pilgrim's heart, and like this same heart that Christ here lays bare to His apostles and to the people. And thus it is that my Master's so perfect diagnosis of me, even before He has begun to prescribe to me, is already such a message of hope to me. The seventh of Mark, as well as the seventh of Romans, and the *Pilgrim's Progress,* and John Owen, and all the rest of that great heart-searching kind, all make me glad, and for these reasons: First, because I gather from them that some who feared God were in this valley as well as myself. Second, for that I see that God was with them, though in that dark and dismal state, and why not with me? And, third,

that I shall have them for my company all the rest of my way.

And when He had called all the people unto Him He said unto them, Hearken unto Me, every one of you, and understand. And, every one of you people here to-night, hearken and understand all that He here says to you about your own hearts, every one of you. And then understand this also, that they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. And, every one of you, understand with me also, and act with me. And act with me in this way. His discovery to me of the state of my own heart only the more entitles me and encourages me to take my heart to Him, and to claim at His hands all His skill in such hearts as mine, and all His instruments for them and all His remedies for them. It is my part to hear and to understand what He here says to me about myself, and then it is His part to heal me. And I warn Him, and I take all you people for witnesses, that I will give Him no rest till my heart is as clean and as whole as His own.

XIX

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

AT table one day Dr. Luther was asked whether he took the story of the rich man and Lazarus for a parable, or for an actual fact. The Reformer replied that to his mind the opening passage at any rate is evidently historical. The description of the rich man is so life-like. There is his dress, and his table, and his five brothers all following in his footsteps. And then the painful picture, as if it also had been taken from the life, of a certain well-known beggar with his sores, named Lazarus. Yes, said Luther, I do think our Lord must have known the rich man and Lazarus in Galilee, or in Samaria, or in Judea.

Now, whether it is pure history, or pure parable, or founded on fact, this tremendous Scripture is equally true and is equally solemnising to us, since it comes straight to us from our Lord's own lips. And our main errand here this evening is to enquire in His temple just what lessons our Lord would have us all to learn and to put in practice out of this terrible story.

The very first thing, as I think, that we are to see clearly in this scripture is this, that the rich man is not in hell simply and wholly because he had starved Lazarus to death. I used to read this parable so superficially as to think that the rich man is where he is altogether because of his starvation of Lazarus. But I see now that our Lord nowhere says so. No. Let the full truth be told even about a man in hell. Let him get all the advocacy, and all the exculpation, and all the palliation, possible. No; it is nowhere said that Lazarus died of this rich man's neglect. Not at all. On the other hand, the crumbs that were sent out to Lazarus must, as I think, have been much more than mere crumbs. They must have been both many and large and savoury crumbs, as I think, else Lazarus would not have been laid so regularly and so long at that gate. Those who carried Lazarus to that rich man's gate every morning did so, as I think, because they had found out by experience that this was the best gate in all the city at which to lay Lazarus down. They had tried all the other gates in the city, but they always came back to this gate.

It is quite true, the rich man might have done much more for Lazarus than he did. For instance, he might have fitted up one of his many out-houses for Lazarus to live in; or he might have arranged for a weekly pension to be paid to the incurable pauper in his own hovel; he might even have sent his own physician to report to him as to the symptoms and the progress of Lazarus's sores. But he did not do any of these gracious actions

to Lazarus. At the same time he did not issue an angry order that that putrifying corpse, called Lazarus, must no more pollute the air before the door of his mansion. He might have given orders to his servants that that disgusting carcass was to be carted away for ever from out of his sight. But it is not said that he was so hard-hearted as that. He is in hell, indeed, but he is not in hell for that; his hell would have been both deeper and hotter than it is, if he had said and done all that against Lazarus. For you must know that there are degrees in hell as there are in heaven; there are depths and deeper depths there; and there are hot and hotter beds there; and with less and less water to cool tormented tongues. And that being so, this rich man might have been even worse than he is, as He here tells us, who has the key of hell and of death in His hands.

Both our Bible and our daily life are full of the real lesson of this scripture—the great danger of great riches to the rich man's immortal soul. Every day we see great riches simply ruining their possessors' souls both for time and eternity. Rich men are so tempted to become high-minded, proud-spirited, arrogant, imperious, selfish, forgetful, and cruel. Rich men get their own way from everybody, and there is nothing in this world so bad for a man as just to get his own way in everything and from everybody. All men yield to a rich man. All men prostrate themselves before a rich man. He speaks when he pleases, and he is silent when he pleases. All are silent when he speaks and wait

till he has finished what he has to say. He will not bear to be contradicted or corrected, and all men learn to leave him alone. A rich man would need to be a very good man before his riches come to him, and then he would both know the temptations that lie in his riches and would strive successfully against those temptations. And if he is not a truly good man before he is a rich man; if he is not a meek, modest, humble-minded, considerate Christian gentleman before he is a rich man, a thousand to one he never will become such a gentleman after he has become rich. At the same time, while all that is true, great riches are sometimes great stepping-stones to a high place in heaven; that is to say, when they are in the possession of a man whose treasure does not lie in his riches. To go no further than Abraham in the history now open before us. Abraham was a very rich man. One of the finest chapters in all the Old Testament turns upon Abraham and his great riches. So rich was Abraham that his mere overflow was quite enough to make Lot his nephew a rich man also. Only, though Abraham in his generosity could make Lot a rich man, he could not make him a gentleman. Abraham might have turned upon Lot and might have said to him that every horn and hoof that Lot possessed he possessed through his uncle's liberality. But what did Abraham as a matter of fact say? He said these immortal words to Lot. "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land

before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will take the right: or if thou depart to the right hand, I will go to the left." What a Christian gentleman was Abraham, and that too such a long time before the day of Christ! And what an abominable mind his nephew in his greed exhibited! And the root of the whole contrast lay in this. Abraham had begun life believing God. He had sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all those flocks and herds were added to him. And with them there was also added an ever humbler, an ever nobler, and an ever-heavenlier, mind. Once get Abraham's humble, noble, heavenly, mind, and then set your heart upon making riches as much as you like. For the good that you will then be able to do all your days, both to yourself and to all other men, will be simply incalculable.

But it is time to pass the great gulf, our Lord leading us across it, in order to learn from Him some of the great lessons that He here sets us to learn, both in heaven and in hell. And first in heaven. Well, Lazarus who now lies in Abraham's bosom, had his own temptations as he lay at the rich man's gate. And had he yielded to those temptations he would not have been where he now is. He would have been where the rich man now is. Lazarus's temptations were to be embittered, and to repine, and to complain, and to find fault with God and man. Lazarus had Asaph's temptations over again and the Seventy-third Psalm may have helped Lazarus to overcome his temptations.

"As for me," said Asaph, "my feet were almost gone: my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. Therefore his people return thither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. For all the day have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." And like Jeremiah also, Lazarus would remember the sins of his youth, and then he would lament in this manner—"Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? He sitteth alone and keepeth silence. He putteth his mouth in the dust if so be there may be hope." And then, since he had been brought up to read and remember his Bible, he would call this out of Micah to mind. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me." Which He did one day. For one day when the rich man's servant took out his morning crumbs to Lazarus he was nowhere to be found. For just when the previous night was at its darkest, and just before the dawn, the angels came down and carried Lazarus up into Abraham's bosom.

Perhaps the most terrible piece of pulpit rhetoric that ever fell from any preacher's lips is to be found in one of Newman's Catholic sermons. I had intended to quote it at this point but I feel now that I dare not. It is too terrible. It is literally true, but you would turn sick under it. For it describes what every lost sinner will say and do when he comes to himself too late before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Just think for yourself what you will say and do if you come to yourself for the first time there. Well, that is Newman's terrible sermon. And then he goes on with his fearful satire to give us the conversations about this and that lost soul that go on in every mourning coach on the way home from every such rich man's funeral. But, terrible as Newman's pulpit can be, there is no pulpit anywhere with the concentrated terror of our Lord's pulpit when as here He takes us and lays our ears against the door of hell. The rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and all hell heard him, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, for I am tormented in this flame. And all hell listened till it heard Abraham's answer. And Abraham said, Son, remember! And the smoke of their torment went up, as never before, when they all began again to remember.

It is hell on earth already when any sinner begins to remember. Myself am hell! cried Satan when he began to remember. And we are all Satan's seed in that. We simply could not continue to live if we did not manage, one way or other, to forget. When God comes and compels us to remember, what a tornado of despair overwhelms our hearts till we manage again to forget. Now, as you would not lie down in hell, Son, remember! Relieve God of His strange work, and remember. Set your past sins in order before yourself from time to time. Take the remorseful work out of

God's hand and take it up into your own hand. Go back and remember. Go back to that day. Go back to that night. Go back to that hour and power of darkness. Remember those who are now in hell and who were once your companions in sin. Remember that man. Remember that woman. Remember all that they remember about you. We sometimes speak of the book of memory. Read often in it, especially in the blackest pages of it. "I have no books, but I have myself," said a great genius and a great saint. Well, you may not have many books, but you all have one book. It is a great book. It is a tragic book. It is such a book that there is no other book like it to you for terror and for horror. And then it is all true. It is no romance. It is no invention. For it is the literal record of your own past life. Return often to that book. Hold daily readings in that book.

There are many more lessons in this terrible scripture. But there is one lesson specially intended, as I think, for us who are ministers. This lost soul seems to have had no hope for his five brothers if they were left alone with the minister he had been wont to meet with at his father's table, and had been wont to hear preaching on Sabbath. In hell he seems to have come to be of the mind of our forefathers who magnified the reading, but "especially the preaching, of the word." That is to say, he became a Puritan in his appreciation of earnest preaching, when it was too late. He admitted that his five brothers had the Prayerbook and the Bible.

'But so had I,' he said. 'Only, I never opened them. I did not understand them. And none of the young fellows who dined and danced in our house ever once opened their Bible any more than I did. Among my father's servants we had a man in black who read prayers morning and night: but I seldom was present, and when I was present, I always fell asleep. Nobody paid any attention to his dronings. He never spoke to me alone. Nor did my father nor did my mother. Nobody ever took me and told me that the wages of a life like mine would be paid me in this place of torment. Else, if they had, do you think I would have been where I now am! O Father Abraham: pity my poor brothers, and send and deliver them from those dumb dogs that eat and drink till they cannot bark.'

A lesson from hell—as it seems to me—how to read, and how to teach, and how to preach; especially how to preach. 'Put a *testimony* into it,' he says to us toothless preachers. "Testify" is his very word to us from hell. 'Show your people that you believe it, if no one else does. Especially, speak straight out to your young men; they are open and honest. They will believe you, and will honour you, and will through you escape this place of torment.' "Testify!" and again he says—"Testify!"

Son, remember, testified Abraham, that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. Now, my sons and my daughters, what are your good things? And what are your evil things? What is your treasure? And where is it? On what is your heart set day

and night? When you pray to your Father in secret, for what do you most importunately and unceasingly ask? Child of God, I will answer for you. I know what your evil things are, and what are your good things. Just go on in that mind. Just go forward in that pursuit. And some day soon—the day is at the door—the same angels that carried up Lazarus to Abraham's bosom will come and carry you up to be for ever with the Lord, and to be for ever like Him. And, till they come, make this your song every morning and every night and the whole of every day and every night—

God is the treasure of my soul,
  The source of lasting joy;
A joy which want shall not impair,
  Nor death itself destroy.

XX

THE SLOTHFUL SERVANT WHO HID HIS LORD'S MONEY

HAD we been with our Lord on the Mount of Olives that day, this parable would have ended far differently from the way we would have expected it to end. As we heard the servant with the five talents introduced, and then the servant with the two talents, and then the servant with the one talent, we would have felt sure that some very severe things were soon to be said about the greatly gifted among men, and the continually prosperous. All our sympathies would have been with that under-estimated and overlooked servant who had only one talent entrusted to him. And at the beginning of this parable we would have felt sure that before it closed the Divine Preacher would take the side of the despised and untalented servant, and would say some of His severest things about the rich, and about the great, and about those who were full of all manner of prosperity. But we would have been disappointed in our expectations.

We would soon have seen that our Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts about such men and such matters. The talented and the privileged and the prosperous in life are always the few and not the many. It is the untalented and the unsuccessful and the obscure and the overlooked who are always the multitude. And it is to the multitude, and to the peculiar temptations of the multitude in the matter now in hand, that our Lord here speaks.

The servant with the one talent started on his stewardship with a great grudge at his master. He is a hard master, said that sullen servant in his heart. At any rate, he has been a hard master to me. He felt himself to be as good a man and as deserving as any of his fellow-servants, and he may very well have been in the right in so thinking and in so saying. And here was he treated in this hard and cruel manner. No wonder he was soured at his heart with the treatment he had got. No wonder that he took up his one talent with a scowl, and cast it into a hole of the earth with disgust, saying as he did so that a harder or a more unjust master no honest servant ever had. Those five talents, and those two talents, and then that one talent, all rankled in his heart, till he was the most embittered and resentful and rebellious of men.

When Ouranius first entered holy orders he had a great haughtiness in his temper. The rudeness, ill-nature, or perverse behaviour, of any of his flock used at first to betray Ouranius into impatience. At his first coming to his little village, it was as disagreeable to him as a prison, and every day

seemed too tedious to be endured in so retired a place. He thought his parish was too full of poor and mean people, that were none of them fit for the conversation of a gentleman. This put him upon a close application to his studies. He kept much at home, writ notes upon Homer and Plautus, and sometimes thought it hard to be called to pray by any poor body's bedside when he was just in the midst of one of Homer's battles. The slothful servant was the father of Ouranius.

This servant who hid his talent in the earth was the father of that young Highland minister also who hid his sermon in the snow. His history was this. A city congregation was looking out for a colleague and successor to their old minister. They had heard of a preacher of great promise in a remote locality, but before they would commit themselves to him they sent four of their number to hear him in his own pulpit. It was mid-winter and a great snow-storm came on that Saturday night. The ambitious and not unfaithful young minister had his sermon all ready, but as there would be a small congregation that snowy morning he would not throw away his whole week's work on such a handful, and so he left his sermon at home. When he entered the pulpit it was too late now when he saw a seatful of city-looking men in the far end of the empty church. And the explanation he stammered out to them did not mend matters. Till it is to be feared that his Master's prophecy at the end of this parable was, some of it, fulfilled in that manse that Sabbath night. He had for long

been ambitious of the city, and he had a sharp punishment that day for despising his small congregation ; for hiding his talent at home because there would not be enough people to appreciate it.

This servant who hid his lord's money was the father also of all those ministers among us who will not do their ordained work because they have so little to do. Their field is so small that it is not worth their pains taking off their coat to gather out the stones, and to weed out the thorns, and to plough up the fallow ground, and to sow in their too small pulpit and pastorate the seed of the kingdom of heaven. If they had as large a field as that five-talented fellow-servant of theirs ; if they had a city pulpit ; if they had a people of education and intelligence, they would prepare for the Sabbath in a very different fashion from what they do. But as it is, what is the use? He was the father of all those probationers also who stand idle till they are settled. Once they are settled and married they will lay out their days, and read the best, and rise in the morning, and preach every Sabbath to the top of their ability. You will see if they will not. But a probationer with an unsettled mind cannot work in that way. He is here to-day and there to-morrow, and he has no heart to tackle a serious task of any kind. Indeed what can he do but wait on and on for a call? With all those drawbacks, two probationers rise up before me who had another father than this wicked and slothful servant. The one of them did this among other things all his probationer time. When he

preached in a vacancy, or for a friend, as he was preaching it, for the first time he found out the faults of his sermon. He found out the loose links that were in it; the want of a beginning and a middle and an end there was in it; the want of order and proportion there was in it; the want of march, and of progress, and of coming to a head there was in it; and the many other faults of all kinds there were in it. And on Monday morning the first thing he did, while the shame and the pain of his bad work were still in his heart, he rose and took his sermon to pieces, re-arranged it in the light of yesterday, re-wrote it from beginning to end, and preached it again next Sabbath, a completely new creation, and a conscientious, a living, and a life-giving, message. Newman re-wrote all his sermons three times over, and one of his best-written books he re-wrote five times. And that probationer did that again and again and again till he not only made his first sermons perfect, but, better than that, by that fidelity and by that labour he worked his whole mind into a methodicalness, and into an order, and into a clearness, and into a consecutiveness, and into other high qualities, that have all combined to make him one of the foremost preachers of our day. The other probationer who rises up before me executed editorial and other work during that same period of his life: work which stands on all our shelves a quarry of resource to us, and a monument of honour to him. And at the same time he began to lay up those immense stores of reading

and writing that make his every sentence to-day a model of fulness, and clearness, and finish.

