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Christ's musts



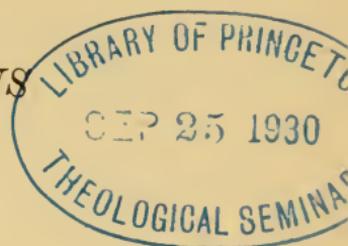






# CHRIST'S MUSTS

AND OTHER SERMONS



BY

ALEXANDER ✓ MACLAREN D.D.

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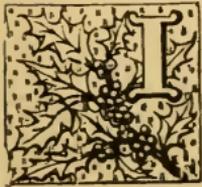
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## I.

### Christ's Musts.

“EVEN so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”—JOHN iii. 14.



HAVE chosen this text for the sake of one word in it, that solemn “must” which was so often on our Lord’s lips. I have no purpose of dealing with the remainder of this clause, nor, indeed, with it at all, except as one instance of His use of the expression. But I felt it might be interesting, and might set old truths in a brighter light, if we gather together the instances in which Christ speaks of the great necessity which dominated His life, and shaped even small acts.

The expression is most frequently used in reference to the Passion and Resurrection. There are many instances in the other Gospels, in which He speaks of that *must*. The first of these is that of my text. Then there is another class, of which His word to His mother when a twelve-year-old child may be taken as a type, “Wist ye not that I *must* be about My Father’s business?” where the mysterious consciousness of a special relation to God in the child’s heart drew Him to the Temple, and to His Father’s

work. Other similar instances are those in which He responded to the multitude when they wanted to keep Him to themselves: "I *must* preach in other cities also"; or, as when He said, "I *must* work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day."

Yet another aspect of the same necessity is presented when, looking far beyond the earthly work and suffering, He discerned the future triumph which was to be the issue of these, and said, "Other sheep I have . . . them also I *must* bring."

And yet another is in reference to a very small matter: His selection of a place for a few hours' rest on His last fateful journey to Jerusalem, when He said, "Zaccheus, . . . to-day I must abide at thy house."

Now, if we put these instances together, we shall get some precious glimpses into our Lord's heart, and His view of life.

I.—Here we see Christ recognizing and accepting the necessity for His death.

My text, if we accept John's Gospel, contributes an altogether new element to our conception of our Lord as announcing His death. For the other three Gospels lay emphasis on it as being part of His teaching, especially during the latter stage of His ministry. But it does not follow that He began to think about it or to see it, when He began to speak about it. There are reasons for the earlier comparative reticence, and there is no ground for the conclusion that then first began to dawn upon a disappointed enthusiast the grim reality that His work was not going to prosper, and that martyrdom

was necessary. That is a notion that has been frequently upheld of late years, but to me it seems altogether incongruous with the facts of the case. And, if John's Gospel is a true record, that theory is shivered against this text, which represents Him at the very beginning of His career—the time when, according to that other theory, He was full of the usual buoyant and baseless anticipations of a reformer commencing His course—as telling Nicodemus, “Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” In like manner, in the previous chapter of this same Gospel, we have the significant though enigmatical utterance: “Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up”; with the Evangelist's authoritative comment: “He spake of the Temple of His body.” So, from the beginning of His career, the end was clear before Him.

And why *must* He go to the Cross? Not merely, as the other evangelists put it, in order that “it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the prophets.” It was not that Jesus must die because the prophets had said that Messiah should, but that the prophets had said that Messiah should because Jesus must. There was a far deeper necessity than the fulfilment of any prophetic utterance, even the necessity which shaped that utterance. The work of Jesus Christ could not be done unless He died. He could not be the Saviour of the world unless He was the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

We cannot see all the grounds of that solemn imperative, but this we can see, that it was because of the requirements of the Divine righteousness, and

because of the necessities of sinful men. And so Christ's was no martyr's death, who had to die as the penalty of the faithful discharge of his duty. It was not the penalty that He paid for doing His work, but it was the work itself. Not that gracious life, nor "the loveliness of perfect deeds," nor His words of sweet wisdom, nor His acts of transcendent power, equalled only by the pity that moved the power, completed His task, but He "came to give His life a ransom for many."

"Must" is a hard word. It may express an unwelcome necessity. Was this necessity unwelcome? When He said: "The Son of Man must be lifted up," was He shrinking, or reluctantly submitting? Ah, no! He *must* die because He *would* save, and He *would* save because He *did* love. His filial obedience to God coincided with His pity for men: and not merely in obedience to the requirements of the Divine righteousness, but in compassion for the necessities of sinners necessity was laid upon Him.

Oh, brethren, nothing held Christ to the Cross but His own desire to save us. Neither priests nor Romans carried Him thither. What fastened Him to it was not the nails driven by rude hands. And the reason why He did not, as the taunters bade Him do, come down from it, was neither a physical nor a moral necessity unwelcome to Himself, but the yielding of His own will to do all which was needed for man's salvation.

This Sacrifice was bound to the altar by the cords of love. We have heard of martyrs who have refused to be tied to the stake, and have kept themselves

motionless in the centre of the fierce flames by the force of their wills. Jesus Christ fastened Himself to the Cross and died because He would.

And, oh! if we think of that sweet, serene life as having clear before it from the very first steps that grim end, how infinitely it gains in pathetic beauty and in heart-touchingness! What wonderful self-abnegation! How he was at leisure from Himself, with a heart of pity for every sorrow, and loins girt for all service, though for all His life the Cross closed the vista! Think! human shrinking was felt by Him. Think! it was so held back that His purpose never faltered. Think! each of us may say, "He *must* die because He *would* save me"; and then ask, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?"

II.—In a second class of these utterances, we see Christ impelled by filial obedience and the consciousness of His mission.

"Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" That was a strange utterance for a boy of twelve. It seems to negative the supposition that what is called the "Messianic consciousness" dawned upon Jesus Christ first after His baptism and the descent of the Spirit. But however that may be, it and the similar passages to which I have already referred, bearing upon His discharge of His work prior to His death, teach that the necessity was an inward necessity springing from His consciousness of Sonship, and His recognition of the work that He had to do. And so He is our great Example of spontaneous obedience, which does violence to itself

if it does not obey. It was instinct that sent the boy into the Temple. Where should a son be but in His Father's house? How could He not be doing His Father's business?

Thus He stands before us, the pattern for the only obedience that is worth calling so, the obedience which would be pained and ill at ease unless it were doing the work of God. Religion is meant to make it a second nature, or, as I have ventured to call it, an instinct — a spontaneous, uncalculating, irrepressible desire—to be in fellowship with God, and to be doing His will. That is the meaning of our Christianity. There is no obedience in reluctant obedience; forced service is slavery, not service. Christianity is given for the specific purpose that it may bring us so into touch with Jesus Christ as that the mind which was in Him may be in us; and we too may be able to say, with a kind of wonder that people should have expected to find us in any other place, or doing anything else, "Wist ye not that because I am a son, *I* must be about my Father's business?" As certainly as the sunflower follows the sun, so certainly will a man, animated by the mind that was in Jesus Christ, like Him find his very life's breath in doing the Father's will.

So then, brethren, what about our grudging service? What about our reluctant obedience? What about the widespread mistake that religion prohibits wished-for things and enforces unwelcome duties? If my Christianity does not make me recoil from what it forbids, and spring eagerly to what

it commends, my Christianity is of very little use. If when in the temple we are like idle boys in school, always casting glances at the clock and the door, and wishing ourselves outside, we may just as well be out as in. Glad obedience is true obedience. Only he who can say, "Thy law is within my heart, and I do Thy will because I love Thee, and cannot but do as Thou desirest," has found the joy possible to a Christian life. It is not "harsh and crabbed," as those that look upon it from the outside may suppose, but musical and full of sweetness. There is nothing more blessed than when "I choose" covers exactly the same ground as "I ought." And when duty is delight, delight will never become disgust, nor joy pass away.

III.—We see, in yet another use of this great "must," Christ anticipating His future triumph.

"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd." Striking as these words are in themselves, they are still more striking when we notice their connection; for they follow immediately upon His utterance about laying down His life for the sheep. So, then, this work was beyond the Cross. And whatever it was, it was to be done after He had died.

I need not point out to you how far afield Christ's vision goes out into the dim, waste places, where on the dark mountains the straying sheep are torn and frightened and starving. I need not dwell upon how far ahead in the future His glance travels, or how magnificent and how rebuking to our petty narrowness

the great word is. "There shall be one *flock*" (not fold); and they shall be one, not because they are within the bounds of any visible "fold," but because they are gathered round the one Shepherd, and in their common relation to Him are knit together in unity.

But what sort of a Man is this who considers that His widest work is to be done by Him after He is dead? "Them also I *must* bring." Thou! How? When? Surely such words as these, side by side with the clear prevision of the death that was so soon to come, are either meaningless or the utterance of an arrogance bordering on insanity; or they anticipate what an evangelist declares did take place—that the Lord was taken up into heaven and sat at the right hand of God, whilst His servants went everywhere preaching the Word, "the Lord also working with them and confirming the word" with the signs He wrought.

"Them also I must bring." That is not merely a necessity rooted in the nature of God and the wants of men. It is not merely a necessity springing from Christ's filial obedience and sense of a mission; but it is a "must" of destiny, a "must" which recognizes the sure results of His passion; a "must" which implies the power of the Cross to be the reconciliation of the world. And so for all pessimistic thoughts to-day, or at any time, and when Christian men's hearts may be trembling for the Ark of God—although, perhaps, there may be little reason for the tremor—and in the face of all blatant antagonisms and of proud Goliaths despising the

“foolishness of preaching,” we fall back upon Christ’s great “must.” It is written in the councils of Heaven more unchangeably than the heavens; it is guaranteed by the power of the Cross; it is certain, by the eternal life of the crucified Saviour, that He will one day be the King of humanity, and *must* bring His wandering sheep to couch in peace, one flock round one Shepherd.

IV.—Lastly, we have Christ applying the greatest principle to the smallest duty.

“Zaccheus! make haste and come down; to-day I *must* abide in thy house.” Why must He? Because Zaccheus was to be saved, and was worth saving. What was the “must”? To stop for an hour or two on His road to the Cross. So He teaches us that in a life penetrated by the thought of the Divine will, which we gladly obey, there are no things too great, and none too trivial, to be brought under the dominion of that law, and to be regulated by that Divine necessity. Obedience is obedience, whether in large things or in small. There is no scale of magnitude applicable to the distinction between God’s will and that which is not God’s will. Gravitation rules the motes that dance in the sunshine as well as the mass of Jupiter. A triangle with its apex in the sun, and its base beyond the solar system, has the same properties and comes under the same laws as one that a schoolboy scrawls upon his slate. God’s truth is not too great to rule the smallest duties. The star in the east was a guide to the humble house at Bethlehem, and there are starry truths high in the heavens that avail for our guidance in the smallest acts of life.

So, brethren, bring your doing under that all-embracing law of duty—duty, which is the heathen expression for the will of God. There are great regions of life in which lower necessities have play. Circumstances, our past, bias and temper, relationship, friendship, civic duty, and the like—all these bring their necessities; but let us think of them all as being, what indeed they are, manifestations to us of the will of our Father. There are great tracts of life in which either of two courses may be right, and we are left to the decision of choice rather than of duty; but high above all these, let us see towering that Divine necessity. It is a daily struggle to bring “I will” to coincide with “I ought”; and there is only one adequate and always powerful way of securing that coincidence, and it is to keep close to Jesus Christ and to drink in His spirit. Then, when duty and delight are conterminous, the rough places will be plain, and the crooked things straight, and every mountain shall be brought low, and every valley shall be exalted, and life will be blessed, and service will be freedom. Joy and liberty and power and peace will fill our hearts when this is the law of our being: “All that the Lord hath spoken, that *must* I do.”

Christ was so Decided.

we may say in the till

iduro:

## II.

### “He is beside Himself.”

“AND when His friends heard of it they went out to lay hold on Him; for they said, He is beside Himself.”—MARK iii. 21.



HERE had been great excitement in the little town of Capernaum in consequence of Christ's teachings and miracles. It had been intensified by His infractions of the rabbinical Sabbath law, and by His appointment of the twelve Apostles. The sacerdotal party in Capernaum apparently communicated with Jerusalem, with the result of bringing a deputation from the Sanhedrim to look into things, and see what this new rabbi was about. A plot for His assassination was secretly on foot. And at this juncture the incident of my text, which we owe to Mark alone of the evangelists, occurs. Christ's friends, apparently the members of His own family—sad to say, as would appear from the context, including His mother—came with a kindly design to rescue their misguided kinsman from danger, and, laying hands upon Him, to carry Him off to some safe restraint in Nazareth, where He might indulge His delusions without doing any harm to Himself. They

want to excuse His eccentricities on the ground that He is not quite responsible—scarcely Himself; and so to blunt the point of the more hostile explanation of the Pharisees that He is in league with Beelzebub.

Conceive of that! The Incarnate Wisdom shielded by friends from the accusation that He is a demoniac by the apology that He is a lunatic! What do you think of popular judgment?

But this half-pitying, half-contemptuous, and wholly benevolent excuse for Jesus, though it be the words of friends, is like the words of His enemies, in that it contains a distorted reflection of His true character. And if we will think about it, I fancy that we may gather from it some lessons not altogether unprofitable.

I.—The first point, then, that I make, is just this—there was something in the character of Jesus Christ which could be plausibly explained to commonplace people as madness.

A well-known modern author has talked a great deal about "the sweet reasonableness of Jesus Christ." His contemporaries called it simple insanity; if they did not say "He hath a devil," as well as "He is mad."

Now, if we try to throw ourselves back to the life of Jesus Christ, as it was unfolded day by day, and think nothing about either what preceded in the revelation of the Old Covenant, or what followed in the history of Christianity, we shall not be so much at a loss to account for such explanations of it as these of my text. Remember that charges like these, in all various keys of contempt or of pity, or of fierce

hostility, have been cast against all innovators, against every man that has broken a new path; against all teachers that have cut themselves apart from tradition and encrusted formulas; against every man that has waged war with the conventionalisms of society; against all idealists who have dreamed dreams and seen visions; against every man that has been touched with a lofty enthusiasm of any sort; and, most of all, against all to whom God and their relations to Him, the spiritual world and their relations to it, the future life and their relations to that, have become dominant forces and motives in their lives.

The short and easy way with which the world excuses itself from the poignant lessons and rebukes which come from such lives is something like that of my text, "He is beside himself." And the proof that he is beside himself is that he does not act in the same fashion as these incomparably wise people that make up the majority in every age. There is nothing that commonplace men hate like anything fresh and original. There is nothing that men of low aims are so utterly bewildered to understand, and which so completely passes all the calculus of which they are masters, as lofty self-abnegation. And wherever you get men smitten with such, or with anything like it, you will find all the low-aimed people gathering round them like bats round a torch in a cavern, flapping their obscene wings and uttering their harsh croaks, and only desiring to quench the light.

One of our cynical authors says that it is the mark of a genius that all the dullards are against him. It is the mark of the man who dwells with God that

all the people whose portion is in this life with one consent say, "He is beside himself."

