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The choice of the highest



THE CHOICE OF THE HIGHEST

City Temple Talks to Young Men

BY
R. J. CAMPBELL



NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO
Fleming H. Revell Company
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

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FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 63 Washington Street
Toronto: 27 Richmond Street, W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 30 St. Mary Street

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I

THE CHOICE OF THE HIGHEST

I

THE CHOICE OF THE HIGHEST

Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us. . . . But if not.—Dan. iii. 17, 18.

THESE words represent the grand challenge of the human heart against evil fate. This book was worth the writing if only because of the thrilling lesson it conveys to us in the testimony of the three Hebrew children in the presence of death. It matters little how we regard the story, whether as history or as allegory, or partly one and partly the other, so long as we learn this particular lesson. A good deal of time, I think, has been wasted in discussions about the authenticity of the Book of Daniel, and as to whether this particular dramatic narrative is actual and literal truth. Personally, I may say frankly I am inclined to believe that it is not, but it has been true in human experience many a time for all that, and is in essence true to-day. That is why it finds a place in Holy Writ.

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The grandest victories of conscience have been those which have been gained not only in defiance of odds, but in contempt of reward. Those who believe in the naturalistic origin of conscience forget that its greatest achievements have not been in line with, but in defiance of popular sentiment. They have been the victories of minorities rather than of majorities. Yet no such sacrifice has ever failed or can fail. The three Hebrew children are a figure of the moral heroes of the world. They were not careful to answer the tyrant as they stood in the presence of death. They did not debate what ought to be done in matters of conscience. It is often said that in questions of conduct first thoughts are best. "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and He will deliver us out of thine hand; but if not, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

"But if not." They went to the burning fiery furnace, from the furnace they were rescued, and the dramatic narrative, I think, reaches its highest altitude in the vision that was granted to the king. "Did we not cast three men bound into the fiery furnace? Lo!

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I see four men walking loose in the midst of the fire, and the form of the fourth is like unto the Son of God."

I have only two things to say to you arising out of this text. The first is that the supreme spiritual need of the hour is a strenuous morality, and the second is there is no morality worthy of the name that is not born in conflict.

There is a good deal of spiritual unrest in the present time, and spiritual needs are being voiced overtly and tacitly on every hand. You may think it strange that I say the supreme spiritual need of the hour is a strenuous morality. What has morality got to do with spirituality? Everything. There is no spiritual truth which has not a moral bearing and places the man who receives it under a moral obligation. It is a cheap spirituality that makes no demand upon conscience. I do not wish to identify morality with spirituality, but I declare they can never be separated. To-day we are confronted with two seemingly contrasted attitudes of the modern mind towards Christianity. First we see before us an admiration for the ethical value of Christianity, for the character of its Founder, for the ideal which He set up, but along with this there comes a very

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considerable and widespread distrust of its dogmas. You cannot improve on Christ—I do not suppose you have ever thought of doing so—as your ideal for all that is good in human character. You are willing to pay Him homage now, but you are not quite sure of everything we say about Him, as to Who He is, and what He does, and what view of His personality we ought to take. Has it ever arrested your attention and struck you as strange that God has left many an apparently open question, many things that may be debated, and upon which even good men may differ, even such an important one as what we are to say about the person of Christ, and yet He has left us in no doubt whatever as to the ethical value of the Christ? None of you dare to say at this moment, or would dream of saying that Christ led you wrong in the Beatitudes, or led you wrong by the example He gave, for the message of Christ was Himself as well as His word, and the impression made to-day upon human hearts by the personality of Christ is that which gives sanction to the word. We feel the Christ, His grandeur, His purity, His holiness, we bow down before Him as our moral ideal. God has, I repeat, left us in some doubt concerning Who He is, but He has left us in

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no doubt concerning the duty of obedience to what He is.

Now, I take it—at least I trust it is so—that I have carried with me every man so far. Lest any of you mistake for a moment where I stand, let me say this: Christ is my only hope for time and for eternity. As Mr. Gladstone called Him, “the one central hope for our poor wayward race.” When I get to the other side of death “I hope to meet my Pilot face to face,” and I do not expect to think less of Christ then than I think of Him now, and I think my conscience can never place Him too high. He is worthy not only of imitation, but of the fullest homage that a man’s heart can render. Christ stands highest, Christ stands first, Christ is my God.

But about that I am not concerned to dispute at this moment. I think Christ is not concerned so much as to what we say about Who He is, but He is very greatly concerned as to the obedience we render unto Him. Here I venture to read some words written by a recent biographer. He says: “One cause of the present decline from old beliefs is a spiritual debility, a lack of the power to take energetic hold of beliefs even when the reason has no fault to find with them.” Is not that true of a

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great many of you? "Nothing could be imagined more likely to counteract that nerveless condition than an energetic attitude to human life. Those who gladly and enthusiastically lay hold upon the ideal are the likeliest to attain to a faith which deals robustly with that which is beyond life." I agree so thoroughly with that biographer that I have chosen the text which is before us. God requires from us not merely saying, not merely professing, but doing, and it is doing that leads to spiritual certainty. "He that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God or whether I speak of Myself."

There is a need to-day of warmth of devotion and moral enthusiasm about the highest things, which, after all, lie close to us every day. Poverty in these things leads to pessimism. Every spiritual truth makes this moral demand. The best way for you young men to find the truth about Christ, about God, about Heaven, is to be good. The good and the true are ultimately one. Do one good action and the universe speaks back to you its "Well done." Test that truth for yourself in the very next opportunity that you have of doing something for your neighbour in the name of God.

Is it not Lady Henry Somerset who somewhere tells how she was walking in her garden and a voice seemed to speak to her heart, saying, "Act as though I were, and thou shalt know I am" ? That experience is not by any means isolated. It has saved many a man from doubt and despondency. One example which is often quoted in these days, and whose influence is greater than it was in his lifetime, is that of Robertson, of Brighton. Some young men may be interested in hearing of the crisis in Robertson's life, when his faith became fixed. Like many other men, there came a time when he doubted nearly everything he had been taught in the name of religion. In 1846, during a visit to Germany, he writes home to a friend in some such terms as the following: "Of one thing I am certain, and it cannot be taken away from me. I have got as far as this—moral goodness and moral beauty are realities lying at the root of and beneath all forms of religious expression. They are no dream, and they are no mere utilitarian conventions. That suspicion was an agony to me once, but it is passing away now. Again and again I despaired of the reality of goodness, but in all that struggle I am thankful to say the bewilderment never told upon my conduct. In the

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thickest darkness I tried to keep my eyes on nobleness and goodness."

Arthur Hallam, Tennyson's and Gladstone's friend at Oxford, passed through a similar spiritual crisis and solved it in the same fashion by moral faithfulness. You know the words in that monumental poem, "In Memoriam," in which Tennyson describes his way out:

" He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

" To find a stronger faith his own;
And power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone."

Men and brethren, every one of you bows before a moral ideal written in his heart. You may prove unfaithful to it, but if you faithfully obey it, it will lead you into light. Whoever or whatever wrought that ideal within you is your God, and your God makes His demands upon you not simply sometimes and here and there, but all the time, and everywhere. The greatest need, I repeat, of the present day is the need of a strenuous form of morality. Make men who are not afraid of rendering homage to conscience, and you will make that type of char-

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acter which Christ Himself delights to honour. For a revival is coming. Some people say, and I am sometimes tempted to think, that it has already come. If it is coming, it will be a revival of homage to conscience. The highest will take care of itself. Christ is the highest, and men are bound to bow down before Him, "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence."

But to go to my second point, there is no goodness worth having which is not born in conflict. The poet I have just quoted says man is as

" . . . iron dug from central gloom,
And heated hot with burning fears,
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
And batter'd with the shocks of doom
To shape and use."

Make a distinction between the morally beautiful and the morally sublime. I trust you have all read Edmund Burke's essay on the "Sublime and Beautiful." You will remember that he declares one ingredient of the sublime to be a feeling akin to fear, fear in the presence of an unknown, dread of an experience that may come. Now, young men, the morally beautiful may contain nothing at all of that particular ingredient. The morally sublime goes to the

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making of character, and in the long run it cannot be opposed to the morally beautiful. Now in this congregation there may be a little child not understanding three words of what I am saying. You cannot but feel that that little child is perhaps in some ways superior to yourself, morally beautiful. There is nothing more winsome than the innocence of childhood. Is childhood ideal? No, but childlikeness is. You will go from the morally beautiful through the morally sublime back to the child spirit. Begin with childlikeness, if you would come to the character of Christ. If you go through the morally sublime, you must be prepared to meet Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation and the demons in the darkness of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Simplicity, naturalness, transparency of character, absence of arrogance, are characteristic of the child. It is remarkable, but splendid, to think that within these are the very things which the world is coming to demand from manhood. Test it yourself. If in place of simplicity we read duplicity, if in place of naturalness we read hypocrisy, if in place of transparency of character we read the modern pose which will give the impression that a man is better than he really is, if in place of the absence of arro-

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gance we notice the presence of the domineering pretence so characteristic of one form of character which is doing so much evil to-day, surely we are obeying our highest instincts when we say, "These things should make way for purity of heart, for meekness of disposition, for all that is characteristic of the child."

Examine your own virtue and see if you have obtained these qualities. That is not virtue which is easily won. The false accent of religiosity to-day says much about humility where humility is not, and a man may come to that dangerous condition when, as has been truly said, he is proud of his own humility. Doing merely what one wants to is no great virtue in the sight of God. There are some people here to-night, it may be, who not so long ago would rather have been in the drinking saloon. Why are not you there to-night? Because it has ceased to appeal. You do not want to go. Near you sits a man who never did want to go, and if the old temptation should come over you you might, for a moment, be disposed to think, and perhaps he, too, might be moved to think he is better than you in the sight of God. But he is not. You are winning your freedom by conflict, and the greatest mon-

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ument of free, unmerited Divine grace in this place at this moment is not you, but the man who has never been tempted to the far country and to feeding upon husks. There is an old prayer which says, "Lord, be merciful unto the tempted. Lord, be merciful unto the fallen. The good have more to praise Thee for in that they have never been tempted and have not fallen."

We are every day confronted with the choice between the higher and the lower, the golden image or the fiery furnace. Sometimes a grand crisis comes in life. We have to choose between God and Mammon, conscience or a momentary gain. In such crises we seem left to ourselves, but we never really are left to ourselves. In the darkest hour there stands by our side that unknown Friend. Most of us want God to rescue us before the crisis comes. He very seldom does that, but He rescues us on the other side of the strenuous activity by which character is beaten out, gained, and won.

I remember during my voyage to South Africa, when we were sailing up the east coast, we came to a port—East London—of which you may have heard. To obtain entrance to the harbour it was necessary for us, in little groups

and in flat-bottomed boats, to cross the bar. Some shrank from the ordeal. I felt a shrinking myself. As we were tossed at the entrance of the harbour, one felt one would rather have gone back and left East London alone. But it is remarkable that when we passed over to the other side, though we could not see why it was so, it was like an inland lake. Here is a figure of our moral opportunity. When God calls us to a crisis, God brings us to a conflict. It is as though there was a bar to cross, and on the other side, and only on the other side, is the still water and safety. God does not give His rescues upon this side. It is an evil agency that would keep a man back from that by which his manhood is won. Here is opportunity in the great crises of life—to venture on for the right, and to leave the future to God.

In Brighton at one time when I was preaching somewhat in this strain, I made the acquaintance of a man who told me a story, bearing a considerable amount of pathos, of his own early life. He said he could remember the time when his father was dismissed from a situation for daring to tell the truth. The children could not understand what the choice was which led him to take that decision. They could not understand the merits of the decision.

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He could remember his mother cutting the last crust of the loaf and shedding tears as she did so, and when they asked her why she cried she told them the story of the father's heroism. They did not understand, they could not enter into it. "But now," said my informant, "do I need to tell you that my father's example and my father's character have saved me in many a similar dark hour?" His heroism was won at a greater cost than that of any of us, for he had to suffer by seeing his children suffer.

Supposing, then, that there is some man listening to me who is face to face with the burning fiery furnace, I would say to him, Make this humble man your ideal. Be not careful about your answer. First thoughts are best in cases like this. Play the man. "Our God is able to deliver" you from the burning fiery furnace—but if not, why, what if not? Then do not bow down. Leave the future to Him, and if He vindicate not His own He is not the God of the heroes of the ages past; and yet we know He must be ever the same.

On yonder wall there is a medallion on which you cannot look too often—that of the poor tinker of Bedford, John Bunyan. His name is a household word in this land of ours to-day because he suffered for the highest. He

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went to prison rather than yield his faith, rather than give up his practice of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. You remember his words, pathetically eloquent, to his little blind girl, who came to him for the evening blessing: "Poor child!" he said, as he took the food from her hand and gave her the laces to sell to make a living; "poor child, how hard it is like to go with thee in this world! Thou must be beaten, must beg, must suffer cold and want and nakedness, and yet I cannot endure that even the wind should blow upon thee." "Our God is able to deliver, but if not——" Even love must be the sword which pierces the heart.

Some of you are, even to-day perhaps, tempted to compromise with the ideal. Watch what you are doing. You are perilling something higher than you know, driving from you, it may be, God's great opportunity.

" Better to stem with heart and hand
The roaring tide of life, than lie
Unmindful on its flowery strand
Of God's occasions, drifting by.
Better with naked nerve to bear
The needles of this goading air,
Than in the lap of sensual ease forget
The godlike power to do,
The godlike aim to know."

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Faithfulness is always vindicated. There is a wondrous grandeur in moral victory. The Jesuit said, in "John Inglesant," that well-known psychological study of the progress of a somewhat too self-conscious soul, It matters comparatively little in this world to what cause or party you attach yourself, so you feel it to be good, but when you have given yourself to cause or party, be faithful and true. Yes. That is what God requires—your very best. Never left alone in the conflict! Though you come to the furnace, beside you walks a form like unto the Son of God. If it were otherwise, God's world would be wrongly made. No man who has ever tested the worth of righteousness has had cause to regret his choice. We are not asked for loud profession. We are not asked for dramatic debate or screaming witness to what we believe to be the highest. We are asked to live it. And to live on the lowest rung of the ladder of truth faithfully and well is bound by and by to lead to the top.

My brother, listen to the call of inflexible good. Dare to trust it and obey. Your life is different from mine, different from everybody else's. You have to settle your own questions in your own corner. As you have to die alone so in some respects you have to live alone.

Sympathy may help to brace you, but there is a grandeur in solitude,—moral solitude,—and great choices remain.

Stand up and look fate in the face. God is able to deliver you from every agony, from every pang that accompanies the choice of the highest. But if not—if not—do you hear it? God is able to deliver you from the fiery furnace to-morrow, beforehand you need not go to it. But if not—what, then, will you do?

II

THE DAY OF DECISION

II

THE DAY OF DECISION

Choose you this day whom ye will serve.—Josh. xxiv. 15.

THIS is a sentence often quoted as the text of an evangelical appeal, and perhaps on that very account some of those who hear it may be inclined to discount its force. It is employed not seldom by persons who have perhaps no very vivid idea of its historic associations. Its force is all the greater when we endeavour to recall what those associations were.

Here is an old warrior, captain of the hosts of Israel. His toils are nearly over. He feels upon him the chilly hand of death. He calls around him his mighty men, the elders of Israel, their sages, their judges, their officers, their men of war. This is the way he talks to them. Pointing with his aged hand north, south, east, west, he says: "Behold this fair land of yours. I conquered it for you with a strong hand. You followed me on many a

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stricken field. Have I ever failed you? Have I ever done aught that was unworthy of Israel? Well, now, look back. See the way that you have come. Recognise the leading hand of God. Your fathers served other gods, and in this new land to which you have come, other gods are worshipped, too. But our God, yours and mine, to Whom we prayed in the wilderness, and Who hath given us the victory, Who hath led us hitherto, to Him be all the glory and all homage due. Not with your sword nor with your bow, but by the mighty hand of God, has this new opportunity been given to you. You are the chosen people. Choose therefore this day whom ye will serve in days to come."

Now I am aware that Israel's view of the nature of the God of Whom Joshua spoke was not quite ours. Let us look that matter quietly in the face. It was not so lofty. The God of Israel was a grim deity,—as Joshua describes Him in the context of this chapter, a jealous God,—although we know better now, because some one bearing the very name of Joshua—for Jesus is that name—came and told us about a Father who loves and cares. But if Israel had never witnessed for the God they thought they knew, we should never have been

here to worship the God that Jesus gave. I want you young men to understand that before we go any further. It was Israel's faithful witness, or the witness of Israel's faithful few, to a God of righteousness, however austere their conception of that God may have been, a God of righteousness, that has made possible your Christian God of love.

Consider, then, how momentous was the choice that was made at the instance of Joshua on that historic day. For if Israel had chosen the god of the Amorites or the god of any of the surrounding people, the world would have gone wrong. You have small conception of the filthiness, of the barbarity and the cruelty of the worship of the Semitic peoples who were all around the little nation of Israel. As Lucretius, the pagan poet, has well put it—

“ 'Gainst all things good and beautiful
 'Tis oft religion doth the foulest treason.”

Israel saved us from the degradation of the religious ideal. Its moral uniqueness, the spiritual loftiness of the worship of Jehovah, have prepared the way for the Christianity of Christ. So you see what a far-reaching effect the decision of Israel had in response to the

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call of Joshua, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve."

With these historic associations in our minds, let us regard the exhortation as addressed to ourselves. My purpose is to make you hear the words of this old warrior as though they were spoken to London and to you. You cannot overrate their importance, and you cannot get away from their appeal. There are some choices that must be made, and you may make them by refusing to make them. You may choose the wrong by closing your eyes to the right, by postponing the day of decision. And all I have to do is to try to make you see, as plainly as I know how, the issues before you and the importance of the decision I urge you to make.

Have you ever read John Foster's essay on decision of character? Probably most of you have not. John Foster was read by your fathers and grandfathers, but this generation appears to be forgetting about him. If you have not read that essay, get it out from some library and read it forthwith. In one paragraph he urges the following consideration, which I do not quote to you, I only cite it from memory. In effect it is this: There are many men to-day drifting into a destiny.

There are many others talking about being fated to do this, foreordained to do that, their destiny appointed, and so on. Doth not clear vision of opportunity and duty—doth not clear vision constitute destiny? Do you not hold your to-morrow in your own hands? You see the right—choose it or choose it not. Speak no more about the destiny appointed; you make or unmake your own.

That prophet of God might come along and speak to the young manhood of to-day, for just as his appeal was true when it was to your fathers, that teaching is true when applied to you. I do not assume that you are all prodigals. Many an evangelist goes a little wrong by talking in that way. You are nothing of the sort. Perhaps the majority of the young fellows and young women who listen to me are in the main disposed to live as good a life as they know. The trouble is that they have never traced out and committed themselves wholly to the ideal of the best life. They are doing what John Foster would call drifting into a destiny. You are of unformed character. Many of you are easy-going and without purpose in life. You are aimless, and yet you are just entering your promised land, and God looks very kindly upon your future. If I could get inside your

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heart and brain, and hear with you and feel with you and understand what your ideals are, I do not think I could have much more sympathy than I have now. Is it not true that you think of life as golden, full of promise? Perhaps you have found yourself in a hard place, your living is not easy to get, the immediate future does not look rosy, but you can sleep at night because you are young and full of hope. There will be a better day by and by, so you assure yourself, or, without assuring yourself, feel it must be so.