The unprofitable servant was the father of Clemens, and Fervidus, and Eugenia also. For Clemens is always proposing to himself what he would do if he had a great estate. He would outdo all the charitable men that have gone before him; he would retire from the world; he would have no equipage; he would allow himself only necessaries, in order that widows and orphans, the sick and the distressed, might find relief out of his estate. Come to thy senses, Clemens. Do not talk what thou wouldst do if thou wert an angel, but consider what thou canst do as thou art a man. Make the best use of thy present state. Remember the poor widow's mite, Clemens. You will find Clemens in the Law gallery also. Fervidus, again, is only sorry that he is not in holy orders. He is often thinking what reformation he would make in the world if he was a priest or a bishop. He would then have devoted himself wholly to God and religion, and have had no other care but how to save souls. But do not believe yourself, Fervidus. For why do you neglect as you do those whose priest and bishop you already are? You hire a coachman to carry you to church, and to sit in the street with his horses whilst you are attending divine service. You never ask him how he supplies the loss of divine service, or what means he takes to preserve himself in a state of piety. And so on, Fervidus, through all your un-Christian life. Eugenia, again, is a good young woman, full of

pious dispositions. She is intending if ever she has a family to be the best mistress of it that ever was. Her house shall be a school of religion, and her children and servants shall be brought up in the strictest practice of piety. She will spend her time in a very different manner from the rest of the world. It may be so, Eugenia. The piety of your mind makes one think that you intend all this with sincerity. But you are not yet the head of a family, and perhaps never may be. But, Eugenia, you have now one maid. She dresses you for church, you ask her for what you want, and then you leave her to have as little religion as she pleases. You turn her away, you hire another, she also comes, and after a time goes. You need not stay, Eugenia, to be so extraordinary a person. The opportunity is now in your own hands. Your lady's maid is your family at present. She is under your care. Be now that religious governess that you intend to be. Teach her the catechism, hear her read and exhort her to pray. Take her with you to church, and spare no pains to make her as holy and devout as yourself. When you do this much good in your present state, then you are already that extraordinary person you intend to be. And, till you thus live up to your present state, there is but little hope that the altering of your state will alter your way of life. Eugenia also, you will all see, is one of his daughters who said: If I had had five talents committed to me, or even two, I would have traded with the same and made them other five talents and other two.

But let Eugenia be done at once and for ever with such a father. Let Eugenia be born again till she has her Father in heaven, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. Come out this week to Fountainbridge, Eugenia. In our mission district in Fountainbridge you will find a prepared scope for all your talents of every number and of every kind. There are hundreds of girls out there who sorely need just such a friend as you could be to them. They need above everything else an elder sister and a more talented sister just like you. Solitary girls in lodgings have a hard fight of it to keep their heads above water. Poor girls starved to death for want of some one to love them, and befriend them, and counsel them, and encourage them in virtue and godliness. You may not have many talents, you may not be rich, you may not be very clever, or very far on yourself in the best things, but you are better off, a thousand times, than those poor sisters of yours out there. And you can speak to them, and know their names, and tell them your name, and go sometimes to see them. At your very poorest and very least talented you can teach two or three neglected children for an hour every Sabbath day. You can take them down to the water-side on a Saturday. You can take them home to a little tea-party every week or two. You can give them little books to read, and make them tell you what they have read, and better and better books as they grow up. Good books for children are so cheap nowadays that you do not need to be rich in order to have a delightful

little library provided for every poor girl's lodgings, and for every Sabbath-school child's mother's house. Come out and make a beginning with your one talent this very week. We are all making a beginning again this very week in that famous old field so well known to your forefathers and foremothers in such noble work. Let Clemens, and Fervidus, and Eugenia all come. Let the five-talented, and the two-talented, and the one-talented, and the no-talented at all, come. For there is a field for all in Fountainbridge, and many a Well done, good and faithful servant! will before long be purchased there again, as in days gone by. Come away then, O servant of God with the one talent! Come and light a lamp, like Samuel. Come and keep a door, like David. Come and give two mites, like the poor widow. Come and give a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple. For,

Little drops of water,
  Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
  And the pleasant land.

Little deeds of kindness,
  Little words of love,
Help to make earth happy,
  Like the heaven above.

XXI

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

IF you had been destined by your parents to be a minister, and if at twelve years old you had come to the same decision yourself, from that day you would have begun to think continually about your future office, and you would every day have done something to prepare yourself for your future office. You would have made it your custom every Sabbath day to go up to the sanctuary both to hear and to ask questions about the Word of God, in the reading and preaching of which your whole life was to be spent. Even if your teachers had not shown you the way you would have found out your own way of reading the Word of God, and meditating upon it, and employing, not your memory only, but your pen and ink also, in order to store up your observations and your readings and your meditations against the time to come. You would have been like Apelles the painter who never passed a day without drawing at least one line and filling it in. *Nulla dies sine linea*, was all that artist's secret, and it was all his advice to his

privileged apprentices. And all your days you would have attributed any success of yours to that teacher who first printed that proverb on your young conscience, and at the same time showed you how to perform it. Now, *mutatis mutandis*, that is to say, after making all the necessary changes, that was our Lord's exact case till He began to be about thirty years of age. And thus it was that, having been made in all things like unto His brethren, He both observed, and read, and meditated, and laid up, the greatest treasures of grace and truth against the day of His showing to Israel. And thus it was that, in all His ministry, He was never once taken unawares or unprepared. Give Him suddenly any Old Testament text to open up and He was ready on the spot to do it. Set Him any intricate question, whatever your motive might be, and immediately you got your answer. As for instance in the case now before us. When Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? His Master that moment recalled that Roman procurator to mind whose case had been the conversation and congratulation of all Galilee in years now long past. And how well that case fitted into the kingdom of heaven for one parable of that kingdom, all the world has seen ever since that day on which our Lord gave that procurator's case as His answer to Peter's complaint.

Peter, for a long time, was a most interfering and offensive disciple. Peter was continually running up against all other men. He was always both giving offence and taking offence. He was always

inflicting wounds and receiving the same. When Peter was converted from all that he splendidly strengthened his brethren. But during the process of his conversion, and till it was perfected, he both caused himself many stumbles and many falls, and was the cause of many such things to his fellow-disciples. What the exact matter was at that moment we are not told. Only, we have Peter coming with this remonstrance to his Master—How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee until seven times: but, until seventy times seven. And then He told Peter the story of that Roman officer who is now known to all time as the Unmerciful Servant. And in this so apposite story, our Lord was like a scribe, as He says Himself, which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old. And then after telling Peter and all the Twelve this story of Cæsar and his degraded and imprisoned procurator, our Lord added this application to the story—So likewise shall My Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your heart forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Now, we are all to learn from this scripture, as we have all learned it already from our own experience, that Almighty God has His reckoning times with all His servants, even in this life. He is to have a great, a universal, and an irrevocable, reckoning time with all men at the end of this life; but the first point in this parable is this, that He

has preliminary and preparatory reckoning times in which He begins to take account of His servants even in this world. Cæsar would take account of his servants, says our Lord. Now the best way to understand this is to look back at our past lives. Unless, indeed, we have all along been let alone of God, as is sometimes the case. But, no doubt, those reckoning times have, by God's special grace to us, come already to some of us. When Dr. Chalmers's reckoning time first came to him he was a greatly gifted, but as yet an utterly unprofitable, servant. It came to him in his brother George's illness and death; and then it came back again to him in his own long, and all but fatal, illness. It came to that young communicant I told you about, when her mother died. And it came to that other young communicant when—"I was engaged to be married, sir, and she died." I have one time, especially, ever before me, when my own reckoning time once came to me. And ever since that time I see myself in this chapter as in a glass. This chapter always reads to me like a literal prophecy of myself. How did your reckoning time come to you? What was it that brought your debt to a head? What was it that brought you up to God's judgment seat before the time? What great trespass was it of yours? What great accumulation of debt was it of yours? And did you do like this Galilean procurator? Did you fall down and worship God and appeal to His patience? Did you promise to pay all the debt if only He would let you have sufficient time in which to pay it?

Did you swear to Him that you would never commit that great trespass again? Did you engage also that you would watch, and pray, and would crucify your flesh, with its affections and lusts, if only He would not deliver you to the tormentors. And how did it all end? Or, is it all ended yet?

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants which owed him an hundred pence; and he laid his hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. Now we are such, and our fellow-servants are such, that they are continually running into all kinds of debt to us, and to all depths of debt. Our brother is like Peter's brother, in that he is sinning against us seven times every day. Partly through his offensiveness and injuriousness, and partly through our imagining all kinds of offences and injuries at his hand, the most immense debts are being run up between us. Seven things in a single day, sometimes, will come between us and our brother. He forgot us. He overlooked us. He preferred some one else to us. He acted on his own intelligence, and judgment, and conscience, in some matter in which we had the insolence and effrontery to dictate to him. He got some promotion, or some praise, that we had not friendship enough to him to stomach. He was more talked about than we were. He carried his custom to another shop than ours. We wrote a book, we preached a sermon, we made a speech, we sang a song, and he did not praise us to the top of our bent. Say, how often shall my brother sin against me in such ways as these, and I forgive him?

No, I cannot do it. I have tried it, and I cannot do it. From the heart to forgive debts like these no, never, I cannot do it. And dost Thou actually expect it of me? Or, is this only another economy of Thine? At any rate, it cannot be done. It has never been done, and it never will be done, so as to justify my Heavenly Father in forgiving me my trespasses. If He suspends my forgiveness on my forgiving such trespasses as these—who shall be saved? Not one. No, not one. Not I, at any rate. "Do you think it will ever be possible to construct an instrument to discover and to exhibit our thoughts against our neighbour?" asked a *Pall Mall* interviewer at Mr. Edison, the great American inventor. "Such an instrument is possible," returned Edison. "But what then? Every man would flee from the face of his neighbour, and would flee to any shelter." So he would. And so he does seventy times every day. As Peter afterwards said, Lord to whom shall I flee but unto Thee? Who shall shelter me and my unforgiving heart but Thee! Who can justify a man like me, both now and at the last account, but Thee and Thy Heavenly Father in Thee! Likewise also say all His disciples. As well ask us to cast Arthur's Seat into the sea.

I feel sure you all say the Lord's Prayer every night before you sleep. Well, how do you do when you come to the fifth petition, which is this—And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors? Dr. Chalmers confesses in one place that he did not feel that dreadful sense of sin and guilt which so overwhelmed Halyburton every night. There are

some advantages, you see, in not having such an overwhelming sense of sin as Halyburton had. For one thing, you get sooner to sleep every night, and you get your sleep more unbroken with dreams of the coming day of account. Amen! stuck in my throat, says Macbeth. And Amen stuck many a night in Halyburton's throat over the fifth petition. His brother in St. Andrews had trespassed against him that day. He had outrun him in some race. He had outbidden him in some market. He had damned Halyburton's sermon with faint praise. He had just hinted a fault, and had hesitated dislike. He had been reported to Halyburton as having sneered at the scholarship and the style of Halyburton's first publication. He had trespassed against Halyburton that day in a way that Halyburton has not the courage to set down in black and white in his diary that night, and therefore he could neither say Amen, nor get to sleep. But Chalmers got his fill of Halyburton's sense both of the guilt and the pollution of sin, long before he went so suddenly to his last account, as we see in this mathematical illustration of it:—"The wider the diameter of light, the larger the circumference of darkness." And in this "far ben" entry of it:—"What would I do if God did not justify the ungodly!"

There is a fine touch in this ancient history that must not be neglected. When the fellow-servants of this unmerciful servant saw him so forget his own ten thousand talents as to take his hundred-pence debtor by the throat and cast him into prison, they were both sorry and angry, and went

and told their Lord what had taken place. It was an excellent saying of one of the seven wise men of Greece, who, when he was asked what would rid the world of injuries, answered:—"When the by-standers shall resent an injury as keenly as he does who suffers the injury." Now those fellow-servants did that, and their resentment is told us in order that we may imitate them in their resentment. That would largely banish all injury from among ourselves, if we would all do what that wise man of Greece advised, and what those fellow-servants actually did. If we would put ourselves in the places of the men who are injured unjustly by their wicked neighbour. When we read or hear of any man being wickedly attacked by tongue or by pen, ten to one all the offender's fault has been that he has disappointed, or offended, or crossed the self-love, and the self-interest, of that revengeful and implacable man. And that, often in the utmost innocence, and even in the most absolute righteousness. Ten to one the root of the wicked treatment is nowhere else but in the wicked heart of that mortally offended, unforgiving, and revengeful, man. Keep well in mind, my brethren, what the wise man said, when you see any man or any cause truculently attacked by tongue or by pen. Resent the injury as if it were done to yourself, and that will somewhat help to rid the world of all such injuries, and of all such injurious men. At any rate, be you not such injurious men yourselves. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. For with the same measure that you mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.

XXII

THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT

CCORDING to some ancient authorities Bartholomew was a nobleman of Galilee before he was a disciple of Christ. Not many mighty, not many noble, were called; but Bartholomew was called as if to show that no class of men is shut out from the discipleship and the apostleship of Christ and His church. Bartholomew was a sort of gentleman-farmer, and, like Matthew the publican, he made a supper to his neighbours before he finally parted with his patrimonial estate. And it was while they were all sitting at supper that this incident, so it is supposed, took place, and this conversation that completed the incident. One of Bartholomew's men-servants came in from the field, put off his everyday clothes, girded himself with a waiting garment, and then served the table till his master and all his master's guests had risen from their supper. Are you not much too tired? said Peter sympathetically to the servant. Are you not doing two men's work? And besides, you must

be faint by this time with hunger. O no! said Bartholomew's serving-man smiling, I am only doing my bounden and delightful duty in waiting on my good master, and on his honoured guests. And then I will sit down to my own excellent supper immediately. "Hear ye what this so exemplary servant saith," said their Master to the twelve, "Verily, I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this man has said and done, be told for a memorial of him."

Our Lord applied that incident in its first intention to the twelve. Their Master was teaching and training the twelve by everything that happened every day to Him and to them. In order to teach and to train the twelve for their fast-coming work, their Master found tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and this great lesson in Bartholomew's ploughman-waiter. The twelve had this lesson taught them first, and, after them, all their successors are taught the same lesson, down to this day. That willing-minded, many-handed, ploughing-man is a pattern to all preachers and pastors to the end of time. For he worked for Bartholomew in season, out of season. He made more work for himself when all his proper work was done. One day, so Hermas tells us in his ancient history, when this servant was commanded by his master to run a paling round a vineyard, he not only ran the paling round the vineyard, but he dug a ditch also round the same

vineyard, and then he gathered the stones and the thorns out of it; and such things he did always, till, when Bartholomew became a disciple, he left one whole farm, with its full plenishing on it, as a bequest to this ploughman as if he had been his own son and his true heir. He is a fine pattern for all ploughmen and for all feeders of their masters' cattle; but he is a perfect prototype to all preachers and pastors especially. Every single syllable of this scripture is a study for us who are ministers. Whatever other men may make or may not make of this fine scripture, no minister can possibly miss or mistake its meaning for him, or get away from Christ's all-seeing eye as he reads it. Christ sets every minister before this ministerial looking-glass, in order that in it he may see what manner of minister he now is, and may forecast what his place is likely to be when his Master sets His supper, and Himself serves it, for all His ploughmen and for all His vine-dressers. Only, far better have ten ploughmen's work to do than one minister's work. A ploughman may finish his tale of furrows, and may then give his fellow-servant a hand in feeding his master's cattle, and may then take another and a willing hand in the work of the house, after which he will sit down to his supper with a sense of satisfaction over his hard day's work. But I defy any apostle of Jesus Christ ever to have that ploughman's good conscience. And much less any successor of an apostle. If you have been bold enough to be numbered among the true successors of the apostles you have taken up a task that makes

self-satisfaction for ever impossible to you. You may write your sermon over and over again as often as Dr. Newman wrote his masterpieces; but as long as you have not torn it up "fiercely," and written it yet again, you will preach it on Sabbath with such jolts and jars in it as will make you blush and stagger before your people. And you may visit your dying parishioners every afternoon, and your sick, and aged, and infirm, every ten days, but you will never be able to say this ploughman's grace over your supper all the days and nights of your pulpit and pastoral life. For, "the wider the diameter of light," as Dr. Chalmers demonstrated to Dr. Hanna's parishioners on a blackboard at Skirling,—"the larger the circumference of darkness."

Our Lord tells all His true ministers to say every night that they are unprofitable servants, and they all say it. But at the same time He solemnly warns all His so-called ministers that He will irrevocably pronounce this very sentence at the last day against some of them. "Cast ye that slothful and unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." I was told about such a threatened minister of Christ and of His Church in Scotland only last night. He got a good congregation committed to his charge when he was ordained. But at the present moment he has neither Sabbath School, nor Prayer Meeting, nor Bible Class, nor Endeavour Society, nor Band of Hope, and as for his pastoral work, an old man died the other day, not many stonecasts from the

manse, who had not seen his minister for two years. Would any institution set up among men but the Church of Christ endure a scandal like that? Would the army endure it? Or a bank? Or a railway? But let us not despair of any man. Even John Mark once ran away from his work. And yet, long after Paul had denounced and deposed him, we have the Apostle actually saying, Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry. John Mark's whole story is told first in the Acts, and then in the Epistles, just to guide and encourage the Church in all her dealings with all such unprofitable ministers as Mark once was. And by far the best way of dealing with all our unprofitable ministers would be to induce and enable them to visit Bridge-of-Allan, or Dunblane, or Perth, or Keswick, or Mildmay. "We've gotten a minister noo!" said an old elder to me after his hitherto unprofitable minister had been induced and enabled to make such a visit. Or send him a Life of Wesley, or of Whitefield, or of Boston, or of Chalmers, or of Spurgeon. Or perhaps better than all that, get an evangelist on fire to spend a week with him in his parish. "Demas apostatises," says Bengel, "but Mark recovers himself." If you have the means and the opportunity, help your Mark in these ways to recover himself, and he may live to write a gospel for you before all is done.