And so the Leader of them all was served in His day; and that purest, perfectest, noblest, loftiest, most utterly self-oblivious, and God-and-man-devoted life that ever was lived upon earth, was disposed of in this extremely simple method, so comforting to the complacency of the critics—either "He is beside Himself," or "He hath a devil."

And yet, is not the saying a witness to the presence in that wondrous and gentle career of an element entirely unlike the most of mankind? Here was a new star in the heavens, and the law of its orbit was manifestly different from that of all the rest. That is what "eccentric" means—that the life to which it applies does not go round the same centre as all the other satellites, but has a path of its own. Away out yonder somewhere, in the infinite depths, lay the hidden point which drew it to itself and determined its magnificent and overwhelmingly vast orbit. These men witness to Jesus Christ, even by their half excuse, half reproach, that His was a life unique and inexplicable by the ordinary motives which shape the little lives of the masses of mankind. They witness to His entire neglect of ordinary and low aims; to His complete absorption in lofty purposes, which to His purblind would-be critics seem to be delusions and fond imaginations that could never be realized. They witness to what His disciples remembered had been written of Him, "The zeal of Thy house hath eaten Me up;" to His perfect devotion to man and to God. They witness to His consciousness of a mission; and there is

nothing that men are so ready to resent as that. To tell a world, engrossed in self and low aims, that I am sent from God to do His will, and to spread it among men, is the sure way to have all the heavy artillery and the lighter weapons of the world turned against one.

These characteristics of Jesus seem, then, to be plainly implied in that allegation of insanity—lofty aims, absolute originality, utter self-abnegation, the continual consciousness of communion with God, devotion to the service of man, and the sense of being sent by God for the salvation of the world. It was because of these that His friends said, "He is beside Himself."

These men judged themselves by judging Jesus Christ. And all men do. There are as many different estimates of a great man as there are people to estimate, and hence the diversity of opinion about all the characters that fill history and the galleries of the past. The eye sees what it brings and no more. To discern the greatness of a great man, or the goodness of a good one, is to possess, in lower measure, some portion of that which we discern. Sympathy is the condition of insight into character. And so our Lord said once, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward," because he is a dumb prophet himself, and has a lower power of the same gift in him, which is eloquent on the prophet's lips.

In like manner, to discern what is in Christ is the test of whether there is any of it in myself. And thus it is no mere arbitrary appointment which suspends your salvation and mine on our answer to this

question, "What think ye of Christ?" The answer will be—I was going to say, the elixir of our whole moral and spiritual nature. It will be the outcome of our inmost selves. This ploughshare turns up the depths of the soil. That is eternally true which the grey-bearded Simeon, the representative of the Old, said when he took the infant in his arms and looked down upon the unconscious, placid, smooth face. "This child is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Your answer to that question discloses your whole spiritual condition and capacities. And so to judge Christ is to be judged by Him; and what we think Him to be, that we make Him to ourselves. The question which tests us is not merely, "Whom do men say that I am?" It is easy to answer that; but this is the all-important interrogation, "Whom do *ye* say that I am?" I pray that we may each answer as he to whom it was first put answered it, "Rabbi! Thou art the Son of God! Thou art the King of Israel."

II.—Secondly, mark the similarity of the estimate which will be passed by the world on all Christ's true followers.

The same elements exist to-day, the same intolerance of anything higher than the low level, the same incapacity to comprehend simple devotion and lofty aims, the same dislike of a man that comes and rebukes by his silent presence the vices in which he takes no part. And it is a great deal easier to say, "Poor fool! enthusiastic fanatic!" than it is to lay to heart the lesson that lies in such a life.

The one thing, or at least the principal thing, which the Christianity of this generation wants is a little more of this madness. It would be a great deal better for us who call ourselves Christians if we had earned and deserved the world's sneer, "He is beside himself." But our modern Christianity, like an epicure's rare wines, is preferred iced. And the last thing that anybody would think of suggesting in connection with the demeanour—either the conduct or the words—of the average Christian man of this day is that his religion had touched his brain a little.

But, dear friends, go in Christ's footsteps and you will get the same missiles flung at you. If a church or an individual has earned the praise of the outside ring of godless people because its or his religion is "reasonable and moderate; and kept in its proper place; and not allowed to interfere with social enjoyments, and political and municipal corruptions," and the like, then there is much reason to ask whether that church or man is Christian after Christ's pattern. Oh, I pray that there may come down on the professing Church of this generation a baptism of the Spirit; and I am quite sure that when that comes the people that admire moderation and approve of religion, but like it to be "kept in its own place," will be all ready to say, when they hear the sons and the daughters prophesying, and the old men seeing visions, and the young men dreaming dreams, and the fiery tongues uttering their praises of God, "These men are full of new wine!" Would we were full of the new wine of the Spirit! Do you think anybody would say of your religion that you were

beside yourself, because you made so much of it? They said it about your Master, and if you were like Him it would be said, in one tone or another, about you. We are all desperately afraid of enthusiasm to-day. It seems to me that it is *the* want of the Christian Church, and that we are not enthusiastic because we don't half believe the things that we say are our creed.

One more word. Christian men and women have to make up their minds to go on the path of devotion, conformity to Christ's pattern, self-sacrificing surrender, without minding one bit what is said about them. Brethren, I do not think Christian people are in half as much danger of dropping the standard of the Christian life by reason of the sarcasms of the world, as they are by reason of the low tone of the Church. Don't you take your ideas of what a reasonable Christian life is from the men round you, howsoever they may profess to be Christ's followers. And let us keep so near the Master that we may be able to say, "With me it is a very small matter to be judged of you, or of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord." Never mind, though they say, "Beside himself!" Never mind, though they say, "Oh! utterly extravagant and impracticable." Better that than to be patted on the back by a world that likes nothing so well as a Church with its teeth drawn, and its claws cut; which may be made a plaything and an ornament by the world. And that is what much of our modern Christianity has come to be.

III.—Lastly, notice the sanity of the insane.

I have only time to put before you three little

pictures, and ask you what you think of them. I daresay the originals might be found in these pews without much search.

Here is one. Here is a man who, like the most of us, believes that there is a God, believes that he has something to do with Him, believes that he is going to die, believes that the future state is, in some way or other, and in some degree, one of retribution; and from Monday morning to Saturday night he ignores all these facts, and never allows them to influence one of his actions. May I venture to speak direct to this hypothetical person, whose originals are dotted about this chapel? It would be the very same to you if you said "No" instead of "Yes" to all these affirmations. The fact that there is a God does not make a bit of difference to what you do, or what you think, or what you feel. The fact that there is a future life makes just as little difference. You are going on a voyage next week, and you never dream of getting your outfit. You believe all these things, you are an intelligent man—you are very likely, in a great many ways, a very amiable and pleasant one; you do a great many things very well; you cultivate congenial virtues, and you abhor a great many vices; but you never think about God; and you have absolutely no preparation whatever for stepping into the scene in which you know that you are to live.

Well, you may be a very wise man, a student with high aims, cultivated understanding, and all the rest of it. I want to know whether, taking into account all that you are, and your inevitable connection with God, and your certain death and certain life in a state

of retribution—I want to know whether we should call your conduct sanity or insanity? Which?

Take another picture. Here is a man that believes—really believes—the articles of the Christian creed, and in some measure has received them into his heart and life. He believes that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for him upon the Cross, and yet his heart has but the feeblest tick of pulsating love in answer. He believes that prayer will help a man in all circumstances, and yet he hardly ever prays. He believes that self-denial is the law of the Christian life, and yet he lives for himself. He believes that he is here as a pilgrim and as a sojourner, and yet his heart clings to the world, and his hand would fain cling to it, like that of a drowning man swept over Niagara, and catching at anything on the banks. He believes that he is sent into the world to be a light of the world, and yet from out of his self-absorbed life there has hardly ever come one sparkle of light into any dark heart. And that is a picture, not exaggerated, of the enormous majority of professing Christians in so-called Christian lands. And I want to know whether we shall call that sanity or insanity?

The last of my little miniatures is that of a man who keeps in close touch with Jesus Christ, and so, like Him, can say, "Lo! I come; I delight to do Thy will, O Lord. Thy law is within my heart." He yields to the strong motives and principles that flow from the Cross of Jesus Christ, and, drawn by the mercies of God, gives himself a living sacrifice to be used as God will. Aims as lofty as the Throne which Christ his Brother fills; sacrifice as entire as that on

which his trembling hope relies ; realisation of the unseen future as vivid and clear as His who could say that He was in Heaven whilst He walked the earth ; subjugation of self as complete as that of the Lord's, Who pleased not Himself, and came not to do His own will—these are some of the characteristics which mark the true disciple of Jesus Christ. And I want to know whether the conduct of the man who believes in the love that God hath to him, as manifested in the Cross, and surrenders his whole self thereto, despising the world and living for God, for Christ, for men, for eternity—whether his conduct is insanity or sanity ?

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

### III.

## An Attempt to Account for Jesus.

“BUT when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.”  
—MATT. xii. 24.



MARK'S Gospel tells us that this astonishing explanation of Christ and His work was due to the ingenious malice of an ecclesiastical deputation, sent down from Jerusalem to prevent the simple folk in Galilee from being led away by this new Teacher. They must have been very hard put to it to explain undeniable but unwelcome facts, when they hazarded such a preposterous theory.

Formal religionists never know what to make of a man who is in manifest touch with the unseen. These scribes, like Christ's other critics, judged themselves in judging Him, and bore witness to the very truths that they were eager to deny. For this ridiculous explanation admits the miraculous, recognises the impossibility of accounting for Christ on any naturalistic hypothesis, and by its very outrageous absurdity indicates that the only reasonable explanation of the facts is the admission of His Divine message and authority. So we may learn, even from such words

as these, how the glory of Jesus Christ shines, though distorted and blurred, through the fogs of prejudice and malice.

I.—I would have you note, then, first, the unwelcome and undeniable facts that insist upon explanation.

I have said that these hostile critics attest the reality of the miracles. I know that it is not fashionable at present to attach much weight to the fact that none of all the enemies that saw them ever had a doubt about the reality of Christ's miracles. I know quite well that in an age that believed in the possibility of the supernatural, as this age does *not*, credence would be more easy, and testimony is less valuable than if it had come from a jury of scientific nineteenth century sceptics. But I know, on the other hand, that for long generations the expectation of the miraculous had died out when Christ came; that His predecessor, John the Baptist, made no such claims; and that, at first, at all events, there was no expectation of Jesus' working miracles, to lead to any initial ease of acceptance of His claims. And I know that there were never sharper and more hostile eyes brought to bear upon any man and his work than the eyes of these ecclesiastical triers. It would have been so easy and so triumphant a way of ending the whole business if they could have shown, what they were anxious to be able to show, that the miracle was a trick. And so I venture to think that not without some weight is the attestation from the camp of the enemy, "This man casteth out demons."

But you have to remember that amongst the facts

to be explained is not only this one of Christ's works having passed muster with His enemies, but the other of His own reiterated and solemn claim to have the power of working what we call miracles.

Now, I want to dwell on that, for one sentence, because it is fashionable to put one's thumb upon it nowadays. It is not unusual to eliminate from the Gospel narrative all that side of it, and then to run over in eulogiums about the rest. But what we have to deal with is this fact, that the Man whom the world admits to be the consummate flower of humanity, meek, sane, humble, who has given all generations lessons in self-abnegation and devotion, claimed to be able to raise the dead, to cast out demons, and to do many wonderful works. And though we should be misrepresenting the facts if we said that He did what His followers have too often been inclined to do, *i.e.*, rested the stress of evidence upon that side of His work, yet it is an equal exaggeration in the other direction to do as so many are inclined to do to-day, *i.e.*, disparage the miraculous evidence as no evidence at all. "Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear." That is His own answer to the question, "Art Thou He that should come?" And though I rejoice to believe that there are far loftier and more blessed answers to it than these outward signs and tokens; they *are* signs and tokens; and they are part of the whole facts that have to be accounted for.

I would venture to widen the reference of my text for a moment, and include, not only the actual miracles of our Lord's earthly life, but all the benefi-

cent, hallowing, elevating, ennobling, refining results which have followed upon the proclamation of His truth in the world ever since. I believe, as I think Scripture teaches me to believe, that in the world to-day Christ is working; and that it is a mistake to talk about the results of "Christianity," meaning thereby some abstract system divorced from Him. It is the working of Jesus Christ in the world that has brought "nobler manners, purer laws"; that has given a new impulse and elevation to art and literature; that has lifted the whole tone of society; that has suppressed ancient evils; that has barred the doors of old temples of devildom, of lust, and cruelty, and vice; and that is still working in the world for the elevation and the deifying of humanity. And I claim the whole difference between "B.C." and "A.D."—the whole difference between Christendom and Heathendom—as being the measure of the continuous power with which Jesus Christ has grappled with and throttled the snakes that have fastened on men. That continuous operation of His in delivering from the powers of evil has, indeed, not yielded such results as might have been expected. But just as on earth He was hindered in the exercise of His supernatural power by men's unbelief, so that "He could do no mighty works, save that He laid His hands on a few sick folk," here and there, "and healed them," so He has been thwarted by His Church, and hindered in the world, from manifesting the fulness of His power. But yet, sorrowfully admitting that, and taking as deserved the scoffs of the men that say, "Your Christianity does not seem to do so very much after all," I still venture to allege

that its record is unique; and that these are facts which wise men ought to take into account, and have some fairly plausible way of explaining.

II.—Secondly, note the preposterous explanation.

“This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.” That is the last resort of prejudice so deep that it will father an absurdity rather than yield to evidence. And Christ has no difficulty in putting it aside, as you may remember, by a piece of common sense: “If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, and his kingdom cannot stand.” There is an old play which has for its title “The Devil is an Ass.” He is not such an ass as that, to build up with one hand and cast down with the other. As the proverb has it, “Hawks do not pick out hawks’ eyes.” But this plainly hopeless attempt to account for Christ and His work may be turned into a witness for both, and yield not unimportant lessons.

This explanation witnesses to the insufficiency of all explanations which omit the supernatural. These men felt that they had to do with a Man who was in touch with a whole world of unseen powers; and that they had here to deal with something to which ordinary measuring lines were palpably inapplicable. And so they fell back upon “by Beelzebub”; and they thereby admitted that humanity without something more at the back of it never made such a man as that. And I beg you to lay that to heart. It is very easy to solve an insoluble problem if you begin by taking all the insoluble elements out of it. And that is how a great deal of modern thinking does with

Christianity. Knock out all the miracles ; pooh-pooh all Christ's claims ; say nothing about Incarnation ; declare Resurrection to be entirely unhistorical, and you will not have much difficulty in accounting for the rest ; and it will not be worth the accounting for. But here is the thing to be dealt with, that *whole* life, the Christ of the Gospels. And I venture to say that any explanation professing to account for Him which leaves out His coming from an unseen world, and possession of powers above this world of sense and nature, is ludicrously inadequate. Suppose you had a chain which for thousands of years had been winding on to a drum, and link after link had been rough iron, and all at once there comes one of pure gold, would it be reasonable to say that it had been dug from the same mine, and forged in the same fires, as its black and ponderous companions ? Generation after generation has passed across the earth, each begetting sons after its own likeness ; and lo ! in the midst of them starts up one sinless Man. Is it reasonable to say that He is the product of the same causes which have produced all the millions, and never another like Him ? Surely to account for Jesus without the supernatural is hopeless.