You are not wrong. That instinct is God's gift to you, and what is more, it is yours to use it right, and make that instinct to become achievement. I went to-day to see some one who, in the course of conversation, happened to say—and he is a man with full and rich experience of life—"I wish you preachers would make a little plainer to the young of your congregation the importance of being clear on the threshold of manhood and womanhood about the things that matter most." "But," he went on to say, "you pulpit teachers teach such different things. You contradict one another. Men are not quite sure about your meaning." Now, I do not agree with my friend, and I want you to see under this statement the same

fallacy I made him see under it. Preachers do not speak different things about the things that matter most. No teacher sent from God really misses the mark, and what is more the people to whom he is sent know perfectly well when he hits the mark, and every sermon preached in this metropolis, every one,—Roman Catholic, Anglican, Jew, and Christian,—will contain something that comes right from the mind and heart of God, and is intended for the mind and heart of man. Different things we do not say, different things about the great truths concerning high living, right thinking, right doing. Beloved, my own life, like yours, is built upon two or three truths, and any man who has two or three main truths in his life, and for which he would give his life if necessary, is pretty safe to be taught of God concerning the things that lie beyond. We carry within us the God-given faculty for recognising the truth that helps us upward, and though my aspect of truth may not be precisely yours, we start from the same base, and we take our stand upon the same eternal facts which, worked out in every-day experience, ever ring true. Externals matter little; modes of statement may differ, but truth is one as God is one.

Now here are three principles on which I

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am building my life. The first is this: The universe is organised for righteousness. Granted it does not look like it, granted that men lose sight of it sometimes (they would not cheat and lie and thief if they did not); but it is so, and it is not only conventional and orthodox preachers who think so. There are people who teach with the pen as well as the tongue, and all men who have stood upon the everlasting hills and caught the glint of God's golden morning have urged that truth upon their fellows in the valley:

“ Because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.”

The second is this: Life does not end at the grave.

“ Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not our goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.”

I have never outgrown that simple hymn of my youth.

Here is the third: The highest is the true, and the highest I know is Jesus.

I can imagine somebody saying, “ We might with a little difficulty agree to your first proposition, but the other two—are not you too dogmatic? Are you sure that life does not

end at the tomb? Are you sure that the highest is the true? How do you know?" My answer is, How do you know anything? The most elementary fact with which you are dealing on the Stock Exchange to-morrow and in the merchant's office on Cheapside begins in a paradox and ends in one. The curious part of it is that men hesitate so much to build their life upon a truth which is no more a paradox than the lower truth in which they are living their life every day.

"How do you know that Jesus is the highest?" Show me a higher, and I will dethrone Him. I am prepared to worship the Christ that stands beyond Jesus if you can make me see Him, but I have never seen Him and you never will. Oh, the folly of standing hesitating, non-committal, half-contemptuous in the presence of the King of kings, and Lord of lords. If Christ is not Master of the universe and Lord of life and Lord of death, who is? I only know one who is worthy, and that is the Lamb that was slain.

The first sermon I ever heard Dr. Parker preach contained a figure which I pass on to you, pungently powerful in this regard. "How men do trifle with truth," he said, "standing on the outside of it, when they

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might be living on the inside." "As I came down to the service this morning I might have seen," he continued, "a man standing outside the station, spelling the name of the railway, and parsing every word, The—Metropolitan—Railway—T—H—E—and so on. By the time he got to the end of the title I had my third-class ticket, and was five miles down the line."

I see you smiling. Will you change your smile into sacred and solemn assent? That figure is as a voice from the tomb. Verily, we do trifle with the truth, and stand hesitating, non-committal, selfishly aloof from the outside, when we ought to be living in grand and noble daring on the inside. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." The Lord who has kept me hitherto will keep me to the end. I know my faith in Him is worth my while because it works. If I had to-morrow to begin again I would begin again with Christ. "I know that my Redeemer liveth," liveth to vindicate everything that is noble, liveth as the Master behind all mystery, the God Who understands the human heart, in that He Himself hath lived the human life. Jesus is the explanation of all that baffles, the Name in which to live, the end to which we go.

Oh, yes, somebody will say, this experience will work for a corner of life. I could understand your religious man talking in this style, but you see we have not time, we are so busy getting a footing in the world. Now make no mistake about the matter. The principle is for the whole of life. There is no departmentalising, life is not lived in compartments. Religion is not for Sunday, or, if so, less for that day than for any other day. If you are a man of business, take your religion into your business. Do more than that, take care that your business is the expression of your religion.

Moreover, the decision to stand for and with God will affect every corner of your thinking, every iota of your action. You cannot give Christ one detail of your life, and retain all the rest. He is entitled to the whole, and the whole He will have. Jesus is worth your best. He has been tried for nineteen hundred years, and is not found wanting. Do not make the mistake of finding out too late that He was worth your choosing, and that you have wasted your days. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Let the result of your decision be this—"We will serve the Lord."

I remember taking a holiday in Devonshire some years ago, and coming to a spot near

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Westward Ho! where two roads branched off a picturesque Devonshire lane. The one seemed precipitous and less inviting than the other. The latter led downward for a time, but, as we thought, led more directly to the place where we wanted to go. Said our guide, who left us at the top of the pass, "Choose the higher road, it is the surer." We stood debating with each other, when we came to the parting of the ways, which way really was the better. Said some, "The guide never told us the higher path; he could not, it was nonsense. Don't you see for yourself this road which leads down must cut off the whole of the unwelcome hill? Just go that way, we shall save no end of time, and spare ourselves no end of weariness." Well, we took the lower way. Down and down we went, splashing through mud, regretting at every step that we had not taken the higher road, and by and by we came out upon the way that we must ascend to get back to the road that we should have taken at first. We saw we had wasted our time, that the weariness was to be incurred on the lower road and not on the higher, and we will take care, if ever any friends of ours have to walk that road again, they shall not make the mistake of choosing the one that we chose. The

lower road was the longer, it was the harder, it was the steeper, it was wearisome, it was disappointing. The higher road was the shorter, it was the grander, it was the sweeter.

In life we often choose the lower road—it seems so easy. By compromising with the ideal, we seem as if we can come out to what we want so much more safely. It is never safe to compromise. It is never worthy to take the lower road. What may hang upon this moment I do not know. If the preacher could be silenced, and every life of tragic failure in this Church could rise up and testify, there would be no doubt as to the choice that would be made by those who are hesitating. If every saint of God, every pure-minded man or woman who had lived a life with Christ could rise and tell what the Lord has meant to them, there would not be much room for hesitation left in the breast of the audience. It is only one who can speak, and I speak for the Master, and just repeat the old warrior's words, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." For if you knew what is at stake, you would never stand for a moment halting between two opinions. "If the Lord be God, follow Him."

It is so possible to go wrong by choosing the easy, by choosing the lower, or refusing to

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choose at all. Let no man hesitate for a moment in the presence of the ideal of the Christ, Who is the highest you have ever seen. Take that road, cost what it may. Trust the Lord, however dark the way, for the Christ in Whom Christians believe has never failed His own and never will. Let that Christ be your Leader and your Captain and your Guide.

To close with the words with which I began, to every young brother however badly and unconvincingly and feebly I have put the truth, forget everything except the One before Whom you stand. Entering upon your promised land, make the right choice in your day of decision, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve," and "Goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life."

III

SPIRITUAL MANHOOD

III

SPIRITUAL MANHOOD

And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.—Ezek. ii. 1.

EZEKIEL'S vision was probably subjective. But such experiences have come to many of the good and the great among God's august and honoured servants in the world, and there is some similarity between them, in that the best and wisest of mankind, when once they have realised with intensity the presence of God, the ineffable, unapproachable holiness, have felt themselves shamed and humiliated. It is only those who are sunk in evil who can speak lightly and easily about the purity of the Holy One. Ezekiel was broken down, shamed, humiliated, as he saw the holiness of the Lord as it came to him in vision, and the sinfulness which he exhibited in contrast to it. As he lay prostrate before the Supernal Being, the voice that spake within him said, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee."

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The sinner's first impulse is to prostrate himself. Repentance always begins within—"God be merciful to me, a sinner"—but it should not end there. From the Cross we go onwards and rise upward, and the first effect of a radical change of heart and life is that manhood begins to show itself. Ezekiel is not the only one who has seen such a vision, and whose whole life has been changed in consequence. Like his experience is that of Isaiah: "Woe is me, for I am undone: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Like St. Paul, erstwhile persecutor, ruthless and arrogant, but now—"Who art thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." How those words were burned into the memory of St. Paul we see from his tender pastoral letters written afterwards to those whom he would persuade from the wrath to come and to the love of the Christ. In Christian history, in not a few instances, such a spiritual crisis has been the antecedent of a marvellous life-work. One could name not simply one, but many of the heroes of God who have begun in humiliation and ended in power. Self-abasement is often the way to manhood. God speaks to the penitent the word of encouragement and strength; the new spirit is breathed into him who is low

before the Lord. "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee."

We have here a spiritual message for the present day, especially for the younger generation. Spiritual manhood is the thing we most want to see, and the thing we most require in this England of ours. I am impressed by many things in the life of my younger brethren in London which no thoughtful observer can afford to pass by. One of them is the comparative absence of what I may call the serious view of life; or we may phrase it otherwise, thus: Is it not that the young men of to-day, speaking broadly, fail to take either themselves or their destiny or life as a whole seriously? There is a danger of an opposite kind, that we take ourselves too seriously. Morbid introspection is bad for any character. I do not ask any young man to think of himself and to study himself until he has fashioned in himself somewhat of the ideal character which in his best moments he can see. In making such a character it were better to look away from yourself. But, on the other hand, there are so few who are prepared to take themselves with sufficient seriousness to begin the process at all. In the metropolis are men of ambition and no ambition; those who are unscrupulous as to their

methods of getting a living and winning a place in life, without any spiritual touch in their character, without any spiritual aspiration which can be detected by another, and those whose flabby character—worse, perhaps, than those who are unscrupulous concerning their methods of carving a road in life—never achieves anything at all. Such men are not only robbing God, but robbing themselves. “He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul.”

If I ask you, “What are you living for?” how many of you would be ready with an answer of which you need not be ashamed? We seldom pause to take stock of ourselves as we should, and without danger of morbidness that should often be done. How much have you counted for? Is the world better because you are in it? Do you ever think concerning your responsibility? Have you made any preparation for the larger life of which this is only the portal? Well is it if you are ready with the answer: “My ideal is a noble one; let God once speak to me, and I will obey.” But that is not, as a rule, the ideal of the manhood of our time; we fall short in this particular, that God is usually left out of account when we are taking stock of destiny. It was not always so in

the history of the world, and particularly of our country. There have been great and grand men—God send them again!—who have helped to shape our history and made us the liberty-loving nation that we are, because they were ready with an answer when the time of questioning came. Cromwell wrestled with God day and night in a time of spiritual crisis, until he came clear out upon the side of deep moral conviction. God humbled him, and then raised him, and in answer to the question “What are you living for?” that man, amongst others in that stirring time, could have answered, “The will and the purpose of the most holy God.”

Around the walls of the City Temple are the names of worthies of a past day, and we have added that of “Joseph Parker.” Those who knew him best and longest will admit, whatever may be said concerning his peculiarities or eccentricities, now that he is gone, and we can take a true perspective of his life, that it was strenuously lived. Had it been lived for its own sake alone, its record would have been other than it was. To the very end that servant of God wore his harness. Yet I have heard him say that in the earlier part of his Christian life he sometimes felt he was unworthy to serve the God Who had given him the

commission. To think that he was in the service of the Holy One abased and humiliated him as it did Ezekiel, but, in response to the heavenly vision, when he had obeyed the call and taken up his life-work, what a man his faith made him!

The old Puritanism had a message to its age. It has been the fashion in some quarters to insult and deride Puritanism, but it made the most massive, morally strongest type of character the world has ever known. It was grim, unlovely in some of its aspects, rugged, stern, sometimes merciless. Because their power of moral indignation was so great, the Ironsides could be ruthless on the battlefield. Perhaps our spiritual forefathers had not a very great sense of humour. Sometimes I think we have too much. But such men as these made the religious life of England a different thing from what, in some of our moods, we are tempted to think it has become. There was a grandeur and massiveness of character about these old Puritans, formed by the conviction that they were servants of God, chosen, called, and sent. In every case the experience of the Puritan seems to have begun in weakness toward God, and ended in strength toward man. "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and

I will speak unto thee," would have been the message of Baxter, Howe, Bunyan, Knox. The last name reminds me of what the Regent Morton said of the great Scottish reformer as he lay in death: "There lies one who never feared the face of man"—no, so much feared he the face of God. But yesterday there was one who seemed to echo the same tone. Chalmers, of New Guinea, went out to his work, to possible failure and actual martyrdom—went forth with the same feeling in his heart, and almost the same words upon his lips. God made him the man he was by humbling him to the dust at the beginning of his spiritual career. Chalmers knew not only how to live, but how to die; he took life seriously, not for himself, but for God. He might have heard the ring of the commission to Ezekiel, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee."

Young men, do you not feel, as you stand face to face with a spiritual fact of this kind, that, however old, it has a present-day significance, and an individual one, too? If we have failed in having a high purpose in life, a noble aim, an ideal of which we need not be ashamed, shall we not begin where those great ones of old began—by entering into relationship with

God, heart to heart, soul to soul, humbling ourselves in the dust before the Most High, that His holy hand may lift us up? There is no spiritual manhood worthy of the name apart from the inspiration of God. Spiritual manhood is Christ-informed character, and the Christ-informed conscience is the guide of life. So many are ashamed of being called Christians, afraid of taking a stand, the non-committal attitude is the favourite one. There is some penalty for such spiritual cowardice, and perhaps it may come home to you before this life is done. What you call manhood is often a base and false ideal. Yet what matters it what our fellows say? What matters it how we cheat ourselves as to the meaning of success and the worth of the goal at which we spend our time in aiming? If God be absent from a life, that life is barren and poor. God-saturated men are wanted in the present day as much as ever they were in the history of our land.

It is not only the lack of seriousness that one sees in young men to-day; there is what I may call a new and dangerous hedonism abroad. One of the most insidious temptations of the hour, sapping the very foundations of manhood, is the craving for pleasure. The rein is

given to passion. By hedonism I mean living for gratification and apologising for what are by courtesy called the weaknesses of human nature. How often we hear such philosophy as, "It is to be expected that young men will sow their wild oats. There is a period for that, and we cannot be too hard upon human nature. If a man does not break out in one place, he will in another. If he does not live for the flesh, as some of the best-hearted fellows are doing to-day, why, then, you must expect a withered, dried-up, cynical schemer who in some other way will take his toll of life." It is a lie! The ideal of manhood suggested by such a philosophy as that is a false one. There is no need for any man to live the life of the beast. If you don't control your senses, your senses will control you. It is perfectly certain that the man who is content to gratify that which links him to the lower creation instead of to the higher, is laying up for himself a harvest of remorse. God forbid that any man, however unwilling to label himself with the name of Christian, or any other, should be led away in the belief that it is right to live for that which is bestial, and that, with the hot blood pouring through his veins, he cannot be master of his own thoughts, let alone his deeds. Character is being built

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every hour, not only by what you do, but by what you think. Live for the highest, not the lowest. "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and hear the speech of God."

Do not speak lightly concerning those sacred things which God has entrusted to our keeping, particularly womanhood. Not many hours since I heard a slighting, insulting, unworthy remark made by a young man concerning the sex to which his mother belongs. Never allow such a word to pass unrebuked in your presence. Never think that it matters little, or that it is becoming and proper to the sex of which you are a member. That is not manhood; it is moral negation. The ideals which are made for you by the voice of the beast are not those which in your best and most solemn moments you know you ought to conform to. God has not left you without a witness, and you need no preacher to tell you this. Stand upon your feet; be master of the body. He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap eternal life.

There is a duty of self-formation. You are making yourself every day and every hour in the unseen. Did you ever think of that? Psychologists tell us that we know very little

about our own being; consciousness is but a tiny corner of that vast entity which is summed up in the personality of any one man. But the unconscious part of us is that in which character resides; we are continually putting into the unseen being lying below our conscious self, yet our very own soul, and by and by, after the great change that we call death, when we live more than ever, what we are will stand out in the lurid light of the eternal world of truth.

“ The tissues of the life to be
We weave with colours all our own,
And in the field of destiny
We reap as we have sown.”

Make no mistake as to the result of our action and the ideals for which we live. We are controlled by them; if we do not aspire to the higher, we are mastered by the lower. There is a judgment which ever proceeds, and so certainly as the Christ is neglected, ignored, so certainly are we thrusting Him from us in the unseen, and shall want Him when we need Him most. Let no man ever make light of the judgment. There must be a judgment. We know sometimes, by the moral indignation that wells up in ourselves at sight of a deed of wrong, what would be the just condemnation

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passed upon us for opportunities let slip and mismanaged. There is a character that the world cannot see in every one of you, perhaps unknown to yourself. It is seen now in the unseen, and by and by you shall see it as it is, when the secrets of all hearts are revealed. Perhaps some good things may come to light then, as well as bad ones. John Wesley used to say that he expected three surprises in heaven—(1) to see some men there that he never expected to see; (2) not to see some whom he did expect to see; (3) greatest wonder of all, to find that he was there himself. John Wesley's eschatology would not be mine, but his vivid sense of judgment to come is mine. We ought never to trifle with the facts of life, and we cannot speak too solemnly and seriously upon that which awaits us when the veil of time and sense is no more; when we see ourselves as we are; when the vision is not only open to our minds, but the influence thereof to our hearts. But God can see even now what has been hidden beneath the veil of pretence. We are building, building all the time for God's great judgment-day.

We cannot afford to trifle with what is commonly called faith. How many young fellows will make any new resolution, or take any new

stand, because of what the preacher says? Yet, young fellows, I mean every word. Faith is real to me. I will tell you what I mean by faith. I don't think faith is the subscription of belief to a proposition; that is only the husk of it. A man may have a most elaborate scheme of beliefs, and be a bad man all the same. You may say, "I believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God." That is well and good in its place; "the devils also believe, and tremble." But supposing you get no further than this: "I hope that Jesus is the Master of the unseen, and I am going to live for Him with all my might and main, the sweetest, purest, highest, embodying all I know or need to know of God," that hope has become faith. Faith is life adjusted to the highest we can see. When you go back to your business life, mark out for yourself what you believe to be the highest that God has shown you; then be sure God has spoken to you. He is calling you to manhood, and the voice that speaks across the centuries to you is the voice that spoke in Galilee nineteen hundred years ago. "Oh, no!" Oh, yes! If Jesus is not speaking, who is it? Can we go as far as this: If it is not Christ, it ought to be? Surely heaven is not cheating us. You can build upon that proposition, unprovable by

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intellect, but verified by experience. Try it. Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and the Christ shall speak with thee.

There are many at the present time whose doubts are pressed to the front and excused, and finally end in a balancing of judgment, which leaves Christ as a sort of pleader at the bar; and there is another counsel upon the other side, and you, the wise, self-poised, self-contained judge, are waiting for the final verdict to be pronounced by you by and by. It will be the Christ that will pronounce that verdict, not you. Perhaps He is pronouncing it now. There are some doubts of which a man ought to be ashamed. I never mind very much what a young fellow says to me as to his doubts about the fundamentals of our faith, if his life is strenuous, real, earnest, noble, girded up to the best that he knows; I can leave him alone, he will come all right; experience will put him on the track to the holiest. Most men that are worth their salt have begun by wondering if the foundations are sure. But I never like to see a young fellow brushing them aside contemptuously, as if they did not matter.

“ There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.”

Do not allow your doubts to gather hazy clouds around your head and keep them there. Face them; master them one way or the other; take the best you can see, and live for it, stand square up to it; you will find that God has not left you to yourself. To live manfully for that which you already know to be true enlarges the border of your spiritual experience.