But all the time, though this character-sketch is intended by our Lord for us ministers in the first

place, it is not intended for us only. Our Lord's true people are all ministers in their own measure, as Moses prayed they might all be. You are all true and direct successors of the disciples and the apostles. And, minister or people, a ploughman or a feeder of cattle, putting up pailings, digging ditches, gathering out stones, or hewing up thorns, when you have done all, end all, as Bartholomew's ploughman ended his long and arduous day's work. End it all with his proverb in your mouth, and in your heart. For be sure of this, that he of God's servants who thinks that he has fully finished and done what he was commanded to do, that man neither knows his Master, nor his Master's commands, nor does he know the a, b, c, of true knowledge about himself. Well may Paul ask, Where is boasting then? And well may he answer himself, It is excluded. And there can be no better mark of the mind and heart of a true and an accepted servant of God than just that he says in his mind and in his heart, after every new and better service of his, that he is the most unprofitable of all God's servants. "The more," says Newman in one of his thrice-written sermons, "any man succeeds in regulating his own heart, the more he will discern its original bitterness and guilt." And all who are engaged in regulating their own heart—which is our Master's whole commandment—will subscribe to what the great preacher says about that. We are fresh in the classes from Chalmers, and Spurgeon, and Foster, and the Wesleys, and Whitefield, and we found them all subscribing to

Newman and to Bartholomew's ploughman. But not one of them all is so much to my own remorseful taste in this matter, as is Thomas Shepard, the Pilgrim Father. Not one of them—passionate as some of them are—is passionate enough for me, till I come to the author of *The Ten Virgins*. Shepard is the most heart-broken, and the most heart-searching, and the most pungently profitable, of all God's heart-ploughing servants to me.

At the same time, while all that is true, and not even Shepard has told the half of the truth, there is another side to all that. And I have never seen that other side so well put as in Marcus Dods of Belford's *Incarnation of the Eternal Word*. "A Book," says the noble-minded and generous-hearted Chalmers, "of great mental wealth and great mental vigour, rich in scholarship, and of a massive and an original power." John Foster demands more case-preaching in our evangelical pulpits, and Marcus Dods's case-page is exactly what Foster wants. And I refer to that page because it so restores the true balance of evangelical and experimental truth in this matter now in hand. It sometimes happens, says Dods, that the true Christian is so far from boasting of himself that he goes much too far in the opposite direction. He dwells far too much upon the defects of his services, or upon some impropriety of motive that had mingled with them. He feels the very acutest anguish over his best and his holiest performances. But there is often a certain taint of self-righteousness in all that. For such a

sufferer not seldom forgets to give the atonement, and the intercession of his great High Priest for him, their true and their full place. He will not take rest nor peace of mind short of the most absolute perfection in his services, leaving no room for the rest and the peace that Christ offers, and Himself is, to all His true-hearted servants. You admit and believe that your services are accepted of God in and through the merit of Christ alone. And yet you are inconsolably distressed because you still detect imperfections in them, and you fear that both you and your services will be for ever cast out of God's presence. Now what is that but making Christ of none effect as your High Priest? What is that but making Him die, and rise again, and intercede for you, in vain? "I have found," says this eminent theologian and evangelical preacher, "this mode of reasoning successful in enabling the mourner to detect the source of his causeless sorrows, and to recover that peace of mind which results from a simple and unhesitating reliance upon our great High Priest, for the pardon of all our sins, and for the acceptance of all our services."

Now, it is all this that explains Paul, and justifies Paul, and makes Paul our greatest evangelical example, where he says with such assurance of heart,—"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." The best fight Paul ever fought was not with wild beasts at Ephesus, but it was with his own self-righteous heart. It was fought that he might be found in Christ, with all his ever-increasing self-discovery and

self-condemnation. And it is his profound grasp of the evangelical faith, that enables Paul so to assure us also that if we only look to Christ alone as our righteousness, and "love His appearing," we shall have our crown of righteousness given to us also at that great day. To be the most unprofitable of servants in our own eyes; to sink into the dust every night speechless with shame and pain over another all but lost day; and at the same time to lie down to sleep accepted in the Beloved,—that is truly to fight the good fight of faith, and to fight it with the whole armour of God: that is really and truly to keep the faith of the gospel till we shall hear our Master's voice saying over us also,—Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

XXIII

THE LABOURER WITH THE EVIL EYE

ESOP'S dog in the manger, and our Lord's labourer with the evil eye, are two companion portraits. Æsop's famous fable taught the very same lesson in ancient Greece that our Lord's present parable taught to Israel in His own day, and still teaches to Christendom in our day.

But before we come to that, there are one or two preliminary lessons that we are intended to learn from the very framework, so to call it, of this parable. And to begin with, let us look well at this unheard-of husbandman. For the like of this husbandman has never been seen before nor since in Galilee, nor in Jewry, nor in Samaria, nor anywhere else. This singular husbandman plants and reaps his vineyard less for the sake of his vines, than for the sake of his vinedressers. This so altruistic husbandman, as we would call him, occupies his vineyard not at all for his own advantage, but for the sole advantage of his labourers. Their well-being is better to him than all the wine they will ever produce. Indeed, and to let out the

whole truth at once, this husbandman is a perfect portrait of God the Father, drawn by the skilful and loving hand of God the Son. My Father is the husbandman, says our Lord in another parable. And it must be so here also. For no other husbandman in all the world ever went out at all hours of the day to hire his labourers, and at the same wages. No other husbandman could afford to pay for one hour's work in the evening of the day as much as he pays for the burden and heat of the whole day. No; this husbandman's portrait is no pure invention of our Lord's sanctified genius, as some of His other portraits are. This is no original stroke of our Lord's holy and fruitful imagination. This is as real and as genuine a likeness as is the likeness of the snarling labourer himself. Only, the snarling and snapping labourer is a likeness taken from this envious and spiteful earth. Whereas this husbandman is the speaking likeness of Heavenly Love. My Father is the husbandman.

"Which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard." Ah, me! With what a sharp stroke does that incidental-looking statement come home to those of us the morning of whose days is now long past! For we remember well how God came to us early in our life, and before we had as yet hired ourselves out to other masters. O young people, if you would only believe it! If we could only put our old hearts into your young bosoms! How fast you would fall in with the husbandman's earliest offer! And what a life of blows, and starvation, and all kinds of cruel

usage, would you thus escape! Satisfy our children, O Lord, early with Thy mercy, that they may rejoice and be glad in Thee all their days.

But of all the hours of this husbandman's labourer-hiring days it is His eleventh hour that comes most home to my own heart. It is His eleventh hour that makes all us old men to exclaim—Who is a God like unto Thee! Whether any young people will be won to God through this scripture to-night, I do not know. But I will answer for some of the old. For He came to us also at the first hour of the day, and at the third hour of the day, and at the sixth hour, and at the ninth hour. But if He will still take us at the eleventh hour, we are His on the spot. The holy child Samuel, and many more early-called, and early-employed, children of God have had their own long and happy lives of highly rewarded labour. But the thought of all such holy and happy labourers is a positive hindrance and stumbling-block to us. All such wise and good men are a rebuke to us rather than an encouragement. It is the thief on the cross who, of all saved men, is our especial example. The thief on the cross was the great eleventh-hour labourer of our Lord's day, and we come into the vineyard with him. At the end of our evil life we come with him. When the sins of our youth, and all our sins, have found us out we come with him. When the wages of our life-long service of sin has become death to us also we come with him. When this mocking taunt is thrown in our teeth,—What fruit have ye now of those things of which ye are

now ashamed? we come with him. Those who are still in the early morning of their days have never heard of the thief on the cross. They have never once read his so heart-encouraging history. It is not yet written for their learning. Not till they are as old as we are will they be able to read the thief's so heartening history as we read it. But it is now the eleventh hour with us as it was with him, and we come with him. Since God takes the bitterest dregs of our sinful lives, and, like this husbandman, pays so altruistically for them, we come. Take us, O God; O do Thou take us. And where our sin has abounded, let Thy grace much more abound.

Is thine eye evil? said the good husbandman to the murmuring labourer. Now, an "evil eye" is just our old Bible English for the Latin word "invidia." Is thine heart so selfish and so envious as that? was what our Lord said to this man who could not enjoy his own wages for grudging and growling at his neighbour's wages. Æsop's dog in the manger had his own bone, and he did not deny that it was both a big and a sweet bone. But he was such a hound at heart that he could not see his master's ox beginning to munch his bottle of straw in his manger without snarling and snapping at him. And no more did this dog of a labourer complain that his wages were not quite enough for all the work he had done. All his unhappiness lay in this that his neighbour had so much wages to take home with him that night to his happy wife and children. He did not complain that he was underpaid himself.

All his misery came from this, that his fellow-servant was so much overpaid. Both Æsop's dog, and our Lord's dog-like labourer, were sick of that strange disease,—their neighbour's health. This wretched creature was so full of an evil eye that every one must have seen it. Even if he hadheld his peace every one must have seen his evil heart running out of his eye. Even if you were a perfect stranger to me; even if I had never seen you before, I would undertake to tell to all men the name of the man you both envy and hate, if I were near enough to see your eye when your rival is being praised and rewarded in your presence. Nay, I would know it from the very tone of your voice; aye, from the very cough in your throat. For envy, like love, will out. And, as our Lord is always saying to us, it will out at the eye. "As to the motive of those attacks on Goethe," says Heine, "I know at least what it was in my own case. It was my evil eye." Now, who is your Goethe? Who is your fellow-labourer in your special line of life? "Potter envies potter," says Aristotle. Who is your companion-potter? And do you have the self-knowledge that even poor Heine had, to say to yourself every day—'As for these dislikes, and aversions, and antipathies, that I feel in my heart; as well as for these depreciations and contempts that pass continually through my tongue and my pen; I know what their motive is in my own case at least, it is in my own evil eye.'

> Envy so parched my blood, that had I seen
> A fellow man made joyous, thou hadst mark'd
> A livid paleness overspread my cheek.

> Such harvest reap I of the seed I sow'd.
> O man, why place thy heart where there doth need
> Exclusion of participants in good?

If he is rightly reported, a Greek commentator who bears a great name makes a very shallow remark at this point. He says that it is difficult for him to believe that any man who is really within the kingdom of heaven himself, and is in its service, and is receiving its rewards, could have an evil eye at another man for his work and for his wages in that kingdom. A more stupid remark never fell from an able man's pen. A more senseless and self-exposing annotation was never made. A young friend of Mr. George Meredith's once came to him in an agony of pain and shame. "This is too bad of you!" he cried. "Willoughby is me!" "No, my dear fellow," said the great writer, "Willoughby is all of us." And in like manner, instead of it being difficult to believe that there was ever such a dog in the manger as this murmuring labourer, we are all such dogs, and he who does not know and confess it—the shell is yet on his head. Yes, Willoughby is all of us. The truth is, an evil eye, like this labourer's evil eye, is not only in all our hearts, but it is the agony of every truly good man's heart that it is so: it is very hell itself to every truly good man's heart that it is so: to every man's heart who is so much as even beginning to know what true goodness really is. Instead of there being no envy among the disciples of Jesus Christ, and among those who labour in His Father's vineyard, as this stupid old annotator would have us

believe; instead of that, the true hellishness of envy is never tasted by any man till he is far up in the kingdom of heaven, and is full of its mind and spirit. Dante was far up on his way to Paradise when the fine dialogue on envy and on love took place. Dante sounds his deepest depths in his heart-searching cantos on envy, even as his most seraphic flights are taken in his cantos on love.

"Behold we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?" That miserable speech of Peter's, which gave occasion to this parable, utterly vitiated all Peter's previous work for his Master, however hard he had worked, and however much he had forsaken for his Master's cause. For it is yet another of the absolute principles of this noble vineyard that it is *motive* in its labourers that counts with its Master. It is motive alone that counts with Him, far more than strength, or skill, or early morning promptitude and punctuality, in His labourers. Unless all these admirable qualities are informed and animated by the right motives, they all go for next to nothing in this so singular and so spiritual vineyard. "An unexamined life is no true life at all," Socrates kept saying continually, as he both examined his own motives every day and set all other men on the daily examination of their own motives. We know from Peter's own mouth what his motives had been in his discipleship up till now. And Peter's shame is told us here that we may see our own shame in our own motives also and up till now. Why, then,

do I do this and that work in the vineyard? Why do I study? Why do I preach? Why do I visit the sick and dying? Why am I an elder? Why am I a deacon? Why do I subscribe to this fund and that? Why am I a Sabbath-school teacher? And why am I a member of this church rather than of that? It is our mean and self-seeking motives that lurk so unexamined in our hearts that make us all so many dogs in the manger, and so many envious and murmuring labourers in the vineyard. And as it was at Peter and his miserable motives that his Master levelled this parable, so it is at us and at our miserable motives, and at the miserable envies and jealousies that spring out of our miserable motives, that He levels this same parable in this house to-night.

And now in summing up our Lord adds this noble lesson to all His other noble lessons in this noble and ennobling scripture. Many are called, He adds, but few are chosen. Take them all together, He says; take those called at the first hour of the day, and those called at the third hour, and those called at the sixth hour, and those called at the ninth hour, and those called at the eleventh hour—when they are all counted up—many are called. But, with all that, the chosen men; the truly choice spirits even among the men who are called; the men who are sincere and single in their motives; the men who are full of humility about themselves, and about their work, and about their wages; the men who are so full of brotherly love that they have no evil eye left at their brother's

good work or good wages, but who rather rejoice in all the good things that fall to their brother-labourer's lot—such men are not many even in the vineyard of heaven itself. There are many in that vineyard who say with Peter—What shall we have, therefore? But they are few who work at all hours of the day, and still receive their wages at night with pain and shame, and say to themselves that they are the most unprofitable of all their fellow-servants. They are the few, even among God's true servants, who continually look on all they receive and possess as so many proofs of His singular and unparalleled grace and goodness to themselves. They are the few who so think and so feel and so speak; but, then, they are the very finest and the very choicest of all His saints. They are the elect of His elect. Their true place on earth is in such a noble vineyard as this, and they are the true servants of such a noble Master as this. My brethren, at whatever hour you enter this vineyard, early or late, work all your days in this fine and noble spirit. So work for your Master, and so love your neighbour as yourself, that you may be found at last, not only among the many called, but among the few chosen.

XXIV

THE CHILDREN OF CAPERNAUM PLAYING AT MARRIAGES AND FUNERALS IN THE MARKET-PLACE

IT is the market-place of Capernaum and it is the cool of the day. The workmen and the workwomen of the town are sitting in the shade after the work of the day is over, and the children, having been released from school, are boisterously engaged in their evening games. 'Come,' cries a leading boy, 'Come and let us have a marriage. This here will be the bride's house, and I will be the bridegroom, and we will all get our lamps lighted, and we will go to the bride's house to bring her home to my house.' 'No,' shouts another. 'No. We had a marriage yesterday, when you were the bridegroom. Let us have a funeral to-day. And I will be the dead man, and you and you and you will take me up and carry me out of the gate, and all the rest will come out after us lamenting and mourning and weeping.' But the bridegroom would not have a funeral, and the dead man would not have a marriage, till a quarrel arose, and till

their fathers and mothers had to separate their children and take them home. And till One who had sat in the market-place and had seen it all, arose and went out into the hill-country and was all that night alone and in prayer. And as He looked on Capernaum He wept and said, "And thou, Capernaum, whereunto shall I liken thee, but to thine own children playing in the market-place, and calling to their fellows, and saying—We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced: we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented."

> The childhood shows the man,
> As morning shows the day,—

sings Milton about the childhood of our Lord. And that childhood scene in the market-place of Capernaum already shows the coming manhood and womanhood of those contending children. And it shows, not their childhood and manhood and womanhood alone, but our own childhood and manhood and womanhood also. The self-will and the bad humour and the obstinacy and the fault-finding of those Capernaum children in the market-place, and of their parents in the synagogue, are all held up before us in this glass of God, looking into which we are instructed to see, not our own children only, but our grown-up selves also. Just because a marriage was proposed by one playfellow his neighbour would not have a marriage. He would have a funeral. His little wilful heart at once rose up within him to resist his neighbour's proposal. He would have a funeral that day and in nothing

but a funeral would he take any part. The marriage game was surely a far more delightful game than the funeral game. But it was not delight that he was now set upon; it was his own will and his own way. "The cause is in my will," said Cæsar. "I will not come. Let that be enough to satisfy the senate." And it was enough that this little Cæsar of Capernaum said that he would not have a marriage but a funeral. Immense libraries have been written, first and last, on the will: and that by our very ablest and very best men. But behind Cæsar's will in Rome, and behind this little tyrant's will in Capernaum, no philosopher or theologian of them all has ever been able to go. We see self-will every day and we taste the bitter fruits of it every day. But why the human will should be so incurably evil, that is past the wit of our wisest men to find out. An evil will is the true mystery of iniquity, till the whole world is one huge market-place of Capernaum, and all owing to your evil will and mine. I will not play with you unless I get my own will and way in everything. And you will not play with me unless you get your own will and way in everything. "He is a very nice man when he gets his own way," said one of yourselves the other day when he was praising one of yourselves. And Elizabeth, as we are told, was a very nice queen when her bishops tuned their pulpits to keep time to her dancing. But when they tuned their pulpits to the truth she showed herself a very virago. She would play at churches with them every day, and all day, if they would but play to please her. But

if they did not, they would know the consequences. To how many things, both in church and in state, and both at home and at play, has Cæsar given us the one true and complete key—"The cause is in my will. Let that satisfy the senate."

It was the mother of the dead man of last night who came with her son in her hand to our Lord as He was preparing to preach in the market-place next morning. 'Master,' she said, 'I saw all Thy sorrow and shame over my son last night. I watched Thee all the time and I knew all that was in Thy thoughts about him. But they were not such sad thoughts as mine were. And now I have brought my little son that Thou mayest lay Thy hand upon him and make him a new heart. And if not, I would rather he had never been born; I would rather see him a dead man indeed, and carried out of the city on his dead bier, than live to see him grow up as he began last night.' And Jesus had pity on her. And He laid His hand on her little son's head, and said, 'Blessed be the son of such a mother. For of such mothers, and of the sons of such mothers, is the kingdom of heaven.