Further, this explanation may be taken as an instance showing the inadequacy of all theories and explanations of Christ and Christianity from an unbelieving point of view. It was the first attempt of unbelievers to explain where Christ's power came from. Like all first attempts, it was crude, and it has been amended and refined since. Earlier generations did not hesitate to call the apostles liars, and Christ's

contemporaries did not hesitate to call Him "this deceiver." We have got beyond that; but we still are met by explanations of the power of the Gospel and of Christ, its subject and Author, which trace these to ignoble elements, and do not shrink from asserting that a blunder or a hallucination lies at the foundation.

Now, I am not going to enter upon these subjects at any length, but I would just recall to you our Lord's broad, simple principle: "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit: neither doth a good tree bring forth evil fruit." And I would apply that all round. Christian teachers have often made great mistakes, as it seems to me, by tracing the prevalence of the power of some heathen religions to their vices and lies. No system has ever had great moral power in this world but by reason of its excellences and truths. Moham-medanism, for instance, swept away, and rightly, a mere formal superstition which called itself Christianity because it grasped the one truth: "There is no God but God;" and it had faith of a sort. Monasticism held the field in Europe, with all its faults, for centuries, because it enshrined the great Christian truth of self-sacrifice and absolute obedience. And you may take it as a fixed rule, that howsoever some "mixture of falsehood doth ever please," as Bacon says, in his cynical way, the reason for the power of any great movement has been the truth that was in it, and not the lie; and the reason why great men have exercised influence has been their greatness and their goodness, and not their smallnesses and their vices.

I apply that all round, and I ask you to apply it to Christianity; and in the light of such plain principles to answer the question: Where did this Man, so fair, so radiant, so human and yet so superhuman, so universal and yet so individual—where did He come from? and where did the Gospel, which flows from Him, and which has done such things in the world as it has done—where did it come from? “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” If it is true that Jesus Christ is either mistakenly represented in the Gospels, or that He made enthusiastic claims which cannot be verified; and if it is true that the faith in a Resurrection on which Christianity is suspended, and which produced such fruits as we know have been produced, is a delusion; then all I can say is that the noblest lives that ever were lived in the world have found their impulse in a falsehood or a dream; and that the richest clusters that ever have yielded wine for the cup have grown upon a thorn. If like produces like, you cannot account for Christ and Christianity by anything short of the belief in His Divine mission. Serpents’ eggs do not hatch out into doves. This Man, when He claimed to be God’s Son and the world’s Saviour, was no brain-sick enthusiast; and the results show that the Gospel which His followers proclaim rests upon no lie.

Again, this explanation is an instance of the credulity of unbelief. Think of the mental condition which could swallow such an explanation of such a Worker and such work. It is more difficult to believe the explanation than the alternative which it is framed to escape. So it is always. The difficulties

of faith are small by comparison with those of unbelief, gnats beside camels, and that that is so is plain from the short duration of each. One can remember in the compass of one's own life more than one assailant taking the field with much trumpeting and flag-waving, whose attack failed and is forgotten.

The old story tells of a giant that determined to slay his enemy, and belaboured an empty bed with his club all night, and found his foe untouched and fresh in the morning. The Gospel is here; what has become of its assailants? They are all gone, and the limbo into which the scribes' theory has passed will receive all the others. So we may be quite patient, and sure that the sieve of time, which is slowly and constantly working, will riddle out all the rubbish, and cast it on the dunghill, where so many exploded theories rot forgotten.

III.—And now, one word about the last point; and that is—the true explanation.

Now, at this stage of my sermon, I must not be tempted to say a word about the light which our Lord throws, in these declarations in the context, into that dim unseen world. His words seem to me to be too solemn and didactic to be taken as accommodations to popular prejudice, and a great deal too grave to be taken as mere metaphor. And I, for my part, am not so sure that, apart from Him, I know all things in heaven and earth, as to venture to put aside these solemn words of His—which lift a corner of the veil which hides the unseen—and to dismiss them as unworthy of notice. Is it not a strange thing that a world which is so ready to believe in spiritual com-

munications when they are vouched for by a newspaper editor, is so unwilling to believe them when they are in the Bible? And is it not a strange thing that scientists, who are always taunting Christians with the importance they attach to man in the plan of the universe, and ask if all these starry orbs were built for him, should be so incredulous of teachings which fill the waste places with loftier beings? But that is by the way.

What does Christ say in the context? He tells the secret of His power. "I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons." And then He goes on to speak about a conflict that He wages with a strong man; and about His binding the strong man, and spoiling his house. All which, being turned into modern language, is just this, that the Lord, by His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and government at the right hand of God, has broken the powers of evil in their central hold; He has crushed the serpent's head; and though He may still, as Milton puts it, "swinge the scaly horror of his folded tail," it is but the flurries of the dying brute. The conquering heel is firm on his head.

And so, brethren, evil is conquered, and Christ is the Conqueror; and by His work in life and death He has delivered them that were held captive of the devil. And you and I may, if we will, pass into "the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free."

That is the only explanation of Him—in His person, in His character, in His work, and in the effects of that work in the world—that covers all the facts, and will hold water. All others fail, and they

mostly fail by boldly eliminating the very facts that need to be accounted for. Let us rather look to Him, thankful that our Brother has conquered; and let us put our trust in that Saviour.

For, if His explanation is true, then a very solemn personal consideration arises for each of us: "If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you." It stands beside us; it calls for our obedience. Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, can cast the evils out of our natures. It is the Incarnate Christ, the Divine Christ, the crucified Christ, the ascended Christ, the indwelling Christ, who will so fill our hearts that there shall be no aching voids there to invite the return of the expelled tyrants. If any other reformation pass upon us than the thorough one of receiving Him by faith into our hearts, then, though they may be swept and garnished, they will be empty; and the demons will come back. With Jesus inside—they will be outside.

#### IV.

### A Gluttonous Man and a Winebibber.

“THE SON of Man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”—LUKE vii. 34.



ESUS CHRIST very seldom took any notice of the mists of calumny that drifted round Him. “When He was reviled He reviled not again.” If ever He did allude to them it was for the sake of the people who were harming themselves by uttering them. So here, without the slightest trace of irritation, He quotes a malignant charge which was evidently in the popular mouth, and of which we should never have known if He had not repeated it; not with anger, but simply in order that He might point to the capricious inconsistency of finding fault with John and Himself on precisely opposite grounds. The former did not suit because he came neither eating nor drinking. Well, if His asceticism did not please, surely the geniality of a Christ who comes doing both will be hailed. But He is rejected like the other. What is the cause of this dislike that can look two different ways at once? Not the traits that it alleges, but something far deeper, a

dislike to the heavenly wisdom of which John and Jesus were messengers. The children of wisdom would see that there was right in both courses; the children of folly would condemn them both. If the message is unwelcome, nothing that the messenger can say or do will be right.

The same kind of thing is common to-day. Never mind consistency, find fault with Christianity on all its sides, and with all its preachers, though you have to contradict yourself in doing so. Object to this man that he is too learned and doctrinal; to that one that he is too illiterate, and gives no food for thought; to this one that he is always thundering condemnation; to that one that he is always running over with love; to this one that he is perpetually harping upon duties; to that other one that he is up in the clouds, and forgets the tasks of daily life; to this one that he is sensational; to that one that he is dull; and so on, and so on. The generation that liked neither piping nor mourning has its representatives still.

But my business now is not with the inconsistency of the objectors to John and Jesus, but simply with this caricature which He quotes from them of some of His characteristics. It is a distorted refraction of the beam of light that comes from his face, through the muddy, thick medium of their prejudice. And if we can—I was going to say—pull it straight again, we shall see something of His glories. I take the two clauses of my text separately because they are closely connected with our design, and cover different ground.

I.—I ask you to note, first, the enemies' attes-

tation to Christ's genial participation in the joys and necessities of common life.

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking." There is nothing that calumny, if it be malignant enough, cannot twist into an accusation; and out of glorious and significant facts, full of lessons and containing strong buttresses of the central truth of the Gospel, these people made this charge, "a wine-bibber and gluttonous." The facts were facts; the inferences were slanders.

Notice how precious, how demonstrative of the very central truth of Christianity, is that plain fact, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking." Then that pillar of all our hope, the Incarnation of the Word of God, stands irrefragable. Sitting at tables, hungering in the wilderness, faint by the well, begging a draught of water from a woman, and saying on His Cross "I thirst!"—He is the Incarnation of Deity, the manifestation of God in the flesh. Awe and mystery and reverence and hope and trust clasp that fact, in which prejudice and dislike could only find occasion for a calumny.

By eating and drinking He declared that "forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise took part in the same." If it is true that "every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God," then it is true that no miracle in His life, nor any of the supernatural glories which we are accustomed to regard as evidences of His majesty, are more blessed, or more important as revelations of His nature, than the fact that the "Son of Man came eating and drinking."

But, still further, mark how the truth which gave colour to the slander attests that Jesus Christ presents to the world the highest type of manhood. The ideal for life is not the suppression, but the consecration, of material satisfactions and pleasures of appetite. And they are likest to the Master who, like the Master, come eating and drinking, and yet ever hold all appetites and desires rigidly under control, and subordinate them all to loftier purposes. John the Baptist could be an ascetic; the Pattern Man must not be.

The highest type of religion, as it is shown to us in His perfect life, includes the acceptance of all pure material blessings. Asceticism is second best; the religion that can take and keep secondary all outward and transitory sources of enjoyment, and can hallow common life, is loftier than all pale hermits and emaciated types of sanctity, who preserve their purity only by avoiding things which it were nobler to enjoy and to subdue.

There is nothing more striking about the Old Testament than the fact that its heroes and saints were kindly with their kind, and took part in common life, accepting, enjoying its blessings. They were warriors, statesmen, shepherds, vinedressers; "they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; they married and were given in marriage." And all the while they were the saints of God. That was a nobler type of religion than the one that came after it, into which Jesus Christ was born. When devotion cools it crusts; and the crust is superstition and formalism and punctilious attention to the proprieties of worship

and casuistry, instead of joyful obedience to a law, and abstinence from, instead of sanctification of, earthly delights and supplies.

So, protesting against all that, and showing the more excellent way, and hallowing the way because He trod it, "the Son of Man came eating and drinking." Henceforward every table may be a communion table, and every meal may be a sacrament, eaten in obedience to His dying injunction: "This do in remembrance of Me." If we can feel that Christ sits with us at the feast, the feast will be pure and good. If it is of such a sort as that we dare not fancy Him keeping us company there, it is no place for us. Wherever Jesus Christ went the consecration of His presence lingers still; whatever Jesus Christ did His servants may do, if in the same spirit and in the same manner.

He hallowed infancy when He lay an infant in His mother's arms; He hallowed childhood when, as a boy, He was obedient to His parents; He hallowed youth during all those years of quiet seclusion and unnoticed service in Nazareth; He hallowed every part of human life and experience by bearing it. Love is consecrated because He loved; tears are sacred because He wept; life is worship, or may be made so, because He passed through it; and death itself is ennobled and sanctified because He has died.

Only let us remember that, if we are to exercise this blessed hallowing of common things, of which He has set us the example, we must use them as He did; that is, in such sort as that our communion with God shall not be broken thereby, and that

nothing in them shall darken the vision and clip the wings of the aspiring and heavenward-gazing spirit. Brethren, the tendency of this day—and one rejoices, in many respects, that it is so—is to revolt against the extreme of narrowness in the past that prescribed and proscribed a great many arbitrary and unnecessary abstinences and practices as the sign of a Christian profession. But whilst I would yield to no man in my joyful application of the principle that underlies that great fact that “He came eating and drinking,” I do wish at this point to put in a *caveat* which perhaps may not be so welcome to some of you as the line of thought that I have been pursuing. It is this: it is an error to quote Christ’s example as a cover for luxury and excess, and grasping at material enjoyments which are not innocent in themselves, or are mixed up with much that is not innocent. There is many a table spread by so-called Christian people where Jesus Christ will not sit. Many a man darkens his spirit, enfeebles his best part, blinds himself to the things beyond, by reason of his taking the liberty, as he says, which Christianity, broadly and generously interpreted, gives, of participating in all outward delights. I have said asceticism is not the highest, but it is sometimes necessary. It is better to enjoy and to subdue than to abstain and to suppress, but abstinence and suppression are often essential to faithfulness and noble living. If I find that my enjoyment of innocent things harms me, or is tending to stimulate cravings beyond my control; or if I find that abstinence from innocent things increases my power to help a brother, and to fight against a desolating sin; or if things good

and innocent in themselves, and in some respects desirable and admirable, like the theatre, for instance, are irretrievably intertwined with evil things, then Christ's example is no plea for our sharing in such. It is better for us to cut off the offending hand, and so, though maimed, to enter into life, than to keep two hands and go into the darkness of death. Jesus Christ "came eating and drinking," and therefore the highest and the best thing is that Christian people should innocently, and with due control, and always keeping themselves in touch with God, enjoy all outward blessings, only subject to this law, "whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God," and remembering this warning, "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

II.—Now, secondly, notice the enemies' witness that Christ is the Friend of outcasts.

As I said about the other charge, so I say of this, the facts were facts, the inferences were errors. The slanderers saw, as nobody could help seeing, that there was a strange kind of mutual attraction between Jesus and publicans and sinners; that harlots as well as little children seemed to be drawn to Him; and that He obviously delighted in the company of those at whose presence, partly from pride, partly from national enmity, partly from heartless self-righteousness, Pharisaism gathered its dainty skirts around itself in abhorrence, lest a speck should fall upon their purity. That being the fact, low natures, who always misunderstand lofty ones, because they can only believe in motives as low as their own, said of Jesus, "Ah :

you can tell what sort of a man He is by the company He keeps. He is the friend of publicans because He is a bad Jew ; the friend of sinners because He likes their wicked ways.”

There was a mysterious sense of sympathy which drew Jesus Christ to these poor people and drew them to Him. It would have been a long while before any penitent woman would have come in and wept over the feet of Gamaliel and his like. It would have been a long while before any sinful men would have found their way, with tears and yet with trust, to these self-righteous hypocrites. But perfect purity somehow draws the impure, though assumed sanctity always repels them. And it is a sign, not that a man is bad, but that he is good in a Christlike fashion, if the outcasts that durst not come near your respectable people find themselves drawn to him. Oh ! if there were more of us liker Jesus Christ in our purity, there would be more of us who would deserve the calumny which is praise—“the friend of sinners.”