One word about the moral struggle of the man who has but a feeble faith. Many of you feel that my stricture upon the careless life missed the point as applied to you. You say: "I don't want to give rein to the lower; if I could I would live for the higher; but oh! the power of the unclean! how easily I am borne down! It is not that I distrust, I would lay hold of the Christ or anybody else, if I only could get up. That seems so impossible. I am not master of myself. Am I responsible for the falls of which I seem to have been guilty?" You are not responsible for the battle—that is God's doing—but no man needs to lie under Apollyon; God never meant that. A young fellow is in a dangerous way who begins to excuse himself for moral defeat. There is deliverance for each and all. Do not dwell in the atmosphere of the miasma; stand up, and commit

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yourself to the highest, and then see whether God keeps His share of the bargain.

Dr. Campbell Morgan told me at Northfield of an instance of the kind. A poor man came to him after a service on Round Top, where the body of Mr. Moody lies, and said, "Do you believe that when you are tempted, and say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' the victory is won?" Dr. Morgan, after a moment, said, "No; I do not." "Then," said his interlocutor, "you stop preaching Christ and deliverance from sin; for I have a temptation. I don't want to live with it; I don't want to be defeated; I would do the best I knew if I had the power, but I have not. If I can't say, 'Get thee behind me,' and be sure of victory, what am I to do?" Dr. Morgan said, "Do you believe that Christ said it, and won?" "Yes; I believe He is the only One who could ever say it, and win." "Then you go, and in the name of Christ, say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' when your hour of torture comes, and see which gets the victory." "The next morning," says Dr. Morgan, "as I drove up I met this man standing in the middle of the pathway in front of me. He looked at me with radiant face, standing square on his two feet, and said, 'Man, it works!'" He had found

the Christ a present deliverer, as well as an abstract Saviour; something for everyday life, as well as for the pulpit; and his new-found faith in the Master was one for practical use. Stand square up to the spiritual fact, fight the battle in the name of the Crucified, and see whether the promise is not kept. The voice of God is heard as you speak, "Get thee behind me." The victory is won. Son of man, do not lie down before the enemy; stand upon thy feet that the Christ may speak with thee.

IV

THE TWO SONS, THE TWO
DESTINIES

IV.

THE TWO SONS, THE TWO DESTINIES

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found.—Luke xv. 31, 32.

NO doubt you have heard the parable of the Prodigal Son expounded, not once only, but many times. It has been a familiar evangelical subject, not only with preachers of this generation, but almost of any, and it has been treated in a variety of ways. But I have little doubt that for the most part you have been accustomed to hear the prodigal made a rather interesting person, and the elder brother not so. Our pity has been reserved for the unfortunate individual who returned from the far country, and we have been accustomed to regard the elder brother as a figure brought before us only to be dismissed again with ignominy, as a sort of villain of the piece. Well, now, if we may reverently

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search the circumstances, and make inquiry into what our Lord's intention was, judging by these circumstances, I do not think you and I can come to that conclusion again. Christ was far too wise and knew too much about the facts of life to put a premium upon the sowing of wild oats, or to make things as right again as if they had never been wrong once the prodigal had come back to the father's house; and He was too wise and too kind and just to suggest anything sinister about the figure of the elder brother, who is represented as having behaved in all things precisely as a son should.

Now I think it is probable that I have before me both types, and I want to speak a faithful word to you both, without, I trust, deviating in any important degree from our Lord's meaning and intent when He first told this story.

Let us speak first of the younger brother. "A 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 sub-

stance in riotous living." The father allowed the son to have his full fling. He left him to himself till he came to himself. God always does just that. If you want to go wrong, you shall go wrong. It sometimes seems as if God helped us to go, not that He ever does. But the facility is there, and if a man is determined to waste his God-given powers he cannot escape. "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." But the purpose of the sad harvest is not a vindictive one. God's punishments are chastisements. Left to himself the prodigal is till he comes to himself. The full consequences of sin are not easy to bear. "The way of transgressors is hard." Sometimes it seems as if life were not organised upon that principle. "The wicked flourish like a green bay tree." They do not all do so, and you may learn from those who have their hell in this life that the ways of God, though past finding out, are inexorably just. Penalty waits upon wrongdoing. But now we are told, and this story is meant to enforce it, that there is no last moment with God, no shutting of the door of mercy. And whether you differ from me or not, I cannot say but that I feel at heart as if the meaning of penitential pain, and it has no other mean-

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ing, is that the soul may be brought to itself and back to its Maker.

Now as to the figure of the elder brother. Some prodigals, I think, know pretty well that all that I have said up to this point is true. Now as to the elder brother. Is there such a being? Our theology is apt to become singularly confused on this point. At one moment we preachers seem to urge that we are all prodigals, every single man of us. At another time we seem to urge that some of us who are Pharisees, who never have been in the far country ourselves, are hard upon the poor creatures who have. Well, now, both cannot be true. The truth is that there are some of you have never been in the far country. Though it may be that you are not perfect characters by any means, you can afford to be thankful to God that you have been kept in the consciousness of His presence from your youth up. Pious fathers, praying mothers, have nourished and trained the character you have, and made the atmosphere in which it grows. Be thankful, for these are facts. And the great majority, perhaps—I know not—of this congregation is not just as the crowd of abandoned ones that will parade Piccadilly to-night seeking to destroy manhood and womanhood, and

we may as well recognise the fact. With all your faults and all your mistakes that have sprung from selfishness, there are some of you who have never wanted to quit the side of God. You have, as it were, been in the Father's house. Perhaps the greatest miracle in the Church to-night is not the recovered prodigal, but the elder brother who has never gone far astray.

Well, when our Lord introduced the figure of the elder brother, do you think He intended him to be reprobated? Let us look a little more closely at the narrative. Jesus spoke these words in Galilee, at the time when He was very popular with respectable people. Curiosity had been excited on the part of those who never went to the synagogue at all, and they thought they would like to hear this strange teacher who came out upon the roadside, and when they flocked to the courtyard of the house of the publican that day to listen, they were astonished at the tenderness and winsomeness of His doctrine of the Divine Father's love. But amongst them, and still more surprised, on the outskirts of the crowd stood the scandalised Pharisees. "This Man is associating with publicans and sinners. Can we hear Him in patience any longer?" So, at

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the close of the discourse in which He had talked of the lost sheep and the lost piece of silver and the return of the prodigal, the Master said something to those round about the door. He said, "There were two sons, you know. Be thankful, all you people who have never known what it was to be a publican or a sinner in the conventional sense of the term. Come and help. I have never been a sinner myself, but I was baptised as a sinner. 'Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' Come down that you may lift up." Saviourhood always shows itself so.

And perhaps, as I said before, there was one convert after the sermon that day, that particular part of it, and that is the man who wrote this story down. Luke, the beloved physician, was himself a Pharisee, and he caught the spirit of the Master, though he had never been in the far country. There was no one in the whole band of them that was more sympathetic to the erring and fallen than sweet St. Luke.

Look into the narrative itself. "The elder son was angry and would not go in." Would you have gone in? Did it seem fair? Turn to human nature and read out of that chapter, and we do not see that it was very unnatural

and very unreasonable that the elder brother should have remonstrated when he heard that the fatted calf had been killed and the best robe brought out. The father went out and entreated him, but the son said, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee and never at any time transgressed I thy commandments, yet thou never gavest me so much as a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But when this thy son is come, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." The father did not deny this. He was no dependent in the house of his elder son, but was giving orders still, though he had divided unto them his living. Instead of replying by a word of reproach and saying, "You owe everything to me," he said, "It is true. Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine." Remarkable vindication of the character of the man who spoke!

Still further, there is a very sweet touch here that you may miss if you do not know the language from which this chapter was translated. It is the use of the word son, which occurs twice in the course of a few verses, and though it appears in English to be the same word, it is not so. The one means the heir,

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the inheritor of the substance, the name, the repute of the father, and the other simply means child, child of the heart's affection. "When this thy heir was come, who hath already devoured thy living with harlots—he is inheritor again." The father replies, "*My child*, thou art ever with me, thou child of my heart's best love, and all that is mine is thine. We have been together, you and I, all these years, never had any misunderstanding, of one spirit are we and of one substance too. My child (not simply my heir), is it not fitting that we should keep together now? This my son, thy brother, was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."

Our Lord introduces the figure by saying he was angry and would not come in. But mark, the chapter closes with this suggestive appeal, that the last word is the father's and not the elder brother's. We are not told that he did not go in after this. The truth is that Christ stopped speaking here, and waited to see what the Pharisees at the door would do, and one of them came in, and his name was Luke, and he stood alongside Matthew, who had been in the far country, the elder brother and the younger brother, the child and the son—brothers both.

Now I think you will see what our Lord was trying to do. He was telling us this, that sonship at its best implies brotherhood, and that again implies saviourhood. God has two ways of training His children, the way of love and the way of pain, and good and bad alike, we have to pass through both. Our love to those of us who are trying to do right, sooner or later spells pain, and our sin, to those who are going wrong, does just the same thing, but there is a whole world of difference between the two pains. I am trying to bring that home to-night. If we will not learn by God's love it is often that we have to learn by God's pain, and it has cost God pain to teach. It has cost God pain to win the sinner by his pain—that in a nutshell is the gospel.

Of course, pain is not always punishment, as I have already hinted, and I wish, in keeping true to the gospel to-night, to throw upon you the principle I am now seeking to declare,—the two sonships, the two destinies, both the objects of love, both suffering pain, but wide as the world apart in the way they come to this common discipline.

Now in all probability I could from amongst those who are listening to me illustrate in full my theme, just as Christ could to the audiences

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He addressed. There is no book that I know of half so interesting as the book of human nature. There are tragedies in this church, there are comedies too. There are stern, hard lives which are yet noble, there are trifling, silly, butterfly lives which are selfish, and it may be that there are the hopeless lives of those who were once selfish to the last degree in taking their own wilful way, and are now paying for it. Not so very far apart, perhaps, as seemed at first, are the experiences borne by these. Even the Captain of our salvation had Himself to learn by suffering, and saint and sinner alike must do the same. There is no man equal to expounding the problem of pain. I think we can feel a meaning, though we cannot demonstrate one. It is this, that "whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Nobleness is born in the furnace of pain, and, speaking generally, and keeping away from particulars, I think that is the inevitable purpose of pain.

Some of you feel that this is indeed a terrible world. Do you not see that the Christ never shrank from the experience which, perhaps, seemed so utterly unreasonable and mysterious to you? As gold must be tried by fire, so the heart must be tried by pain. Here, for

instance, are family misfortunes that have to be borne in common. Amongst this congregation is a once light-hearted lad or girl, now a sad-hearted, sour-visaged man or woman. The difference has been caused by the gathering clouds over the rough places on the road of life; one thing heaped upon another, one sad day followed by a succession of such, until now a plaintive note has come into the life, and you are sometimes inclined to ask wearily, but almost indignantly, "Why does God cause me to walk along this path and to bear this burden?" It is not to you that I am primarily speaking to-night. I only have to say this and pass on—you are not the first that went that way.

" Christ leads us through no darker room
Than He went through before."

It makes very little difference, after all, what your lot in life may be. It makes a very great difference how you face it, how you take it, how you go through it. "Be a hero in the strife."

Yet again, there is the pain that follows sin, which is deserved by the sinner, and borne by somebody else as well. I have heard of a suffering wife who has had to bear the consequences of the sin of a weak husband. They

have shared them together, but the larger share has been hers. There is not one of this kind in the world only, but one hundred thousand, in this land of ours it may be, who have to chant this particular song of agony. See how that man comes staggering home at night to a house comfortless because he has made it so, to a wife whose love and loyalty he ought to have forfeited long ago, but has not, and see how she bears—and he is not capable of it—the burden that he alone has brought. Which of these two would you be? They are both suffering, because the remorse of the weak man is real enough when he comes to himself. Oh, this problem of moral weakness! I know a wife who has gone out in a morning from the apartment her husband's habits had reduced them to, and walked the streets all day for fear the landlady should discover that she had nothing to eat, and that her husband was the cause of her hunger. I have heard of a father—nay, I know him—who one day with awful sorrow said to me when I inquired about his son, "He is dead, thank God! Don't mention him to his mother if you happen to see her." "Why?" "Because we gave up hoping that we could get him right. We only got him home at last when he was helpless, and in-

stead of recovering to go into the far country again, he died. Let us thank God it is no worse than that." Here was suffering, a home tragedy. The boy who was dying could not have died indifferent. He knew that his father's grey hairs meant something, he knew of the sorrow of his mother's heart. It must have been a terrible pang in his own. They all three suffered, they all came through the same experience, but by what different ways! There are many here who have passed through like experiences, doubtless. Which would you sooner be, the sufferer by another's fault, the sufferer who suffers because he loves, or the sufferer who causes pain by his selfishness and by his sin? Because some of you are to be remembered in the less worthy category. There are young fellows here of whom home cannot be very proud. In your better moments you are sorry,—ah, more than sorry, almost heartbroken,—as you think what you have done to those who deserved the best of you, and how often and how grievously you have broken your promise. You have tried to shield, it may be, your guilty secret from those at home who would trouble to hear it, to whom it would cause anguish of spirit to know it, but it has got to them—the world always finds ways and

means to do as much mischief-making as it can. Oh, prodigal, selfish, delirious in your moments of self-indulgence, why do you do it? Life might treat you hardly, anyhow, but I would rather have their pain than yours. You are in the far country, feeding upon husks; the father, the mother, the brother, the friend sorrowing in consequence! They are sharers in the pain of God, they are of the company of redeemers, and if ever you are saved at all you will be saved by this mediating love of theirs—this love which is, after all, only the love of God. They are sharers in the Cross of Christ, filling up the measure which is behind. Thus redemption comes to the world.

I think I can hear the Christ speaking to some of the heartbroken whose lives have been noble: "Child, fellow-worker, thou art ever with Me, and all that is Mine is thine." Oh, it is a call to bear a cross of this kind, and, sinner, if you only knew it, it is a merciful love that you bear your cross, too, and it is waiting for you if you have not already begun to bear it.

Now to the prodigal I would say this—Be thankful if you have anybody in the world to care for you at all. Be worthy of that love, and never shirk, and never try to shirk in un-

manly fashion, the consequences of your own ill-doing. Of one thing I am perfectly sure, that the safe road is the honest road, the brave and the true. If you have done wrong, go straight round and do right. Penitence shows itself there, not in puling, piping cries that God will let you off the consequences and somebody else bear something instead. No. It is a sure and certain thing that you never can save either yourself or others whom you have made to suffer from the experiences they have to bear, you have to bear, the chastisements of love.

To those nobler ones of whom the elder brother is a type, rightly applied, I would say this—pray to be faithful to your trust. Why hath God given you to stand in the relation that you do—husband, wife, brother, friend, child—why? Because you are His trustee. It is no accident that you are where you are, and bound by invisible but infrangible bonds, you do not belong to yourself alone. Love is vocation. It means the highest joy, it means pain too. Go through with it. You can see, perhaps, through the eyes of love what no one else can but the sinner to whom you were sent, and that is why you suffer. The other day, while I was waiting at the railway station, my

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eye fell on the face of a man whose character I thought was a little evident from the expression that he habitually wore, or seemed habitually to wear. I was not attracted by him, perhaps no one else would have been at first sight. But I saw a child, or rather a young girl, go up to that forbidding man and fling her arms around his neck. And then I knew that a vision had been granted unto her which was hidden from my dull eyes. I had not love to teach me what good there was in that (perhaps) prodigal.

“ No soul can ever clearly see
Another's highest, noblest part,
Save through the sweet philosophy
And loving wisdom of a heart.

“ I see the feet that fain would climb,
You but the steps that turn astray;
I see the soul, unharmed, sublime,
You but the garment and the clay.

“ You see the mortal, weak, misled,
Dwarfed ever by the earthly clod;
I see how manhood perfected
May reach the stature of a God.”

This is the meaning of this peerless teaching of our Master concerning the chastisements of love. The prodigal suffers that peradventure he may yet “ reach the stature of a God,” and when he comes to his home he does not come

back to the undivided love, unto things as they were. No, they must suffer together—father, brother, son.

And it is something to know that he who is willing to suffer for his brother's sake has an experience which knits him to the Christ. God's work never fails. Soul-agony spells a victory any time, anywhere, whether you can discover that result or no.

"Life is ever lord of death
And love can never lose its own."

There is a grand home-coming. You do not see it all here. We only get a glimpse of that fair future, sublime and holy. We must be with God in that hour of solemn triumph. Well, then, we must be with God now. The Spirit of Christ is abroad in the world to-day. For all the unselfish ones who for no interest of their own are willing to suffer, God be praised. The elder-brother spirit is saving the world. To be partners with Jesus is the grandest vocation on earth. You will want nothing save to know that love has conquered when your full reward comes home. "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." Like Him be faithful, be true, do not shirk your trusteeship. Go the road the Master

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has marked out, never flinching, never faltering. That is the road of safety and of light and triumph.

Oh, that we might all, at the grand day of ingathering, but see the Master bend His gaze on the faithful and say, "My child, it was worth it all, child of My heart. Thou hast ever been with Me, and all that is Mine is thine. Let us rejoice together now, for this thy brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost, and is found."

V

OTHER-WORLDLINESS

V

OTHER-WORLDLINESS

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.—Col. iii. 2.

THIS is an echo of our Master's own words, given in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, as well as slightly modified in St. Luke—"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." I say our text is an echo, almost an adaptation and an application of these beautiful sentences of the Master Himself, which no one ever grows tired of hearing. But it is something more. The context tells us what that something more is. "If then ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

In other words, the Apostle is setting us to

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live up to a great spiritual fact—a fact which those who heard Christ speak did not understand. Now he assumes them to understand. Christ the Conqueror is passed into the unseen, Christ the Captain, the Saviour, the Almighty Friend. Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, and seek them through this Christ to Whom by faith ye are joined, “for ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Sometimes these words and others like them have been held to justify a form of other-worldliness which is not helpful nor admirable. There is hardly a text in Scripture which cannot be misconstrued and made to justify the light which is darkness. *Quot homines, tot sententiæ*—so many men, so many opinions. And almost every doctrine that has been preached in the name of Christianity, however vicious and shortlived, has been justified in some fashion from Scripture.

There has been a form of other-worldliness, perhaps it still exists, which is absolutely mischievous, and which has been justified from passages like this; it has taken the form described by Milton in that well-known phrase, “a fugitive and cloistered virtue.” There is the absolutely selfish man who, in quest of the

salvation of his own poor, petty soul, shuts out all consideration for his brother's needs. There is the man who cares not how the world goes so long as he is not made to suffer any inconvenience, and there are people of such sensitive and fine feeling, so called, that they cannot bear that there should be any jarring note in the music of their lives, or wail from the suffering world without. That is not the other-worldliness, you may be perfectly certain, of which St. Paul speaks. For this man, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, suffering stripes and bonds for His sake, toiling with his own hands that he might be free to carry the gospel where he chose, this man, who was a missionary at a time when Christianity had been heard of only to be scorned, lived no easy life. When he said, "Seek those things which are above," he did not mean, "be indifferent to the things which are below."

We are told in one breath in Holy Scripture, "Love not the world, neither the things of the world," and in another, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." What are we to understand by the meaning of the word "world" as it is employed in these two

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phrases? It is the same word, but its significance is not the same. In the former sense it stands for the sum-total of all those things, ends, pursuits which seek their gratification here, and must have it here or nowhere. One word will do for all the lot, and we put down "world." And what is more, people anywhere now understand full well what you mean if you speak of a man of the world; you mean a man whose aims are not high, a man who is living for that which gratifies and pleases just now, not a man whose aims are set on things nobly above the pursuits of the moment and the conventions of the hour. In the other sense the word "world" stands for the sum-total of poor humanity. God so loved these creatures of His, children of His heart, that God came for them to suffer and to die. If you keep these two things clear in your mind, you will understand a little of the light which is thrown upon the duty of this-worldliness by the consecration that we give to motives which are other-worldly. The poet Southey phrases it very beautifully for us, in lines which doubtless you know as well as I do.