> They that have my Spirit,
> These, said He, are mine.'

Now my brethren, if you and I have grown up, and are growing old, without having been blessed of God with a new heart: that is to say with a gentle, humble, meek, affable, and complying heart: if we are come to manhood and womanhood with a hard and stony heart: a proud, self-willed, obstinate,

despotic, and tyrannical heart still within us—how is it all to end? and when? and where? We cannot be content, surely, to go on and on with such an evil heart within us, making ourselves miserable, and making all who have to do with us miserable also. And if the New Testament is true; if we suddenly die with such a heart still in us, it will be to be devils for ever ourselves, and the playfellows of devils for ever. If we are hardening our hearts against God and man, and are set on having our own will in everything; if we go about tyrannising over everybody, and making everybody suffer from our insolent temper, what is there in death, or after death, to give such as we are a new heart? There are abundance of promises in death and after death to the meek, and to the sweet, and to the submissive, and to the self-surrendering, and to the self-sacrificing. But I have not found any such promises and consolations to the high-minded, and the sour-tempered, and the quarrelsome, and the self-asserting—have you? I have met with not a few warnings and threatenings and divine denunciations against such, both in this world and in the world to come. And you must have met with the same. And to all such among you, amid scenes of misery caused by your wicked temper and your tyranny, your own conscience must have told you to your face that you are the man. Now what are you doing to alter that? Or are you doing anything? And are you content to go on as you are, with such a heart as yours and you taking no step to mend it? Yes, what step are you taking to mend it? For even

if you came to Him to whom that Capernaum mother came, He would only say to you what He said to her, and what He said to her far-off fathers and mothers through His servant Ezekiel. "Repent," He will say to you, "and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so your iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit, for why will you die? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." Come away then, and let us look at some of the times and the places when and where you must set about making yourselves a new heart; that is to say, a broken, contrite, chastened, tender, yielding, companionable, heart.

"How shall a man like me ever become of an affectionate and companionable temper?" asks Epictetus, the Stoic professor, at his students in his lecture-room in Nicopolis. And this is the answer he gives himself in their hearing. I take his answer out of the notebook of one who was present. And I take Epictetus because our Lord said, "And thou, Capernaum; they shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven, while many of the children of the kingdom, such as thou and thy children are, shall in nowise enter into it." "How," asks the old Stoic, "shall a man like me ever become of a truly noble and divine disposition?" And he answers himself in this way. "Every man is improved by the corresponding acts. The carpenter is improved by the acts of carpentry. And

the orator is improved by the acts of oratory. But if a carpenter slovens over his work he will never become a good carpenter. And if an orator does not speak better and better every time he rises to his feet he will soon be hissed out of the pulpit. And in religion and morals it is the very same thing. Thus, modest actions preserve and improve the already modest man, and immodest actions destroy him. Shamelessness strengthens the shameless man, faithlessness the faithless man, abusive words the abusive man, angry words and angry acts make the man more and more a man of anger, and avaricious acts end in making a man a miser." And the great Stoic has line upon line, and precept upon precept to his scholars in this all-important matter. For in another page of Arrian's notebook I come upon this—"Every habit and faculty is maintained and increased by the corresponding actions. The habit of walking by walking, and the habit of running by running. If you would be a good reader, read; if a good writer, write. Lie down ten days and then attempt a long walk, and you will see how your power of walking has gone from you. Generally, then, if you would make anything a part of your character, practise it. When you have been again angry to-day, you have not only been again angry to-day, but you are all that the more open to anger to-morrow. Till to-day's anger, and to-morrow's anger, and the next day's anger, will all unite to make you an absolute savage to all who live near you. But if you wish not to be such a savage, do not do the acts of a savage, but the acts of a

gentleman. Do not feed your savage temper by savage words and savage actions. Keep your bad temper in hand, till you can count the days on which you have not been angry. I used to be in a passion every day at something or somebody, now every second day, then every third, then every fourth day. But if you have intermitted thirty days without an explosion of anger, make a thanksgiving sacrifice to God. If you escape for two or three months, be assured that you are in a very good way. Great is the combat, divine is the work; it is for freedom, it is for happiness, it is for holiness. Remember God, and go on." So far Epictetus.

Are you then a self-willed, proud-hearted, intolerant, and tyrannical, man? Or are you a virago of a woman? And would you be a gentleman and a gentlewoman? Epictetus has told you the way to-night. Butler has told you the same way in your own tongue, but Epictetus was beforehand by two thousand years. Gentlemanly acts will end in making you a gentleman, and nothing else will. No man was ever born a gentleman; no mere man. But multitudes have made themselves gentlemen and gentlewomen. And that on the Epictetus-principle of acts, habits, character. The next time, then, that opinions and proposals differ where you are concerned, seize you this assurance, that God Himself has brought about that difference of opinion, and those conflicting proposals, with His eye set on you. Opinions and proposals are nothing to Him: but you, and your moral character, and your Christian conduct are

everything to Him. To-night yet, and before you have slept this scripture of His off your mind, and to-morrow, to a certainty, two opinions and two proposals will be tabled before you, and that in order to put it to the proof if you have paid any attention to-night. In order to see if your visit to the playground of Capernaum, and to the mountain of prayer above Capernaum, has done you any good. Be you ready. Be you prepared. Play you the man that moment. If it is a marriage that is proposed, put yourself at their disposal. Say that you will undertake to see the registrar and the minister. Do not mention the other engagements you had made for that week and that day. But put them all off till you have seen this marriage carried smoothly and sweetly through. And after you have seen them away to their honeymoon, you will be far happier in your lonely lodging than if you had been the bridegroom himself. Do it and see! At any rate, there will be better than bridegroom-joy in heaven over you because this playground of Capernaum has not been lost upon you to-night.

XXV

THE SAMARITAN WHO SHEWED MERCY

A CERTAIN man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

"And, by chance, there came down a certain priest that way," says our Lord, telling the story after

the manner of men. He knew better than any one that there is nothing left to "chance" in this world; not even the fall of a sparrow; not even a hair of our head. "It will be obvious to the intelligent reader," says Thomas Boston's son in editing his father's priceless *Autobiography*, "that the radical principle upon which this narration is founded, is that *God hath preordained whatsoever comes to pass.* This principle the author believed with all his heart, it was often an anchor to his soul, and every minister of the Church of Scotland is bound, by his subscription and ordination vows, to maintain it. This, kept in view, will account for the author's ascribing to an over-ruling Providence many incidents, which some may think might be resolved into natural causes." I do not know what, all, this priest's ordination vows may have been. But I am quite sure that if any one had asked him in the temple yesterday saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He would have answered him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. But the pity with this priest was, that as soon as he got his temple duties over yesterday, he forgot all that about his neighbour till he put on his gown again next Sabbath morning in Jericho. And thus it was that he was on his way down to Jericho that day when, by chance, he came on a half-dead man on the way-side. Being a temple priest, he should have said to himself as he set out on his journey,—

The Lord shall keep thy soul: He shall
Preserve thee from all ill.
Henceforth thy going out and in
God keep for ever will.

And then he should have been making the "bloody pass" safe to himself and to others by singing to himself,—

Shew me thy ways, O Lord:
Thy paths O teach thou me:
And do thou lead me in thy truth,
Therein my teacher be.

For thou art God that dost
To me salvation send,
And I upon thee all the day
Expecting do attend.

But not setting out in that way, and not singing to himself in that way, the priest missed his chance of salvation and of eternal life,—for that day at any rate.

The Levite who followed him would seem, for one thing, to have had somewhat more curiosity than the priest, and to have come all that the nearer that day to eternal life. The priest saw enough at the first glance to suffice and satisfy him: but the Levite stopped and went to the side of the road and looked at the half-murdered man, but that one look was enough for him also, for he also passed by on the other side. If the half-dead man's eyes were not entirely torn out by the thieves, and if he was able to open his eyes for a moment as he heard the coming footsteps, how his heart must have beat back to life again at the sight of the priest

and the Levite. When a beggar at one of our road-sides sees a minister coming along with his black clothes and his white neckcloth, the poor wretch feels sure that he will not be passed by this time without a kind word at any rate. But his disappointment is all the more when the man of God looks the other way and passes by in silence on the other side.

Now, nobody who knew what the Samaritans were would have wondered at one of them setting out on a journey any morning and every morning without a Psalm, and then coming "by chance" on this man and that, all the day, and passing them by without a thought. But however he set out, psalm or no psalm, and however this Samaritan was occupied as he rode down the Jericho-pass, as God would have it, Behold, there is a half-dead Jew lying in the ditch at the roadside. Were ever any of you as full as you could hold of mortal hatred at any enemy of yours? At any enemy of your church or your country? Were you ever in such a diabolical state of mind at any man, or at any race of men, that it would have made you glad to see him lying wounded and half dead? Well, that was the very way that the Jews and the Samaritans felt to one another in our Lord's day. They had nothing short of your mortal hatred at one another. And, had that been a half-dead man of Samaria, it would have been nothing wonderful to see the Samaritan traveller doing all that to his fellow-countryman. But to do it to a Jew,—that is why this Samaritan's name is so celebrated in heaven. What do you

think would be the thoughts of the half-dead Jew as he saw his own temple-kinsmen passing by on the other side, and then saw this dog of a Samaritan leaping off his mule? What would he think and say all night as he saw this excommunicated Samaritan lighting the candle to pour oil and wine into his wounds and watching all night at his bedside? That Samaritan mule hobbling down the Jericho-pass with that half-dead burden on its back always reminds me of Samuel Johnson hobbling along to Bolt Court with the half-dead street-walker on his back and laying her down on old Mrs. Williams's bed to nurse her back to life. The *English Dictionary* has long been superseded, and it is only one enterprising student of the best English literature here and there who goes back to *The Lives of the Poets.* But that immortal picture of that midnight street in London, and that immortal picture of that bloody pass of Adummim, will be sister portraits for ever among the art-treasures of the new Jerusalem. And if you love your neighbour as yourself in this city, as this Samaritan and Dr. Johnson did in Jericho and in London, you will yet see those two portraits and the originals of them with your own eyes, in the art-galleries of the heavenly country.

Then said Jesus to the lawyer, Go, and do thou likewise. But he, willing to justify himself, began, lawyer-like, to raise speculative and casuistical questions, instead of immediately setting about to do his duty. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." 'Yes,' said the man of law, 'but who is

my neighbour? Distinguish, and clear up to me who, exactly, my neighbour is,' said this subtle casuist. My brethren, all men are your neighbours. Absolutely all men. Absolutely every man. But more immediately every stripped, and wounded, and half-dead, man. And still more, every enemy of yours. Yes, absolutely every man. For, who is so unrobbed, and so unwounded, and so full of life and love, as not to stand in need of your brotherly love, and of every kind of life-giving office at your hands? Who is there on the face of this earth who does not need, and will not welcome, the oil and the wine of your loving kindness poured into his many wounds? No man. No woman. It is not only in the bloody pass of Adummim and on the midnight street of London that your neighbours are to be come on wounded and half-dead: they are to be found everywhere. Many who have their own beasts to ride upon, and who are quite able to pay their own bill to the inn-keeper and your bill also: many such stand in as much need of your love and your services of love as did that half-dead Jew on the road to Jericho. A kind thought, a kind look, a kind word, a kind deed; carry about that oil and that wine with you, and you will not lack wounded and half-dead men and women to bless the day on which they first saw your face and heard your voice.

But some lawyer here, willing to justify himself, will stand up to tempt me, and will demand of me whether I mean to deny all my late sermons on the Romans? And to teach to-night that this Samaritan

was justified before God simply because of this good deed of his? I quite admit that both our Lord, and His Apostle, sometimes teach economically, and paradoxically, and one-sidedly even, on occasion. All the same,—go you and do you as this good Samaritan did. And if death and judgment overtake you walking beside your mule on the way to the inn at Jericho: or if your Lord summons you to give in your account when you are up smoothing the pillow of a half-dead enemy of yours; I would far rather take your chance of eternal life than if death and judgment overtook you still debating, however Calvinistically, about your evangelical duty. Yes: Go at once to-night and do likewise.

Spurgeon says somewhere that wherever his text is, and whatever his text is, he will find his way, somehow, to Jesus Christ before he leaves his text. Now it is not to go far from this text to go to Him who is The Good Samaritan indeed. It has been said of Goethe that, like this priest and this Levite, he kept well out of sight of stripped, and wounded, and half-dead, men. I hope it is not true of that great intellectual man. At any rate it is not true of Jesus Christ. For He comes and He goes up and down all the bloody passes of human life, actually looking for wounded and half-dead men, and for none else. Till He may well bear the name of The one and only entirely Good and True Samaritan. They are here to whom He has said it and done it. "When I passed by thee, and saw thee wounded and half dead, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee

when thou wast in thy blood, Live. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was a time of love. Then washed I thee with water, and I anointed thee with oil." And we ourselves are the proof of it. That we are here to-night, in the land of the living and in the place of hope, is the sufficient proof of it. We are as it were in the inn of Jericho to-night. But to-morrow He will come back and will repay whatever they are to-night spending here upon us. And as soon as we are able to be removed He will come and take us home with Him, for a greater and a better and a bigger-hearted than the best Samaritan is here. He will take us to that land with Him where no man falls among thieves and where they rob not nor wound nor leave a man half-dead. Go, said His Father to Him, and love Thy neighbour and Thine enemy as Thyself. And instead of wishing to justify Himself; instead of saying, But who is My neighbour—you know what He said, and what He did, and to whom He said it and did it. And we who were in the bloody pass, and were stripped, and wounded, and half-dead, we are the proof of it, and will for ever be the proof and the praise of it.

And now, my brethren, is it not a cause of the profoundest praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God that peace has come, and that there is not a man on the face of the whole earth that we any more wish to see wounded and half-dead? And must it not be a sweet thing to our King to think about on his bed, and to all his Royal House, that he has no enemy now to his throne and sceptre and

crown in all the wide world. And that is so, because He, The Good Samaritan, is our peace, Who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us: having abolished in His flesh the enmity; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace. And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby. For through Him we both have access by one spirit unto the Father; through Jesus Christ, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

XXVI

MOSES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT MOUNT

THE Sermon on the Mount is the last sermon of Moses that has come down to us. It is the last sermon and it is the best of that great lawgiver. In this last sermon of his we have Moses rising above himself and stretching himself beyond himself. But all the time, and with all that, this is still Moses. The mouth, indeed, is the mouth of a far greater than Moses, but the hands and the heart are still the hands and the heart of the old lawgiver. For as we sit under this sermon we soon find that we are still in the hands and the heart of the law. The law is at its most spiritual indeed; the law is at its most holy, and just, and good indeed, in the Sermon on the Mount. But the very spirituality of its holiness only serves to make our condemnation under it all the more hopeless, and our death at its hands all the more certain and inexorable. Till we cry out under this sermon, as the murderers of his Master cried out under Peter's sermon—Men and brethren, what shall we do?

The eight beatitudes with which this sermon begins are undoubtedly very beautiful. There is no denying that. That is to say they are very beautiful to him who finds himself in a position to claim them as his due, and to possess them and to expatiate upon them. But let him who has tried with all his might to purchase them and to claim them, let him tell us what he thinks of their beauty and what effect their beauty always has upon his heart and upon his conscience. Orion and the Pleiades are very beautiful, he will tell you. But he will tell you also that he will sooner hope to build his house up among their sweet influences, than he will hope to possess the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount by anything he can ever suffer or perform or attain. The pole-star is not so far out of his reach, he will tell you, as is the nearest to him of those beautiful, but heart-breaking, beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. I do not know how it is in this matter with you. But I will tell you frankly how it is with me. Ever since I first saw something of their terrible spirituality, I cannot bear to read so much as one single beatitude, or indeed any other sentence in this sermon, till I have again strengthened my heart with the Epistle to the Romans. To me the Epistle to the Romans is the true foundation-stone, corner-stone, and copestone, of the whole New Testament. Nay, its bold-hearted author is bold enough to take his Epistle to the Romans, and his Epistle to the Galatians, and to lay them away up before and underneath even the Book of Genesis itself. And

as often as I read again his so ancient and so unanswerable argument, I forthwith feel that I hold in my hand, not only the true key to all the promises and prophecies and types and emblems of the Old Testament; but what is far better to me, I hold in my hand the true and only key to let me out of that dungeon of despair into which Moses again shuts me, as often as I read any of his sermons, and forget my Romans and my Galatians. I can walk at liberty around Mount Sinai itself; I can climb to the very top of its most threatening precipices, and can look down over them to their very bottom, if I have Paul as my mountain guide to lean upon, and his Romans to direct me and to encourage me.

Luther—'not such a perfect gentleman as Paul, perhaps, but almost as great an evangelical genius,' —Luther labours with all his might, and it is not little, to keep Moses in his right place and not to let him move out of his right place, no, not by so much as one single inch, or, rather, out of his three right places. The first of Moses' right places is what the Reformer calls his political place. That is to say, the place from which the great lawgiver issues his laws for the good government of states and cities and households. Moses' second place is that of a universal prosecutor and accuser of all men; for out of his second place he convicts all men of sin and death and shuts all men's mouths. And his third right place, according to Luther, is to be an overseer and task-master of all wise and safe housebuilding, as in the text. Now,

come and let us take this approved housebuilder to-night, and let us address ourselves to learn some communion-evening lessons from him, and from Moses, and from Paul.