It was an attestation of His love, as I need not remind you. I suppose there is nothing more striking in the whole wonderful and unique picture of Jesus Christ drawn in the Gospels than the way in which two things, which we so often fancy to be contradictory, blend in the most beautiful harmony in Him—viz., infinite tenderness and absolute condemnation of transgression. To me the fact that these two characteristics are displayed in perfect harmony, in the life of Jesus Christ, as written in these Gospels, is no small argument for believing in the historical veracity of the picture there drawn. For I do not know a

harder thing for a dramatist, or a romancer, or a legend-monger to effect than to combine, in one picture—without making the combination monstrous—these two things, perfect purity and perfect love for the impure.

But, dear brethren, remember that if, we are to believe Jesus Christ's own words, that strange love of His, which embraced in its pure clasp the outcasts, was not only the love of a perfect Man, but it was the love of God Himself. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." When we see Jesus Christ looking across the valley to the city, with tears in His sad and gentle eyes; and when we see harlots and sinners coming near Him with new hope, and a strange consciousness of a fascination which He wields; and when we see Him opening His heart to all the impure, just as He laid His clean hand on the leper's ulcers, let us rejoice to believe that the Friend of publicans and sinners is God manifest in the flesh.

Then, still further, this wondrous, seeking love of His for all the outcasts is the sign to us of His boundless hopefulness concerning the most degraded.

The world talks of races too low to be elevated, of men too hardened to be softened. Jesus Christ walks through the hospitals of this world, and sees nowhere incurables. His hope is boundless, because, first of all, He sees the dormant possibilities that slumber in the most degraded; and because, still more, He knows that He bears in Himself a power that will cleanse the foulest and raise the most fallen. There are some metals that resist all attempts to volatilize them by the highest temperature producible in our

furnaces. Carry them up into the sun and they will all pass into vapour. No man or woman that ever lived, or will live, is so absolutely besotted, and held by the chains of his or her sins, as that Jesus cannot set them free. His hope for outcasts is boundless, because He knows that every sin can be cleansed by His precious blood.

Therefore, Christianity should know nothing of desperate cases. There should be no incurables in our estimate of the world; but hope as boundless as the Master's, Who drew to Himself the publicans and sinners, and made them saints.

I need not remind you how this is the unique glory of Christ and of Christianity. Men have been asking the question whether Christianity is played out or not. What has been the motive power of all the great movements for the elevation of mankind that have occurred for the last nineteen centuries? What was it that struck the fetters off the slaves? What is it that sends men out amongst savage tribes? Has there ever been found a race of men so degraded that the message of Christ's love could not find its way into their hearts? Did not Mr. Darwin subscribe to the Patagonian Mission—a mission which takes in hand perhaps the lowest types of humanity in the world—and did he not do it because his own eyes had taught him that in this strange superstition that we call the Gospel there is a power that, somehow or other, nothing else can wield? Brethren, if the Church begins to lose its care for, and its power of drawing, outcasts and sinners, it has begun to lose its hold on Christ. The sooner such a Church dies the

better, and there will be few mourners at its funeral.

The Friend of publicans and sinners has set the example to all of us His followers. God be thanked that there are signs to-day that Christian people are more and more waking up to the consciousness of their obligations in regard to the outcasts in their own and other lands. Let them go to them, as Jesus Christ did, with no false flatteries, but with plain rebukes of sin, and yet with manifest outgoing of the heart, and they will find that the same thing which drew these poor creatures to the Master will draw others to the feeblest, faintest reflection of Him in His servants.

And, last of all, dear friends, let each think that Jesus Christ is my Friend, and your Friend, because He is the Friend of sinners, and we are sinners. If He did not love sinners there would be nobody for Him to love. The universality of sin, however various in its degrees and manifestations, make more wonderful the universal sweep of His friendship.

How do I know He is my Friend? "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And when we were yet enemies He was our Friend, and died for us. How shall we requite that love? "Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you to do." All over the Eastern world to this day the name by which the Patriarch Abraham is known is the "Friend" or the "Companion." Well for us, for time and for eternity, if, knowing that Jesus is our friend, we yield ourselves, in faith and love, to become His friends.

## Jesus Charged with Blasphemy.

“ THEN the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy ; what further need have we of witnesses ? ”—  
MATT. xxvi. 65.



JESUS was tried and condemned by two tribunals, the Jewish ecclesiastical and the Roman civil. In each case the charge corresponded to the court. The Sanhedrim took no cognisance of, and had no concern with, rebellion against Cæsar ; though for the time they pretended loyalty. Pilate had still less concern about Jewish superstitions. And so the investigation in each case turned on a different question. In the one it was, “ Art Thou the Son of God ? ” in the other, “ Art Thou the King of Israel ? ” The answer to both was a simple “ Yes ! ” but with very significant differences. Pilate received an explanation ; the Sanhedrim none. The Roman governor was taught that Christ’s title of King belonged to another region altogether than that of Emperor, and did not in the slightest degree infringe upon the dominion that he represented. But “ Son of God ” was capable of no explanation that could make it

any less offensive; and the only thing to be done was to accept it or to condemn Him.

So this saying of the high priest differs from other words of our Lord's antagonists, which we have been considering in recent sermons, in that it is no distortion of our Lord's characteristics or meaning. It correctly understands, but it fatally rejects, His claims; and does not hesitate to take the further step of, on the ground of these, branding Him as a blasphemer.

We may turn the high priest's question in another direction: "What further need have we of witnesses?" These horror-stricken judges, rending their garments in simulated grief and zeal, and that silent Prisoner, knowing that His life was the forfeit of His claims, yet saying no word of softening or explanation of them, may teach us much. They are witnesses to some of the central facts of the revelation of God in Christ. Let us turn to these for a few moments.

I.—First, then, they witness to Christ's claims.

The question that was proposed to Jesus, "Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the living God?" was suggested by the facts of His ministry, and not by anything that had come out in the course of this investigation. It was the summing up of the impression made on the ecclesiastical authorities of Judaism by His whole attitude and demeanour. And if we look back to His life we shall see that there were instances, long before this, on which, on the same ground, the same charge was flung at Him. For example, when He would heal the paralytic, and, before He dealt with bodily disease, attended to

spiritual weakness, and said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," ere He said, "Take up thy bed and walk," there was a group of keen-eyed hunters after heresy sitting eagerly on the watch, who snatched at the words in a moment, and said, "Who is this that forgiveth sins? No *man* forgiveth sins, but God only! This man speaketh blasphemies." And they were right. He did claim a Divine prerogative; and either the claim must be admitted or the charge of blasphemy urged.

Again, when He broke rabbinical Sabbath law by a cure, and they said, "This man has broken the Sabbath day," His vindication was worse than His offence, for He answered, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." And then they sought the more to kill Him, because He not only brake the Sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." And, again, when He declared that the safety of His sheep in His hands was identical with their safety in His Father's hands, and vindicated the audacious parallelism by the tremendous assertion, "I and My Father are One," the charge of blasphemy rang out; and was inevitable, unless the claim was true.

These outstanding instances are but, as it were, summits that rise above the general level. But the general level is that of One who takes an altogether unique position. No one else, professing to lead men in paths of righteousness, has so constantly put the stress of His teaching, not upon morality, nor religion, nor obedience to God, but upon this, "Believe in Me"; or ever pushed forward His own personality into the foreground, and made the whole nobleness and

blessedness and security and devoutness of a life to hinge upon that one thing, its personal relation to Him.

People talk about the sweet and gentle wisdom that flowed from Christ's lips, and so on; about the lofty morality, about the beauty of pity and tenderness, and all the other commonplaces so familiar to us, and we gladly admit them all. But I venture to go a step further than all these, and to say that the outstanding *differētia*, the characteristic which marks off Christ's teaching as something new, peculiar, and altogether *per se*, is not its morality, not its philanthropy, not its meek wisdom, not its sweet reasonableness, but its tremendous assertions of the importance of Himself.

And if I ask you to look to the ground upon which such an assertion may be vindicated, I would point you to such things as this, that this Man took up a position of equality with, and of superiority to, the legislation which He and the people to whom He was speaking regarded as being Divinely sent, and said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old time" so and so; "but I say unto you": that this man declared that to build upon His words was to build upon a rock; that this Man declared that He—He—was the legitimate Object of absolute trust, of utter submission and obedience; that He claimed from His followers affiance, love, reverence which cannot be distinguished from worship, and that He did not therein conceive that He was intercepting anything that belonged to the Father. This Man professed to be able to satisfy the desires of every human heart when He said, "If any man thirst

let him come to Me and drink." This Man claimed to be able to breathe the sanctity of repose in the blessedness of obedience over all the weary and the heavy laden; and assured them that He Himself, through all the ages, and in all lands and for all troubles, would give them rest. This Man declared that He who stood there, in the quiet homes of Galilee, and went about its acres with those blessed feet for our advantage, was to be the Judge of the whole world. This Man said that His name was "Son of God"; and this Man declared, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

And then people say to us, "Oh! your Gospel narratives, even if they be the work of men in good faith, telling what they suppose He said, mistook the Teacher; and if we could strip away the accretion of mistaken reverence, and come to the historical person, we should find no claims like these."

Well, this is not the time to enter into the large questions which that contention involves, but I point you to the incident which makes my text, and I say, "What need we any further witnesses?" Nobody denies that Jesus Christ was crucified as the result of a combination of Sanhedrim and Pilate. What set the Jewish rulers against Him with such virulent and murderous determination? Is there anything in the life of Jesus Christ, if it is watered down as the people who want to knock out all the supernatural desire to water it down—is there anything in the life that will account for the inveterate acrimony and hostility which pursued Him to the death? The fact remains that, whether evangelists and apostles

misconceived His teaching when they gave such prominence to His personality and His lofty claims, His enemies were under the same delusion, if it were a delusion; and the reason why the whole orthodox religionism of Judaism rejoiced when He was nailed to the Cross was summed up in the taunt which they flung at Him as He hung there, "If He be the Son of God, let Him come down, and we will believe Him."

So, brethren, I put into the witness-box Annas and Caiaphas and all their satellites, and I say, "What need we any further witnesses?" He died because He declared that He was the Son of God.

And I beseech you ask yourselves whether we are not being put off with a maimed version of His teaching, if there is struck out of it this its central characteristic, that He, "the sage and humble," declared that He was "likewise One with the Creator."

II.—Secondly, note how we have here the witness that Jesus Christ assented always to the loftiest meaning that men attached to His claims.

I have already pointed out the remarkable difference between the explanations which He condescended to give to the Roman governor as to the perfectly innocent meaning of His claim to be the King of Israel, and His silence before the Sanhedrim. That silence is only explicable because they rightly understood the meaning of the claim which they contemptuously and perversely rejected. Jesus Christ knew that His death was the forfeit, as I have said, and yet He locked His lips and said not a word.

In like manner when, on the other occasion to which I have already referred, the Pharisees stumbled

at His claims to forgive sins, He said nothing to soften down that claim. If He had meant then only what some people would desire to make Him mean when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee"—viz., that He was simply acting as a minister of the Divine forgiveness, and assuring a poor sinner that God had pardoned him—why, in common honesty, in discharge of His plain obligations of a teacher, did He not say so—not for His own sake, but for the sake of preventing such a tremendous misunderstanding of His meaning? But He let them go away with the conviction that He intended to assert the Divine prerogative, and vindicated the assertion by doing what only the Divine power could do: "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, He saith unto the sick of the palsy, Take up thy bed and walk." There was no need for Him to have wrought a miracle to establish His right to tell a poor soul that God forgave sin. And the fact that the miracle was supposed to be the demonstration and the vindication of His right to declare forgiveness shows that He was exercising that prerogative which belongs, as they rightly said, to God only.

And in precisely the same manner, the commonest obligations of honesty, the plain duty of a misunderstood Teacher, to say nothing of the duty of self-preservation, ought to have opened His lips in the presence of the Jewish authorities, if they understood wrongly and set too high their estimate of the meaning of His claims. His silence establishes the fact that they understood them aright.

And so, all through His life, we have this peculiarity

that He never puts aside as too lofty for truth men's highest interpretations of His claims, nor as too lowly for their mutual relation the lowest reverence which bowed before Him. Peter, in the house of Cornelius, said, "Stand up, for I myself also am a man." Paul and Barnabas, when the priests brought out the oxen and garlands to the gates of Lystra, could say, "We also are men of like passions with yourselves." But this meek Jesus let men fall at His feet; and women wash them with their tears and wipe them with the hairs of their head; and souls stretch out maimed hands of faith, and grasp Him as their only hope. When His apostle said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," His answer was, "Blessed art thou, . . . for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee," and when another exclaimed, "My Lord and my God," this Pattern of all meekness accepted and endorsed the title, and pronounced a benediction on all who, not having seen Him, should hereafter attain a like faith.

Now I want to know whether that characteristic, which runs through all His life, and is inseparable from it, can be vindicated on any ground except the ground that He was God manifest in the flesh. Either Jesus Christ had a greedy appetite for excessive adoration, was a victim to diseased vanity and ever-present self-regard—the most damning charge that you can bring against a religious teacher—or He accepted love and reverence and trust, because the love and the reverence and the trust knit souls to the Incarnate God their Saviour.

III.—And so, lastly, we have here witness to

the only alternative to the acceptance of His claims.

He hath spoken "blasphemy." Not that He had derogated from the dignity of Divinity, but that He had presumed to participate in it. And it seems to me, with all deference, that this rough alternative is the only legitimate one. If Jesus Christ did make such claims, and His relation to the Jewish hierarchy and His death are, as I have shown you, apart even from the testimony of the evangelists, strong confirmation of the fact that He did — if Jesus Christ did make such claims, and they were not valid, one of two things follows. Either He believed them, and then, what about His sanity? or He did not believe them, and then, what about His honesty? In either case, what about His claims to be a Teacher of religion? What about His claims to be the Pattern of humanity? That part of His teaching and character is either the manifestation of His glory or it is like some of those fatal black seams that run down and penetrate into the substance of a fair white marble statue, marring all the rest of its pale and celestial beauty. Brethren, it seems to me that, when all is said and done, we come to one of three things about Jesus Christ. Either "He blasphemeth" if He said these things, and they were not true, or "He is beside Himself" if He said these things and believed them, or

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ ;  
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

Now I know that there are many men who, I venture to say, are far better than their creed, and who, believing it impossible to accept, in their plain

meaning, the plain claims of Jesus Christ to Divinity, do yet cleave to Him with a love and a reverence and an obedience which more orthodox men might well copy. And far be it from me to say one word which might seem even to quench the faintest beam of light that, shining from His perfect character, draws any heart, however imperfectly, to Himself. Only, if I speak to any such at this time, I beseech them to follow the light which draws them, and to see whether their reverence for that fair character should not lead them to accept implicitly the claims that came from His own lips. I humbly venture to say that if we know anything at all about Jesus Christ, we know that He lived declaring Himself to be the everlasting Son of the Father, and that He died because He did so declare Himself. And I beseech you to ponder the question whether reverence for Him and admiration of His character can be logically and reasonably retained, side by side with the repudiation of that which is the most distinctive part of His message to men.