" They sin who tell us love can die;
With life all other passions fly,
All others are but vanity.

In heaven ambition cannot dwell,
Nor avarice in the vaults of hell.
Earthly, these passions of the earth,
They perish where they had their birth.
But love is indestructible,
Its holy flame for ever burneth;
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth.
Too oft on earth a troubled guest,
At times deceived, at times oppressed,
It here is tried and purified,
Then hath in heaven its perfect rest.
It soweth here with toil and care,
But the harvest-time of love is there."

Has any man ever made a mistake in pursuing to its noblest the ideal of love? Righteousness itself is incomplete except it find its highest and final expression in love. You can do it here. Is it worldly? It is impossible for a man to seek a "fugitive and cloistered virtue" whose life is given to the service of the highest, and whose character reveals itself in love. It may be this-worldly, but it is other-worldly too. "The harvest-time of love is there."

I think you and I can now see pretty plainly what the Apostle means by our text, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." It means set your affection on things that are worthy to live, not on things that are doomed to die. And affection is only another

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word for mind, which is given in the margin—thought, purpose, desire, aspiration. “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” In all your work, in all your ways, set your purpose, your mind, your thought upon that which is *worthy* of heaven. For though it be but a tenant of earth for the time being, that is where you will find it. “The harvest-time is there.”

It is not always easy to maintain this upward gaze. You know that life is not easy for any man, but it is always possible to live, in the strength of God, the life of heaven amid the things of earth. None of us would ever dream of claiming to be perfect. I think the nearer we are to the ideal of Christ, as a rule, the less we care to claim it—I mean the less we care to claim that we are standing near. We are all trying—perhaps I ought to qualify even the last sentence. There may be some one in the church who is not trying, but most men, I think, when they are tested, are conscious that their deepest desire, after all, though it never reaches the surface in actual achievement, is to be good. Some of the most serious moral failures are men who, if they could by some magician’s wand be changed into characters of moral worth, would choose quickly the highest.

I will proceed on that assumption, that we want to get up. Therefore, I repeat that it is possible for every single soul among you,—trying, struggling, aspiring,—it is possible for you to live a life that is worthy of heaven amid these claims of earth. You will never do it alone. You will be in for some sorry and humiliating failures if you do not seek in the right place for the strength so to live. Lay hold upon the risen Christ. “If then ye be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ standeth.” Be worthy of that for which you do aspire, and by Him you shall reach it. No man is ever defeated until he gives up trying. The only overthrow that you have to dread is when your will turns round and marches downward. Until that point is reached, you are not living for this world. You are living for the service of this world in the spirit of Christ Who has overcome it.

Now this is a far better thing to say than to say that you are living simply in the hope of heaven, the conventional heaven, the golden streets and the jasper gates. I do not mind if there are no such things save in figure. Heaven, I take it, is that state of perfect goodness which God is preparing for them that love

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Him, and without it there is no heaven. And heaven as God sees it for us, the heaven that is to be, is where goodness and gladness shall kiss each other. The highest heaven, the heaven which Christ means, is the heaven of the redeemed, purified in the blood of the Lamb, spotless before the throne of God, pure as He is pure. The only heaven which is worth any man's while is that sort. What would young men think if they were to hear one of their own number saying to them, "I am hoping to go to heaven." They would laugh if he said he avoided this and chose that, and clung to this, perhaps, and declined the other in the hope that by and by he would win through and enjoy his heaven. I am afraid they would despise it, because the nearer a man comes to that ideal the less he talks about the merely objective side of it. He speaks of the inner. The man that you would respect is the man who is busy living the character that need not be shamed when it stands before the great white throne, the man who never lies, the man who never cheats, the man who masters the beast that we all carry within us, the man who knows the heaven of nobleness, though it costs him something to reach it down here. The vindication is sure. It requires faith, and it

requires courage to live so. The man is a fool who thinks he can do it by himself. But it is always possible. "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is." Let the Christ lift you up. Set your affection on things that are worthy of Him, not on things that, as the fashion of this world, are passing away. Yet, brethren, I expect heaven. I expect a heaven about which we sing in our hymns, and I am not ashamed to say so. I expect to see you in the company of the redeemed. I expect this ideal that is told almost at the close of the Holy Book, "I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

I take it no man, however strong he may be, however self-sufficient in character, who knows life as it is now, and the battle you have to fight day by day, would speak of that as an unworthy ideal. But if it ever comes, my friend, do you know how it will come? "To

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him that overcometh will I give to sit down with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne."

The joy of heaven is the joy of the conqueror. The noblest joy is that in which pain is latent, swallowed up. Do you see what I mean? The joy that has never known pain, even though the pain is swallowed up, is something short. If you could break up every ray of light in this church to-night, these white rays which make it possible for us to see each other's faces, you would find all the colours of the spectrum. There is the blood-red ray there. You cannot see it, but it is there, swallowed up. That white light would not be the light it is but for that blood-red ray. I remember once going into a town in the Potteries and to a special business house there, where they were producing works of art, vases and such like. They were paying high salaries to the people who paint certain designs in various colours upon these vases one by one. Then they were placed in a furnace, and when they came out again I found that the colour, which I could have wiped off with my hand before it went into the furnace, was now part of the structure, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. So God is fash-

ioning you and me. If there is any light which has ever been thrown upon the meaning and purpose of pain, it is just this—we are here that the pain which God imposes upon us, and by which He trains us, may command our response to the highest, and he is worthy of heaven who wins through, and even from the midst of his furnace keeps his gaze upon that which is above.

A few days ago I had to go to a sculptor, but I had very little time to spare, and before I arrived the sculptor had prepared a sort of model of one's self from what he had seen in the pictures that were given him. He had prepared, as I thought with wonderful skill and even genius, the little model of what he meant by and by as the presentment of the person he was seeing. I learned a lesson from what I saw there. He had some failures before he had his success. He had crushed up the clay more than once, and now I saw that he was making, as it were, an idea, a soul, an image, a presentment of something real and living that he had never seen. Do you know what you are doing? You are building in the likeness of Christ, if so be that you have never taken your eye from that which is above. Every one of you is not yet that man that

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shall be, but God sees the man. Set your affection on things above, press toward the mark of the high calling. God has not done with you, and there will be no failure. The Christ that is to be, you are being fashioned into the likeness of such. God will take you there, if you do not fail Him on the way. You and I are soldiers of the cross, we are pilgrims on the heavenly way, I want you to believe. With all my might I would impress this upon you. It is possible, however heavy the odds may be, it is possible for you to be builded in the likeness of Christ. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

Now I have just a few words in application. The first is to those who are struggling, for every man has to meet sooner or later temptation, the very presence of which may be a horror to him. Some of the young fellows who have come into this house of prayer tonight came up in the hope, it may be, that something would be said to help in this awful battle with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. I do not like to go too near to the dark things of life, but I think I know where your worst bat-

ties are, and what brings them. I know some of you dread taking upon yourselves the name and profession of Christian, not only because it has been conventionally associated with a spirit of pietistic weakness, but also because you will not play the hypocrite, and you think until the beast is slain you will claim no kinship with Jesus. Well, you are wrong. You are doing foolishly in fighting your battle by yourself, and in thinking that the Christ requires perfection. No, you are in the sculptor's room, and he is busy with the clay.

You make a sorry mistake if your eye is fixed upon the temptation and not on Him. We go badly wrong by staring at the enemy instead of at the Saviour. You are tugging away, as it were, from the presence of the evil thing, but you have not got your gaze on the ideal above. The way of safety is not to think too much about the enemy, not too much reckon with him, but think as much as ever you can about the Saviour. I used to be a cyclist, and not a very good one, and I can remember so well one's amateurish days, when one was seeking proficiency on that dangerous wheel. Sure enough if one tried to avoid a stone in the pathway, or a ditch upon the roadside, one went for that stone or that ditch.

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The way not to do so was to look where you sought to go, and somehow the wheel went there. Young men, do not dwell in the region of the morbid, do not think too much of the shadows of life, do not get into the charnel-house of morbid experience, do not dwell with the enemy. It is no cowardice to turn your back upon him sometimes; that is the way to show your faith. Set your gaze higher, on the ideal of the Saviour.

I am speaking to others here who know how fierce the battle is with one's self. You make your own universe, so to speak. No one has ever wrought you overmuch harm. It just depends what sort of a man you carry within, how the world looks to you. Well, oftentimes the battle with one's self is best won by forgetting one's self, looking away to the great humanity with its needs, its struggles, its failures, and its victories. The man whose eyes are always turned inward is in a dangerous condition. Get a pure, unselfish purpose. It matters not very much what it is.

The best other-worldliness is to do your best to purify this world. You are setting your affection on things above when you say to yourself, "I am going to try what I can do to make the world a little better than I found it," and

by and by morbid imaginings will disappear, and you will be saved from that sad form of self-consciousness in which a man is always chronicling his own successes or his own defeats. Look out, look up. The world is wide, and the Christ is the Saviour of us all. Give yourself to such service as He would have you render unto your needier fellows. The world is divided into strugglers and helpers. You and I are sometimes in one class and sometimes in the other. The struggler is the better for his struggle, and the helper for the helping. Go up both together to the ideal which has set you both to work.

I would like to speak one word of comfort unto some who do not need to be told that this world is only the beginning, and not the end of things, for their interest in it, it may be, is not very great since God took away from them the nearest and the best. It used to be easier for you to seek the things that are above because of that wise friend, that beloved husband, wife, mother, or father upon whom you could lean, and to whom you could look. God becomes incarnate in good men, and the Saviourhood of Christ is read through the character of those who have been fashioned by it. It is not wrong to say so. Now how does it look?

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“ Seems the earth so poor and vast,
All our life-joy overcast ? ”

Well now, instead of dwelling upon the sorrow and the separation and the tomb and the grizzly figure of death, set it yonder !

It will pass, this time of yours, this heart sorrow, this wringing agony. You can only feel as you do because God is busy making you, and every blow of His chisel brings the ideal a little nearer. Set your affection on that ideal, and never, even in your blackest hour, take your gaze away.

To some of you earth's bereavements—bereavements because of the conduct of the living—are worse than the bereavements of death. Here is a man whose whole life has been changed by the injury done to him through the conduct, the selfish conduct of another. You are brooding over it, you are lying down beside it, as it were, or rather it is on the top, and that injury has been magnified a thousand times since it was first inflicted upon you. You have allowed it to master your judgment and your conscience and your feeling and now your soul. Have you not done wrong? Have you not made a mistake? There was another way. Why did you not lift far above that injury your faith in the Crucified? “ Father, forgive

them, for they know not what they do"—that is where Christ stands. "Set your affection on things above, where Christ is." "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." You do not need to be angry with any man who has ever done you harm; you do not need to be, if you could see that man as he really is and as he really feels, and not as he seems. All injuries in God's economy recoil upon him that inflicts them. "It must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom they come." But you are conquered by a wrong the moment the thought of vengeance arises in your soul. Do not go down underneath these blows of wickedness, rise up looking clearly in the face of the Master. "Set your affection on things above."

I would like to make to-morrow different for some of you if I could. We are just a company of brethren talking together about life and the thing we make it. We do not know very much about each other, and before the week is out some of us will be hard upon the others. Let us try the better way. I would like to send you out to your work in the morning, back to your home circle to-night, filled with a high hope and a noble courage. I would like to breathe into you the spirit of Christ, which is

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the spirit of His great servant who wrote these words. I would like to make you as Paul was. It is possible! It is possible! If he lived that life, you can and I can. Shall I tell you what to do? Go on, go up, keep true, trust as simply as ever you can in the living Lord, and He will never fail you nor let you down. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

VI

AMBITION, TRUE AND FALSE

VI

AMBITION, TRUE AND FALSE

Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.—Jer. xlv. 5.

IT is related of the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon that at the commencement of his ministry, when he was beginning to feel conscious of the wonderful powers with which God had endowed him—like most young people, I suppose, for he was but a boy, or little more than a boy at the time—he was one day walking across a common and seemed to hear, as it were, a voice speaking to his innermost consciousness in the terms of my text, “Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.” Mr. Spurgeon accepted the text which flashed into his mind as a Divine message and monition, and from that moment made a fuller consecration of himself, his life, his opportunity, his power to the service of the living God. We know the result, and looking back upon it we know it, much better, I venture to think, than he did even on the day of his

death, but not better than he knows it now. He chose the good part, which was not taken from him. He set his affections on things above, not on things of the earth.

Now, all that was best worth his while, all that was as the reward of his seeking, and his noble method of living has come to him. We will agree that he chose rightly in the day that he obeyed the Divine monition which is our text. Yet remember what it cost him. Mr. Spurgeon was not what we ordinarily call a liberally educated man, and because of certain peculiarities in his methods, and in his manner of setting forth truth, he was exposed to persecution even on the part of well-meaning people. And because he was a prophet, and a faithful servant of God at that, and never blinked the truth, however unwelcome it might be to his hearers, he suffered contumely, and his work was attended by every circumstance of ridicule and contempt. At the outset of his ministry, I think he was almost invariably misunderstood except by the few—for they were comparatively few, after all—that gathered round him. But the time came, and now is, when England saw the value of that man, knew and loved him for his personal worth, and there is scarcely anybody, I should imagine, on

the globe to-day who has heard his name but would give him credit for sincerity and unselfishness all his life through, from the first day of his public service for the Master unto the last. We know him now. Well, brethren, there was the secret, after all—he chose an interest higher than his own, and he chose a Master higher and worthier than the world.

Now, in the thought that some young fellows listening to me may be standing at the parting of the ways, which go to the making or unmaking of destiny, I have chosen this text, which meant so much to Mr. Spurgeon, and have read it in your hearing in the hope that it may be a Divine message to your soul. Mr. Spurgeon deliberately renounced worldly ambition. That is what I want you to do. But do not make any mistake and think that I mean you to renounce ambition in the truer sense, because Mr. Spurgeon certainly did not. I want you to see what is the difference between ambition false and ambition true and to endeavour, if I can, to clear away some confusion of thought which clings around this particular subject.

What is ambition, as commonly understood? You will gather it, I think, from such familiar phrases as “that last infirmity of noble minds,”

or "by this sin fell the angels." Ambition, as commonly understood, might be so expressed, and you have a fairly clear idea in your minds, I am sure, at this moment of what such ambition is, and it stands condemned.

It takes many forms. If one wished to suggest a name or a life in which ambition had freest and most unrestricted reign, I think we should name Napoleon. He is the classical, outstanding instance; not that, I am quite sure, he is any more guilty than thousands of persons before him and since. But in Napoleon ambition, insatiate and unconcealed, had undisputed sway. He waded to his throne, as has been said, through the blood and tears of millions. He allowed no scruple of affection to stand in his way if he wished to add one more jewel to his crown. And after all, what did it amount to? We know him now. I think many even of his contemporaries knew him then: the French, who suffered because of his military ambition, as much as the rest of Europe, knew him as a man who had sold his soul, as it were, that he might gratify his lust for power. I never care to be too hard on a conventional type of a particular failing for fear one should happen to be wrong, but Mr. Gladstone said of Napoleon that perhaps he had the mightiest in-

telleet that was ever packed into a human skull. Judged by the facts as they appear to us, that intellect was prostituted. It never was exalted as it might have been, and, as I believe sincerely, God meant it to be.

Another instance, however, that I may give you, and of a different kind of ambition, more sordid perhaps, was that of Jay Gould, the American millionaire. I know nothing of the private life of this man except that I remember to have heard somewhere that he was not unkindly at home, but when he died a howl of execration from ten thousand throats followed him to his grave. It was the curses of the men whom he had ruined. He was a strong man, he knew what he wanted and he got it, but he got it by riding rough-shod over broken hearts. He made his pile, he gratified his ambition—what was it worth?

Yet another type is Cecil Rhodes. Here, again, I speak somewhat diffidently, because very different opinions obtain in regard to the worth and work of Cecil Rhodes. But this is my view of his life. He had a great idea as to the position and place of England in the world. More than that, he believed in the mission of the Anglo-Saxon race. But he was not too scrupulous in his attempts to realise his

ideal, if we may judge by the facts as they appeared to us. He would have done almost anything to have swept out of his way an obstacle to the ideal with which he was obsessed. It was a form of ambition not so despicable as Napoleon's, because it was less self-centred, but I venture to think it was materialistic and mistaken, and now that the great man has gone there are thousands upon thousands of us who, looking upon his career, pronounce those saddest words of tongue or pen, the saddest of all, "it might have been." Cecil Rhodes was a great empire builder, we are told. He might have been more than that. He sought great things, and he saw himself associated with them. Do you feel, you young men, that his is the highest ideal and the type to which you would like to conform your character? I trust to be able to show before I close that it was not.

It is true that the general good may accompany such self-seeking as I have tried to illustrate here. A great historian, not long dead, has said, "The best work in the world, perhaps, is being done by men who are scrupulous as to aim but unscrupulous as to means, yet who in their very self-seeking manage to benefit the human race." Well, true, but if

the self-seeking were out of account, would not the benefit to the human race be incalculably greater? The busy man whom we call a faddist often does considerable mischief by what he is pleased to call his conscience, but his mischief is on nothing like so great a scale as that of an unscrupulous man who, in search of what he thinks to be a justifiable ideal, makes one mistake. We all agree in condemning self-seeking if it is blatant self-seeking that makes great mistakes, but we are not so hard in our condemnation of self-seeking if it is done in a corner. We assume in most people a selfish motive. Perhaps we are right in a good many instances, but we are not right all the time. You men of the world know perfectly well how you weigh each other up. You see a good thing done for which a man is receiving an amount of public credit, and you promptly ask, "What is his aim? What axe has he to grind?" You can scarcely bring yourself to believe in disinterestedness, because, so far as you have been able to see, people who were apparently disinterested, really had some ulterior motive that would not bear the light.

You know among your associates, for example—in the business house, it may be—the difference between the man of modest ambi-

tion and the man of scheming unscrupulousness. You prefer the former, but you seldom believe that he has no axe to grind of his own. In most cases you are right, but beware of general statements. You need some qualification, and a general statement like that inevitably leads to cynicism.

I think the chief danger of to-day is not that men are too ambitious, but that they serve the wrong form of ambition. There are men in your business—perhaps a good many of those who are here present could be included in the category, who are at fault not because they have too much ambition, but because they have not enough of the right sort. I was struck, and painfully so, on my visit to America, with the contrast between the ideals of the young American and the ideals of the young Englishman. As far as I was able to read them, there a man expects to get on and usually does it.

Success is not always unworthy by any means, and even if it is, it is no more unworthy than the selfish negation of ambition that one sometimes sees among our own youth. The man who will not work, the man who will not aspire—and there are plenty of them in our country—the man who never wishes to be any better or more useful, or to live his life more

completely than now, is of no benefit to society, and his selfishness is as real as the selfishness of any Napoleon or Jay Gould of them all.

You owe something to God, you owe something to men. There is not one among you who is an isolated unit. The man who thinks he is making no great claim upon society and stands in nobody's way, and refuses to do his best, is entitled to no credit for renouncing ambition. God has given him a talent to use, and he is not using it, and on the great day that talent will be required of him again with usury.

Carlyle puts more clearly than I can the distinction between the true ambition and the false. Nothing I say will be equal to it in force and point. "Let me say that there are two kinds of ambition, one wholly blameable, the other laudable and inevitable. . . . The selfish wish to shine over others, let it be accounted altogether poor and miserable." "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." This is most true. "And yet I say," continues Carlyle, "there is an irrepressible tendency in every man to develop himself according to the magnitude which nature has made him of, to speak out and to act out what nature has laid in him. This is proper, fit, in-

evitable; nay, it is duty, the duty of duties. For man the meaning of life here on earth might be defined as consisting in this—to unfold yourself, to work what thing you have the faculty for. It is a necessity for every human being, the first law of our existence.”