Well then, let it be remarked and remembered that the first praise that is given to this wise housebuilder is this, that he digged deep down for a foundation before he began to build his house. And this sermon which leads up to him, digs deep down also, if ever sermon did. As you will see if you will but walk over the ground it covers and with your eyes open. Take, to begin with, that hunger and thirst after righteousness to which the fourth beatitude is attached, and you will see what a deep and central shaft that sinks into your own soul. Then take all kinds of purity of heart, and that is, as you must confess, another very deep and very secret shaft. And take your demanded reconciliation to your offended brother, before you need seek for your reconciliation to your offended God, and that, you must allow, is not surface work. Neither is the command to do good to the men who hate you and despitefully use you. Now all that is what this sermon describes as digging deep. And one of our very first lessons from all that should surely be that as this sermon digs so deep, so should all sermons do. The true worth to us of every sermon is not its learning, or its eloquence, but its depth: the depth of him who preaches it, and the depth of them who hear it. Thomas Goodwin, whose depth has drawn me to him all my days, has this passage on this subject. "By this digging

deep I do not mean deep terrors, for it is not necessary that all kinds of earth should be digged out with iron pickaxes. God uses such tools to none but hard earth only. Very small spades and shovels suffice to dig up and empty out some men. Only, all men must be dug up and emptied out somehow. All men must be emptied out by a spiritual insight into their true estate, and made to see down to the bottom of their own hopelessly evil hearts. And must be made to confess their utter inability to build a single stone of a safe house for themselves, except out of and then upon that Rock which is Christ."

There is no saying of His in all this sermon of His that is more deep-digging and fundamental than what our Lord here says to us about much secret prayer. For there is nothing that we scamp and skim over more than just much secret prayer. The Preacher of this sermon had all His own days dug deep, and had laid the foundations of His own house deep, in continual and unceasing secret prayer. And He went on doing that till the time came when He Himself was to be likened to a wise man. For all that night in the garden of Gethsemane He was still digging deep, and was making absolutely sure that His house was founded on God His Father, and on Him alone. And it was so, that when the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house all that night, it fell not: for it was founded on a Rock. And had Peter taken his Master's advice and example all his days, and even that one night, his

house would not have fallen with such a sad fall, all that night and all next day. Do this deep saying of Christ yourselves, O all you communicants of to-day! For there are clouds rising that will soon burst on your house also, and if it is not dug deep with much secret prayer, you may depend upon it, great will be the fall of it.

And now as you go over all this deep-dug ground, what do you say to all these sayings of His about meekness, and about hunger after righteousness, and about purity of heart, and about peacemaking, and reconciliation to your offended brother, and about cutting off your right hand, and plucking out your right eye, and about loving your neighbour as yourself, and about closet prayer, and about laying up treasure in heaven, and about seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and about judging not, that you be not judged, and about entering in at the strait gate—what do you say to all these sayings of His who came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it, and to have it fulfilled in you? What do you really think and feel about the whole of this Sermon of His on the Mount? Babes at the breast; preachers and writers with the shell on their heads, chatter their praises of the Sermon on the Mount, and incessantly advertise us that all their New Testament, and all their creed, and all their catechism, are summed up in the Sermon on the Mount. My brethren, you know better. You have dug deeper. The law of God has been dug deeper than that into your understanding and your heart and your

conscience. Yes, this is very Moses to you, and Moses with his two-edged sword in his hand, as never before. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." And by this deep law of wise house-building all your foolish building is discovered and denounced to you. Just try your hand at a truly spiritual house, and see. Take—"Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." And begin at once to found deep, and to build up, your spiritual house. Begin to live a life of meekness. Study humility. Keep ever before your eyes the many and deep reasons there are why you should be the meekest and the humblest-minded of men. Set yourself with all your might to put up with all injustice, and all ill-usage, and all contempt, and all neglect on all hands. Suffer long and be kind. And your house will rise, for a time, on that foundation, till one day a storm will come. One dark day the rain will descend and the floods will come, and the winds will blow and beat upon your house of meekness, till it will fall, and will bury you under it. Another will attempt his house on this foundation, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." Begin to lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and tell me how long your refuge lasts you. And so on, through all the foundations laid on Sinai.

Yes. This whole sermon is still Moses and his two tables of stone, rather than Jesus Christ and His Cross and Righteousness. Literally, no doubt,

Jesus Christ did preach this sermon. Nobody disputes that. But then, the real truth is, that it is not Christ's preaching that proves Him to be the true Christ to you at all; it is not His sermons but His Cross that is the sure proof of that to you: and His Cross is still a far way off. We have far greater preachers of Christ in the New Testament Church than Christ was Himself. It was not yet the time for any one fully to preach Christ. As He said Himself to His mother at the marriage of Cana—My time is not yet come. The truth is—I will say it for myself, if you will not let me say it for you—unless far other sermons than the Sermon on the Mount had been preached in the New Testament Church it had been better for me I had not been born. But for Paul's preaching of Christ, I, for one, would be of all men the most miserable. 'Far greater and far better sermons than mine shall be preached,' He said, 'because I go to the Father. I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth. He shall glorify me; for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.'

Wherefore then serveth the Sermon on the Mount? you will demand of me; to which demand of yours Paul will answer you. "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid; for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the

law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to all them that believe." In other words —The Sermon on the Mount sets forth, as never before nor since, a splendid exhibition of the majestic and noble righteousness, as well as the exquisitely inward spirituality, of God's holy law. And this sermon commands all men, and more especially all men of a spiritual mind, to keep looking at themselves continually in this glass that Christ Himself here holds up before them. Holds up with His own hands before them in order that they may see, and never for a moment forget, what manner of men they still are. And then His redeeming death being accomplished, and Paul being raised up to preach the true, and full, and complete, and final, Gospel; and after we have heard and believed that Jesus Christ is made of God to us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, we now return to the Sermon on the Mount to see in all its beatitudes and in all its commandments what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness.

XXVII

THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

OU are not to think of an angel with six wings. This is neither a Michael nor a Gabriel. I cannot give you this man's name, but you may safely take it that he was simply one of the oldest of the office-bearers of Ephesus. No, he was no angel. He was just a chosen and faithful elder who had begun by being a deacon and who had purchased to himself a good degree, like any one of yourselves. Only, by reason of his great age and his spotless character and his outstanding services, he had by this time risen till he was now at the head of what we would call the kirk-session of Ephesus. By universal acclamation he was now the "president of their company, and the moderator of their actions," as Dr. John Rainoldes has it. This angel, so to call him, had grown grey in his eldership and he was beginning to feel that the day could not now be very far distant when he would be able to lay down his office for ever. At the same time, it looked to him but like yesterday when he had heard the prince of the apostles saying to him

those never-to-be-forgotten words—"Take heed to thyself, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made thee an overseer, to feed the flock of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." And, with many mistakes, and with many shortcomings, this ruling and teaching elder of Ephesus has not been wholly unmindful of his ordination vows. In short, this so-called angel of the Church of Ephesus was no more an actual angel than I am. A real angel is an angel. And we cannot attain to a real angel's nature, or to his office, so as to describe such an angel aright. But we understand this Ephesus elder's nature and office quite well. We see his very same office every day among ourselves. For his office was just to feed the flock of God, as Paul has it. And again, as James has it, his office was just to visit the widows and orphans of Ephesus in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world of Ephesus. And he who has been elected of God to such an office as that in Ephesus, or in Edinburgh, or anywhere else, has no need to envy the most shining angel in all the seven heavens. For the most far-shining angel in the seventh heaven itself desires to look down into the pulpit and the pastorate of the humblest and obscurest minister in the Church of Christ. And that because he knows quite well that there is nothing for him to do in the whole of heaven for one moment to be compared with the daily round on this earth of a minister, or an elder, or a deacon, or a collector, or a Sabbath-school teacher.

Now, there is nothing so sweet, either among angels or among men, as to be appreciated and praised. To be appreciated and praised is the wine that maketh glad the heart of God and man. And the heart of the old minister of Ephesus was made so glad when he began to read this Epistle that he almost died with delight. And then as His all-seeing and all-rewarding way always is, His Lord descended to instances and particulars in His appreciation and praise of His servant. 'I know thy works. I chose thee. I gave thee all thy talents. I elected thee to thy charge in Ephesus. I ordained thee to that charge, and my right hand hath held thee up in it. Thou hast never been out of my mind or out of my eye or out of my hand for a moment. I have seen all thy work as thou wentest about doing it for me. It is all written before me in my book. All thy tears also are in my bottle.'

We have an old-fashioned English word that exactly sets forth what our Lord says next to the angel of Ephesus. 'I know all thy painfulness also,' He says. It is a most excellent expression for our Master's purpose. No other language has produced so many painful ministers as the English language, and no other language can so well describe them. For just what does this painfulness mean? It means all that is left behind for us to fill up of His own painful sufferings. It means all that tribulation through which every true minister of His goes up. It means cutting off now a right hand and plucking out now a right

eye. It means taking up some ministerial cross every day. It means drinking every day the cup of the sinfulness of sin. It means to me old Thomas Shepard more than any other minister that I know. "Labour," as our bloodless version has it is a far too dry, a far too wooden, and a far too tearless, word, for our Lord to employ toward such servants of His. Depend upon it He will not content Himself with saying "labour" only. He will select and will distinguish His words on that day. And to all who among ourselves have preached and prayed and have examined themselves in and after their preaching and praying, as it would seem that this angel at one time did, and as Thomas Shepard always did, their Master will signalise and appreciate and praise their "painfulness" in their own so expressive old English, and they will appreciate and appropriate His so suitable word and will appreciate and praise Him back again for it.

His patience is another of the praises that his Master gives to this once happy minister. I do not suppose that the angel of Ephesus counted himself a specially happy man when, all unthought of to himself, he was laying up in heaven all this eulogium upon himself and upon his patience. But all the more, with such a suffering servant, his Master held Himself bound to take special knowledge of all that went on in the Church of Ephesus. And to this day and among all our so altered circumstances, patience continues to take a foremost place in the heart and in all the ministry of every successor of the true apostleship. Nay,

patience was not only an apostolic grace, it was much more a Messianic grace. Patience was one of the most outstanding and far-shining graces of our Lord Himself as long as He was by far the most sorely tried of all His ministers. And He has all men and all things in His hands to this day that He may so order all men and all things as that all His ministers shall be put to this school all their days, as He was put all His days by His Father. The whole of every minister's lot and life is divinely ordained him so as to win for him his crown of patience, if he will only listen and believe it. "I know all thy patience," said our Lord to the angel of Ephesus.

I do not the least know who or what the Nicolaitans of Ephesus were, and no one that I have consulted is any wiser than I am, unless it is Pascal. And Pascal says that their name is equivocal. When that great genius and great saint comes upon the Nicolaitans in these Epistles, he has an original way of interpretation all his own. He always interprets this name, so he tells us, of his own bad passions. And not the Nicolaitans of Ephesus only; but the Egyptians, and the Babylonians, and as often as the name of any "enemy" occurs in the Old Testament, and it occurs in the Psalms continually, that so great and so original man interprets and translates them all into his own sinful thoughts and sinful feelings and sinful words and sinful actions. That is I fear a far too mystical and equivocal interpretation for the most of us as yet. To call the Nicolaitans of

Ephesus our own wicked hearts, is far too Port-Royal and puritan for such literalists as we are. Only, as one can see, the minister of Ephesus would be swept into the deepest places, and into the most spiritual experiences, both of mysticism and of puritanism before their time, as often as he set himself, as he must surely have henceforth set himself every day of his life, to hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, whoever they were, and at the same time to love the Nicolaitans themselves. To a neighbour minister in the same Synod our Lord sends a special message about the sharp sword with the two edges. And it would need all the sharpness of that sword and all its edges to divide asunder the deeds of the Nicolaitans from the Nicolaitans themselves in their minister's heart. To divide them, that is, so as to hate their evil deeds with a perfect hatred, and at the same time to love the doers of those deeds with a perfect love. The name Nicolaitan is equivocal, says Pascal.

A *litotes* is a rhetorical device by means of which far less is said than is intended to be understood. A true *litotes* has this intention and this result that while, in words, it diminishes what is actually said, in reality, it greatly increases the effect of what is said. What could be a more condemning charge against any minister of Christ than to tell him in plain words that he had left his first love to his Master and to his Master's work? And yet, just by the peculiar way in which that charge is here worded, a far more sudden blow is dealt to this minister's heart than if the charge had been

made in the plainest and sternest terms. To say "nevertheless I have somewhat against thee": to say "somewhat," as if it were some very small matter, and scarcely worth mentioning, and then suddenly to say what it is, that, you may depend upon it, gave a shock of horror to that minister's heart that he did not soon get over. You would have thought such a minister impossible. Had you heard his praise so generously spread abroad at first both by God and man you would have felt absolutely sure of that minister's spiritual prosperity and praise to the very end. You would have felt as sure as sure could be that behind all that so immense activity and popularity there must lie hidden a heart as full as it could hold of the deepest and solidest peace with God; a peace, you would have felt sure, without a speck upon it, and with no controversy on Christ's part within a thousand miles of it. But the ministerial heart is deceitful above all other men's hearts. And these shocking revelations about this much-lauded minister have been recorded and preserved in order that all ministers may see themselves in them as in a glass. Now, there is not one moment's doubt about when and where all this terrible declension and decay began to set in. His Master does not say in as many words just when and where matters began to go wrong between them two. But that silence of His is just another of His rhetorical devices. He does not tell it from the housetops of Ephesus, as yet. But the minister of Ephesus knew quite well, both when and where his first love began to fail

and he to fall away. He knew quite well without his Master's message about it, that all this declension and collapse began in the time and at the place of secret prayer. For, not this Ephesus minister only, but every minister everywhere continues to love his Master and his Master's work, ay, and his Master's enemies, exactly in the measure of his secret reading of Holy Scripture and his secret prayerfulness. Yes, without being told it in as many words I am as sure of it as if I had been that metropolitan minister myself. You may depend upon it; nay, you know it yourselves quite well, that it was his habitual and long-continued neglect of secret prayer. It was from that declension and decay that his ministry became so undermined and had come now so near a great catastrophe. 'With all my past praise of thee, I give thee this warning,' said that Voice which is as the sound of many waters, 'that unless thou returnest to thy first life of closet communion with Me, I will come to thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of its place. I gave thee that congregation when I might have given it to another. And I have upheld thee in it, and have delivered thee out of a thousand distresses of thine. But thou hast wearied of me. Thou hast given thy night watches to other things than a true minister's meditation and prayer for himself and for his people. And I will suffer it at thy hands no longer. Remember from whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works.'

And now with all that in closing take this as the secret prayer of the angel of Ephesus the

very first night after this severe message was delivered to him. 'O Thou that holdest the stars in Thy right hand, and walkest in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. Thou hast spoken in Thy mercy to me. And thou hast given me an ear to hear Thy merciful words toward me. Lord, I repent. At Thy call I repent. I repent of many things in my ministry in Ephesus. But of nothing so much as of my restraint of secret prayer. This has been my besetting sin. This has been the worm at the root of all my mistakes and misfortunes in my ministry. This has been my blame. O spare me according to Thy word. O suffer me a little longer that I may yet serve Thee. What profit is there in my blood? Shall the dead hold communion with Thee? Shall the grave of a castaway minister redound honour to Thee? Restore Thou my soul. Restore once more to me the joy of Thy salvation, then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted to Thee. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion; build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.'

XXVIII

THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

IF Polycarp was indeed the angel of the Church of Smyrna, then we know some most interesting things about this angel over and above what we read in this Epistle addressed to him. All John Bunyan's readers have heard about Polycarp. "Then said Gaius, is this Christian's wife and are these his children? I knew your husband's father, yea, also, and his father's father. Many have been good of this stock. Stephen was the first of them who stood all trials for the sake of the truth. James was another of the same generation. To say nothing of Peter and Paul, there was Ignatius, who was cast to the lions. Romanus, also, whose flesh was cut by pieces from his bones. And Polycarp, that played the man in the fire." You possess Polycarp's whole history in a nutshell in that single sentence of John Bunyan about him. And if you but add that one sentence to this Epistle you will have a full-length and a perfect portrait of the angel of the Church of Smyrna.

Polycarp was born well on in the first century.

And it must have been a matter of constant regret to Polycarp that he had not been born just a little earlier in that century so as to have seen his Lord with his own eyes and so as to have heard Him with his own ears. But as it was, Polycarp was happy enough to have been born, and born again, quite in time to enjoy the next best thing to seeing and hearing his Saviour for himself. For Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John, and he must have often heard the Fourth Gospel from John's lips long before it had as yet come from John's pen. And that was surely a high compensation to Polycarp for not having seen and heard the Divine Word Himself. And then we are very thankful to possess a circular-letter which the elders of the Church of Smyrna sent round to the Seven Churches telling the brethren everywhere how well their old minister had played the man in the fire. After narrating some remarkable incidents connected with Polycarp's apprehension the circular-epistle proceeds:—

'When Polycarp was brought to the tribunal the pro-consul asked him if he was Polycarp. Have pity on thy great age, said the humane Roman officer. Swear but once by the fortunes of Cæsar. Reproach this Christ of thine with but one word, and I will set you free. "Eighty-and-six years," answered Polycarp, "I have served Jesus Christ, and He has never once wronged or deceived me, how then can I reproach Him!" And then as some of the executioners were binding the aged saint, and others were lighting the fire, certain who stood by

took down this prayer from his lips: "O Father of Thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ. I bless Thee that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day and this hour. I thank Thee that I am permitted to put my lips to the cup of Christ. And I thank Thee for the sure hope of the resurrection and for the incorruptible life of heaven. I praise Thee, O Father, for all Thy soul-saving benefits. And I glorify Thee through our eternal High-Priest, Jesus Christ, through whom, and in the Holy Ghost, be glory to Thee, both now and ever, Amen." Eleven brethren from the Church of Philadelphia suffered with Polycarp, but he is famous above them all; the very heathen venerate his name. He was not only an eminent teacher and an illustrious martyr, but in all he did he did it out of a truly apostolical and evangelical spirit. Polycarp suffered his martyrdom on the great Sabbath, at the eighth hour of the day. I, Pionius, have transcribed and posted this letter to all the Churches round about. So may our Lord gather my soul among His elect, Amen."