Oh, brethren, if it is true that God has come in the flesh, and that that sweet, gracious, infinitely beautiful life is really the revelation of the heart of God, then what a beam of sunshine falls upon all the darkness of this world! Then God is love; then that love holds us all; does not shrink from dying for us, and lives for ever to bless us. If these claims are true, what should our attitude be but that of infinite trust, love, submission, obedience, and the shaping of our lives after the pattern of His life?

These rejectors, when they said, "He speaketh

blasphemies," were sealing their own doom, and the ruined temple and nineteen centuries of wandering misery show what comes to men who hear Christ declaring that He is the Son of the living God and the Judge of the world, and who find nothing in the words but blasphemy.

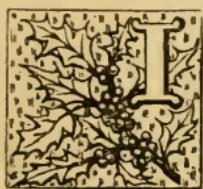
On the other hand, if we will answer His question, "Whom say ye that I am?" as the apostle answered it, we shall, like the apostle, receive a benediction from His lips, and be set on that faith as on a rock against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

*5th line by His Son*  
*1st of 12*

VI.

The Servant=Lord and His Servants.

“EVEN as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”—MATT. xx. 28.



IT seems at first sight strangely unsympathetic and irrelevant that the ambitious request of James and John and their foolish mother, that they should sit at Christ's right hand and His left in His kingdom, should have been occasioned by, and have followed immediately upon, our Lord's solemn and pathetic announcement of His sufferings. But the connection is not difficult to trace. The disciples believed that, in some inexplicable way, the sufferings which our Lord was shadowing forth were to be the immediate precursors of His assuming His regal dignity. And so they took time by the forelock, as they thought, and made haste to ensure their places in the kingdom, which they believed was now ready to burst upon them. Other occasions in the Gospels in which we find similar quarrelling among the disciples as to pre-eminence are similarly associated with references made by our Lord to His approaching Crucifixion. On a former occasion He cured these

misplaced ambitions by setting a child in the midst of them. On this He cures them by a still more pathetic and wonderful example, His own; and He says, "I, in My lowliness and service, am to be your Pattern. In Me see the basis of all true greatness, and the right use of all influence and authority. The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

I.—So, then, let us look first at the perfect life of service of the Servant-Lord.

Now, in order to appreciate the significance of that life of service, we must take into account the introductory words, "The Son of Man came." They declare His pre-existence, His voluntary entrance into the conditions of humanity, and His denuding Himself of "the glory which He had with the Father before the world was." We shall never understand the Servant-Christ until we understand that he is the Eternal Son of the Father. His service began long before any of His acts of sympathetic and self-forgetting lowliness rendered help to the miserable here upon earth. His service began when He laid aside, not the garments of earth, but the vesture of the heavens, and girded Himself, not with the cincture woven in man's looms, but with the flesh of our humanity, "and being found in fashion as a man," bowed Himself to enter into the conditions of earth. This was the first, the chiefest of all His acts of service, and the sanctity and awfulness of it run through the list of all His deeds and make them unspeakably great. It was much that His hands should heal, that His lips should comfort, that His

heart should bleed with sympathy for sorrow. But, oh! it was more that He *had* hands to touch, lips to speak to human hearts, and the heart of a man and a brother to feel *with* as well as *for* us. "The Son of Man came." There is the transcendent example of the true use of greatness; there is the conspicuous instance of the true basis of authority and rule. For it was because He was found in fashion as a Man that He has won a name that is above every name, and that there have accrued to Him the "many crowns" which He wears at the Father's side.

But then, passing beyond this, we may dwell, though all imperfectly, upon the features, familiar as they are, of that wonderful life of self-oblivious and self-sacrificing ministration to others. Think of the purity of the source from all which these wonders and blessednesses of service for man flowed. The life of Jesus Christ is self-forgetting love made visible. Scientists tell us that, by the arrangement of particles of sand upon plates of glass, there can be made, as it were, perceptible to the eye, the sweetness of musical sounds; and each note when struck will fling the particles into varying forms of beauty. The life of Jesus Christ presents in shapes of loveliness and symmetry the else invisible music of a Divine love. He lets us see the rhythm of the Father's heart. The source from which His ministrations have flowed is the pure source of a perfect love. Ancient legends consolidated the sunbeams into the bright figure of the far-darting god of light. And so the sunbeams of the Divine love have, as it were, drawn themselves together and shaped themselves into the human form of the Son of

Man who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

No taint of bye-ends was in that service; no side-long glances at possible advantages of influence, or reputation, or the like, which so often deform men's philanthropies and services to one another. No more than the sunbeam shines for the sake of collateral issues which may benefit itself, did Jesus Christ seek His own advantage in ministering to men. There was no speck of black in that lustrous white robe, but all was perfectly unselfish love. Like the clear sea, weedless and stainless, that laves the marble steps of the palaces of Venice, the deep ocean of Christ's service to man was pure to the depths throughout.

That perfect ministry of the Servant-Lord was rendered with strange spontaneity and cheerfulness. One of the evangelists says, in a very striking and beautiful phrase, that "He healed them that had need of healing," as if the presence of the necessity evoked the supply by the instinctive action of a perfect love. There was never in Him one trace of reluctance to have leisure broken in upon, repose disturbed, or even communion with God abbreviated. All could come always; they never came inopportunately. We often cheerfully take up a burden of service, but find it very hard to continue bearing it. But He was willing to come down from the mountain of Transfiguration because there was a demoniac boy in the plain; and therefore He put aside the temptation—"Let us build here three tabernacles." He was willing to abandon His desert seclusion because the multitude sought Him. Interrupted in His communion with the

Father by His disciples, He had no impatient word to say, but "Let us go unto other cities also, for therefore am I sent." When He stepped from the fishing boat on the other side of the lake to which he had fled for a moment of repose, He was glad when He saw the multitude who had pertinaciously outrun Him, and were waiting for Him on the beach. On His Cross He had leisure to turn from His own physical sufferings and the weight of a world's sin, which lay upon Him, to look at that penitent by His side, and He ended His life in the ministry of mercy to a brigand. And thus cheerfully, and always without a thought of self, "He came to minister."

Think, too, of the sweep of His ministrations. They took in all men; they were equally open to enemies and to friends, to mockers and to sympathizers. Think of the variety of the gifts which He brought in His ministry—caring for body and for soul; alleviating sorrow, binding up wounds, purifying hearts; dealing with sin, the fountain, and with miseries, its waters, with equal helpfulness and equal love.

And think of how that ministering was always ministration by a Lord. For there is nothing to me more remarkable in the Gospel narrative than the way in which, side by side, there lie in Christ's life the two elements, so difficult to harmonize in fact, and so impossible to have been harmonized in a legend, the consciousness of authority and the humility of a servant. The paradox with which John introduces his sweet pathetic story of our Lord's washing the disciples' feet is true of, and is illustrated by, every instance of more than ordinary lowliness and self-

oblivion which the Gospel contains. "Jesus, knowing that He had come from God, and went to God, and that the Father had given all things into His hand"—did what? "Laid aside His garments and took a towel and girded Himself." The two things ever go together. And thus, in His lowliest abasement, as in a star entangled in a cloud, there shine out, all the more broad and conspicuous for the environment which wraps them, the beams of His uncreated lustre.

That ministration was a service that never shrank from stern rebuke. His service was no mere soft and pliant, sympathetic helpfulness, but it could smite and stab, and be severe, and knit its brow, and speak stern words, as all true service must. For it is not service but cruelty to sympathize with the sinner, and say nothing in condemnation of his sin. And yet no sternness is blessed which is not plainly prompted by desire to help.

Now, I know far better than you do how wretchedly inadequate all these poor words of mine have been to the great theme that I have been trying to talk about, but they may at least—like a little water poured into a pump—have set your minds working upon the theme, and, I hope, to better purpose. "The Son of Man came . . . to minister."

II.—Now, secondly, note the service that should be modelled on His.

Oh! brethren, if we, however imperfectly, have taken into mind and heart that picture of Him who was and *is* amongst us as One that serveth, how sharp a test, and how stringent, and, as it seems to us sometimes, impossible, a commandment are involved in the "even

as" of my text. When we think of our grudging services; when we think of how much more apt we are to insist upon what men owe to us than of what we owe to them; how ready we are to demand, how slow we are to give; how we flame up in what we think is warranted indignation if we do not get the observance, or the sympathy, or the attention that we require, and yet how little we give of these, we may well say, "Thou hast set a pattern that can only drive us to despair." If we would read our Gospels more than we do with the feeling, as we trace that Master through each of His phases of sympathy and self-oblivion and self-sacrifice and service, "that is what I should be," what a different book the New Testament would be to us, and what different people you and I would be.

There is no ground on which we can rest greatness or superiority in Christ's Kingdom except this ground of service. And there is no use that we can make either of money or of talents, of acquirements or opportunities, except the use of helping our fellows with them, which will stand the test of this model and example: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The servant who serves for love is highest in the hierarchy of Heaven. God, who is supreme, has stooped lower than any that are beneath Him, and His true rule follows, not because He is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or any of those other pompous Latin words which describe what men call His attributes, but because He loves best, and does most for the most.

And that is what you and I ought to be. We may

well take the lesson to ourselves. I have no space nor time, and, I hope, no need to enlarge upon it; but be sure of this, if we are ever to be near the right and the left of the Master in His Kingdom, there is one way, and only one way, to get it, and that is to make self abdicate its authority as the centre of our lives, and to enthrone there Christ, and for His sake all our brethren. Be ambitious to be first, but, remember, *Noblesse oblige*. He that is first must be last.

He that is Servant of all is Master of all. That is the only mastery that is worth anything, the devotion of hearts that circle round the source from which they draw light and warmth. What is it that makes a mother the queen of her children? Simply that all her life she has been their servant, and never thought about herself, but always about them.

Now, I intended to have said a word or two about the application of these threadbare principles in the Church and in society, but I have no time to do that, only let me say in a word—here is the one law on which pre-eminence in the Church is to be allocated.

What becomes of sacerdotal hierarchies, what becomes of the “lords over God’s heritage,” if the one ground of pre-eminence is service? I know, of course, that there may be different forms embodying one principle, but it seems to me that that form of Church polity is nearest the mind of Christ in which the only dignity is dignity of service, and the only use of place is the privilege of stooping and helping.

This fruitful principle shall one day shape civil as well as ecclesiastical societies. For the present, our

Lord draws a contrast between the world's and the Christian notions of rank and dignity. "It shall not be so among you," says He. And the nobler conception of eminence and service set forth in His disciples, if they are true to their Lord and their duty, will leaven, and we may hope finally transform, society, sweeping away all vulgar notions of greatness as depending on birth, or wealth, or ruder forms of powers, and marshalling men according to Christ's order of precedence, in which helpfulness is pre-eminence and service is supremacy, while conversely pre-eminence is used to help and superiority stoops to serve.

One remark will close my sermon. You have to take the last words of this verse if you are ever going to put in practice its first words. "Even as the Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister":—if Jesus Christ had stopped there He would only have been one more of the long roll of ineffectual preachers and prophets who show men the better way, and leave them struggling in the mire. But He did not stop there:—"Even as the Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many."

Ah! the Cross, with its burden of the sacrifice for the world's sin, is the only power which will supply us with a sufficient motive for the loftiness of Christlike service. I know that there is plenty of entirely irreligious and Christless beneficence in the world. And God forbid that I should say a word to seem to depreciate that. But sure I am that for the noblest, purest, most widely diffused and blessedly

operative kinds of service of man, there is no motive and spring anywhere except "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." And, bought by that service and that blood, it will be possible, and it is obligatory upon all of us, to "do unto others," as He Himself said, "as I have done to you." "The servant is not greater than his Lord."

## VII.

# What the Historic Christ Taught about His Death.

“THE Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many.”—MATT. xx. 28.



WE hear a great deal at present about going back to the Christ of the Gospels. In so far as that phrase and the movement of thought which it describes are a protest against the substitution of doctrines for the Person whom the doctrines represent, I, for one, rejoice in it. But I believe that the antithesis suggested by the phrase, and by some of its advocates avowed, between the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ of the Epistles, is false. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ of the Epistles, as I humbly venture to believe. And I cannot but see that there is a possibility of a movement which, carried out legitimately, should command the fullest sympathy of every Christian heart, degenerating into the rejection of all the supernatural elements in the nature and work of our Lord, and leaving us with a meagre human Christ, shrunken and impotent. The Christ of the Gospels, by all means; but let it be the whole Christ of all the

Gospels, the Christ over whose cradle angels sang, by whose empty grave angels watched, whose ascending form angels beheld and proclaimed that He should come again to be our Judge. Go back to that Christ, and all will be well.

Now it seems to me that one direction in which there is a possibility of such movement as I have referred to being one-sided and harmful is in reference to the conception which we form of the death of Jesus Christ. And therefore I want you to listen for a few moments to me at this time whilst I try to bring out what is plain in the words before us; and is, as I humbly believe, interwoven in the whole texture of all the Gospels—viz., the conception which Jesus Christ Himself formed of the meaning of His death.

I.—The first thing that I notice is that the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was to be His own act.

I do not think that it is an undue or pedantic pressing of the significance of the words before us if I ask you to notice two of the significant expressions in this text. "The Son of Man *came*," and that "to *give* His life." The one word refers to the act of entrance into, the other to the act of departure from, this earthly life. They correspond in so far as that both bring into prominence Christ's own consent, volition, and action in the very two things about which men are least consulted, their being born and their dying.

"The Son of Man *came*." Now if that expression occurred but once it might be minimized as being only a synonym for birth, having no special force. But if you will notice that it is our Lord's habitual word

about Himself, only varied occasionally by another one equally significant when He says that He "was sent"; and if you will further notice that all through the Gospels He never but once speaks of Himself as being "born," I think you will admit that I am not making too much of a word when I say that when Christ, out of the depths of His consciousness, said "the Son of Man *came*," He was teaching us that He lived before He was born, and that behind the natural fact of birth there lay the supernatural fact of His choosing to be incarnated for man's redemption. The one instance in which He does speak of Himself as "being born" is most instructive in this connection. For it was before the Roman governor; and He accompanied the clause in which He said, "to this end was I born"—which was adapted to Pilate's level of intelligence—with another one which seemed to be inserted to satisfy His own sense of fitness, rather than for any light that it would give to its first hearer, "And for this cause came I into the world." The two things were not synonymous; but before the birth there was the coming, and Jesus Christ was born because He willed to come. So says the Christ of the Gospels; and the Christ of the Epistles is represented as "taking upon Him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man." Do you accept that as true of "the historic Christ"?

With precise correspondence, if we turn to the other end of His life, we find the equally significant expression in my text which asserts for it, too, that the other necessity to which humanity necessarily and without their own volition bow was to Christ a

matter of choice. "The Son of Man came to *give*." "No man taketh it from Me," as He said on another occasion. "I lay it down of Myself." "The good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." "My flesh . . . I give for the world's life." Now, brethren, we are not to regard these words as mere vague expressions for a willing surrender to the necessity of death, but as expressing what I believe is taught us all through Scripture, and is fundamental to any real grasp of the real Christ, that He died because He chose, and He chose because He loved. What meant that "loud voice," witnessing, with which He said, "It is finished," but that there was no physical exhaustion, which was the immediate occasion of death by crucifixion? What meant that surprising rapidity with which the last moment came in His case, to the astonishment of the stolid bystanders? They meant the same thing as I believe that the Evangelists meant when they, with one consent, employed expressions to describe Christ's death, which may indeed be only euphemisms, but are apparently declarations of its voluntary character. "He gave up the ghost." "He yielded His Spirit." He breathed forth His life, and so He died.