I am going to try and spiritualise even further, if I can, that wonderful principle set forth by Carlyle. True ambition is to live out what is in you for the sake of Him who gave you life. It is a wonderful, it is even an awful, thought that God Himself finds fulfilment through what you are. God’s work is being done, God’s thoughts and purposes are being realised by these apparently commonplace men and women that I see around me, and every one of you is the embodiment of the Divine. Would you shrink and shrivel that Divine which God has given you? It is to be manifested not only for your own sake, nor chiefly so, but for the sake of Him who gave it and for the sake of mankind. I want to warn you against misusing God’s great gift, your own soul. The first that you will ever be asked for in the great day of revelation will be your own. There never was any one like you in the world before, and there never will be again. You are a unique product in the universe, and there are

unmeasured possibilities before every man here. Each of us, all of us are citizens of eternity.

The other day in a sculptor's studio I heard some words of wisdom from a man who has time to stand and think while he is at work. One very shrewd observation he passed upon life was this. He said there are two kinds of men. There is the man in whom the Divine life is manifesting itself, the man who loves his work and lives for it, the man who does his best to read it out; and there is the hewer of wood and the drawer of water, whose hat goes on the moment the clock strikes five and he is out of the shop. There is all the difference in the world between these two—the man who cares to do something well, and the man who does not care to submit to anything like sacrifice or pain, cost what it may to other people. He was right about that. The true ambition is that of a man who is not afraid to endure, not afraid to sacrifice, not afraid to spend his soul, for in giving he is gaining, and he shall have more abundantly.

Now, young men, I want to warn you before I go on against possible disappointment even in your endeavour to live up to your ideal. It may be that while I have been speaking in these terms to you some old and wise man in this as-

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sembly may have been thinking to himself, "That preacher will change his tone in a few years when he knows how sadly life can disillusion and can trample upon our ideals." Oh, the tragedies of life, the hopes blighted, the old men who are just doing their day's work in patience that expects no more! There are crowds of them here, who began life as you young fellows are doing, expecting great things and believing that there were great things for them to do, but now, as the evening of life approaches, they know that they have not realised their hopes, that the world would not let them, that the twilight-time is sad.

You are only saying what has been said before. That poor, unhappy genius, Percy Bysshe Shelley, saw a little further than the disappointment when he told us in so many words that it is never possible for the soul to live itself out completely here. How should it be? Because here is not the close of our destiny. It will take all eternity for you to live out what God has put in.

"We have passed age's icy caves,
And manhood's dark and tossing waves,
And youth's smooth ocean, smiling to betray;
Beyond the glassy gulfs we flee
Of shadow-peopled infancy,
Through death and birth, to a diviner day."

Never think that you are going to live out all, but I think you will save yourself from disappointment and pessimism if you will only say, "It is possible for me to get on the right track now and be living out in time that which I shall live out better when eternity comes." It is possible for you to give a whole-hearted, unselfish allegiance to a great ideal, and that not for your own sake. There is a Divine idea pervading the visible universe, the spirit of truth and beauty and good. We are called to service, every one of us is called to reveal and express that Divine idea in some fashion. For us it is embodied in Jesus Christ. I cannot but halt there. The Christ contains for me all that humanity is able to aspire to or understand, the great Divine idea. The life that is given to Christ is well invested. It has produced the best results in the history of human character. What a man was Paul! The world was his oyster when he was a young man, and he might have opened it with his genius, and who knows where that brilliant Jew might have stopped if he had entered the service of the Cæsars? But the Christ crossed his path, and this ambitious, zealous, burning soul changed to something else, Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle, lived a suffering life and died an ob-

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scure death in a Roman prison; and this was his verdict when the evening came—"I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. . . . I am now ready to be offered." Paul knew that his life was hid with Christ in God. He knew that this is the shadow-time, the other side is the reality. He chose on the day of the heavenly vision, and the Master's comment on the choice is this—"I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Young men, I strongly urge you, the magnificent young life that I see around me, to choose the life wherein you can throw your best energies for God. Have a purpose therein. Do not fear to give back to Him the life He has placed in your keeping. Beware of seeming to drift into a destiny. Let your choice be rational, let it be strong, let it be pure. I care not what vocation you have chosen so long as you be faithful to that which you have chosen. By and by you shall do greater things than these. In time be faithful to the little that you can do, that in eternity you may do the more for God. Believe that you have a vocation, a vocation for God. You will not live out all that is within you here. You cannot. But if you live only for yourself here you will be a wretched man.

Give the best to God; I would not care to join the ranks of the disappointed people who have tried for their own sake, and their own sake alone, and have miserably failed by their very success.

“ If there be good in that I wrought,
Thy hand declared it, Master, Thine;
Where I have failed to meet Thy thought,
I know through Thee the blame is mine.

“ One stone the more swings to her place
In that dread temple of Thy worth;
It is enough that through Thy grace
I saw naught common on Thy earth.”

What can you do to bless the world, to live that fuller life? You must consecrate your powers to that which is higher than self. It can be done, it has been done marvellously by very ordinary men.

We have all read that psychological novel “ John Inglesant,” with its too self-conscious hero. One character drawn therein, that of a Jesuit who for a time is spiritual adviser to John Inglesant, seems to me to be a remarkable one. I know not whether such a Jesuit ever existed, but you know this, the Jesuits by their system of training manage to squeeze out of every man upon whom they get their grip any thought of living for his own self-interest. He becomes the bond-slave of the society. They

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have great strength from the fact that they can thus obsess a man, as it were, de-self him, and make him work for the great organisation. Here is the Jesuit's verdict to John Inglesant upon his own life, an exhortation for his pupil: Choose your side or your lot; when you have chosen it, be true to it all the way. It matters comparatively little what a man chooses as his course of action provided it be a worthy one and his conscience tells him so, but when he has chosen, no looking back. Go straight on, be faithful to the uttermost, cost what it may. A grand and a glorious ideal for the twentieth century, as well as for the seventeenth! We know how possible it is for a young woman to give her whole life and thought and interest, counting not the cost, for the sake of the man whom she loves. We men are not apt to be so unselfish. We know it is possible, again, for an old man or an old woman to re-live life in the career of a child. It is pathetically beautiful to witness the way in which this is done around us every day. The old live again unselfishly in the life of the young. Could not the young try it as unselfishly in the life of the world? How shall I serve my God if I serve not my kind? And there is a Divine principle within us which urges us to do our best to make the world better

than we found it. I have often been struck with the fact that very ordinary people, who make very small profession of religion, somehow will do this at some part of their career, in some one of their interests. They feel they must even at a cost do a little to make the world gladder and to make the world good. Remember the utterance of the Bishop in Victor Hugo's "*Les Misérables*." As the convict stands at the door of the house, proclaiming what he was by his dress and his demeanour, thus spoke the servant of God—"This house is not my house, it is the house of Jesus Christ. This door does not demand of him who enters it whether he has a name, but whether he has a grief."

Oh, I feel that if our bodies were made the temples of the Christ as the Bishop's house was made the tabernacle of his Lord; if our interests, our opportunities were consecrated to Him, oh, what a difference, majestic, far-reaching, redemptive it would make to the world to-morrow! And, if I could, I would like to fill every young soul with that divine ideal. What can we do, you and I, to bless the world? Just what these noble ones in times past have done, the Pauls and the Luthers and the Wesleys,—not worldly ambition, but the consecrating of

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everything they possessed to their Lord and the counting all but loss if they might win Him. Let us do the same as these. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." Seekest thou great things for God? Go on. Live out all that God has given you as His trustee. Seekest thou joy and blessedness and victory and power in the highest sense of these words? Would you come to the full stature of your manhood? Then "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

VII

MORAL RESPONSE TO SPIRIT-
UAL VISION

VII

MORAL RESPONSE TO SPIRITUAL VISION

*I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.—
Acts xxvi. 19.*

THE incident described in the twenty-sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles brings us into direct connection with a dramatic moment in the world's history. Probably few of those whose names are recorded here as having been concerned with this episode, if any of them, ever dreamed that it would be spoken of again, much less be known to millions upon millions of people, and do something to change the history of the world. But so it was. I have often thought that there could be no much better subject for a painter than the appearance of St. Paul before Agrippa. Which was the real king in that assembly, the poor, undersized, hunch-backed man in chains on the floor, or the monarch upon the exalted seat with the governor at his side? The world has made up its mind now as to which was the

majestic figure. It was that of the austere, lonely, meek-hearted prophet. So convincing, so eloquent, was his simple testimony as to the change that had passed over his life, and the reason for it, that the young king said, and I believe said in all sincerity, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Now, mind you, the word Christian then had not the conventional meaning it has now. Far from it. The word Christian was a term of reproach. It was the title borne by an obscure and persecuted sect, and this Paul, this gentleman, this educated Pharisee, this man of the established religion, had made himself an outcast and a by-word for the sake of this new thing. Here he stands face to face with the king and the Roman governor, and tells them in the hearing of an unsympathetic crowd the reason of the change of faith and for his new course of life; and when by the simple testimony, all-powerful because so sincere and so simple, he wrings from the king himself the generous compliment, or something more than compliment, the wistful testimony, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," his reply is equally generous and nobler far—"I would that not only thou, but also all these who hear me this day, were almost and altogether such

as I am, except these bonds." Paul knew the value of his profession. He had seen something, he knew things in their true proportions, he acted in consequence. "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

My intention, I may as well state at the outset, is to make an appeal, if I can, in the name of the same principle and of the same great Master Who had changed Paul's life. In a word, I am going to try what I can do as an evangelist, and if one's purpose is thus confessed at the outset, I trust you will hear with sympathy what I have to advance.

It is not often that men are convinced of sin or brought face to face with God in any startling or dramatic fashion such as is recorded here. There are a few such in history, but only a few. St. Augustine, for instance, after a youth spent in debauchery, and as the result of his mother's prayers, changed his life. The immediate occasion requires some explanation, and I do not know that any has ever been forthcoming. The saint that was to be, great thinker and mighty force in the world for Christ—none greater unless it be Paul himself—was walking in his garden, when it seemed as though he heard a voice from heaven saying, "Take and read, take and read." And what

he took and what he read was simply the story of Jesus of Nazareth, and through that Pauline experience Augustine came from darkness into light, from bestial sensuality into the purity of the saints of God.

Another and different experience—perhaps not so very different—was that of St. Francis of Assisi. You are familiar with the vision that he saw on the heights above his home in the night-watches, which changed the careless, pleasure-loving, though brave-hearted, humble youth to the great saint of God and teacher of truth that he afterwards became. He saw, and was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. In humbler circumstances and in modern times men have seen or men have heard visions and voices without or within themselves calling them to the service of God, like that Moravian missionary whose experience has been put into these words :

“ I hear a voice you cannot hear
Which bids me not to stay ;
I see a hand you cannot see
Which beckons me away.”

But mostly such experiences as these, when they have come, have been experiences calling men to exceptional service, and they are few and far between. No man ever received one

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such experience as a special privilege, to convince him of this truth or of that. He received it as a call to great and to arduous service. And such it was to St. Paul. "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake."

But more frequently there is no outward vision at all. Hardly any of us can remember anything very startling the first time that we were inclined to decision for God, and there are not a few in this place to-night who feel that Christ is the centre and circumference of their lives. You came, but not through anything startling, and not through anything dramatic. It is of the essence of moral change that it should be in the midst of normal conditions. If your life is changed without significance to the world that lies without, I mean without any obvious significance to the larger world that lies without, it is all but imperative that it should have been changed by solemnly and quietly facing the ordinary facts of ordinary life. God will not visit you with His lightnings, God will not come to you in some amazing supernatural fashion. He will come to you, it may be, in the "still small voice," and not through "the earthquake, wind, and fire."

Sometimes I have heard young people, yes, and older people, too, ask a question of this kind—"Why does God not show us plainly what is the truth about everlasting life? Here we are left to puzzle and stumble without knowing for certain just what things are and how they are. This man teaches that aspect of truth, and yonder man another, but how are we to know just what is the truth? Why are we not more plainly shown?"

Well, I will tell you, and I think you will agree with me, the answer is irrefutable. It is because there is no room for doubt upon the things that are imperative on heart and conscience. Conduct, to be truly heroic, must be lived in the midst of mystery. If you knew as certainly as two and two make four that it would always pay you to do right, there would be no cost in the right and no nobleness to be won. God has left a good many things in doubt, but there is one thing He has left us in no doubt about at all, and that is, if you will permit the truism, that it is right to do right, it is wrong to do wrong. He has given us each a highest to see, and to follow the highest leads us into ever-expanding vision of truth. John Henry Newman wrote at the great crisis in his own life:

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“ Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.”

No, we need not look for the abnormal, nor is it right that we should, in our spiritual crises, but there is no man here who has not seen some heavenly vision. Notwithstanding all that I have said, that vision is peculiarly your own, as much so as was St. Paul's on the road to Damascus. The question is, what response you have made to your vision. For instance, there are hundreds, it may be we get into thousands, of people here, who have or have had such tender and winsome associations round about them in their early life that they will never forget them, they will never belittle them, and they will see increasingly more and more of beauty and grandeur therein. A man brought up in a good home, with a childhood round about which there was an atmosphere of tenderness and truth, and humble but real affection—you have gone a long way since then, it may be, and you have taken a wild way, but as you look back, man of the world though you may be, you see with increasing susceptibility and increasing readiness to acknowledge that fact, that there was a beauty you did not see at the time in that home of your childhood's days. You never saw how noble nor how


grand was your father's life, it may be, nor how sweet and how winsome were your mother's prayers. At the time you failed to see these things, but as years roll on you see them more and more. You were surrounded by wonderful things. There is no novel half so rich in descriptive experience as could be written out of the lives of the ordinary people here. I find that times and again when one comes to know people one is addressing. You never knew, it may be, what your home was until you left it, you never knew what the goodness of a loved one was till he was gone. It may be you played the traitor to it all; some of you indeed—and this is an increasing perplexity to me the older I get—have treated the nearest and the dearest and the ones to whom you owed the most in such a fashion that to your worst enemy you could not have been more cruel. You know what I mean. A man may love his own and yet break their hearts. A man may be obtuse and blind to the gracious and wonderful and radiantly beautiful heavenly things that to him are only commonplace when he is in their midst. You may have repaid with pain and agony the love and affection that was showered upon you. If so, you do not need any preacher to hurt you by reminding you of it.

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A member of the family of the late John Bright once gave me a poem which I was told was a favourite with the great statesman and man of the people. I can only remember a few lines of it, but these were the most important of the whole. It was the sad song of a husband who had not seen what God had given him in the noble wife until she was gone, and thus he sighs:

“ My burden then I did not see
Dropped from my shoulder, borne by thee.” 

The last lines of all,

“ The hand of death gave rest to thee,
And, wondrous thing, gave sight to me.” 

Yet the point of what I am telling you is this—he might have seen before. If God would only give us to see more plainly the beautiful things that are to be seen when we are face to face with them! But we are disobedient often and often to the heavenly vision.

There is another thing I would like to say; I think it is of more importance still. There are many of us who do not see the value of innocence. Here I speak no word of rebuke, but a word of warning. The people to whom I address myself are the young. Experience is always dearly bought. Ask these grey-headed

men. Yet in youth the vision of nobleness is there, plain to see. It is only that you will not let your eyes rest upon it long enough. There is a fascination about the forbidden fruit. Believe me, there are sights that some of these young people, brought up in good homes and hitherto having lived good lives, had better never see. I know you are always wanting to see them. Better let them alone. Seeing life, as they call it, is often a synonym for seeing hell. You may drink the cup of pleasure to the dregs, and then find that you have another to quaff, the cup of remorse, and I know of no antidote to that. After a recent sermon I received a letter which contained this sentence: "If some one had talked to me when I was a youth as plainly, as faithfully, as unmistakably as you spoke to your young men, I would be a different man to-day and have a different record and a gladder heart." Well now, I am speaking again, this time a word of warning. Have no foul and festering secrets in your life, no dark, ugly corners that will not bear the light. See what is beautiful, see it now, and never turn your gaze away.

For God has given you that vision. It is Divine, as much as Augustine's that came in the garden after his evil life had been lived.

You need not have the regrets that the great saint had. God need not snatch you from the burning fiery furnace of self-contempt and self-despair. Do not go into it. A heavenly vision has been granted—be true to it.

You remember, some of you, the publication some years ago of a remarkable psychological novel, "The Silence of Dean Maitland." The central character of that story is a refined, clever Church of England clergyman, rising to be a high dignitary in his own communion. But in his youth, first through vanity, and then through something darker, he came to be a seducer and a murderer—ugly words, he dare not face them himself. His excuse always to himself was this, "You know I never meant it." Of course he did not. No sinner ever does mean the consequences, he only means the sin. He never was punished so far as this world was concerned, no, not in the dramatic finale, but he carried within his bosom all the long years of his guilty life a serpent that gnawed at his vitals. Who would have changed places with this man for all his position and all his success? "Keep innocence" he once preached, in the best sermon he ever uttered. "Keep innocence. Only so shall a man have peace at the last."

And I tell you in the name of God that there is no position that you will ever obtain in this world that can compensate you for a guilty conscience. Keep to what you have now. Keep clean, keep good. It is a simple word, but it is a right one. Keep as near to the Christ as ever a good father or a wise mother took you. Keep your eyes fixed upon the vision that God has given you. Otherwise, on the other side of sin you have a discovery to make, a discovery that everybody makes, that no sin is worth the price that is paid for it. We have before now in each other's company called up the figure of Queen Guinevere, Tennyson's creation, true to the life, and her wail of self-reproach as the king, her husband, left her. And Arthur, you know, is the prototype of Christ, Tennyson's Christ. Said the guilty queen :

“ It was my duty to have loved the highest:
 It surely was my profit, had I known:
 It would have been my pleasure, had I seen.
 We needs must love the highest when we see it,
 Not Lancelot, nor another.”

There is the vision I have set before you now. The highest you have seen. God sends it. No man can make excuse that he has not seen it. The Christ of Galilee, of Calvary, of Glory is ever one and the same, and this is

the Being who changed Paul's life, and to that Christ I call you. This is the heavenly vision. "Where there is no vision the people perish." Behold, this same Jesus—a wondrous thought, but I am convinced it is true, that the Jesus Who spoke to Paul on the highway to Damascus is speaking in this great assembly to-night, to you and me, to all and to each. Sometimes, when we really get hold of that thought it becomes awful, as well as blessed, in its majesty and its power. See the Christ, His goodness, His beauty, His love, His cross—that is what Paul saw, and he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; and as a dear old saint who lived in a corner once declared, "I had rather be in hell with the Christ than in heaven with His murderers." And so would you. I am certain that the cry of every heart would be, if it came to close quarters between Christ and the personification of evil, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," even if He had remained slain. Better a Christ that was defeated than a Pilate that won. But then the Christ was not defeated, and Pilate lost, and to the Paul that stood before Agrippa the person of Christ was the Master that day, and the Conqueror over death and hell.

You and I are called to participate in a

victory like this. We see quite plainly what is at stake. We are to choose between the Christ and the powers of darkness. Think of what the Christ means to the world and shall mean. There is a great deal of cant talked about His followers to-day. I would warn you against it when you come face to face with the vision of Christ. There is a cant of this world as well as a cant of religion, and plenty of it.