Apostolical, evangelical, and most illustrious, martyr, as Polycarp proved himself to be at the last, yet, when he began his ministry in Smyrna he was a man of like fears and flinchings of heart as we are ourselves. You may depend upon it, Polycarp was for a long time in as great bondage through fear of death as any of yourselves. And every syllable of this Epistle is the proof of that. His Master dictated every syllable of this Epistle with the most direct and the most pointed bearing on Polycarp and on his ministry in Smyrna. Every

iota of this Epistle shows us that it was addressed to a minister who was at that time of a timid heart and one whose continual temptation it was to flinch and flee. The very name that Polycarp's Master here selects for Himself in writing to Polycarp spoke straight home to Polycarp's trembling heart. "These things saith He which was dead and is alive." Polycarp was in constant danger of death and in constant fear of death. But after this Epistle, and especially after that opening Name of His Master, Polycarp became another man and another minister. Till this was Polycarp's song every day till the day when he played the man in the fire—

> Death ! thou wast once an uncouth, hideous thing !
> But since my Master's death
> Has put some blood into thy face,
> Thou hast grown sure a thing to be desired
> And full of grace !

We found the *litotes* device in the first of these Seven Epistles, and we find here the *parenthesis* device in the second of the Seven. When the Spirit speaks to the Seven Churches He does not despise to make use of the rhetorician's art. He recognises and sanctifies that ancient accomplishment by His repeated employment of it, and in His repeated employment of it He gives us so many lessons in our employment of it. "The parenthesis is the delight of all full minds and quick wits." Now though these exact words have never before been applied to Him whose Epistle to Polycarp we are now engaged upon; at any rate, we may

surely go on to apply these so expressive words to His so-talented amanuensis. And this full-minded and quick-witted parenthesis comes in here in this way. Polycarp's poverty was one of his many trials and temptations as the minister of Smyrna. And just as the ever-present image of his Divine Master's death and resurrection nerved Polycarp to overcome all fear of his own death, so in like manner his poverty is here put to silence for ever by this parenthesis, ("but thou art rich"). And not only have we a parenthesis here, but a paradox as well. And both of these rhetorical devices are demanded here in order to give utterance to the fulness of the mind and the quickness of the wit both of the true Author of this Epistle and of the highly privileged amanuensis of it. So he was. Polycarp was both poor and at the same time rich. As many of his best successors in the ministry still are. They are almost as poor as he was as far as gold and silver go. But they are even richer than he was in many things that gold and silver cannot command. For one thing, they are far richer than Polycarp could possibly be in the riches of the mind. They are surpassingly rich in so far as they possess the talents and the trainings and the tastes of cultivated and refined Christian scholars. Money is greatly coveted because it gives its possessor the entrance into the best society of the day. But a well-educated and a well-read minister has entrance not only into the very best society of his own day, but of every day, and he will deign to enter no society

of any day but the very best. He keeps company with the aristocracy only. Again, riches are to be desired for what they enable their possessor to be and to do and to enjoy. Riches enable their possessor to the true enjoyment of life, to the true use of life, to true power in life, and to the opportunity and the ability of attaining to the true end of life. Unchallengeably, riches in the right owner's hand immensely assist in the attainment of all these high ambitions. But sure I am, there is no class of men among us who are so rich in all these respects as just our well-educated, well-read, hard-working, absolutely-devoted, ministers. No doubt the parenthesist had in his eye Polycarp's riches toward God exclusively. But had he written in our day he would certainly have extended his arms to embrace a poor minister's few but fit books, and his select friendships, as well as many other things that go to alleviate and even to make affluent his remote and arduous life. Money brings troops of friends also, so long as it lasts. But when Polycarp was robing for presentation at Court, so Pionius tells us, his young men would not let him so much as touch his own shoe-latchet. Now you may have your shoes put on and taken off for money, but you cannot have them tied with heart-strings, as Polycarp's shoes were tied that day.

Malicious and abusive language was another of Polycarp's tribulations. I have not enough ancient Church History to be able to inform you just what outlets they had for their malice in that sub-

apostolic day. We have Letters to the Editor among the resources of our civilisation. And neither do I know beyond a guess just what Polycarp did when he was again ill-used by the tongues and pens of his day. But if you will hear it I will tell you what Santa Teresa did. And it is because she did what I am to invite you to do, that I for one entirely, and with acclamation, acquiesce in her canonisation. "After my vow of perfection I spoke not ill of any creature, how little soever it might be. I scrupulously avoided all approaches to detraction. I had this rule ever present with me, that I was not to wish, nor assent to, nor say such things of any person whatsoever, that I would not have them say of me. Still, the devil sometimes fills me with such a harsh and cruel temper; such a spirit of anger and hostility at some people, that I could eat them up and annihilate them. At the same time, concerning things said of myself in detraction, and they are many, and are very prejudicial to me, I find myself much improved. It is a mark of the deepest and truest humility to see ourselves condemned without cause, and to be silent under it. Indeed, I never heard of any one speaking evil of me, but I immediately saw how far short he came of the full truth. For, if he was wrong or exaggerated in his particulars, I had offended God much more in other matters that my detractor knew nothing about. O my Lord, when I remember in how many ways Thou didst suffer detraction and misrepresentation, I know not where my senses are when I am in such haste to defend and excuse

myself. What is it, O Lord? what do we imagine to get by pleasing worms like ourselves, or by being praised by them! What about being blamed by all men, if only we stand at last blameless before Thee." The slander of the synagogue of Satan in Smyrna was not met, I am sure, with a mind more acceptable to the First and the Last than that.

The last thing that He which was dead and is alive said to Polycarp was this mysterious utterance of His, "Thou shalt not be hurt of the second death." Did Polycarp fully understand that assurance, I wonder? Do you fully understand it? At any rate, you understand what the first death is. In our first death our souls will leave our bodies, and then corruption will so set in upon our dead bodies that those who loved us best will be the first to bury us out of their sight. Now, whatever else and whatever beyond that the second death is, it begins with God leaving our souls. God is the soul of our souls. He is the life, the strength, the support, the light, the peace, the fountain, of all kinds of life in soul and body. And when He leaves our souls that is the beginning of the second death. Only, God does not, properly speaking, leave the soul. He is driven out of the soul. In spite of all that God could do, in spite of all that love and grace and truth could do, the lost soul has banished God for ever out of itself. It has insulted and despised God in every way. It has trampled upon Him in every way. It has shut its door in His face ten thousand times, and has taken in and has held revels with His worst enemies.

Had Polycarp feared death more than he feared Him who was now alive; had he feared the fires in the market-place of Smyrna more than the fires that are not quenched; had he deserted his post in Smyrna because of its difficulties; had his soul soured at God and man because of his poverty; when he was reviled, had he reviled back again; when he suffered, had he threatened; and had he reproached Christ when he was bribed with his life so to do,—Polycarp is here told plainly that he would have died the second death with all that it involves. But as it was, he died neither the first death nor the second. Polycarp was changed, rather than died. Polycarp had such a Master that He died both deaths for His servant. It was not for nothing that He said to Polycarp that He was once dead but is now alive. For He was dead with both deaths for Polycarp. It was when He was hurt of the second death for Polycarp that, under the soreness of the hurt, He cried out first in the garden, and then on the Cross. Have we not seen that in the second death the soul is forsaken of God? And was He not forsaken till Golgotha for the time was like Gehenna itself to Him? He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches: He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from the fear of death. O death, I will be thy plague. O grave, I will be thy destruction.

XXIX

THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS

N his beautifully-written but somewhat superficial commentary, Archbishop Trench says that there is a strong attraction in these seven Epistles for those scholars who occupy themselves with pure exegesis. And that strong attraction arises, so the Archbishop says, from the fact that there are so many unsolved problems of interpretation in these seven Epistles. Now, I am no pure exegete and those unsolved problems of pure exegesis have little or no attraction for me. My irresistible attraction to these seven Epistles lies in this that they are so many looking-glasses, as James the Lord's brother would say, in which all ministers of churches everywhere to the end of time may see themselves, and may judge themselves, as their Master sees them and judges them. Another thing that greatly attracts our commentators to Pergamos is the intensely interesting and extraordinarily productive field of pagan antiquities that Pergamos has proved itself to be. Pergamos was the most illustrious city in all Asia. It was a

perfect city of temples. Zeus, Athene, Apollo, Dionysus, Aphrodite, Æsculapius, were all among the gods of Pergamos, and all had magnificent shrines erected and administered to their honour. Here also Galen the famous physician was born. Pergamos possessed a library also that rivalled in size and in value the world-renowned library of Alexandria itself. Two hundred thousand volumes stood entered on the catalogue of the public library of Pergamos. Our well-known word 'parchment' is derived to us from the stationers' shops of Pergamos, and so on. Whether the minister of Pergamos found all that heathen environment as full of delight and edification to himself, and to his proselyte people, in his day as it is to us in our day, is another matter. But of the deep interest and the great delight that all these things have to us there can be no doubt. For the most of our expositors spend both their time and our time in little else but in telling and hearing about the antiquities of Pergamos. But with all those intellectual and artistic attractions filling every part of his parish, after the minister of Pergamos had this Epistle sent to him, all the rest of his days in Pergamos he would have neither time nor thought nor taste for anything else but for this, that Satan had his seat in Pergamos.

It was to bring home the discovery of this fearful fact to the minister of Pergamos that was the sole object of this startling Epistle to him; just as his receiving of this Epistle was the supreme epoch and the decisive crisis of his whole ministerial life.

And no wonder. For to be told, and that on such absolute authority, that while Satan had his colonies and his dependencies and his outposts in Ephesus, and in Smyrna, and in Thyatira, yet that his very citadel and stronghold was in Pergamos,—that must have been an awful revelation to the responsible pastor of Pergamos. Pergamos is Satan's very capital, said this Epistle to the overwhelmed minister of Pergamos. It is the very metropolis of his infernal empire. All his power for evil, both against God and man, is concentrated and entrenched in Pergamos. "London is a dangerous and an ensnaring place," writes John Newton in his *Cardiphonia*. "I account myself happy that my lot is cast at a distance from it. London appears to me like a sea, wherein most are tossed by storms, and many suffer shipwreck. Political disputes, winds of doctrine, scandals of false professors, parties for and against particular ministers, fashionable amusements, and so on. I often think of the difference between London grace and country grace. By London grace, when genuine, I understand grace in a very advanced degree. The favoured few who are kept alive to God, simple-hearted and spiritually-minded, in the midst of such deep snares and temptations, appear to me to be the first-rate Christians of the land. Not that we are without our trials here. The evil of our own hearts and the devices of Satan cut us out work enough. My own soul is kept alive, as it were, by miracle. The enemy thrusts sore at me that I may fall. In London I am in a crowd of

temptations, but in the country there is a crowd of temptations in me. To what purpose do I boast of retirement, when I am myself possessed of Satan's legions in every place? My mind, even at Olney, is a perfect puppet-show, a Vanity Fair, an absolute Newgate itself."

John Newton is one of the three best commentators I have met with on this Epistle. John Newton, and James Durham, and Miss Rossetti. And what so greatly interests those three commentators in Pergamos is this, that they see from this Epistle to the minister of Pergamos that Satan really had his seat in that minister's own heart, just as that same seat is in their own heart. No other antiquity in Pergamos has any interest to James Durham at any rate, but that antique minister's heart in Pergamos. For Satan, if he is anything, is a spirit. And if he has a seat anywhere in this world it is in the spirits of men. Satan dwells not in temples made with hands, either in Pergamos, or in Olney, or in Edinburgh, but only in the spirits of men; and, most of all, in the spirits of ministers, as this Epistle teaches us, and as all the best commentators tell us it teaches us. And the reason of that so perilous pre-eminence of ministers is plain. Ministers, if they are real ministers, hold a kind of vicarious and representative position both before heaven and hell, and the swordsmen and archers of both heaven and hell specially strike at and sorely wound and grieve all such ministers. Satan is like the King of Syria at the battle of Ramoth-Gilead. For before that battle the King of Syria

commanded his thirty-and-two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, "Fight neither with small nor great save only with the King of Israel." And Satan is right. For let a minister but succeed in his own battle against Satan, let a minister but "overcome," as our Lord's word is in every one of these ministerial Epistles, and his whole congregation will soon begin to share in the spoils of their minister's victory.

> Thus Satan trembles when he sees
> A minister upon his knees.

O poor and much-to-be-pitied ministers! With Satan concentrating all his fiery darts upon you, with the deep-sunken pillars of his seat not yet dug out of your hearts, with all his thirty-two captains fighting day and night for the remnants of their master's power within you, and all the time, a far greater than Satan running you through and through with that terrible sword of His till there is not a sound spot in you—O most forlorn and afflicted of all men! O most bruised in your mind, and most broken in your heart, of all men! Pity your ministers, my brethren, and put up with much that you cannot as yet understand or sympathise with in them. And never for a day forget to pray for them in secret, and by name, and by the name of their inward battle-field. Do that, for your ministers have a far harder-beset life than you have any idea of; with both heaven and hell setting on them continually and to the last drop of their blood. May my tongue cleave

to the roof of my mouth before I say a single word to turn any young man away from the ministry, who is called of God to that awful work. At the same time, let all intending ministers count well the cost lest, haply, after they have laid the foundation and are not able to finish, both men and devils shall point at them and say, this minister began to build for himself and for his congregation, for eternity, but come and see the ruin he has left! Count well, I say again, whether or no you are able to finish.

A single word about "Antipas my faithful martyr" in Pergamos. "It is difficult," complains the commentator mentioned in opening, "to understand the silence of all ecclesiastical history respecting so famous a martyr as Antipas." But faithful martyrs are not surely such a rarity, either in ancient or in modern ecclesiastical history, that we need spend much regret that we are not told more about one out of such a multitude. At any rate, we have a pretty long roll of well-known names in our own evangelical martyrology, and the cloud of such witnesses is by no means closed in Scotland. Whether this Antipas was a martyred minister or no, I cannot tell. Only there are many martyred ministers in our own land and Church whose names are as little known as the bare name of Antipas. Only, the silence and the ignorance and the indifference of earth does not extend to heaven. The silence and the ignorance and the indifference of earth will only make the surprise, both of those ministers and of their persecutors, all the greater

when the day of their recognition and reward comes. "Then shall the righteous man stand before the face of such as have afflicted him, and have made no account of his labours. When they see it they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all they had looked for. And they, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves—This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and made a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. But now he is numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!" For then shall be fulfilled that which is written, To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna. And I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

This new name which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it is plain. This is no unsolved problem of interpretation. For, a name in Scripture is always just another word for a nature. That is to say, for the very innermost heart and soul of any person or any thing.

> I named them as they passed, and understood
> Their nature; with such knowledge God endued
> My sudden apprehension,

says Adam to the angel. And a new name is always given in Scripture when a new nature is imparted to any person or to any thing. And so

will it be beyond Scripture when that day comes to which every scripture points and promises, and for which every holy heart yearns and pants and breaks. That day when He which hath the sharp sword with two edges shall make all His redeemed to be partakers of His own nature; whose nature and whose name is Love. And just as no man knoweth the misery of that heart in which Satan still has his seat but the miserable owner of that heart, so only God Himself will know with them the new name that He will give to His holy ones on that day. As every sin-possessed heart here knows its own bitterness, so will every such heart alone know its own unshared sweetness in heaven, and no neighbour saint nor serving angel will intermeddle with things that are beyond their depth. And ministers especially. When they have overcome by the blood of the Lamb; when their long campaign of sanctification for themselves and for their people has been fought out and won; a new name will be given to every such minister that he alone will know and understand, and that, as Adam said, by a sudden apprehension. When we are under our so specially severe sanctification here—

> Not even the tenderest heart, and next our own,
> Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh,

and much more will it be so in the uninvaded inwardness and uniqueness of our glorification. No man knows the hardness and the blackness of a sinful heart but the unspeakably miserable owner of it, and no man knows the names

he calls himself continually before God, but God who seeth and heareth in secret. And, as a consequence and for a recompense, no man shall see the whiteness of the stone, or hear the newness of the name written in that stone, saving he that receiveth it. For your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion; therefore in their land they shall possess the double; everlasting joy shall be unto them. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, and unto the ministers of the churches.