As one of the old fathers said, "Who is this that thus falls asleep when He will? To die is weakness, but thus to die is power." "The weakness of God is stronger than man." The desperate king of Israel bade his slave kill him, and when the menial shrunk from such sacrilege he fell upon his own sword. Christ bade His servant Death, "Do this," and he did it; and dying, our Lord and Master declared Himself

the Lord and Master of Death. This is a part of the history of the historic Christ. Do you believe it?

II.—Then, secondly, the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was one chief aim of His coming.

I have omitted words from my text which intervene between its first and its last ones; not because I regard them as unimportant, but because they would lead us into too wide a field to cover in one sermon. But I would pray you to observe how the re-insertion of them throws immense light upon the significance of the words which I have chosen. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." That covers the whole ground of His gracious and gentle dealings here on earth, His tenderness, self-abnegation, sympathy, healing, and helpfulness. Then, side by side with that, and as the crowning manifestation of His work of service, without which His life—gracious, radiant, sweet as it is—would still want something of its power, He sets His death.

Surely that is an altogether unexampled phenomenon; altogether a unique and unparalleled thing, that a *man* should regard that which for all workers, thinkers, speakers, poets, philanthropists, is the sad term of their activity, as being a part of His work; and not only a part, but so conspicuous a part that it was a purpose which He had in view from the very beginning, and before the beginning, of His earthly life. So Calvary was to Jesus Christ no interruption, tragic and premature, of His life's activities. His death was no mere alternative set before Him, which He chose rather than to be unfaithful or dumb. He

did not die because He was hounded by hostile priests, but He came on purpose that He might so end His career.

I need not remind you of, and the time would not permit me to dwell upon, other instances in the Gospels in which our Lord speaks the same language. At the very beginning of His public ministry He told the inquiring rabbi—who came to Him with the notion that He would be somewhat flattered by His recognition by one of the authoritative and wise pundits of the nation—that “the Son of Man must be lifted up.” The necessity was before Him, but it was no unwelcome necessity, for it sprung from His own love. It was the very aim of His coming, to live a Servant and to die a Ransom.

Dear brethren, let me press upon you this plain truth, that no conception of Christ’s death which looks upon it merely as the close, by pathetic sufferings, of a life to the activities of which it adds nothing but pathos, approaches the signification of it which inheres in the thought that this was the aim and purpose with which Jesus Christ was incarnate, that He should live indeed the pure and sweet life that He lived, but equally that He should die the painful and bitter death that He died. He was not merely a martyr, though the first of them, but something far more, which we shall see presently. If to you the death of Jesus Christ is the same in kind, however superior in degree, as those of patriots, and reformers, and witnesses for the truth, and martyrs for righteousness, then I humbly venture to represent that, instead of going back to, you have gone away from, the Christ

of the Gospels, who said, "The Son of Man came . . . to give His life"; and that such a Christ is not a historic but an imaginary one.

III.—So, thirdly, notice that the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was a ransom.

A ransom is a price paid in exchange for captives, that they may be liberated; or for culprits, that they may be set free. And that was Christ's thought of what He had to die for. There lay the "must."

I do not dwell upon the conception of our condition involved in that word. We are all bound and held by the chain of our sins. We all stand guilty before God, and, as I believe, there is a necessity in that loving Divine nature whereby it is impossible that without a ransom there can be, in the interests of mankind and in the interests of righteousness, forgiveness of sins. I do not mean that in the words before us there is a developed theory of atonement, but I do mean that no man, dealing with them fairly, can strike out of them the notion of vicarious suffering in exchange for, or instead of, many. This is no occasion for theological discussion, nor am I careful now to set forth a fully-developed doctrine; but I am declaring, as God helps me, what is to me, and I pray may be to you, the central thought about that Cross of Calvary, that on it there is made the sacrifice for the world's sins.

And, dear brethren, I beseech you to consider, how can we save the character of Jesus Christ, accepting these Gospels, which on the hypothesis about which I am now speaking are valid sources of knowledge,

without recognizing that He deliberately led His disciples to believe that He died for—that is, instead of—them that put their trust in Him? For remember that not only such words as these of my text are to be taken into account. Remember that it was the Christ of the Gospels who established that last rite of the Lord's Supper, in which the broken bread, and the separation between the bread and the wine, both indicated a violent death, and who said about both the one and the other of the double symbols, "For you." I do not understand how any body of professing believers, rejecting Christ's death as the sacrifice for sin, can find a place in their beliefs or in their practice for that institution of the Lord's Supper, or can rightly interpret the sacred words spoken then.

This is why the Cross was Christ's aim. This is why He said, with His dying breath, "It is finished." This truth is the explanation of His words, "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

And this truth of a ransom-price lies at the basis of all vigorous Christianity. A Christianity without a dying Christ is a dying Christianity. And history shows us that the expansiveness and elevating power of the Gospel depend on the prominence given to the sacrifice on the Cross. An old fable says that the only thing that melts adamant is the blood of a lamb. The Gospel reveals the precious blood of Jesus Christ, His death for us as a ransom, as the one power which melts hostility and binds hearts to Him. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ who taught that He died for us.

IV.—Lastly, the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death had world-wide power.

He says here “a ransom for *many*.” Now that word is not used here in contradistinction to “all,” nor in contradistinction to “few.” It is distinctly employed as emphasizing the contrast between the single death and the wide extent of its benefits; and in terms which, rigidly taken, simply express indefiniteness, it expresses universality. That that is so seems to me to be plain enough, if we notice other places of Scripture to which, at this stage of my sermon, I can but allude. For instance, in Romans v. the two expressions, “the many” and the “all,” alternate in reference to the extent of the power of Christ’s sacrifice for men. And the Apostle in another place, where probably there may be an allusion to these words before us, so varies them as that He declares that Jesus Christ in His death was the ransom “instead of all.” But I do not need to dwell upon these, “Many” is a vague word, and in it we see the dim crowds stretching away beyond vision, for whom that death was to be the means of salvation. I take it that the words of our text have an allusion to words in the great prophecy in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, in which we read, “By My knowledge shall My righteous Servant” (mark the allusion in our text, “Who came to minister”) “justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.”

So, brethren, I believe that I am not guilty of unduly widening out our Lord’s thought when I say that the indefinite “many” is practically “all.” And, brother, if “all,” then *you*; if all, then *me*; if all, then

*each.* Think of a man, nineteen centuries ago, away in a little insignificant corner of the world, standing up and saying, "My death is the price paid in exchange for the world"! That is meekness and lowliness of heart, is it? That is humility, so beautiful in a teacher, is it? How any man can accept the veracity of these narratives, believe that Jesus Christ said anything the least like that, not believe that He was the Divine Son of the Father, the Sacrifice for the world's sin, yet profess—and honestly profess, I doubt not, in many cases—to retain reverence and admiration, all but adoration, for Him, I confess, for my poor part, that I cannot understand.

But I ask you, what you are going to do with these thoughts and teachings of the Christ of the Gospels? Are you going to take them for true? Are you going to trust your salvation to Him? Are you going to accept the ransom and say, "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant: Thou hast loosed my bonds"? Brethren, the Christ of the Gospels, by all means; but the Christ that said, "The Son of Man came to . . . give His life a ransom for many." My Christ, and your Christ, and the world's Christ is "the Christ that died: yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

## VIII.

### “Concerning the Crown.”

“THEY do it to obtain a corruptible crown ; but we an incorruptible.”—1 COR. ix. 25.



ONE of the most famous of the Greek athletic festivals was held close by Corinth. Its prize was a pine-wreath from the neighbouring sacred grove. The painful abstinence and training of ten months, and the fierce struggle of ten minutes, had for their result a twist of green leaves, that withered in a week, and a little fading fame that was worth scarcely more, and lasted scarcely longer. The struggle and the discipline were noble ; the end was contemptible. And so it is with all lives whose aims are lower than the highest. They are greater in the powers they put forth than in the objects they compass, and the question, “What is it for ?” is like a douche of cold water from the cart that lays the clouds of dust in the ways.

So, says Paul, praising the effort and contemning the prize, “they do it to obtain a corruptible crown.” And yet there was a soul of goodness in this evil thing. Though these festivals were indissolubly intertwined with idolatry, and besmirched with much

sensuous evil, yet he deals with them as he does with war and with slavery; points to the disguised nobility that lay beneath the hideousness, and holds up even these low things as a pattern for Christian men.

But I do not mean here to talk so much about the general bearing of this text as rather to deal with its designation of the aim and reward of Christian energy, that "incorruptible crown" of which my text speaks. And in doing so I desire to take into account likewise other places in Scripture in which the same metaphor occurs.

I.—The crown.

Let me recall the other places where the same metaphor is employed. We find the Apostle, in the immediate prospect of death, rising into a calm rapture in which imprisonment and martyrdom lose their terrors, as he thinks of the "crown of righteousness" which the Lord will give to him. The Epistle of James, again, assures the man who endures temptation that "the Lord will give him the crown of life which He has promised to all them that love Him." The Lord Himself from heaven repeats that promise to the persecuted Church at Smyrna: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The elders cast their crowns before the feet of Him that sitteth upon the throne. The Apostle Peter, in his letter, stimulates the elders upon earth to faithful discharge of their duty, by the hope that thereby they shall "receive a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away." So all these instances taken together with this of my text enable us to gather two or three lessons.

It is extremely unlikely that all these instances of the occurrence of the emblem carry with them reference, such as that in my text, to the prize at the athletic festivals. For Peter and James, intense Jews as they were, had probably never seen, and possibly never heard of, the struggles at the Isthmus and at Olympus and elsewhere. The Book of the Revelation draws its metaphors almost exclusively from the circle of Jewish practices and things. So that we have to look in other directions than the arena or the race-course to explain these other uses of the image. It is also extremely unlikely that in these other passages the reference is to a crown as the emblem of sovereignty, for that idea is expressed, as a rule, by another word in Scripture, which we have Anglicised as "diadem." The "crown" in all these passages is a garland twisted out of some growth of the field. In ancient usage roses were twined for revellers; pine-shoots or olive branches for the victors in the games; while the laurel was "the meed of mighty conquerors"; and plaited oak leaves were laid upon the brows of citizens who had deserved well of their country, and myrtle sprays crowned the fair locks of the bride.

And thus in these directions, and not towards the wrestling ground or the throne of the monarch, must we look for the ideas suggested by the emblem.

Now, if we gather together all these various uses of the word, there emerge two broad ideas, that the "crown" which is the Christian's aim is a state of triumphant repose and of festal enjoyment. There are other aspects of that great and dim future which correspond to other necessities of our nature, and I

suppose some harm has been done and some misconceptions have been induced, and some unreality imported into the idea of the Christian future by the too exclusive prominence given to these two ideas: victorious rest after the struggle, and abundant satisfaction of all desires. That future is other and more than a festival; it is other and more than repose. There are larger fields there for the operation of powers that have been trained and evolved here. The faithfulness of the steward is exchanged, according to Christ's great words, for the authority of the ruler over many cities. But still, do we not all know enough of the worry and turbulence and strained effort of the conflict here below to feel that to some of our deepest and not ignoble needs and desires that image appeals? The helmet that pressed upon the brow even whilst it protected the brain, and wore away the hair even whilst it was a defence, is lifted off, and on unruffled locks the garland is intertwined that speaks victory and befits a festival. One of the old prophets puts the same metaphor in words imperfectly represented by the English translation, when he promises "a crown" or a garland "for ashes"—instead of the symbol of mourning, strewed grey and gritty upon the dishevelled hair of the weepers, flowers twined into a wreath—"the oil of joy for mourning," and the festival "garment of praise" to dress the once heavy spirit. So the satisfaction of all desires, the accompaniments of a feast, in abundance, rejoicing and companionship, and conclusive conquest over all foes, are promised us in this great symbol.

But let us look at the passages separately, and we

shall find that they present the one thought with differences, and that if we combine these, as in a stereoscope, the picture gains solidity.

The crown is described in three ways. It is the crown of "life," of "glory," and of "righteousness." And I venture to think that these three epithets describe the material, so to speak, of which the wreath is composed. The everlasting flower of life, the radiant blossoms of glory, the white flower of righteousness; these are its components.

I need not enlarge upon them, nor will your time allow that I should. Here we have the promise of life, that fuller life which men want, "the life of which our veins are scant," even in the fullest tide and hey-day of earthly existence. The promise sets that future over against the present, as if then first should men know what it means to live: so buoyant, elastic, unwearied shall be their energies, so manifold the new outlets for activity, and the new inlets for the surrounding glory and beauty; so incorruptible and glorious shall be their new being. Here we live a living death; there we shall live indeed; and that will be the crown, not only in regard of physical, but in regard of spiritual, powers and consciousness.

But remember that all this full tide of life is Christ's gift. There is no such thing as natural immortality; there is no such thing as independent life. All Being, from the lowest creature up to the loftiest created spirit, exists by one law, the continual impartation to it of life from the fountain of life, according to its capacities. And unless Jesus Christ, all through the eternal ages of the future, imparted to the happy

souls that sit garlanded at His board the life by which they live, the wreaths would wither on their brows, and the brows would melt away, and dissolve from beneath the wreaths. "I will give him a crown of life."

It is a crown of "glory," and that means a lustrousness of character imparted by radiation and reflection from the central light of the glory of God. "Then shall the righteous blaze out like the sun in the Kingdom of My Father." Our eyes are dim, but we can at least divine the far-off flashing of that great light, and may ponder upon what hidden depths and miracles of transformed perfectness and unimagined lustre wait for us, dark and limited as we are here, in the assurance that we all shall be changed into the "likeness of the body of His glory."

It is a crown of "righteousness." Though that phrase may mean the wreath that rewards righteousness, it seems more in accordance with the other similar expressions to which I have referred to regard it, too, as the material of which the crown is composed. It is not enough that there should be festal gladness, not enough that there should be calm repose, not enough that there should be flashing glory, not enough that there should be fulness of life. To accord with the intense moral earnestness of the Christian system there must be, emphatically, in the Christian hope, cessation of all sin and investiture with all purity. The word means the same thing as the ancient promise, "Thy people shall be all righteous." It means the same thing as the latest promise of the ascended Christ, "They shall walk with Me in white."

And it sets, I was going to say, the very climax and culmination on the other hopes, declaring that absolute, stainless, infallible righteousness which one day shall belong to our weak and sinful spirits.

These, then, are the elements, and on them all is stamped the signature of perpetuity. The victor's wreath is tossed on the ashen heap, the reveller's flowers droop as he sits in the heat of the banqueting-hall; the bride's myrtle blossom fades though she lay it away in a safe place. The crown of life is incorruptible. It is twined of amaranth, ever blossoming into new beauty and never fading.