It is not my custom to make any reply, or even any reference, to aspersions on myself and my work. One has something else to do. But it happened only yesterday that my eyes fell for the first time on one criticism that has been directed against myself and the City Temple, and the occasion was that I was asked to review a book by a friend of mine, Mr. Frank Ballard. I found that Mr. Ballard was replying, on my behalf, to something that had been said by the editor of a certain paper against religion in general and this Church in particular. Why they should ever take the trouble to reply to the criticisms, the puerilities, that are directed against Christianity and against the followers of the risen Lord I do not know. But if anybody can do it well, it is Mr. Ballard. Here is the criticism: "Seven thousand pounds spent in making grand a

place where people meet to sing and pray, while a woman's soul can be bought outside the door for a few shillings." That was cant, you know, pure cant. I will tell you what cant is. Cant is the profession of a belief and practice to which the life is not conformed. If that is made by a religious man, he is a hypocrite, he is guilty of cant. If it is made by a man of the world, he is equally guilty of just the same thing. Mr. Ballard's reply was crushing: "Admitted. If a woman's soul is sold outside the City Temple for a few shillings, the purchaser is not a worshipper." Our business here is to fight that traffic. We may not be doing much we ought, perhaps some of us take it too lightly and too easily, but at any rate we are trying to do something, and as Mr. Ballard said in two lines more, "What are the critics of the Churches and of the followers of Christ doing in their place to stem the torrent of evil? Nothing but talk, nothing but talk." And, young men, my whole purpose in putting that circumstance before you now is to make you see with perfect clearness the choice between the higher and the lower. You will be tempted to-morrow morning, when somebody chooses to rail against what you have heard to-night, to join in with them and say, "Look

at the practices of these so-called Christians." Do you not see what you are doing? In the very moment that you condemn the practice, you exalt the Christ, for you tell us what we ought to be, which is the same thing as telling us what Christ is.

No more cant. You and I are face to face with Christ. You may be a man of the world and I may be a Christian, and we may both talk cant. But there is the vision. No one can pull Him down from His eminence, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day and for ever." Not all the righteous influences of the world, put together, can come anywhere near to what the Christ has writ upon the hearts and lives of men. There is the vision, the vision Paul saw and gave his life for. I want yours for it. You see the truth, rise to it. Trust your own highest, for that too is Christ and the Spirit of God witnessing within you. "No," you say, "I cannot see, it is not true, I cannot be sure of the Christ." Well, I will tell you what I would do if I were you—I would trust *that* in you by which you see Him *now*.

"Can time undo what once was true?"

It made a hero out of an austere Pharisee. He

was not disobedient unto the call of the Crucified. There is something here in every man by which he sees a higher than he will ever live up to in this world. Let me illustrate what I mean. Mr. Hawkins has shut up his organ now. You cannot hear a note. Do you know what music is? It is a Divine message that comes simply through the vibration of air waves. Only that, and there is some music in either end of the scale that you cannot hear, your ear will not take it. But where the ear leaves off, something else begins. Do you know what note that flower is singing? I cannot hear, but I can see. I see the sound of that daisy, I hear the music of that daffodil with my eye.

Now, young men, you can hear no heavenly music. We are shut in, and we are shut down to the range of common things, though heaven perhaps lies about us. But I can see the Christ who makes heaven, and having seen Him, follow to the end. Suppose the worst, if you like. Suppose the Christ crumbling to dust in Galilee, suppose the tomb to be the end not only of His gospel, but of you and me. Supposing that, it were better for you, once having seen the Highest, to stay there and keep true to it, better to be deluded with Christ than wise with

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His detractors. Be true to the best you can see, and better will come for you. "Be not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

"Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest,
Cannot confound nor doubt Him, nor deny;
Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

VIII

THE STRUGGLE WITH TEMP-
TATION

VIII

THE STRUGGLE WITH TEMPTATION

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.—James i. 12.

THIS is a strange chapter. The whole book is remarkable. Luther called it an epistle of straw, but I think he had the wrong perspective. This chapter abounds in sayings which contradict each other if we measure them by the rules of barren, inadequate logic. Some things are higher than logic; most truths that are worth enunciating contain some element of paradox. This chapter contains paradoxes and even antinomies. Particularly is that the case with the part of it immediately concerned with our subject. Compare: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" with "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried"—that is, when he is approved—"he shall receive

a crown of life." Read along with that: "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man." If these sentences do not contradict each other as they stand, apparently they come very near to it.

St. James did not write at random, and the explanation is to be found in this fact. In this chapter "temptation" is used to express two allied but distinct ideas. The original means trial, sorrow, discipline, pain; anything is temptation by which you are compelled to suffer. It would be useless to say that such temptation is not sent of God; we know that it is. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." There is no manhood without struggle. Even when we are passive, and are being wrought upon, rather than ourselves reacting upon life, pain is God's instrument employed by Him, the instrument of His deliberate choice, for the making of manhood. In that sense we are tempted of God, and the apostle does not mean to suggest anything else. It is of this kind of temptation he speaks when he says: "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," trials, disciplines, pains, "knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have

her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

The second meaning, however, is that with which the word is more commonly associated in the English tongue. By temptation is popularly understood solicitation towards evil, a drawing downwards. In that sense it never can be true that God tempts men. But is it not true that God makes the crisis in which our choice of the higher is possible only at the risk of our falling into the lower? What is sin but following the lower in the presence of the higher, doing that which is easy in opposition to that which is right? There is a moral test involved in every crisis in which we deliberately choose the higher. The lower stands before you too; it is possible for you to give your adherence to the lower, but God is not tempting you downward. He is calling you upward, and every crisis in which you are called upon to choose the higher in the presence of the lower is God's opportunity for you, and it is His summons to your manhood—come up higher.

We are all the time in the region of such temptation; no matter how strong we seem to be, we have to struggle with the lower self and with the assaults which reach that lower

self from without. The citadel of our being is never impregnable. There is an enemy inside who, if not watched, would unbar the door. Every man has his own weaknesses and is aware of them, though he may not like to be told of them, and each is in danger of moral overthrow. There is a crisis in every lot, perhaps in every day: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." What overwhelming surprises we sometimes get when some one of our friends suddenly goes wrong, or an acquaintance to whom we have been accustomed to look up falsifies the opinion of his circle, and appears to have been living a hypocritical life. The latter does not necessarily follow. It may simply mean that the enemy from inside has unbarred the door; and in one weak place the man was vulnerable and was overthrown. If we are wise every one of us will say, without calling names to the man who has gone down, "But for the grace of God there go I."

Let us survey some of the commoner forms of temptation to which you and I have been exposed, or probably will be. I place in the foreground those peculiar to youth and hot blood. The less these are dwelt upon in public perhaps the better, but they ought never to be entirely

ignored. It must seem to young men, who are trying to live a right life and keep their thought and actions pure, that the sexual instincts are far too strong; the angel and the beast are very near together. What a humiliation it is that you have to fight a battle with the flesh at all; but saints and heroes the wide world over, and all history through, have had that same battle to fight. It is a most arresting fact that oftentimes the finest temperaments, those belonging to the highest order of genius, have been subjected to that particular conflict, and there is a danger in it through the very loss of self-respect which is involved in failure. There is no deadlier temptation than that which comes in the wake of the battle with the flesh that has been lost. There are many things to discourage a man in entering upon a conflict with the flesh. One is that he knows perfectly well that a victory gained to-day secures him no immunity to-morrow. The tone of the society in which you move does so much to make the conflict worse, and many young fellows, I verily believe, are held back from a public profession of Christ by the thought that they have this conflict in secret, and they do not like to take any profession upon them which would seem even to themselves to involve something

that looks like hypocrisy. You are never to blame merely for being tempted; you may be to blame for going where temptation is, for giving harbourage to evil suggestions, for dwelling in thought upon that which is impure. But the mere fact of temptation you are not responsible for, and this is why the apostolic writer says, "Blessed are you in that you are able to meet and endure temptation, if you come off victor."

Let us survey some other forms of temptation not of this specific kind, and yet allied to it in that they are incidental to our social life. There is the temptation of the wine-cup. Is anything more deadly to our national well-being than that? Again, I may mention hazards of the gaming-table, of which we are hearing so much just now. I have heard it said that England is corrupt at two ends, the highest and the lowest grades of society. I am not well informed enough to say whether that is entirely true; but I know that right-thinking people, serious-minded men, are afraid for their country's future because of those twin demons, drink and gambling. This triad—drink, gambling, immorality—lie very close together, and walk hand-in-hand. Besides these, there is the lowering of moral

tone that sometimes comes as the effect of the company you keep. It is a remarkable fact that the general tone of a certain company may fall below the habitual level of any man in it. It seems as though we descend to meet. We are ashamed of seeming at our best in the presence of our fellows, and, in our shrinking from Pharisaism, we go to an unworthy extreme. Then there is the craving for new pleasure, and one sinister feature of our modern civilisation is the countless opportunities it provides for self-indulgence. It is not always easy to say just where the harm comes in; perhaps this is the point: anything which is in danger of acquiring the mastery over our manhood is an enemy to be wrestled with. It does not matter much what it is, any idea which tends to create a monopoly of your interests and pursuits is an enemy. Watch! If it be love of money, be careful. If for money's own sake you are willing to do more than for almost anything else, and if your thoughts are employed in planning so to do, beware! you are in danger, simply because you cannot hold loosely that which in itself is not wrong. 'Any idea, I care not much what it is, if it is a particular form of pleasure, watch it, take care that you are master; for so soon as an ignoble idea

acquires dominance in a man's mind his character begins to suffer. Oftentimes, when social pleasures upset character, we are grieved that it is not the cold-hearted and calculating who go under, but the jolly good fellows, as they are called. But jolly good fellows can do much mischief to themselves and to others. By his very weakness the man who is easily led is a menace to the circle in which he moves.

There is an order of temptation incidental to your vocation. The more earnest you are about your business or profession, the greater becomes your liability to this special form of temptation; the pursuit grips you, holds you tight. The dangerous point in many careers is not early manhood, but middle life. When a man has outlived his illusions, generous sentiments, early love, when ambition begins to take the place of sentimental affection, then is the dangerous time. Then a man wants to fight the world with the world's weapons, to take short cuts to success. The craze to be rich is responsible for many temptations. Take the "Liberator" crash. Some of you may be feeling very bitter about the change in your fortunes that took place as the result of that overwhelming catastrophe; but I am credibly informed by financial men that those who were

punished in connection with that disaster were not common swindlers, and never intended to be. What they did intend was a magnificent coup, the shuffling of figures, the stretching out of the hand to do a big thing, and do it quickly. The attempt failed; in other cases it has succeeded. We send one man to gaol for financial jugglery, we put up a statue to another. As a matter of fact, we are all in danger of this particular form of temptation. Life becomes more strenuous as you get to know more about it, as you measure your strength against the world. There is a subtle, insidious, most dangerous form of temptation, to achieve success quickly by some dodge or device, instead of replying upon the strenuous, manly qualities with which we are all endowed. Blessed is the man who can pass that danger-point successfully, keeping his manhood intact and pure.

Some may be saying, This is all true, you are pointing out what we have already been thinking; but what do you recommend us to do? I ask you, in the first place, to remember that it is not a bad but a good thing that you have to meet temptation, and that you have to meet it every day. It is your manhood's opportunity. You are not solicited to evil by Al-

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mighty God, but by the very presentation of the choice, as I have already said, God is calling you to ascend. Remember also that every evil desire is the perversion of a good one, and the good is present all the time and every time with the evil. You never were asked yet to do a thing that you knew to be wrong, but that at the same moment the good was making itself heard too; and it just depends upon which choice you make what kind of manhood you grow. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted downwards by the will of God. When you are tempted, say, I am summoned upward by the love of God. It is ours to destroy the evil by choosing the good, to fight the lower by rising to the higher.

Now to return to the solicitation of the first kind of temptation I mentioned—that associated with lust or sensuality. Are you aware, young men, that the very fire and energy which tends to your ruin in this respect is the mark of your manhood? Be thankful to God for the impulses which would destroy you if you give them rein; for they will carry you upward if you are master of them, instead of them master of you. Your manhood is worth very little unless you do feel this fire and energy burning within you; it is your source of

power, it is Divine if divinely used; fling it upon the highest things and trust to the God Who gave you this instinct to keep you from degrading it.

“ Thus Nature gives us (let it check our pride)
The virtue nearest to our vice allied.”

There is nothing which more beautifully and grandly expands personality than an unselfish love, the love of one man for one woman. So many disqualify themselves for it by giving rein to lust, and yet lust is only perverted love. The whole world is larger, more glorious, to the man who keeps that instinct pure. Instead of making a frontal attack upon sensual temptation, fling the manhood and the power that is its endowment upon the highest; look right away from yourself up to the ideal, to that God Who has given you your manhood in order that He may make it all divine.

To the man who feels himself to be in danger in mid-life, because of his worldly interests and success, I would say, You ought never to expect failure. You are God's trustee, take care to hold loosely that which God has given you, for by and by that will be gone; but your manhood will remain. Measure all your daily activities in their spiritual

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equivalents. Do not deem it a bad thing that you have to make choice between the lower and the higher; do not be cast down if you do feel the force of a temptation sometimes to increase your success by illegitimate means. Every time such a suggestion comes God is suggesting a higher choice: make the higher, and make it in company with Him. There is nothing in business life that need degrade a man. I can think of no worthier pursuit than that of the man who in industrial forms is trying to serve the community for the community's good. If only he keep watch and ward upon his manhood, the greatest asset of all that he affords the community is the gift of himself.

Lastly, I would have you remember that temptation has two deadly allies—self-consciousness and fear. A self-centred morality is unhealthy. So many of us in our battle with temptation—perhaps this is more feminine than masculine—turn our eyes inward; we think, and perhaps say, This is my battle, and I only can win this; this is my victory, and we are only trying to draw away from the enemy and escape the grip of his cruel claw. Whereas, instead of talking about “my” battle and “my” victory, we might speak about God's battle and

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God's victory in us, and instead of drawing away from the foe, look up to the highest and say, I must attain it. Instead of making your struggle negative, make it positive; instead of dwelling upon the power of the temptation, dwell upon the goal that God intends us to make. The struggle is worthless if it is for your sake alone, and the power of the adversary is increased the more you think upon that power. The antidote to such self-consciousness in moral struggle is to look away from self to God; indeed, sometimes the ideal that you are called upon to serve is more clearly seen in the darkness than in the light. We take things very calmly and dispassionately when the sun is shining, and sometimes we deceive ourselves into thinking that we are better men than we are, simply because there is no battle to fight for the time being. But in the dark time, when there is a struggle, we see far more clearly what it is that God intends us to do. Just because we are tempted away from it the ideal becomes more distinct. I remember hearing of a diamond district in Africa where the diamond shone only in the night. It was seen by many people, particularly by one man; but it never could be found in the day. As it shone straight across the ravine, on one side

of which this man stood, he determined that he would aim at the point in the darkness. He fired his shot, and the next day he found the diamond bearing the mark of the rifle. He could not see it in the day, he saw it distinctly in the night. We often have to fire our shot in the darkness; most clearly then can we see the ideal when we are most in danger of losing it. But do not fail to aim, for, so certainly as you serve in the dark the highest that God has made you capable of seeing, so certainly shall you have the fruits of your struggle when the sunshine comes again. We are inclined to dwell too much upon our own particular struggle, and, so certainly as we do, fear becomes the enemy and adds intensely to temptation. I do not know anything more deadly in moral struggle than the presence of the grim spectre of fear. Could you abandon fear, you have already won your victory. The antidote to fear is faith. Believe it is the will of God that you should not be a failure, do not harbour the thought of defeat for an instant, trust your concerns to Him, the tides of God will float you. Every man is in possession of immense resources of unused spiritual power. The Eternal is already within you, and no man is weak who has hold of the arm of God. Re-

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main calm and trust to Him. The universe is so made that the righteous man is vindicated in the long run. Here is a ship lying upon the beach; watch the fishermen trying to launch her. It cannot be done, the ocean has ebbed. What do those who have charge of the ship do—quit it? That would be a foolish proceeding, for the tide is coming in. Stay on the ship and be still, the problem is not really yours. Perhaps in the night, while you sleep at your post, the tides will come and lift your barque away. God's tides will float any man who commits himself to them in sincerity and simple-hearted trust.

We are never left to struggle by ourselves. We talk as if we were in a lonely place and there were no God, no power unseen, no Eternal that the prayer of faith could reach. It is not so; present in the conflict is One like unto ourselves, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.

It is related that during one of Napoleon's campaigns the French army was stricken with fever, and there was very great danger that it would be decimated, not by the enemy, but by the plague. In spite of all the protestations

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of his generals, the Emperor walked through the camp, where the sick were laid in rows, touching one man here, speaking to another man there, letting his eagle eye fall upon another yonder. The effect was electrical. Sick men leaped from their beds, calling, "The Emperor!" Napoleon's courage, far more than anything else could have done, and the sense of his presence, saved the army from the most deadly enemy, not the plague, but the fear which had infected the soldiers. We are not alone in our struggle. Jesus Imperator, holding the keys of death and hell, Master of the universe, King of kings, and Lord of lords, is here. We must not think of Christ as in a far-distant heaven, looking upon the struggles of earth, but present in the midst of them. Our Emperor is walking through the ranks.

"The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again.
O Lord and Master of us all,
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine."

IX

THE TWO SIDES OF TEMPTA-
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IX

THE TWO SIDES OF TEMPTATION

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.—James i. 12, 13.

HERE again is this puzzling antithetic statement, all the more perplexing when we read the context. Let me once more remind you of it. The second verse of this chapter says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptation." The second verse of our text says, "Let no man when he is tempted say, I am tempted of God." "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." Yet "Every man is drawn away by his own lusts, and enticed," not tempted of God.

When we take the text itself, without going to the context at all, we see from the apostle's reference that of deliberate and set purpose he

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puts these two sides of temptation before us, one in which he says it is a glorious thing, with a reward at the other side of it, that a man should fight and overcome temptation; and yet at the same time he bids us beware. He sets it down in writing, close to his former statement, that no man is entitled to say when he is tempted, "I am tempted of God." But here is the point, and the explanation—"For God cannot be tempted of evil." And we might insert one little word and illumine the whole verse, the word "*so*"—neither *so* tempteth He any man. And by adding a little to the context we may throw a little more light on it, if I may amplify—"For every man is tempted evilly when he is drawn away with his own lusts and enticed—God never *so* tempteth any man." Now sum it up. Every temptation may be a call upward on the part of God, or it may be a solicitation downwards. The former is a summons to prove our spiritual manhood, it is no solicitation to evil; and the latter the fruit of the evil resident in every man and which may be appealed to and assailed by the evil from without.

It is solicitation downward to which we usually give the name of temptation; but temptation has two sides—God's summons upward,

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which is necessary for any man who would be a good man, to fight his battle and to win his victory, and there is never any need for him to fail in the contest that God gives—God summons us only upwards. But, on the other hand, there is a side of temptation, and it may be sought by a man himself, in which is a distinct solicitation downward, with which God has nothing to do, a man's evil nature or a man's evil environment, or both together, and the result of his own wilfulness may lead him to disaster.

My purpose in once more setting before you this almost paradoxical text is this—I want to help some, if possible, who are struggling with temptation, in one or more of its many forms, and who, perhaps, think themselves to be in greater danger than they are.

For some years past I have conducted in a weekly paper a column of correspondence on moral and intellectual questions—a correspondence which is largely taken advantage of by young people. It has taught me a good deal, and if one wanted to illustrate almost any sermon, no matter what, one has only to go to one's correspondence for that particular week. This week, oddly enough, I gathered a few questions relating to practically the same prob-

lem, and amongst them was one from four young men, who have written a letter between them and signed it, regarding a form of temptation about which I must say something. Nearly every man in this building knows something about it. It is very far from being a savoury subject, and it is one I would much rather avoid, but it is not one's duty to shirk unpleasant subjects. It seems to me that there are more ways than one of handling an objectionable theme. The question was put to me something like this—"We are four Christian friends. We know each other very closely and help each other in Christian work. But lately, in an hour of confidence, we have confessed to each other our chief besetment, and, to put it frankly, it is sensual sin. We are humiliated by it. We feel that, if we could, we would get free of it entirely. We would serve God in pure, clean, manly lives. But it seems to us as though the battle to which we are exposed is somewhat unfair. It is too fierce, and the odds against us are too strong. Can you tell us what to do?"