XXX

THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

READ the first three chapters of Hosea and this Epistle to the angel of the Church in Thyatira together, and substitute the *dura lectio*, the hard reading, "thy wife," for the easy reading, "that woman" in the twentieth verse, and it will be seen at once that the angel of the Church in Thyatira is just the prophet Hosea over again. Very much the same scandal and portent that Hosea and his house were in Israel; nay, almost more of a scandal, has the house of the angel of the Church in Thyatira been in Christendom. Our classical scholars have a recognised canon of their own when they are engaged on their editorial work among old and disputed manuscripts; a canon of criticism to this effect that the more difficult to receive any offered reading is the more likely it is to be the true reading. Nay, the more impossible to receive the offered reading is the more certain it is to have stood in the original text. And this so paradoxical-sounding, but truly scientific, principle of our great scholars, has been taken up by some of

our greatest expositors and preachers, and has been applied by them to the exegetical and homiletical treatment both of Hosea's household history in the Old Testament, and of this so similar household history in the New Testament. And, indeed, as if it were to forewarn us, and to prepare us for some impossible-to-be-believed disclosures in Thyatira, our Lord introduces Himself to the minister of Thyatira and to us under a name that He has not taken to Himself in the case of any of the other seven ministers of the Seven Churches. Only the very greatest and very grandest of the classical tragedies ever dared to introduce and endure the descent and the intervention of a god. Now Thyatira at this crisis in her history is a great and a grand tragedy like that. For our glorified Lord puts on His whole Godhead when He comes down to deal with this tragical minister in Thyatira and with his tragical wife and children. These things saith the Son of God, and He armed with all the power and clothed with all the grace of the Godhead. The Son of God who has His eyes like unto a flame of fire wherewith to search to the bottom all the depths of Satan that are in Thyatira. That is to say, to search to the bottom the reins and the heart of the minister of Thyatira, and the reins and the hearts of all his household, and of all his people. And then His feet are like fine brass wherewith to walk up and down in Thyatira, till He has given to the minister of Thyatira and to his house and to all the rest in Thyatira according to their works. Neither let a god interfere, unless a difficulty

should happen worthy of a god descending to unravel; nor let a fourth person be forward to speak, is the advice of Horace to all his young dramatists.

It was not the schools of the prophets in Israel that made Hosea the great and original and evangelical prophet that he was. It was his life at home that did it. It was his married life that did it. It was his wife and her children that did it. We would never have heard so much as Hosea's name had it not been for his wife and her children. At any rate, his name would not have been worked down into our hearts as it is but for his awful heart-break at home. And so it was with the minister of Thyatira. We might have heard that there was a certain minister in that ancient city in the days of the Revelation, but this so terrible Epistle would never have been written to him or transmitted to us but for his household catastrophe—a catastrophe so awful that it cannot be so much as once named among us. His Divine Master would have known all the good works of His servant in Thyatira, but He would not have been able to say that the last of those good works of his were so much better than his first works, had it not been for that terrible overthrow in his house at home. The minister of Ephesus had left his first love to God and to God's work because he was so happy in the love of his wife and children. But his co-presbyter in Thyatira had never known what the love of God really was till all his household love had decayed, and had died, and had been buried, and had all turned to corruption

and pollution. Both the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament and this apostolical minister in the New Testament had come to see that when any man is called of God to this work of God, all he is and all he has, all his talents, all his affections, all his possessions, all his enjoyments, his very wife and children, must all be held by him under this great covenant with God, that they are all to be possessed and enjoyed and used by him, in the most absolute subordination to his ministry. And all the true successors of those two typical men have at one time or other, and in one way or other, to make this same great discovery and have to submit themselves to this same sovereign necessity.

Marriage or celibacy, an helpmeet or an hindrance, children or childlessness, good children or bad, health or sickness, congregational prosperity or congregational adversity, and all else; absolutely and without any reserve *everything* must come under that great law for all men, but a thousand times more for all ministers; that great law which the greatest of ministers has thus enunciated:—"For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Hosea learned at home, and all the week, that new sensibility to sin, that incomparable tenderness to sinners, and that holy passion as a preacher, with all of which he carried all Israel captive Sabbath after Sabbath, and so did his antitype in Thyatira. His antitype, the minister of Thyatira, was a fairly good preacher before he had a household, but he became an immeasurably better

preacher as his household life went on and went down to such depths as it did. As many as had ears to hear in Thyatira they could measure quite well by the increasing depth of his preaching and his prayers the increasing depths of Satan through which their minister was wading all the week. We have never had deeper-wading preachers than Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Boston, and never since the garden of Eden has there been two ministers happier at home than they were. And it is very happy for those of us who are ministers to see also that the two happiest homes in all New England and in all old Scotland were also the homes of two such deep and holy and heavenly-minded and soul-winning preachers. But they were not without this same universal and indispensable training in sin and sorrow. Only they got their training in those things in other ways than in shipwrecked homes. With all their happiness in their wives and children, the author of the *Religious Affections*, and the author of the *Crook in the Lot* and the *Autobiography*, had not their sorrows to seek. Some of the sorrows that sanctified them and taught them to preach so masterfully all their readers see and know, while some of his most constant and most fruitful sorrows the closest students of Boston have been absolutely beat to find out. But it is enough for us to be sure that such noble sorrows were there though the deepest secrets of the manse of Ettrick then were, and still are, with the Lord. And thus it is that with two such enviable households as were the households of Edwards and Boston, those two

ministers also in their own ways are another two outstanding illustrations of Luther's great pulpit principle—'Who are these so incomparable preachers, and from what divinity hall did they come up? These are they who climbed the Gospel pulpit out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

Though you are not ministers you must know quite well how the same thing works out in yourselves. You are not ministers, and therefore it is not necessary that you should be plunged into such depths of experience as your ministers are plunged into continually if they are to be of any real use to you. But you are hearers, and good hearing is almost as scarce, and almost as costly to the hearer, as good preaching is to the preacher. To hear a really good sermon, as it ought to be heard, needs almost as much head and heart, and almost as much blood and tears, as it needs to preach a really good sermon.

> A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
> Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
> Of him who makes it.

Yes; but a sermon's prosperity lies in both the tongue of the preacher and the ear of the hearer. And a sermon's true prosperity is purchased by both preacher and hearer at more or less of the same price.

There is still left one more of those cruxes of interpretation that had almost turned me away from this Epistle to the minister of Thyatira altogether.

And it is this: "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star." What a strange promise to make to a minister,—a rod of iron! Yes, this is just one more of those scripture-passages of which Paul once said that the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. For the letter here had almost killed out all my hope in this passage till a gleam of the Spirit came to light me into it and to light me through it. "He that overcometh" is just that minister who meets all the temptations and trials of life, at home and abroad, with more and more charity, and with more and more faith, and with more and more patience, as long as there is a hard heart in his house at home or in his congregation abroad. It is just to the minister who so overcomes his own passions in his own heart first, that his Master will give power to break in shivers the same passions in all other men's hearts, as with a rod of iron. By his charity and by his patience, by these two rods of iron, especially, any minister will overcome as the angel of the Church in Thyatira at last overcame. All the iron rods in the world would not have broken men's hard hearts as that reed broke them, that our Lord took so meekly into His hand when the soldiers were mocking and maltreating Him. And if you just strike with all your might, and with that same rod, all the hard hearts that come near you, you

will soon see how they will all go to shivers under it. Till for your reward your Master will give to you also the morning star. That is to say, when many other ministers that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt, they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

XXXI

THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

THEMISTOCLES, Plutarch tells us, could not get to sleep at night so loud was all Athens in the praises of Miltiades. And the ministers of the other six churches in Asia were like Themistocles in the matter of their sleep, so full were all their people's mouths of the name and the renown of the minister of Sardis. When he went to the communion-seasons at Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamos and Thyatira, for years after the captivated people could tell you his texts and at every mention of his name they would break out about his preaching. His appearance, his voice, his delivery, his earnestness and impressiveness, and his memorable sayings, all contributed to make the name of the minister of Sardis absolutely a household word up and down the whole presbytery. Now it was after some great success of that pulpit kind; it was immediately on the back of some extravagant outburst of his popularity as a preacher, that his Master could keep silence no longer toward the minister of Sardis. In anger at

him, as also at those who so puffed him up; both in anger and in love and in pity, his Master sent to His inflated servant this plain-spoken message and most solemn warning. 'Thou hast a great name among short-sighted men. Thou hast much praise before men, but not before God. All men think well of thee, but not God. All thy great sermons are so much sounding brass before God. And what is not already spiritually dead in thee is ready to die, and will soon be for ever dead, unless thou dost become a new manner of minister, not before men, but before God.'

"Of all men in the world," says James Durham, "ministers are most obnoxious to this tentation of vanity. And that because most of their appearances are before men, and that in the exercise of some gift of the mind which is supposed to hold forth the inward worth of a man more than any other gift. Now when this meeteth with applause, that applause has a great subtility in its pleasing and tickling of them, and is so ready to incline them to rest satisfied with that applause." Durham is right in that. For praise and popularity is the most dangerous of all drugs to a minister. Dose a minister sufficiently with praise, and you will soon drown his soul in perdition, if God does not interpose to save him. He is as happy as a king all that day after a sufficient draught of your soul-intoxicating praise. He is actually a sanctified and a holy man all the rest of that day. His face shines on all the men he meets all that day. He loves all the men he meets. He even walks with God all that

day. But you must give him his dram again on his awaking to-morrow morning, else as soon as he has slept off his debauch he will be a worse man and more ill to live with than he was before. To him who lives on praise all the world is as dark as midnight and as cold as mid-winter to him when he cannot get his praise. The wings of an angel sprout in his soul as long as he gets enough praise, but he is as good as in his grave when he opens his mouth wide and you do not fill it. It is true that is a very weak mind which values itself according to the opinion and the applause of other men. But then it is well known that God chooses the weakest of men to make them His ministers. For many reasons He does that, some of which reasons of His all His ministers know, and some of which reasons the wisest of them have not yet found out. "It were vain," says one of the wisest of ministers, "to pretend that I do not feel in me that mean passion that can be elated by applause, and mortified by the contrary; but there is nothing under heaven that I more sincerely and totally despise, and nothing which ever makes me so emphatically despise myself. I feel it infinitely despicable at the very moment the passion for praise is excited, and I hope by degrees, as time goes on, to be substantially delivered from it. I have a thousand times been astonished that this mean passion of mine should not have been completely extirpated by the sincere and deliberate contempt I have long entertained for human opinion. Opinion, I do not mean, as regarding myself, but as regarding any other person, or

any other book. To seek the praise that comes from God only, is the true nobleness of character; and if a due solicitude to obtain this praise were thoroughly established in the soul, all human notice would sink into insignificance, and would vanish from our regard." By the end of his ministry the angel of Sardis will subscribe to every syllable of John Foster. But he is a long way from that as yet, and he will need to have some plain words told him about himself, and about his ministry, before he comes to that.

For one thing, admitting and allowing for all the good work His servant did, I have found it far from perfect, his Lord says. But perfection in the work of the ministry at Sardis or anywhere else is quite impossible; and thus it is that when we look closer into our Lord's words we find that it was not so much absolute perfection that his Master demanded, as ordinary honesty, integrity, and fidelity. What He really said was this, 'I have not found thy work at all filled up on its secret and spiritual and God-ward side. On its intellectual and man-ward side I have nothing to complain about—but not before God.' You see the state of the case yourselves. No man can long command pulpit popularity without hard work. And it is not denied that this minister paid for his popularity with very hard work. He was a student. He took off his coat to his sermons. He wrote them over and over again till he got them polished to perfection. And his crowds of polished people were his reward. But while doing so much of that kind,

and no man in all Asia doing it half so well, at the same time he left a whole world of other things not done. Milton did all his work from his youth up under his great Taskmaster's eye. And so did the minister of Sardis. Only his taskmaster was the great crowds that hung on his elaborated orations. Take away the eyes and the ears of those captivated crowds and this thrilling preacher was as good as dead. "Dead," indeed, is the very word that his Master here so bitterly charges home upon him. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." His preaching was all right. None of his neighbour ministers, not the most accepted of God and the most praised of God of them all, could preach half so well. His preaching was perfect; but his motives in it, his aims and his ends in it, the sources from which he drew his pulpit inspiration, his secret prayers both before his sermons were begun, and all the time they were under his hand, and while they were being delivered, and still more after they were delivered,—in all these things,—"thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." 'Be watchful, and strengthen these things,' said his Master to him. 'It is good to study, only strengthen it with much faith and with much prayer before God. It is good to give thyself to reading, only read and write in the presence of God. It is good to bring up thy very choicest work to these great congregations of thine, only seek their salvation in every sentence of thy great sermons. It is good to take captive with thy wonderful eloquence the attention and the admiration of these crowds, only do so in

order to take their hearts captive, not to thyself as heretofore, but to Me henceforth. Strengthen, I say unto thee, the things that remain and are ready to die. And above all else, and with a view to all else, and as a means to all else, strengthen thy closet-prayer before God. Strengthen it in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, and in the depth of it, and in the height of it. Strengthen it in the time you take to it, in the intensity you put into it, and in the way you work it up into your sermons, both in their composition, and in their delivery, and in the way you continue to wait and to pray after your sermons; to wait, that is, not for the applause of the hearers, but for their profit and My praise.'

And his heart-searching Master still proceeds with His pastoral counsels to this minister of His, very unwilling to give him over to the decay of soul into which he has fallen. "Remember how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent." As if He were to say to some such minister among ourselves—'Remember thy conversion, and the spirit of truth and love that was instilled into thee, and that made thee turn into this ministry of Mine. Remember thy college days, and the high hopes and generous vows made to Me in those days. Remember also how I delivered thee when in thy deep distresses thou didst call on Me, and what communings and confidences used to go on between us. Remember thy ordination day, and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, and the way thy heart swelled within thee as they pronounced and

enrolled thee a minister of Mine.' Yes, even to call such things to remembrance, my brethren, will work together with the seven Spirits that are in Christ's right hand, and with many other things, to set a fallen-down minister on his feet again, and to give him a new start even after he is as good as dead and deposed in the sight of God. Ay, such remembering and such repenting will yet save this all but lost minister of Sardis, and it will save some ministers among ourselves who are quite as far gone as he was. And as he was saved through this Epistle, so will they; and like him they will yet receive the heavenly reward that is here held out to us all by Him who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.

The last thing of the nature of a threat that is addressed to the minister of Sardis is this, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." There is a certain note of terror in that warning which is here addressed to all ministers, the most watchful, the most prayerful before God, and the best. And yet, no; for perfect love casteth out all such terror; perfect love to Christ, and to His work, and to His coming, delivers them who through fear of His coming have all their days been subject to terror. If I love you, you cannot come too soon to me. And the more unexpected your coming is to my door the more welcome will you be to me. If I am watching and counting and keeping the hours till you come, you cannot come on me as a thief. Christ could not

come on Teresa as a thief as long as she clapped her hands for His coming every time her clock struck. He cannot come too soon for me if I am always saying to myself,—why tarry the wheels of His chariot? If my last thought before I sleep is about you I will be glad to see your face and hear your voice the first thing in the morning. When I awake I am still with Thee. The name of that chamber was Peace, and its window opened to the east. And every night after he received and read this Epistle, the minister of Sardis always slept in that chamber till the sun-rising.

And now that the tide is beginning to turn in this Epistle, and in this minister's heart and life, this so unexpected word of encouragement and comfort is spoken to him, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments: and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy." It was with the minister of Sardis somewhat as it was with Thomas Scott when he was first awaking to his proper work. Scott in his youth had been ambitious to be an author, but he was now beginning to see that preaching was second to nothing on the face of God's earth; and that it had praise of God as nothing else had when it was well done. Scott's preaching was not yet well done by a long way, but it was far better than it once was. And one of the best proofs of its improvement was this, that his parishioners began to come to ask guidance from him in the things of their souls. But at that stage Scott had put all he knew into his sermons and he had little to add

as pastoral counsel to his inquiring parishioners. And it would be something like that in Sardis. Some of his people had somehow been kept in life all through their minister's declension and death. There is nothing more surprising and touching than to see how a tree will sometimes cling round a rock and will suck sap and strength out of a cairn of stones. "How do you manage to keep yourself alive, then?" I asked an old saint who is in a case not unlike those few names in Sardis. "O," she said, "I have an odd volume of Spurgeon's Sermons, and I have a son at the front." I did not ask her, but I suppose she meant that the thought of her son in his constant danger made her life of intercessory prayer in his behalf perfect before God, and all Spurgeon's readers will bear her out about his sermons. Even in Sardis, their sons in constant peril, and a volume of some first-century Spurgeon, kept alive those few names all those years that their minister was dead.

And then to put the copestone on this far-shining case of a minister's recovery, and to send him back to his work till, like his much-tried neighbour in Thyatira, his last years should be far better than his first, this splendid seal was set on his second conversion—"to him that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment: and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels." It will be on that day to the minister of Sardis like that great day when Joshua stood before the angel of the Lord and

Satan stood at his right hand to resist him. Satan will resist him and will tell to his face how he sought his own things in the early days of his ministry and not the things of his people or of his Master. How he swelled with vanity in the day of his vanity. How his own name was in every thought of his and nothing else but his own name. Only let his name be blazoned abroad, Satan will say, and he was happy and all about him were happy. And so on, till Christ will stop the accuser's mouth, and will confess His servant's name. The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord stood by.