II.—Now look, secondly, at the discipline by which the crown is won.

Observe, first of all, that in more than one of the passages to which we have already referred great emphasis is laid upon Christ as *giving* the crown. That is to say, that blessed future is not won by effort, but is bestowed as a free gift. It is given from the hands which have procured it, and, as I may say, twined it for us. Unless His brows had been pierced with the crown of thorns, ours would never have worn the garland of victory. Jesus provides the sole means, by His work, by which any man can enter into that inheritance; and Jesus, as the righteous Judge who bestows the rewards, which are likewise the results, of their life here, gives the crown. It remains for ever the gift of His love. “The wages of sin is death.” But we rise above the region of retribution and desert when we pass to the next clause—“the gift of God is eternal life,” and that “through Jesus Christ.”

Whilst, then, this must be laid as the basis of all,

there must also, with equal earnestness and clearness, be set forth the other thought that Christ's gift has conditions, which conditions these passages plainly set forth. In the one which I have read as a text we have these conditions declared as being twofold—protracted discipline and continuous effort. The same metaphor employed by the same Apostle, in his last dying utterance, associates his consciousness that he had fought the good fight and run his race, like the pugilists and runners of the arena, with the hope that he shall receive the crown of righteousness. James declares that it is given to the man who *endures* temptation, not only in the sense of bearing, but of so bearing as not thereby to be injured in Christian character and growth in Christian life. Peter asserts that it is the reward of self-denying discharge of duty. And the Lord from heaven lays down the condition of faithfulness unto death as the necessary pre-requisite of His gift of the crown of life. In two of the passages there is included, though not precisely on the level of these other requirements, the love of Him and the love of "His appearing," as the necessary qualifications for the gift of the crown.

So, to begin with, unless a man has such a love to Jesus Christ as that he is happy in His presence, and longs to have Him near, as parted loving souls do; and, especially, is looking forward to that great judicial coming, and feeling that there is no tremor in his heart at the prospect of meeting the Judge, but an outgoing of desire and love at the hope of seeing his Saviour and his Friend, what right has he to expect the crown? None! And he will never get it. There

is a test for us which may well make some of us ask ourselves, Are we Christians, then, at all?

And then, beyond that, there are all these other conditions which I have pointed out, which may be gathered into one—strenuous discharge of daily duty and continual effort after following in Christ's footsteps.

This needs to be as fully and emphatically preached as the other doctrine that eternal life is the gift of God. All manner of mischiefs may come, and have come, from either of these twin thoughts, wrenched apart. But let us weave them as closely together as the stems of the flowers that make the garlands are twined, and feel that there is a perfect consistency of both in theory, and that there must be a continual union of both, in our belief and in our practice. Eternal life is the gift of God, on condition of our diligence and earnestness. It is not all the same whether you are a lazy Christian or not. It does make an eternal difference in our condition whether here we "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." We have to receive the crown as a gift; we have to wrestle and run, as contending for a prize.

III.—And now, lastly, note the power of the reward as motive for life.

Paul says roundly in our text, that the desire to obtain the incorruptible crown is a legitimate spring of Christian action. Now, I do not need to waste your time and my own in defending Christian morality from the fantastic objection that it is low and selfish, because it encourages itself to efforts by the prospect

of the crown. If there are any men who are Christians—if such a contradiction can be even stated in words—only because of what they hope to gain thereby in another world, they will not get what they hope for; and they would not like it if they did. I do not believe that there are any such; and sure I am, if there are, that it is not Christianity that has made them so. But a thing that we must not set as the supreme motive, we may rightly accept as a subsidiary encouragement. We are not Christians unless the dominant motive of our lives be the love of the Lord Jesus Christ; and unless we feel a necessity, because of loving Him, to aim to be like Him. But, that being so, who shall hinder me from quickening my flagging energies, and stimulating my torpid faith and encouraging my cowardice, by the thought that yonder there remain rest, victory, the fulness of life, the flashing of glory, and the purity of perfect righteousness? If such hopes are low and selfish as motives, would God that more of us were obedient to such low and selfish motives!

Now it seems to me that this spring of action is not as strong in the Christians of this day as it used to be, and as it should be. You do not hear much about heaven in ordinary preaching. I do not think it occupies a very large place in the average Christian man's mind. We have all got such a notion nowadays of the great good that the Gospel does in society and in the present, and some of us have been so frightened by the nonsense that has been talked about the "other-worldliness" of Christianity—as if that was a disgrace to it—that it seems to me that the

future of glory and blessedness has very largely faded away, as a motive for Christian men's energies, like the fresco off a neglected convent wall.

And I want to say, dear brethren, that I believe, for my part, that we suffer terribly by the comparative neglect into which this side of Christian truth has fallen. Do you not think that it would make a difference to you if you really believed, and carried always with you in your thoughts, the thrilling consciousness that every act of the present was registered, and would tell on the far side yonder?

We do not know much of that future, and these days are intolerant of mere unverifiable hypotheses. But accuracy of knowledge and definiteness of impression do not always go together, nor is there the fulness of the one wanted for the clearness and force of the other. Though the thread which we throw across the abyss is very slender, it is strong enough, like the string of a boy's kite, to bear the messengers of hope and desire that we may send up it, and strong enough to bear the gifts of grace that will surely come down along it.

We cannot understand to-day unless we look at it with eternity for a background. The landscape lacks its explanation, until the mists lift and we see the white summits of the Himalayas lying behind and glorifying the low sandy plain. Would your life not be different; would not the things in it that look great be wholesomely dwindled and yet be magnified; would not sorrow be calmed, and life become “a solemn scorn of ills,” and energies be stimulated, and all be

different, if you really "did it to obtain an incorruptible crown?"

Brethren, let us try to keep more clearly before us, as solemn and blessed encouragement in our lives, these great thoughts. The garland hangs on the goal, but "a man is not crowned unless he strive according to the laws" of the arena. The laws are two: No man can enter for the conflict but by faith in Christ; no man can win in the struggle but by faithful effort. So the first law is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," and the second is, "Hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown."

## IX.

### The Lord's Supper a Declaratory Rite.

“. . . . YE do show the Lord's death till He come."  
1 COR. xi. 26.



THESE words occur in the course of the oldest narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The Apostle declares that he received his information directly from Jesus Christ. So that we have here an independent witness to the facts. The testimony carries us back beyond the date of the earliest of our existing gospels, and brings us within five-and-twenty years of the Crucifixion. By that early period, then, the Lord's Supper was universally observed; and not only so, but it had been in existence long enough to have been corrupted. The corruptions are instructive, as is also the apostolic method of dealing with them.

The abuses to which the Apostle refers, and which are his sole reason for mentioning the Lord's Supper at all, are mainly two, both of which cast great light on the earliest form of the ordinance. Some Corinthians were accustomed to make it an occasion for gluttony and intoxication, and some were accustomed to eat, as the Apostle says, "their own

supper," so breaking the unity which the rite was in part intended to express.

How would it have been possible for abuses of that sort to arise, unless the first form of the observance of the Lord's Supper had been associated with a common meal, and the domestic aspect been prominent in it? And how would individual hurry in partaking each one of his own supper have been possible, if there had been present an officiating priest to do his magic ere the rite could be observed? It is a strange picture, to our eyes, which necessarily arises from the consideration of these two abuses. And it is a long road from the upper room where the Corinthian Church met to the "tremendous sacrifice of the Mass."

The Apostle's way of dealing with the abuses is quite as remarkable as they are, and quite as illuminative, as I think, as to the true significance and sacredness of this ordinance. I simply take the words before us as they lie, noting the three points which he emphasizes in order to enforce his doctrine of the sanctity of the Lord's Supper. It is a proclamation. It is a proclamation of the death of Christ. It is a proclamation perpetually "till He come." That is all, and he thinks it is enough.

Now, then, let us deal with these three things.

I.—First, then, this great thought that the essential characteristic of this ordinance is that it is a declaration.

What it declares we shall have to speak about presently. It is its nature, not its theme, that I first note. The word rendered "show forth" means fully to proclaim aloud by word of mouth, and it is generally

employed in reference to the preaching of the Gospel, or of the Word of God. Plainly, then, the Apostle wishes to parallel the two things, the oral declaration of the Gospel, and the symbolical declaration of the same verities, as standing on precisely the same ground, and differing only in regard of the method which is adopted for their proclamation, and the senses to which they are directed. A parable is a spoken symbol; a symbol is an acted parable. The one and the other lay hold upon the Material, and bend it, flexible as it is, to become the illustration and partial embodiment of the Spiritual. Such is, as the Apostle says, the nature of this rite. It stands on the same level as any other method of declaring the truths which it declares, and its only distinction lies in the peculiarity of the method adopted, which is a symbolical presentation, to the eye, of the facts which are given to the ear in what we ordinarily call the preaching of the Gospel.

Now, it is clear that I am not forcing too much meaning into a single expression, because, throughout this whole context, there is not a single word that goes beyond such a conception of the Lord's Supper. It is a memorial, and, as the Apostle says in my text, the reason why it is a memorial is because it is a proclamation. Or, to put it into other words, by the rite we declare to ourselves and to others the Christian facts, and the declaration helps us to bring them to mind, and to feed upon Him whom they reveal to us.

Nothing beyond that lies in this context. And the omission of any reference to anything unique, mystical—still more, supernatural—in the rite, is all the more

remarkable if you remember the purpose that induced the Apostle to speak about it at all—viz., to rebuke irreverence, and to elevate the notions of the Corinthian Christians as to the sanctity of the ordinance. If he had shared the ideas of the people who call themselves his “successors,” how could he have refrained from using that conclusive argument, when his purpose was to enforce the sacredness of the rite? The only reason why he did not use it was because he never dreamt of it, nor had it ever entered into the horizon of the Christian consciousness of his day. The sacredness lies in the proclamation which it makes, and that is sacredness enough.

But then, brethren, as every king's crown and every wedding ring bear witness, all symbols are apt to run to seed, and there gathers round them, by swift accretion, almost necessarily, at all events generally, something that is far more than symbolical, even a superstitious use of them. Therefore our Lord, recognizing the needs of sense, has made concession to sense, in the two ordinances of His Church; and recognising the dangers of symbol, has rigidly limited the symbols to the two appointed by Himself. But men have not lived at that lofty elevation. And paganism, when it came into the Church, grasped at the symbols, and translated them as it had translated those belonging to the system of idolatrous worship which in name was rejected and in spirit too often retained. All that is vulgar, and all that is sensuous, and all that is weak in humanity, cling to the outward rite, and transform it into a power. And so we find that the baleful shadow of priestcraft is creeping over England

again to-day, and that the centre of gravity of Christianity is being shifted from personal union by faith with Jesus Christ to participation in an outward form which brings the benefits of union with Him.

And I for my part believe, though it may sound in these days of æsthetic worship and growing regard for ceremonial, extremely and archaically Puritan and narrow—I believe that there is no logical standing ground between these two conceptions of the Lord's Supper, "Ye do show the Lord's death," and on the other hand the extreme Roman Catholic view, to which so many people to-day seem to be so rapidly drifting. Nonconformists used to understand the limits of ritual and the place of ordinances. Some of us, I am afraid, are beginning to falter in our repetition of the ancient witness which our fathers have borne.

II.—Notice here the theme of the proclamation.

"Ye do show the Lord's death." Now I need not remind you, I suppose, that there is perhaps no better evidence of an historical fact than the almost contemporaneous origin, and continuous duration, of some commemorative symbolical act, as the history of all nations may tell us. And it should be taken fairly into account, in estimating the historical evidence for the veracity of the Gospel narratives, that almost simultaneously with the events which they profess to record there sprang up, and there has continued to exist ever since, this rite. The book of the Acts of the Apostles shows us that immediately after Pentecost the disciples "continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread"; and that at a later period they

were in the habit of assembling on the first day of the week for the same purpose. So I claim this long-practised rite, which can be traced up almost to the open grave of the Master, as a very strong attestation of the historical veracity of the Gospel narratives. Thus, in the lowest sense, we do proclaim the Lord's death.

But the force of the words goes far beyond that. Note, then, and give to it due importance in your conception of what the Gospel truth and Christ's teachings are, the fact that He Himself chose out from all His history His death as the thing which day by day loving hearts were to remember, and hungry souls were to feed on. Why was that? Why was it that He passed by all the rest and fixed on that? It seems to me that the ordinance of the Lord's Supper ought to exercise the influence of a barrier against all attempts to minimize or to diminish the significance and the importance of Christ's death. What do churches which have ceased to proclaim the full doctrine that the death of Christ is the life of the world do with that rite? They neglect it or let it drop into desuetude or explain it away by all sorts of obviously insufficient explanations. But there it stands. Not His words of gentleness; not His deeds of power; not His teachings of wisdom and of truth; not His revelation of God by the beauty of a perfected humanity and the patience of inexhaustible tenderness, are what He desires to be remembered by; but that death upon the Cross. Surely, surely, that indicates a unique influence and power as residing there.

And that same conviction is enforced if we remember that the showing of the Lord's death, which is accomplished in this rite, shows it under very distinct conditions, explanatory of its meaning and power. For the duplication of the memorials into the bread and the wine taken separately indicates a death by violence; and the language of the institution points us to deep mysteries—the body “broken” or given “for you”—and the “blood shed for the remission of sins.” The same idea is conveyed by the associations which our Lord was careful to establish between this feast of the Christian Church and the Passover feast of the Jewish. He swept aside the sacrifice that was made for the redemption of Israel from the captivity of Egypt, and He said “Forget the shadow and remember the substance, forget the sacrifice that was made of the Lamb, unbroken in bone, and remember the other of Him whose body was given for you, the Lamb of God, the Passover for the sins of the world.”

The same declaration of redeeming power, as lying in the death of Christ, is enforced by the other reference, which our Lord Himself has bid us see, to the new covenant in His blood, the covenant of which the articles are remission of sins, the mutual possession of God by the redeemed soul and of that soul by God, the direct knowledge of Him, and the continual inscribing of His law upon the heart.

And so, brethren, we have not to look back to that death as simply the touching martyrdom of the purest soul that ever lived. We have not to look back to Christ's work as having been done as they who reject His propitiatory death are forced to regard it,

chiefly in His life of gentleness, in His words of teaching, in His deeds of power and of pity; but we have to recognise this unique fact, that His death is the centre of His work, and in a peculiar sense the foundation of salvation for us all. "Ye do show the Lord's death."

And "ye do show," too, the conditions of our partaking of it—viz., that we should feed upon Him; the heart on His love, the will on His commandments, the understanding on His word, and the whole sinful man upon His atoning death. "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life."

III.—Lastly, note the perpetual duration and prophetic aspect of the proclamation.

"Ye do show the Lord's death till He come." Now I suppose I do need to dwell upon the thought that that distinctly implies that all through the ages of the Church the Apostle contemplated the continuance of this rite of witnessing, but I rather desire to suggest to you how, in the very rite itself, there can be distinguished, not only a commemorative aspect or a backward look, but a prophetic aspect, and a symbol of that which is to come.