I do not suppose there is one young man—at any rate there are very few—who does not know something about this insidious, baneful, humiliating fact. I admit the fierceness of the

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conflict to which you are exposed by the strength of your passions, and shall I say by your youth? It avails little for me to tell you that by and by you will wonder that you ever feared the temptation so much as you fear it now. But I want to tell you also that to assert that there is any need for a man to commit sensual sin is a lie. Just believe that what I tell you is true; there is no need for you to fall. You will go into certain company where you will be told that all men fail in this particular fashion. It is untrue! You may be told also that it would be impossible for you to fight your battle to a finish. That is equally false. You are not to blame for the presence of temptation, but I think you are to blame, often, for the ways in which you attempt to face it. Regard me as a brother of yours, as it were, speaking on a level with you, quietly, and as delicately as I know how. I want to warn you against taking either too lightly or too seriously this infirmity, this propensity of the flesh. It is a loathsome subject, but the manhood of the nation, the moral fibre of our race, is imperilled just now by not a few things, and this is one of them. It is a trite saying that Rome, that vast empire that comprised the civilised world, fell from within, not through the attacks of our

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ancestors from without (fierce, untutored, clean-living barbarians), but through the vices of her manhood and womanhood within. Now it is true to-day that in England we are in danger from just that kind of loose practice and the flabby kind of hedonism which describes this kind of sin as either inevitable or as of little importance. It is true, on the contrary, that the well-being and the future of our great Empire, of which we are all proud, and the very existence of which gives a certain moral value to every man in this place, is imperilled by this particular kind of sin.

Now, let me tell you how to meet it. In the first place, I want you manly young fellows not to be morbid in the presence of it, not to be afraid of it, not to allow your thoughts to be occupied too much with it. Above all, shun the company of and dismiss the friend who insists on directing your attention to it. He is no friend, and that company is bad. A friend of mine a few days ago, speaking to me about this enormous problem, said, "I have two sons now on the threshold of manhood. I know what they have to meet. I know the perils that lurk in their path and the snares that are set for them. So, being a Christian

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man, as well as, I trust, an affectionate and loyal father, I have taken these two boys into my confidence and I have told them all about the matter. I have bidden them be aware that almost every man whom they admire and respect has had his battle to fight with the flesh." You see, young men are apt to jump at the conclusion that every noble character in history or in the life of to-day has been in some mysterious fashion immune from the desires of the flesh. It is not true! But I will tell you what is true. That good father knew, when he talked to his boys, what the truth is, that such men as these refuse to live in the pestilential atmosphere, the noisome surrounding of carnal temptation. On the contrary, they set their thoughts on the highest point of human aspiration. There is God within you, and there is a devil, too. There is manhood at its best if you will only trust it, and there is the beast. You are approached from two sides. You are summoned heavenward by the very fact that you have a conflict at all. That is the way to make a man of you. You have to fight and you have to win, and you are being drawn downward by that with which in the flesh you are most closely allied, the creatures that crawl, and God asks you, and heaven ex-

pects you, to fight your battle in the strength Divine, and to come out conqueror. I want you not to be overwhelmed with humiliation at the presence of such temptation. It is not the presence of the temptation that is wrong in you ; it is becoming its victim. More than that—I would like you to understand that the best way to fight it is not to make a frontal attack. It is by looking away from it, fixing your gaze on something worthy of your best efforts and energies. What is that? Surely it is the Christ, the Christ and all Christ-made men, the Christ in His moral ideal, the Christ in all that that winsome name stands for. Here is the beauty of this method to which I recommend you—the Christ Himself is the very means of your victory. If I could only get men, not only in this particular conflict, but in every other, to understand and to realise and to believe that the Divine within them is stronger than the earthly, they would win every time.

It is not true that you are left to yourself. It is not true that you need to go under. It is true that you have to fight, but it is also true that you are called to trust. To trust the best means victory before the battle is fought. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown

of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

I would like to ask you now to permit me to pass to another aspect of this subject, on which one feels impelled to speak, but which is not so objectionable. It is allied to what I have just been saying, and is all the more dangerous because it comes to us in the garb of something noble. I have been struck of late with the number of people, men and women, who have come to me for advice on subjects of this kind. Two people work together, a young man and a young woman, helping each other in Christian service either in the place of business or in the Church. They establish what they call Platonic friendship. They never can become husband and wife. But by and by they begin to speak of the high regard in which they hold each other, how much of Christ the one can discern in the other and so on. They speak of love, but they speak of it, they think, in terms that are highest. Then the question arises—Is this relationship equivocal and dangerous, or is it not? There is something fascinating in it, so mysteriously and sweetly romantic oftentimes. But there is nothing, I think, more deadly in the whole range of life and of experience. It

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has wrecked many a career and will do it again. And if you are in any such situation, let me tell you what to do—Get at once, without further dallying or consideration, out of equivocal relationships which must result in moral mischief and may result in disaster and in ruin. You remember Lancelot's testimony in the "Idylls of the King," when he stood face to face with the friend he was injuring:

"In me lived a sin
So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
Noble, and knightly in me climbed and clung
Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
And poisonous grew together, each as each
Not to be plucked asunder."

You remember, too, the reply of the King:

"Nay—but thou errest, Lancelot; never yet
Could all of true and noble in knight and man
Twine round one sin, whatever it might be,
With such a closeness, but apart there grew
Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness;
Whereto see thou, that it may bear its flower."

I would say to every one of you who is in that entanglement or danger, the very highest in you lies very close to the lowest. Keep right away from the region of temptation. The apostle saw deeply into human nature when he put so close together this Godlike side of the conflict and this earthward side.

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“Blessed is the man that endureth.” Blessed is the man who knows, when he is face to face with temptation, what its real name is and gets the victory. This may take many forms; temptation nearly always comes with a lie on its face and bids us call sin by a wrong name. Be faithful with yourself, no matter what the temptation may happen to be. The other side of every sin is sorrow and remorse. Reckon with Christ, not after sin is committed, but before, and test every question by His name and Spirit. It is no use for a man to say, “I did not know, and the conflict became too much for me.” We always know enough before sin is committed to be able to say, “This is wrong.” The highest courage oftentimes is to turn and flee.

Now, brethren, I have done with that. I have spoken as a matter of simple duty, and it is probable in doing so I have done as much service to my Master as by anything I have ever said before. If you knew life as some fathers and mothers know it, you would feel that it was your duty to sustain, by every means in your power, by prayer and by example, and if necessary by testimony, every effort to stem this particular torrent of evil. But it is one thing to do that, it is another

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thing to be always talking about it, and I am strongly of opinion that some well-meaning people to-day do more harm than good by thrusting upon the attention of the young always and everywhere questions of that kind. Far better to make an atmosphere in which it is difficult for the temptation to live. Seeing that it is there, do not let us be afraid of calling it by its name and invoking the power of Christ to deal with it.

Now I want to go on to speak of another form of temptation which I know is also deadly, but which is far removed from what I have been describing. This, too, has two sides. All this time you will observe that I have been speaking to people who stay more or less in the presence of sin when they ought to get out of it. Now I want to speak of some of God's people who, whether they will or not, as it were, are thrust into the presence of a sorrow which contains within itself a temptation. For instance, among those who have written to me there was the wife of a man who is now, it seems, in a lunatic asylum, but who was once a prosperous man of business, a brave-hearted, righteous man, who did all the good he could within his particular sphere. Ruin came, she does not say how. The family has been scat-

tered, the husband, as you see, is almost worse than dead, and she asks of her minister, and myself, this difficult question, "Can I keep my Christianity? Is not trust in God meaningless? Have you a word of comfort?"—Now it is very probable that there are people in this church who have passed through tragedies as great, or nearly as great as this. Some of you are in the midst of them now. Far be it from me, who have not your life to live and do not know your trouble as you know it, to talk lightly or dogmatically and with much assurance as to what you ought to do; but in God's Word I think I see something about you and your life. Temptation, as St. James uses the word, has two meanings, or rather one meaning which in English has become two words. In this very chapter and in others the word "trial" is the same as the word that is given as "temptation"—trial, sorrow, calamity, tragedy, pain, and suffering of all kinds, whatever it may be. Do you not see, then, what the apostle means, that in all sorrow there is a subtle temptation? You may be a worse man for having been caused to pass through pain, or you may be a better one—which shall it be? Remember, God summons no man to failure. We do not ask that the way shall

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be made pleasant to us, but what we ask is this, that we shall never prove unworthy of that high calling unto which we are called. So I would say, however fierce the blast, however stern the trouble to which God has called you, look up, look over, there is another side and a dawning of the morning.

Now to illustrate what I mean, I will show you how it has been done. Let me tell you of yet another letter, written by a man who asked me a question quite remote from this one, and in so doing placed his experience before me thus: "Some years ago," he said, "God took from me, one after the other, and all near together, all my four children, and I remember the Gethsemane of that experience as acutely as though it were yesterday. When one boy lay dead in one room I had to go with cheerful, smiling face into the next one, because the doctor told me I must give no shock to my suffering little one there, and with a cheerful demeanour and without reference to the shadow of death on the other side of the wall I had to tell him all I could to make him glad and to keep him hopeful. Oh," he added, "there never was anything more grimly dreadful, surely, in the world!" I agree; it is true; but that man kept his faith. He kept it right

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through that terrible time. He is as sure of God to-day as he was then, and he says his children are safe in the arms of Jesus. I know it may seem to a man without faith a most unreal and foolish thing that he should speak so, but he does speak so. He thinks he knows a little more now what wrung the Saviour's heart than he did before. It was his time of trial and the trial contained a temptation, and God called him upward by it, and he obeyed, and he stands on a spiritual plane where he never stood before. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

There may be some one here who will speak to me in these terms: "There are seasons when I cannot pray, when it seems as though the power to pray leaves me, when to utter one single sentence to God seems a thing without soul and without meaning. Do you know what that is, to feel that you cannot pray?" Well, that is a very stern time, a testing time. Mind what you do. That is just the time when you must pray. There will be no such feeling as rewards you at other times, but that prayer has gone heavenwards, be sure, and it

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will come back laden with blessed results. God knows the worth of such a prayer, wrung from a heart in agony. Do not turn your face from the light. Your only safety is in standing by the best, in holding on. Victory waits upon your expectation thereof. God can give you that victory every time.

Such a period and such an experience just bring you to this. You see how little strength there is in you, how little your resolutions mean, how small is your own moral resource. It is all of God. If there is any good in you whatever, it is all of God; we can praise His holy Name that there is enough there. My friend Mr. Jowett was preaching on Wednesday morning in my hearing at Newcastle, and in his sermon told an experience of his early days when he was a minister in Newcastle. He said there sat near the pulpit an old man who used to repeat the Lord's Prayer along with the minister, in tones which were distinctly audible to the man in the pulpit. When Mr. Jowett reached the ascription, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory," at the utterance of the word "Power" the old man used to say quietly, "Hallelujah, hallelujah." "He never said it anywhere else," declared Mr. Jowett, "only there. I saw what

he meant—‘Thine is the power,’ always, everywhere.”

Oh, you struggling men and women, lay hold, lay hold! “For we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one that hath been tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” It is not by imitating Him only that I win, it is by laying hold of Him. Blessed is the man that can hold on to the Christ. And I think I hear Him say, “To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne.”

X

THE LARGER FORGIVENESS

X

THE LARGER FORGIVENESS

The father said, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.—Luke xv. 22.

THE circumstances under which these words came to be spoken by our dear Lord are worth a few moments' consideration. If we are to believe a great New Testament scholar, it is probable that the three parables contained in the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke were a sermon spoken by Him Who spake as never man spake, in the courtyard of the house of Matthew the publican, and to a very composite audience. Our Master had just finished His ministry to the synagogue-going people, and, being anxious to take the same message to the vast number of outsiders who then and now were to be found in multitudes, he asked Matthew the publican to make a place for Him and bid all his own class there too. And there came publicans and sinners, as we read in the beginning of the chapter, all the social outcasts, all the people who had done

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with religion and to whom religion had no more to say. Probably they were crowded into that courtyard very much as you are crowded in here, and at the door were the astonished Pharisees, to whom He had been talking up to now. Turning to the Master's immediate followers, they said, in words expressive of their surprise, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

Then our Lord began to speak; the words of His text are probably preserved by Matthew, the sermon by Luke. The text was, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The publican, who had been looking for this very thing so long, remembered that peerless sentence and wrote it down, and the only place in literature where you will find it is in St. Matthew's Gospel. But it was the beloved physician, the Pharisee, who remembered the parable, with the figure of the elder brother who would not come in. Was Luke with the people round the door? The parable stops abruptly at the father's word, "Let us make merry and be glad, thy brother was lost and is found," and we are not told any more that the elder brother did not come in. Luke came in, and he lived to write the chapter, and with that Pharisee the

publican came in and wrote the text. And with Matthew and Luke the Magdalen came in, and the new life was begun. Our Lord's converts from that day, who shall number? Shall we ever know until the Great Day? Many a soul has been won by this winsome story of the prodigal since that day.

The pith and the marrow of it are in the sentence that we have taken as our text, "The father said, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him." The fallen sinner is offered a place before the throne. The blackest of transgressors is offered the righteousness of the Son of God. That robe of righteousness, that garment of salvation, is given to all who in penitence seek it. The offer is so simple, so purely unconditional, that man has found it hard to believe. "The best robe"—not the second best—"bring that forth and put it on him."

Now, the question which has been addressed to me so often, and which from this text I try to answer to-night, is this: "How far does God's forgiveness go? How much can Christ's salvation do? Are there not some problems too great for Him, some knots that nothing but death can cut? Is the Master really master? Are not the consequences of some

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people's sins too tragic, too terrible for any Gospel to meet?"

Now, here am I with the Master's words, "The best robe." There is nothing too intractable in human history for the Gospel of Christ to meet; there is nothing too terrible for the great Redeemer Who has made a way for us into the holiest, and the laceration of His own heart was the price He had to pay. There is no corner in the "far country" too remote for the Shepherd to find His sheep, and there is no prodigal in this place who is deemed an outcast for ever from the Father's home and the Father's heart.

And yet you would remind me that the facts of life seem to tell against this winsome theory. Well, I will go with you some way. It does not do to sprinkle the road of life with rose-water. We sin not with impunity—you must have found that out. There are some people who talk very lightly about the wages of sin. Let no person in this church even think it at this moment, for perhaps next to you in the pew is a man who knows from bitter experience that the way of transgressors is hard. 'And as I have said before, if there were no preaching and no gospel, and if we could suppose the world without a Christ, the problem

would still be there in all its poignancy. Men want to know how to escape the dread consequences of their own evil.

Take, for example, this man who has sinned against his constitution. Need you go further? Nature knows no reversal of her decrees. She is inexorable, and his trembling, palsied limbs are the evidence of the life he has led. "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

There is that man who has flung away his social opportunity. If you could read his history and go back with him to the days of early manhood, before he trifled with delicate things and violated his conscience, and injured his fellows, you would wonder why his life should ever have come to be what it is now. Judas meant well when he joined the Twelve, and the Master knew it, but his besetting sin of covetousness was his ruin, and has landed him in everlasting infamy.

Some of you meant well at twenty years of age. You are ruined at thirty or forty, and you know what it is to put behind you all that once you counted good. Are you tempted to say, "My punishment is greater than I can bear"? There is a man as big a sinner as you; he has done things that would damn him

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if the world knew it, but it does not know. You feel it is hard that you should be down and he should be up; but do not make any mistake, his time is coming all right. God makes no mistakes. You think to yourself, in sadness perhaps, but in penitence I trust :

“ The tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.”

But I have sterner problems yet. There are men here held back from the Highest who are accustomed to sneer at religion. There may be a good reason for it down in the depths of your heart—it is not confessed—it is this, they feel they cannot come to the Cross of Christ and leave outside in the world the wrecks that they have made, the lives that they have blighted, the suffering they have caused.

Here is a man, for instance, who has ruined a woman some time in past years. *You* are sitting in the pew now, listening. Where is *she*? If you could just get back twenty years and see what you see to-day, if you could only put right what you put wrong, if you could only restore innocence to that life, would you not do it, you poor, unhappy wretch? But while I offer you salvation you think, “ Am I a slinking, snivelling cur? Am I coming to

any Cross of Christ while the shame and ruin of a fellow-creature are working out their dread result?"

Here is another. Here is a man whose evil life has been visited upon his children. When we call, "Come to the Cross!" he thinks of the cross that is already borne by an innocent little one, and the loathsome disease from which that child suffers is an unceasing scourge to him. Will penitence put it right?

And, lastly, it may be there is that man with a foul and loathsome secret in his life. If your wife knew what you are, it would destroy her peace for ever. She might come to hate you—oh, no! she would not! That is not woman's way. But you dare not tell; yet impossible for you for ever, so would you think, is a life of purity and a life of goodness. You would feel like a hypocrite. Atonement? No; you must say, or you do say:

"The moving finger writes; and having writ
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

Brethren, I think I have stated the facts pretty fairly. That is life, the life about which you read in the newspapers and the popular novel—the life that in far more enthralling

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terms, if you could only read them, is written here.

Now, what have I to set over against this? “ Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” For “ God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And this gospel, this mystery, this unfathomable atonement covers not only your life but your record, and God’s goodness can track out all the way that you have gone. The past is not yours, the future is.

Will you think for a moment perfectly clearly upon this subject—sin and the consequences thereof, and the sequences to eternity? Remember if there were no consequences at all—the inwardness of the transgression of the moral law is not hidden from the sinner nor from God. Our Master spoke of those who committed adultery in their hearts. They have no woundings to bring home, but sin is sin against God. You have bruised the Face of Christ by your sins of thought, as well as of deed. Sin against God is the first thing to think about, and such sin, repented of, can be dealt with by the Eternal Father. Dismiss

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consequences from your mind. Think of the sin. Lay down the burden of guilt at the Cross. God cannot deny Himself. There is forgiveness there.

“ Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy Blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come !”

‘And we must all come. You wish you were as good a man as somebody of your acquaintance. Do you know that when he wins through into heaven it will be the robe of Christ’s righteousness he shall wear, and it will be the same colour as yours? “What are these that are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.” Oh, it is all of Jesus, and you owe more than you know.

“ When this passing world is done,
When has sunk yon glaring sun,
When we stand with Christ on high
Looking o’er life’s history,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much we owe.”

Just this fact I want you to get into your mind—God forgives without reserve, conse-

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quences or no consequences. It is the sin you repent of, not the consequences.

Now for them. Well, brethren, God can remit them all if he chooses, every one of them. He can make that poor paralytic whose evil life has destroyed his manhood to be as a little child again if He choose—if He choose—and, brethren, sometimes God has swept away every trace of a man's wrong-doing, and you see no more of it in this life, and there are some here who know what I mean by that. Supposing you got in this life what you deserve. There are some miracles—men who have gone to the very edge of the precipice, and not gone over, men who have been brought back from the "far country," and they have had over again something of the portion of goods they wasted in riotous living. And there are others who have not, and you still speak as if God was implacable and had excepted you from grace. He has not. I want you to think that punishment ceases to be punishment when penitence finds itself at the Cross. The curse is transformed; it is now the cross, and every son of God bears one. There are some of you who would, if you could, get back and stand at the beginning of life's journey again, and not bring the wreck and the ruin that you have

brought into your own life and other people's. God will not let you stand there; but this He does—He will lift you by the pain He leaves, and if you had not had this cross which you feel you have deserved, you would have had another, for “whom He loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.”