XXXII

THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

IF James Durham had lived in Kirriemuir in Disruption days he would to a certainty have said that very much what Daniel Cormick was in the presbytery of Forfar, that the angel of Philadelphia was among the seven churches in Asia. No minister all round about had less strength of some kinds than Daniel Cormick: but, then, like the angel of Philadelphia, by universal consent, he was by far the holiest man of them all and by far the most successful minister of them all. Mr. Cormick used to say in his humility that had it not been for the liberality of Lady Fowlis he would never have got to College at all, and that had it not been for the leniency of some of his professors he would never have got the length of being a minister. Be that as it may, it will be to the everlasting salvation of many that Daniel Cormick was ever sent to College, was carried through his studies, and was ordained a minister. When I was a lad in Kirriemuir our minister's name was wide-spread and dear to multitudes, not so much for his pulpit gifts,

as for his personal and pastoral graces. The delightful stories of Mr. Cormick's unworldliness of mind, simplicity of heart, and beauty of character, crowd in upon me at this moment till I can scarcely set them aside. And it was such things as these in Daniel Cormick that far more than made up for the fewness of the talents his Sovereign Master had seen good to commit to the stewardship of His servant. I see myself standing in the passage all through the forenoon and afternoon services, the church was so full. I see Dr. Mill in his crowded pew, a much-honoured man, who largely shared in his minister's saintliness. And there sits Mr. Brand, the banker and writer, whose walk and conversation, like the same things in Dr. Mill, influenced and edified the whole town and country round about. Mr. Brand's copy of Halyburton's *Memoirs*, with his name and my mother's name on it in his own handwriting, is always within reach of my chair, and I am sure I have read it at least as often as Dr. Jowett said to Lady Airlie he had read Boswell. And dear old heavenly-minded, if somewhat sad-hearted, Duncan Macpherson, the draper. A saint if ever I knew one; if, perhaps, a little too much after the type of Mr. Fearing and Mr. Weteyes. There never was a kirk-session in Kirriemuir or anywhere else like Daniel Cormick's kirk-session, and the pillars of it were almost all and almost wholly of their minister's own quarrying and hewing and polishing and setting up. When David White of Airlie became awakened to see what he was, and what a minister ought to be, he sought out Daniel Cormick

for his counsellor. As Walter Marshall sought out Thomas Goodwin, and as Thomas Scott sought out John Newton, so did David White sit at Daniel Cormick's feet. The two ministers used to tryst to meet in the woods of Lindertis, where they strolled and knelt and spent hours and days together, till Mr. Cormick was honoured of God to lead one of the ablest men I ever knew into that grace in which he himself stood with such peace and such assurance of faith. To Mr. Cormick's kind and winning ways with children I can myself testify. Is *James Laing: A Lily Gathered*, still in circulation in Dundee? I well remember that red-letter day to me when Mr. Cormick took me to his lodgings with him and gave me that little book to take home with me. But I am wandering away from my proper subject before I have even begun it. I am taking up too much time with Daniel Cormick, deserving of it all as he is. The angel of the church in Philadelphia could not be more deserving. It was James Durham, in the way he speaks about "the little strength" of the angel of Philadelphia, that led me back to speak of Daniel Cormick with all this love and reverence and thankfulness.

If his Sovereign Master allowed to the minister of Philadelphia but little strength of intellect, as James Durham in his profound commentary holds it was, and but little learning; then, what he lacked on the mere mental side was more than made up to him on the moral and spiritual side. And that wisest by far of all the seven ministers in Asia soon found out where his true strength lay and threw

himself with all his weakness upon his true strength. William Law complains with all his incomparable scorn that so many of the ministers of his day spent so much of their time and strength in the pulpit on such subjects as the seasons and the directions of the wind called Euroclydon, and on the times when the Gospels were writ. Now Daniel Cormick had not that temptation, for he possessed none of its literature, and even had he lived in our so-learned day and possessed all the learned apparatus of our day, he would not have given way to our temptations in his pulpit. "You, brethren," said Andrew Bonar in Daniel Cormick's funeral sermon, "are witnesses that in all his ministry your pastor ceased not to preach in public, and from house to house, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. His first sermon after his ordination was on this great text: 'Be ye reconciled to God.' And was not that commencement truly characteristic of Mr. Cormick's whole ministry among you? For, whatever subject he handled he failed not to arrive at sin and salvation before he left it. And such was the unction of his words that even when he was not exhibiting very intellectual views of the text, still his personal affection in setting forth the subject was always felt to be refreshing and quickening."—And this Epistle pays the same praise to the minister of Philadelphia for the way he preached his Master's name, and his Master's name only, in every sermon of his. I have myself, to my confusion of face I confess it, wasted many a precious hour in this pulpit on Euroclydon,

and on the times when the Prophets, and the Psalms, and the Gospels, were writ. But I am beginning now to number my days, and I am, as you must witness, turning my own attention and yours far more to the name of Jesus Christ, in imitation of the minister of Philadelphia. Now, what is His name? and what is His Father's name? if you have begun to learn those great names from me and with me? For we ministers should preach the name of the Father and the name of the Son far more than we do. And you, our people, should read far more than you do read, both in your Bible and in other books, on those so foundation and so fruitful subjects. Just what a name is, what its root is, and when and where this and that name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost were first heard; these inquiries, as Clement says, breed great light in the souls both of preachers and hearers. To turn up and read continually the very chapter where God first gave His full and true name to Moses, and then to trace that name and see that once it was given to Israel there is little or nothing else in the whole of the Old Testament but that name. And then to see how the Father's name gives place to the Son's name in the New Testament, —all that breeds great light in the soul, as Clement says. Even with as little strength as there was in Philadelphia and Kirriemuir, a minister will win great praise, both from God and from God's people, if he keeps close to God's word and more and more holds up God's name.

Tentatio, meditatio, oratio, were Luther's three

indispensable qualifications for a minister. Now we gather that the minister of Philadelphia had quite a special training in the school of temptation. We hold far too coarse ideas about temptation. We think of temptation as if it were for the most part to whoredom and wine. But the temptations that make a minister after Luther's own heart are as far as the poles asunder from such temptations as these. The holier and the more heavenly-minded a minister is, the more he lays himself open to a life of unspeakable temptation. With every new advance in holiness, with every new progress in the knowledge of God and of himself, with every deeper and deeper entrance of the exquisitely holy law and spirit of God into his heart and conscience, a minister's temptations multiply upon him, till he feels himself to be the most beset, behind and before, of all beset men that dwell upon the earth. And there is good reason for that. For if a minister is to be a real minister; if he is to know, as by the best and the latest science, all the diseases and all the pains in the souls of the saints who are in his ward, of necessity he must have been taken through all those spiritual experiences himself; of necessity they have all been made to meet in him. O, wretched man that he is! before he is fit to feel for and to prescribe to like wretched men with himself. And that is the reason why He who was Himself made perfect through temptation has specially promised that He will keep His ministers in the hour and power and crisis of their temptations, as He was kept in the hour and power and

crisis of his own. Tentatio, meditatio, oratio. Oratio especially. Now, there was one special kind of prayer that Daniel Cormick was greatly noted for among those who were intimate with him. All ministers pray much and earnestly before preaching. And the reason is, they are so afraid that they may not do so well to-day. The minister of Sardis, who never prayed at any other time in all the week, to be called prayer, was always in real anxiety and earnestness before he entered the pulpit, because he had such a name for preaching to keep up. And so it is still with all who are like him. They are so afraid that they may forget or displace things, or in other ways disappoint your expectations, that they pray with all their heart till God, according to His promise, hears them and carries them through again without a stumble. The difference with Daniel Cormick was that he would get, now Robert M'Cheyne, and now Andrew Bonar, and now John Baxter, to pray both with him and for him *after* his preaching. As I remember Thomas Shepard also always did: and as, I feel sure, the angel of Philadelphia also did. The "honest weak ministers," that they all three were, as James Durham, that honest but not weak minister, in his incomparable commentary calls them.

"Behold, I come quickly: hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown," said He that is holy, He that is true, to this minister of His. As if He had said, 'Hold fast by thy temptations, and thy meditations, and thy prayers both before and after preaching. And hold fast also by My name,

and by all that is due to My name in thine office, as well as in thine own soul. Let no man take thy crown in that matter. Be suspicious, be jealous, of all men. Let no man invade on thy work. Give up not an atom of thy work thou canst by any possibility perform thyself. Never weary for one moment in thy well-doing. Let not thy hand for one moment become slack. Do not let thyself lie down to die till all thy work is fulfilled and finished. For if thou dost so die, then thy successor in Philadelphia will take thy crown which I had intended for thee.' As John Newton took Thomas Scott's crown as long as Scott neglected his dying parishioners till they sent for Newton. And as ministers' crowns are dropping off their heads in every parish all round about for any ambitious man to pick them up and put them on. Any one, that is, who will visit such and such a sick-bed, and read a Psalm there, and after it one of the Pilgrims' crossings of the Jordan. Hold fast, O all you ministers and elders and nurses and doctors! Hold fast as Dr. Mill held fast at so many death-beds in and around Kirriemuir, till he stole some shining gems even out of Mr. Cormick's crown. Hold fast lest some aspiring man run off altogether with the crown your Master had at one time intended for you. If it took a man like Daniel Cormick all his might to keep his crown from being all stolen from him, what chance, think you, have the most of us ministers?

But look up! Who is that glorified saint shining as the brightness of the firmament, and as

the stars for ever and ever? That is the angel of the Church that once was in Philadelphia. That is he, built in for ever as a "pillar" in the heavenly temple to go no more out. He was such a true pillar on earth that the whole of the seven Churches in Asia were strengthened and upheld by means of him. And now he is set in the very midst of the city of God which is new Jerusalem. And, behold, with the name of his God also written upon him, so that all men can read that name on him, as they pass by. Had the name of his God been strength of understanding, or depth and power of mind, or stores of learning, or an eloquent tongue; had it pleased God to save His people by dialectics, then that pillar had not borne as he now bears the name of his God. But God's nature is not like to ours. For we read in letters of gold God's glorious nature and name, and it is this,—the LORD; the LORD GOD, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sins. And that name was taken up with such Paul-like determination, and was so preached in Philadelphia and nothing else was preached, till both the preacher and the people knew none other name. Like preacher, like people. That preacher of Philadelphia fed his people on the finest of the wheat till it became bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, and till God's great name came out in letters of light all over their foreheads, and was written in works of love all over their lives. What a comfort to the most of us ministers! For the most of

us ministers must always be far more like the minister of Philadelphia with his little strength than like the minister of Sardis with his great name. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

XXXIII

THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF THE LAODICEANS

THE Archippus who is so remonstrated with in the Epistle to the Colossians concerning his neglected ministry, may very well have lived on to be the lukewarm angel of the Church in Laodicea. As a matter of fact, there is both internal and external evidence that the angel of the Church in Laodicea was none other than this same inculpated Archippus now grown old in his unfulfilled ministry. And if the external evidence had only been half as strong as the internal the identity of those two unhappy men would have been proved to demonstration. It is much more than a working hypothesis then, the assumption that this angel now open before us is none other than young Archippus at last grown grey in neglect of his work and in ignorance of himself. Archippus was still to all intents and purposes a young minister when this message was sent to him from the aged Apostle, "Say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." But instead of taking that timeous

reproof to heart, Archippus had gone steadily down in his declension and decay till he had this last reproof addressed to him, and which has been a last reproof to so many ministers and their people since his day and down to our own day.

The English language has inherited one of its most contemptuous and denunciatory epithets from this Epistle to this lukewarm minister and his lukewarm church. We call a man a Laodicean. We have no other single word that so graphically describes a certain detestable type of human character. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." That is plain-spoken enough and in few words. But ever since this so scornful Epistle was written, all that, and more than all that, has been collected up into this one supremely scornful word,—thou art a Laodicean! And thus it is that to all time the angel of the Church in Laodicea will stand forth as the spiritual father of all such spiritual sons. Archippus will stand at the head of a long apostolic succession that has descended from his ancient diocese into all the churches: Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Independent. And this Epistle now open before us is a divinely fashioned looking-glass, as James the Lord's brother would have called it, in which all Laodicean ministers and people are intended to see themselves.

"Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased

with goods, and have need of nothing." But Archippus with all his stark stupidity could never by any possibility have said that. He was not such an absolute idiot as actually to say that. No, not in so many words. No minister ever, out of Bedlam, said that in so many words. No. But at the same time by the very Scriptures he read and expounded to his people, as well as by the Scriptures he did not read; by the very psalms and hymns and spiritual songs he sang, and did not sing; but especially by his prayers, Archippus all his days sealed down his people in the same deadly ignorance in which he lay sealed down himself. And indeed it is just of this deadly ignorance of himself that his Master here so scornfully speaks. "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." On the margin of a copy of Thomas Adams' *Private Thoughts* now preserved among the treasures of the British Museum, Coleridge has written these pencilled lines: "For a great part of my life I did not know that I was poor, and naked, and blind, and miserable. And even after I did know that, I did not feel it aright. But I thank God I feel it now somewhat as it ought to be felt. Stand aside, my pride, and let me see that ugly sight, myself. I have been deceived all my life by sayings of philosophers, by scraps of poetry, but most of all by the pride of my own heart, into an opinion of self-power, which the Scriptures plainly tell me, and my repeated failures tell me, that I possess not. It is the design of the religion of Jesus Christ to

change men's views, to change their lives, and to change their very tempers. Yes. But how? By the superior excellence of its precepts? By the weight of its exhortations, or by the promise of its rewards? No. But by convincing men of their wretchedness, and guilt, and blindness, and helplessness. By inculcating the necessity of the remission of sin, and the necessity of supernatural light and assistance, and by promising to the penitent sinner, and by actually conveying to him, these evangelical blessings." Well might Charles Lamb say, "Reader! lend thy books to S. T. C., for he will return them to thee with usury. He will enrich them with his annotations, and thus tripling their value. I have had experience, and I counsel thee. Shut not thy heart, nor thy library, against S. T. C."

Among all the terrible things here threatened against this miserable minister of Laodicea, his "nakedness," and "the shame of his nakedness," is surely the most terrible. There is nothing that is more terrible to the heart of man than shame. Shame and contempt, as a parallel passage in the Old Testament has it. Shame and contempt are far worse to face than death itself. When we speak of shame, in our shallow and superficial way we usually think of the shame of a naked body. But there is no real shame in that. When the Bible speaks of shame it is always of the infinitely more terrible shame of a naked soul. Take away the terrible shame of a naked soul and there is no shame at all in the nakedness of the body. But

once strip a soul naked, and death is its only refuge and hell its only hiding-place. Take it home to yourselves and see. Suppose your innermost soul laid absolutely bare to us who are your friends and neighbours. Suppose your most secret thoughts about us told to us from the housetops. Suppose all your malicious thoughts about us told, and all your secret hatred of us, and all your envy of this man and that man, naming him, and for what. Suppose it, if you dare for one moment to suppose it, the whole bottomless pit of your evil heart laid bare. Now all that is the threatened case of this miserable creature here called an angel. Indeed his case is far worse than yours; unless, indeed, like him you are a minister. For he will have all the shame that you will have, and, over and above all that, being a minister he will have the special shame and the special contempt and the special revenge both of God and man to bear, and that, if the prophet is right, to everlasting. It is the awful forecast of all this to Archippus that makes his Master's heart to relent once more and to address to him this last-trumpet Epistle. "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." It was this same salvation offered to all such ministers as Archippus in the Old Testament, that made Micah exclaim at the end of his ministry, Who is a God like unto Thee!

And then there is this evangelical invitation to crown all. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." This, I feel quite sure, is a reminiscence of what had often happened to Him who here speaks. For He was often that He had not where to lay His head. He was often that He had to stand at the door and knock. The parable of the friend at midnight was not so much a parable after all. He must often have been that poor and importunate man Himself. For if He hungered on His way to the city, much more must He have hungered and thirsted and been nigh unto fainting, on His way out of the city. And at such times of temptation, Satan would say to Him—'If thou be the Son of God, command these stones to become bread, and command the wayside streams to run with wine and milk.' But He would say to Satan—'Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips: I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.' And so saying He entered a certain village, and knocked at the door. And the man from within answered, "Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed, I cannot rise and let thee in." But in the next street there was a lamp still burning, and a voice from within answered, "Come in, Thou Blessed of the Lord." And they supped together that night. When you next think you hear His knock, rise off your seat, rise off your bed even, and open the door. Yes: go and actually

open the door. Think to yourself that He is actually in the street, and is actually, and in the body, standing at your door. This is the sacrament night. And it will be a sacramental action to go and actually open your room door or your street door late and alone to-night. Imagine to yourself that you see Him dim in the darkness of the night. Put out your hand into the darkness. Lead Him in. Set a seat for Him. Ask Him when and where He broke His fast this morning. Ask Him where He has been all day, and going about and doing what good. Tell Him that you are sure He has not had time so much as to eat. And set the best in your house before Him, and He will come in and will sup with you, and you with Him. Believe and be sure that He is in this city to-night. Believe that and it will make you to be on the watch. Do not put off your coat, do not wash your feet, till you have opened the door to Him. Sit up for Him. Expect Him. Set your candle in your window. Have your door standing already ajar. And even if you should again and again be deceived and disappointed: even if again and again you should mistake some other sound in the street for His footstep, do not despair of His coming. Do not shut the door whatever you do. Far better a thousand such mistakes through overwatchfulness than to be dead asleep when at last He comes. And besides, who can tell, He may not have eaten a morsel or drunk a drop in all the city this day,—all these communion-tables notwithstanding. And would it not be wonderful if all the entertainment

He is to get in this city this whole day still awaits Him in your house this night. And then there is this; whosoever or whatsoever you are, let nothing debar you from supping with Christ to-night. You may not have been at our table to-day. We lay down rules and restrictions as to who shall, and who shall not, sup with Him in this house. But, all the time, He is the Master, and He can lift off all our restrictions, even when they are quite right in us to lay them down, and He can and He will sup when and where and with whom He pleases. And these are His own undoubted words about this night that is yet before Him and before you and before us all. These words: "If *any* man hear My voice, and open the door,"—communicants, He means, or non-communicants; members or adherents; young or old; minister or elder; especially any minister. For as He stood that night at Archippus's door in Laodicea, so will He stand at all ministers' doors in Edinburgh this night. And, all the more, if they are all asleep, have you your lamp still burning on your window-sill for Him. And you will be able to tell us to-morrow how your heart burned as He supped with you and you with Him. For it was a proverb in Athens that they were always well in health, and full of all sweet affability all next day, who had supped last night with Plato.

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