There is no cross so likely to keep a man humble as that which will remind him of the life he once lived and the rescue God has made. Even the suffering of your little child may go far to do that. “What of the child?” you say. Well, it is a good thing even for the child that you would lay down your life to spare the little one a pang which is the result of your wrongdoing. If there is any good in you it will come out then, and as for the child, why, the same as for you and me and all mankind, vicarious suffering is the law of the higher life—it is God's doing, and not man's.

You remember in Kingsley's poem the martyr who, to save her husband from torture and from death, recanted, and denied the Christ. The rebuke of the martyr brought her back to the Cross again, and she says—or Charles Kingsley makes her say—“I saw there was but one right thing in the world to do, and

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I must do it." Sometimes for the highest you have had to sacrifice your dearest. There are times when you feel it were better they should be afflicted than righteousness should be compromised. A thousand times this comes in life; it is of God that men suffer for other men's sins. Be it so; it brings us to Calvary and to the fellowship of the Crucified. All Christ's conquests have been made so. Peter denied his Lord to escape something, and when he came back to his Lord he went cheerfully forth to the very thing he had lied to escape. Peter died upon the cross—tradition says head downward. Did he ever think of the moment in Pilate's hall when he denied the Master who was standing at the whipping-post? Did he ever think of the moment of deepest repentance when he went out and wept bitterly? Did it matter? He faced the worst; it mattered nothing to him then, so that he had the love of his Lord.

Sinners, play the man! Nothing matters much to you but losing the love of God. Be like Peter—face the cross, take it up! Know this—God never meant you to be a lost soul, and every man who wills to live the righteous life shall have his chance. What of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, the least of all the

apostles, he says, not meet to be called an apostle because he persecuted the Church of God—remember what that means? Paul tore the father from his child and the husband from his wife, he broke up families, he sent sorrow and ruin and death into the midst thereof, in the name of religion; and then he came to preach Christ himself! If Paul could only have stood on the other side of the stoning of Stephen, and never had part therein, he would have been glad, I trow. And yet he came to Christ, and he lived to say, “I have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith; I am ready to be offered.”

When we have stood with Peter and Paul at the Cross of Christ, and looked back, we feel that the Saviourhood of the Master is great enough for all things—that which hath been, that which is; that the best robe which was for the Apostle of the Gentiles is meant even for you and for me, though we have sinned grievously against God and against each other. And you will never help any fellow-creature by remaining in sin. Would you save your brother whom you tried to ruin? You had better come to the Cross yourself. Would you undo the mischief you have done? You had better pay over your record into the

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hands of Christ. You will never atone, you will never undo; God will. Would you redeem the time, would you stand with the "multitude whom no man can number" around the throne of God in heaven, and would you see there some whose lives are dearer to you than your own, yet to whom you have caused both sorrow and shame? Then rise and come to the Father!

Beloved, I feel tempted to do to-night what I have never done in this church or in any other, and that is to ask the men of guilty lives to confess before the whole multitude of God's people in this place that they begin again at the place where forgiveness has been covenanted—the Cross of Christ. Say in silence what I think I must not ask you to utter openly, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Come home! There is joy in the presence of the angels of God.

XI

THE SHELTERING MANHOOD

XI

THE SHELTERING MANHOOD

*A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind
and . . . the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.—
Isa. xxxii. 2*

DR. GEORGE ADAM SMITH, who is perhaps the first living authority on the exegesis of Isaiah, tells us that the first eight verses of this chapter belong to what we may call the prophet's escapes, by which he means a period of special inspiration greater than the prophet himself knew, a moment of unencumbered vision, a long forelook, a glorious anticipation of a better than he had ever known. Every prophet has such escapes, such periods of special and exalted insight, and they are always greater than the prophet himself is aware of. Compare with this chapter, for instance, the eighth of Romans, where St. Paul seems to be carried away upon a stream of spiritual imagery and marvellous eloquence to describe a greater than he could ever hope to see himself upon this side of death. We are

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straining our eyes to-day towards St. Paul's vision and we know more than he could realise, but he saw substantially the same vision as Isaiah saw, a greater than either prophet knew. The prophet, speaking to his own time, is like a lark twittering upon the ground or singing upon a branch. The prophet speaking for all time is like the same bird singing in high heaven.

Read our text, then, in the light of this scholar's description of it, and see if it does not fire our imagination too. "There is a time coming," the prophet said, "a time coming when a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Again I say I can hardly think Isaiah knew all that was contained in the beautiful utterance of this matchless imagery.

Now, what does it mean? No prophet ever overstates his case, although he may not know in fulness the meaning of that which he has seen and tried to express. Here is just a moment of Divine enthusiasm. Isaiah is speaking to decadent Israel. He is expostulating with its debased manhood, he is foretelling calamities that are to come upon his native land. But

he sees beyond the moment, and beyond the trouble, to a more glorious day, and, in making an appeal for a higher manhood, he passes from request into declaration, and says, in effect, "I see it, there is a man who is to be a hiding-place from the wind and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Every one of you would say at once this vision was really and only fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But you would be prepared to say along with me, the prophet did not know about any Christ when he spoke. He did not foresee what we now, looking back, can plainly see. But if Isaiah had lived and had taken his place alongside of the little group that heard Jesus speak on the hillsides of Galilee, and sat at His feet in the upper room, what do you suppose he would say? "Here is a man, a man Divine for whom our hearts have been yearning, here is He who has brought us God, here is One at the same time strong and gentle, in Whom all humankind can rest, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." What Isaiah would have said you and I can say. All this is true and reaches its highest fulfilment in our Saviour Christ.

Examine the figure a little more closely. The prophet, as you see, has the desert in

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mind, and every Oriental knows what that means perhaps better than we who live in this fruitful country can ever realise. He is thinking of the scorching wind which, in the hotter months of the year, sweeps like a desolation over the desert. He sees in imagination a weary company of pilgrims threading their way through it, the glaring sun beating upon them, the hot breath of fiery flame threatening to destroy them, and then he sees a mighty rock rising in the midst of the desert, and the pilgrims nestling beneath its shade. Then breaks out his figure in the richness of its imagery: a man should be like this rock in the desert, a hiding-place from the fury of the tempest: the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Speaking broadly, I say no one would deny that Jesus has been just such to the world that lies behind us. Many and many a thousand have found rest in His great name.

“ It woke our wondering childhood
To muse on things above,
It drew our harder manhood
With cords of mighty love.”

Oh, how many have been able to say (we do not say why, we simply note the fact it has been so) that Jesus Christ has been to them the fulfilment of all their highest aspira-

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tions. He has been to them the goal of all noblest hope. Jesus has been as "a hiding-place from the wind and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

" Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty rock
Within a weary land,
A home within the wilderness,
A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat
And the burden of the day."

Just exercise your not too vivid Anglo-Saxon imagination for one moment and think, as you look back on the line of history, how many people in nineteen centuries have had this experience and sung this song. The prophet never saw further than the truth, and the truth was greater than the prophet. Christ Jesus has been to humanity, and is still, the Rock of Ages.

But it is in no merely general sense that I would employ these words. Jesus Christ is more than of general interest for us, and I mean every man when I say "us." The words of Isaiah are true just this moment, and I will try to show you in what sense they are true for our day and for you and for me.

Many questions are asked concerning the

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person of our blessed Lord. To-day nearly all religious controversy seems to centre about His sacred head. And I know quite well that many a young fellow must be perplexed to know what to think concerning Him about Whom all men in our day and generation and beloved country *must* think. We have to take account of Christ, whether we will or no. Now then, listen to this question. One young fellow comes to me and says, "I am bewildered to know just where the humanity of Christ leaves off and His divinity begins. It is such a perplexing question as to be all but impassable. I feel that one fails in the presence of it. Can you give me any satisfaction?" Another comes and says, "You preach a supernatural Christ. I suppose that is the Christ of the gospel, but I feel, having to fight the battles that I must fight, and meet the temptations that I must meet, that a purely human Jesus would be of much more help to me, a man, a conqueror, yet one of like passions with myself." I am speaking now what I do know when I say some feel that a purely human Christ, victor over temptation and over sorrow and over wrong, noble, unselfish, and pure, would be a greater help to them than the ecclesiastical Christ who is too often presented.

Well then, listen to me. Precisely the Christ of whom you are in search is the Christ of the gospel. Do not talk any more nonsense about the point where humanity leaves off and divinity begins, or divinity leaves off and humanity begins. Christ is all human—human all the time, Divine all the time. He is your brother, He is also more than that. He is your God. There is nothing in Christ that is foreign to what you and I aspire to know in our God. And yet Christ is as completely human as you. Pardon me, I have even understated my case. He is more human than you are. The only Man whom the world has ever seen is your Christ and mine, human as you. Your humanity will only come to its own when it aspires to His and is represented in it. Remember, there is no dividing line between the deity and the humanity of our blessed Lord. He is both, and both are one. The Christ of the gospel is just your Christ, the Christ you are seeking, the Christ you need. “A *man* shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

This Divine Man has intercepted on the desert of history the scorching breath of sin for many a penitent, this Divine Man is “the shadow of a great rock” to many thousands

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in world-weariness, this Divine Man at this hour is fulfilling this same great function, this dual function, Brother and Redeemer He.

“ And lo, from sin and grief and shame,
I hide me, Jesus, in Thy name.”

Faith in Christ is a fact—a fact that can never be ignored by one who would know human nature. It has made and still makes “ a shelter in the time of storm.” You cannot surely read the New Testament without gathering from it the impression, or something of the impression, that the simple man felt as he first drew near to Jesus. Men with similar problems to yours and mine have felt Him to be not only gracious but strong. They felt the spell of his personality, felt His disinterestedness, His unearthly nobleness, and it was this Jesus, this personal Jesus, about Whom men did not frame any theories beyond this, that they knew He was the expression of God. It was this human Jesus Whom now we worship as the Jesus Divine. A deathless trust in that ever-loving Christ is the wisest investment of your life.

Now, to go one step further, your manhood and mine is to be shaped by the manhood of Christ if we would really solve the riddle of

life and fulfil the purpose for which we were created. The true manhood is the manhood which is the product of the spirit of Christ. It is but seldom that you and I ever meet a manhood under which the weak can shelter. I remember being profoundly impressed some years ago when a dear friend of mine, Dr. Horton, of Hampstead, was celebrating the twenty-first anniversary of his ministry. There came amongst the speakers, in addition to myself, an Oxford friend of Dr. Horton, who made a public confession something like this. It can do no harm to state it, for he said it himself in the presence of the great throng.

"There are many of us," said this scholar and gentleman, "who have lost our way amid the great religious problems of life, though we have never, I trust, forsaken the Christian ideal of living. To such men as we are, men with no clear vision upon the promise of life, this ministry of this man has been as 'the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'"

I felt that it was true of my friend, must be true of such a life as his, so unselfish, so devout, so Christ-like. But what made that manhood? We know. Only one thing, only one influence, and that a living one. Mind you,

it was the Christ to Whom I am calling you, that Christ Whom Isaiah dimly foreknew, the Christ Whom at this very moment you and I are facing, some in unfaith, some in wistful yearning, some in blissful trust. The living Christ made my friend's manhood "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Consider how seldom it is possible to say, even in the twentieth century, that any ordinary character is as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." How few the Christ is permitted to shape, and oh, how many might be shaped by that Master hand, if they would. On the contrary, the manhood that we know may be strong or it may be weak, but it is not Divine. You have met only yesterday, perhaps, a man who could break you, you feel he could, by the strength of his will, the ruggedness and indomitableness of his selfish desire. We know these men in business. Strong, are they not, strong for evil, sometimes not knowing it, sometimes altogether indifferent to it, sometimes deliberately setting about it, the strong, strong men. You would not call them noble. You feel sometimes that this is a bad world for the weak. You cannot afford to be weak, for, oddly enough, just such a man as I have described is the man who gets on

easiest. Men let him alone, they are afraid of him. He is like the rock upon which a ship might be dashed in a storm and be broken up, but not the rock under which a man can shelter and the weary find rest. You may have found that to your cost. Compare it with the manhood of Christ. No, leave it a moment, I will come back, I will show you how the Christ would deal with such strength as that. You have seen the beasts of the field, it may be, turning on one of their number which has fallen sick; they destroy it—a figure of human life. We trample down the weak. Let it be understood, let it be even suspected that a man can be assailed, can be overthrown, and woe betide him. In your business house, young man, let it be suspected that you can be squeezed—permit the word—into the mould of another man's will, and squeezed you will be. Let it be understood that you are ready to take the side of the strong, and upon that side you will be compelled to go, whether you wish it or whether you do not. Let it be understood that you are liable to defeat, that your principles are not strong enough to uphold you, and you will have tenfold the more battles to fight than the man who has fought his battle once for all, and against whom it is

hopeless for the evil man to fight. What shall I say about a remedy, a hope, for the man who feels himself to be weak and finds himself on the battlefield exposed against that which is strong? I will show you. I have just now promised to do so. Have you ever seen a man, a real man, against whose character no reproach could be hurled, who was guilty of no petty vanity, no sinful pride, no vainglory, no self-seeking?—he is rather a *rara avis*, I know—may I bring in my friend's name—one like the minister of Hampstead? “The shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” Bring all your battalions and try what you can do with such a man.

Let the world's strong man do his worst, I know a stronger, and he is the spiritual man, the manhood in which weakness can shelter, the manhood that is formed in the spirit and in the image of our blessed Lord, the manhood, indeed, which is enthroned in the universe, overlooked and sustained by the manhood of Jesus Christ. I have met such men, and in very obscure walks of life, too, and I have seen evil broken upon them. They have been rocks like battlements, against which sin has hurled itself in vain. Belief in Christ involves such manhood, a manhood that does not trample

upon the weak, but a manhood that shelters it, a manhood that believes in humanity and will sacrifice to save it.

I remember when I was in Italy a sight that moved my English sympathies very much. It was during the visit of President Loubet to Rome. In the procession, a military procession, with dazzling uniforms and military gewgaws, I saw one carriage containing a group of grizzled veterans wearing red shirts. It flashed upon me at once that these old fellows must have been the followers of Garibaldi, so with English audacity I went up and stopped the carriage and asked them whether it were so. The old men were pleased. They asked me what countryman I was, which was not just obvious at the moment, and I told them. "Ah," said one of them, "in that trying hour England was the friend of Garibaldi." England was. Why? Because he was a man. Victor Emmanuel was seated upon the throne of a united Italy, almost against his will, by a man who knew how to do and dare. While politicians were scheming and plotting and hesitating, Garibaldi landed and trusted the patriotism of his countrymen. These old men told me they had followed him in all his campaigns, had marched with him to victory, had

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seen Emmanuel crowned first king of modern Italy. He was only king; their hero, almost their god, was Garibaldi. The utterance of his name, the wearing of his uniform, was to them an incentive to higher manhood, and they looked men indeed.

Young fellows, I thought about the days when Garibaldi had fought a battle single-handed, and such men as these came over to his side. You have heard, probably, about the city in middle Italy which surrendered without a blow, although its walls had been manned against him by the Italian soldiers. They were told to fire on Garibaldi if he and his redshirts should assault it, and they stood to their guns all day long waiting for the assault of the patriot army, prepared to obey orders, no doubt. Toward evening they saw upon the horizon a cloud of dust rising. The word was passed, "It is coming, the army of Garibaldi." The guns were primed and directed upon the spot against which the supposed assault would be made, but no assault came. The cloud of dust grew no bigger. It came nearer, and the Italian mercenaries saw that there was only a carriage drawn by a single horse, and in it sat a single man. And as it came near the gates of the Italian town they saw the man rise

upon his feet and stand with folded arms, facing the town that expected the attack. They had not expected an attack like that. A shout broke forth and passed round the walls, "Garibaldi, Garibaldi himself and alone!" They knew it was no use resisting such a man as he. They could fire if they liked, but if they did they murdered Italy. So the gates were flung open with cheering and weeping; they took the patriot to their hearts. What did it? you say. A manhood—yes, a manhood with a record. That man dared in person for his country's sake, that man had dared many deaths, that man had put everything on the altar of his country's good, and they saw it in his scarred hands and weather-beaten face, and they could not resist the manhood that hitherto had been uncrowned, the manhood that now was in their midst. Almost any other man than Garibaldi might have risen against those walls, and they would not have fallen.

I see here a figure, yes, a not unsuitable figure, of my Master's record, too. Christ is in heaven, it is true. But once He was on earth in the flesh; He is on earth in the spirit now. But when men saw Him some of them jeered and hooted Him. Some of them added to His agony on Calvary, some of them repu-

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diated Him out of selfish hate, but some of them loved Him better than life. They could not ignore Him. Wherever Jesus went they felt there was a man, and that manhood conquered when it died. The Cross of Christ it was that gave the victory. Like Garibaldi, Jesus has been moving since against the citadel of a selfish world, and human hearts have been flung open to Him one by one. But it was because of the crown of thorns and the pierced side, it was because of the suffering manhood that now we are responding to the glorified manhood which rules from heaven. That is the manhood that is making such manhood as I have been describing to you, "a hiding-place from the wind and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

The sentiment of brotherhood is abroad to-day. Do not believe in any brotherhood which is not founded upon the manhood of Jesus Christ. There are other types of manhood abroad. You know what I mean. There is the literature of the cynic, the cynic rebuking sin, the most ghastly spectacle of our time. There is the literature morally destructive in tendency, which would break down all the fabric of historic Christianity, and would trample upon everything associated with the

name of Jesus. I warn you solemnly against it. Judge ye which is the higher manhood, the manhood of the cynic, which refuses to believe in a better day for poor humanity; the manhood of the cynic, who repudiates nobleness in any and every form, or the manhood inspired by loyalty to Jesus Christ. I want you to be Christ's men, and I do not think that one should always plead in vain. Some of these days I expect to see this fair young manhood, all unformed as yet, stand boldly forth for Jesus Christ. But I would not have you come out to make an empty profession. It means the living of a life; belief in Jesus Christ means that manhood will be tested indeed. You go out to be His ministers in every department where God has called you and sent you to serve. You go at your own cost, you go at great risk, you fight His battles, in His name you do it for love's sake, and have no hope of reward except the Master's "Well done" by and by. But humanity is longing, sighing, praying. Men are calling for a higher manhood, the manhood of Jesus. Oh, show it to them, I beseech you.

" 'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for ! my flesh
that I seek

In the Godhead ! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it
shall be

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A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like
to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever! A Hand
like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See
the Christ stand!"

If a man sets himself to change for the better any situation, any atmosphere in which he has to live and to labour, he can do it—he can do it, and I will tell you why. It is because he knows what he means, and the man who knows what he wants and is willing to give himself for it, is pretty sure to get it. It is also because he knows he is right. No strength of evil can contend against the man who knows clearly what is right and is determined to serve it.

But there are enormous differences nowadays between the men whom God is summoning to high service. One rises, another sinks. Why? It is just faith, the presence or the absence of faith in the ideal manhood. Try what faith can do, you who listen to me to-night—faith in the sheltering manhood of Jesus Christ. It will make you such as God has called you to be. Believe it, I entreat you.

"O Lord and Master of us all,
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine."

Henry Drummond was fond of telling a story of a university student who set himself to save another man. He knew the odds were against him, but he did it, and the man is living to-day as a monument of his self-sacrificing work. It meant being laughed at for his pains, it meant sitting up at nights and watching for his drunken friend. It meant testifying for him in open court even in the presence of those who once believed in him, but he conquered. It was worth his while. One kind of manhood was pitted against another, and the stronger conquered because the more Divine.

Oh, young men, you might be such. Yours can either be the manhood that leans or the manhood that stands; the manhood that is pitied or the manhood that has some pity to spare for others. Which shall it be? The manhood of Christ, that, that and nothing less. "A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

THE END

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