"Till He come." All symbolical worship carries in itself the witness of its own cessation, and points onward to the time when it shall not be needed. It is, as I said, a concession to sense; it is a confession of weakness. It is, if not inconsistent with, at least in some measure incongruous with, the highest genius of the Christian dispensation. That is no reason for precipitate dispensing with external form. No man can judge another in regard of that matter. There is

need for a great deal more charity, both on the side of those who incline to the Quaker freedom from all ritual, and of those who incline, by natural disposition, to the other side, than is usually practised. It is no proof of spiritual maturity to try to do without the help of external rites. It is no proof of spiritual immaturity to cleave to them, if only it be distinctly understood that the whole value of them lies, not in what they are, but in what they signify. But still the existence of symbolical worship is a prophecy of its own cessation. It digs its own grave, as it were; and just because here we need the bread and wine to help us to remember the death, the taking of these, in compliance with that temporary necessity, itself carries our thoughts, or ought to carry them, onward to the time when, Christ Himself being present with His Church, and we sitting at His table in His kingdom, the symbols shall be no more needed. "I saw no temple therein." "Ye do show . . . till He come."

Again, the memory of His death is fitted, and intended, to quicken the hopes of His return. For the two belong to one another, and are bolted together, if I might so say, like two stars revolving round a common centre. He being what He is, the Cross and the open sepulchre cannot be the last that the world is to see of Him. The Death demands the Throne, and the Throne certifies the Return. So the memory of the past is brightened into hopes for the future; and the radiance behind us flings the reflection forward on to the darkness before, and illumines that with a sister lustre. He has come and died, therefore He will come and reign.

And then, still further, hope is inextricably intertwined with memory; because, in this domestic rite, we see the symbol that the Master Himself has given us of the calm felicities of that life beyond. He Himself said, on that last night when He sat at the table, "I appoint unto you a Kingdom that ye may sit at My table in My Kingdom"; feeding on Christ then in reality, as we now do in symbol and imperfectly by faith; companioned by Christ according to His gracious promise, "I will sup with Him and He with Me," as in the depths of spiritual communion we now partially do; reknit to those whose empty places at this board below make some of us always solitary and often sad; and having the Master Himself to bless the feast and to part the viands.

"They shall go out no more." From the supper room Christ went to His Cross; the traitor to his gibbet; the beloved Apostle to his denial; the rest to forsake and to fly. But from that feast there will be no going forth, and the loftier service of heaven shall not interrupt participation in Jesus, for His servants shall serve Him and see His face.

Brethren, the one question for us all is, "Do I feed upon Jesus Christ? Do I discern that body as broken for and given to me? Do I know that my sins are remitted by the shedding of His blood? No participation in outward rites will bring or sustain the spiritual life. Partaking of Jesus Christ alone can do that, and rites help us to partake of Him in the measure in which they bring His death to heart and mind, and so help faith to grasp it as the means of our salvation. His solemn words, "Whoso eateth My flesh and

drinketh My blood hath eternal life," are degraded when they are understood as referring to the external ordinance. In the same conversation He Himself interpreted them when He said, "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life."

"Believe, and thou hast eaten," said Augustine. "Eat, and ye shall live for ever," says Jesus Christ.

→ *Belief &*  
*Personal part of . -*

*Order of the service*  
*Communion*

## The Soul's Thirst and Satisfaction.

"My soul thirsteth for Thee. . . .

"My soul shall be satisfied. . . .

"My soul followeth hard after Thee."—PSALM lxiii. 1, 5, 8.



IF we let this psalm speak for itself it tells us a good deal about the singer's circumstances. He was in a dry and waterless land, excluded from his wonted worship in the sanctuary, surrounded by enemies who sought his life, apparently a king whose throne was in danger, conscious of many times of deliverance and help in past trials, and anticipating an impending fight in which his foes should be delivered to the power of the sword, and their corpses be torn by beasts of prey. All these things are in the psalm. They all seem to me to converge on David, and to make it far more probable that he is the author than that anyone else is.

Whoever wrote it has given immortal expression to the experiences of a soul in communion with God. The three clauses which I have ventured to isolate from their connection are the pivots on which the psalm turns, and they give, very strikingly and beautifully, the stages of seeking and finding God.

We have, first, the soul thirsting, or longing for God; then the longing soul satisfied in God; and, last, the satisfied soul pressing still closer to God. Happy are they who can take these words as the transcripts of their own experiences. If we begin with the first, we shall attain to the second and the third. Let me ask you, then, to look at them in succession.

I.—First, we have the soul thirsting for God.

Now, the Psalmist is a poet, and has a poet's sensitiveness to the external aspects of nature, and the imagination that delights in seeing in these the reflections of his own moods. So, very beautifully, he looks upon the dreary scene around, and sees in it symbols of the yet drearier experience within. He beholds the grey monotony of the waterless wilderness, where the earth is cracked with clefts that look like mouths gaping for the rain that does not come, and he recognizes the likeness of his own yearning spirit. He feels the pangs of bodily weariness and thirst, and these seem to him to be but feeble symbols of the deeper-seated pains of desire which touch his soul. Of course, the occasion of his longing was his seclusion from the outward worship of the sanctuary. The stage of revelation and of religion at which he stood made the connection between form and spirit more intimate than it ought to be with us, who know that neither in Gerizim nor in Jerusalem is God's throne. But whilst thus the occasion of his longing belonged to the era in which he lived, the substance of it is permanent. All men thirst after God. The unrest, the deep yearnings, the longings and desires of our

natures—what are they all except cries for the living God, tendrils which are put forth, seeking after the great prop which alone is fit to lift us from the mud of this lower world? But the misery is that we do not know what we want, that we misinterpret the meaning of our desires, that we go to the wrong sources for our need; that when our souls are crying out for God, we fling them worldly good and say, “There, satisfy yourselves on that!” A man that has a wild thing in a cage, and does not know what its food is, when he hears it yelping, will cast to it what he thinks may suit it, on which it eagerly springs, and then turns from it in disgust. So, men seek to feed their souls on the things of earth, and, all the while, what they are crying for is, not earth, but God. Hence, desire is misery; and longing, instead of being the prophecy of blessedness, is pain. We resort to muddy pools and broken cisterns, and try there to slake our thirst, in vain. Oh, brethren, if we would give heed to the deepest voices within, we should make fewer mistakes in the ordering of our lives, and in the selection of our aims; and should, therefore, save ourselves from many an ache, and from the fever of many a thirst, that we never, never shall satisfy, apart from God. Shipwrecked sailors drink salt-water in their wild thirst, and it makes them mad. Travellers in the desert are drawn by the mirage to seemingly shimmering lakes, fringed with palm trees; and it is nothing but sand. “My soul thirsteth for Thee.” Let us interpret the desire aright.

Let us see to it, too, that since we believe, or say we believe, that God is our chiefest good, the intensity

of the longing bear some proportion to the worth of the thing desired. Can there be anything more preposterous, anything in the strictest sense of the word more utterly irrational, than tepid wishes for the greatest good? Can it be anything but lunacy for men to let the whole swift, strong current of their affections run towards worldly things, and only a little dribble be led off to flow towards that which is their true good? What would you think of a man that had some feeble wish after health or life, or for the beloved of his heart to be his own? And what shall we say of men whose very profession declares that their estimate of God is that He is the best and only home and strength of their hearts, and who yet, if they were honest with themselves, would acknowledge that they do not wish for Him one-tenth part as much as they do for prosperity in business, the gratification of their ambitions, the satisfaction of their affections, the success of their purposes, or the attainment of their fleeting desires?

This Psalmist was making no exaggerated statement when he said, "My soul thirsteth," and my flesh pines. Does not his eagerness shame our lack of earnestness? Cold wishes for God are as flagrant an absurdity as cold sunshine. Religion is nothing if it not fervour.

II.—We have here the seeking soul satisfied.

"My soul shall be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness." Of course, the imagery of a feast naturally follows upon the previous metaphor of the soul's thirst.

Now, it is to be observed here with what beautiful

and yet singular swiftness the whole mood of the Psalmist changes. People may say that that is unnatural, but it is true to the deepest experiences ; and it unveils for us one of the surest and most precious blessings of a true Christian life—viz., that fruition is ever attendant upon desire. The Psalmist may have long been musing before the fire burned, and he spake with his tongue. We know not how that may be, but this we know, that the lips which were parted to say, “ My soul thirsteth,” had scarcely uttered it when again they opened to say, “ My soul is satisfied.” It is no wonder. God’s gifts are never delayed, in the highest of all regions. In the lower there often are long delays—the lingerings of love for our good—but in the loftiest, fruition grows side by side with longing. The same moment witnesses the petition flashed to Heaven, as with the speed of lightning, and the answer coming back to the waiting heart ; as in tropical lands when the rain comes, what was barren, baked earth in a day or two is rich meadow, all ablaze with flowers, and the dry torrent beds, where the stones lay white and glistening ghastly in the hot sunshine, are foaming with rushing streams and fringed with budding oleanders. Spring comes at a bound on the back of Winter in the Arctic regions. In the realm of communion with God, to desire is to have ; and the soul that thirsts has no sooner opened the mouth wide than the desired blessing pours in and fills it. So, brethren, there need be no long interval between these two phases of experience in our cases, and if the former be genuine and deep, the latter will be swift and immediate.

Not only does this second text of ours give us that thought of the simultaneousness, in regard of the highest of all gifts, of wish and enjoyment, but it also tells us that the soul thus answered will be satisfied. If it be true, as we have been trying to say, that God is the real object of all human desire, then the contact of the seeking soul with that perfect aim of all its seeking will bring rest to every appetite, its desired food to every wish, strength for every weakness, fulness for all emptiness. Like two of the notched sticks that were formerly used as tallies, the seeking soul and the giving God fit into one another, and there is nothing that we need that we cannot get in Him. So the answer is the satisfying of the soul.

And, still further, as our psalm tells us, the satisfied souls breaks into music. For it goes on to say, after the words, "My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness," — "my mouth shall praise Him with joyful lips."

Of course, the Psalmist had still many occasions for sorrow and doubt and fear. Nothing had changed in his outward circumstances. The desert was still round him. Jerusalem was still far away, on the other side of the river. The foe was still pursuing, murderous in heart as before. The little camp was still shelterless in the open. But this had changed—God was felt to be as close as ever He had been in the sanctuary. And that consciousness altered everything, and turned all the Psalmist's lamentations into jubilant anthems. It transposed his music from the minor key, and his lips broke into songs of gladness. There is, perhaps, a very beautiful allusion to his

circumstances in the verse that follows our second text, where he speaks about meditating on God in the night watches. The unprotected encampment had to keep vigilant guard lest the nightly silence should be broken by the shout of surprising foes. But even in such circumstances this man had a song in the night, and could meditate upon God.

Translate these particulars into general thoughts, and they are just this:—No sorrow, nor anxiety, nor care, nor need for vigilance against danger ought to check the praise that may come, and should come, from a heart in touch with God, and a soul satisfied in Him. It is a hard lesson for some of us to learn; but it is a lesson, the learning of which will be full of blessedness. There is a bird common in our northern districts which people call the storm-cock, because his note always rings out cheeriest in tempestuous weather. That is the kind of music that the Christian's heart should make, responding, like an Æolian harp, to the tempest's breath by song, and filling the night with praise. It is possible for us, even before sorrow and sighing have fled away, to be pilgrims on the road, "with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads." The Psalmist felt that he was sitting at a feast, "satisfied as with marrow and fatness," and he felt that the festival was incomplete without melody.

III.—And so, lastly, notice how the satisfied soul presses closer to God.

"My soul followeth hard after Thee," says the last of our texts. The language in the original is extremely condensed and significant. Literally translated, though, of course, much too clumsily for an

English version, the words run: "My soul cleaveth after Thee," expressing, in one pregnant phrase, two attitudes usually felt to be incompatible, that of calm repose and that of eager pursuit. But these two, unlike each other as they are, may be, and should be, harmoniously blended in the experience of a Christian life. On the one hand, there is the clinging of satisfaction, and, on the other hand, the ever-satisfied stimulus to a closer approach.

The soul that is satisfied will, and ought to, adhere with tenacity to the source that satisfies it. The word that is used here is the same which is employed in stating the great law of the sacredest of human affections: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and *cleave* unto his wife." It is the same word that is employed to describe how Ruth clung to Naomi, and for her sake abandoned country and friends. With such absorbed, all-sacrificing devotion and clinging tenacity ought our souls to grapple and hold fast to God, as the ivy to the tree, as the limpet to its rock—clinging to Him with will, affections, thought, and by the direction of the practical life, and the recognition of Him as present in all our distracting work and circumstances.

From Him, and from Him only, comes the true satisfaction for our souls, and if thus our hearts are fed on God, will not the very blessedness of that fruition be such as to ensure our cleaving to Him? There will be no temptation for a man to wander away from that source of all good. I have found all that I need. Why should I search any further? The dove folds its pinions when it reaches the ark, and needs no

more to wing its weary way over sullen waters, vainly searching for a resting-place. Nomad tribes, when they find themselves in some rich valley, unload their camels, and pitch their tents, and say, "Here will we dwell, for the land is good." And so we, if we have made experience, as we may, of God and His sweet sufficiency, and sufficient sweetness, should be delivered from temptation to go further and fare worse. And then this clinging, resulting from satisfaction, is accompanied with earnest seeking after still more of the infinite Good. In other regions, and when directed to other objects, satisfaction is apt to pass into satiety, because the creature that satisfies us is limited. But when we turn ourselves to God, and seek for all that we need there, there can be no satiety in us, because there can be no exhaustion of that which is in Him. The cup that He gives us to drink when our souls thirst has nothing cloying in its sweetness, but rather a taste that stimulates to deeper draughts of the same. So, the two opposing blessednesses, the blessedness of search that is sure of finding, and the blessedness of finding which is calm repose, are united in the Christian experience. And we may, at every moment, have all that we want given to us, and by the very gift our capacity, and therefore our longings, be increased. Thus, in wondrous alternation, satisfaction and thirst beget each other, and each possesses some of the other's sweetness.

And when we thus press on to know and to possess more of God, as the Psalmist tell us in the context, "Thy right hand upholdeth me." They who thus long, and possess, and long again, receive the support

of that Divine hand in their longings and in all their lives.

So, dear friends, let us learn the meaning of our unrest. Let us listen to Him who says, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink." Then "we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more" with pain, though always with happy desire. Then, "satisfied with goodness, and full of the favour of the Lord," we shall not seek elsewhere for our delights. Then, clasping and clasped by that strong and gentle hand, we shall stand steadfast against all storms, and lie in His palm, protected and safe against all dangers. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them; and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; and no man shall pluck them out of My hand."

## Waiting for Power.

“TARRY ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.”—LUKE xxiv. 49.



LUKE goes twice over the same ground—the narrative of our Lord’s forty days after the Resurrection, and of the Ascension—in the end of His Gospel, and in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. The double narrative binds the two books together, and shows the importance to be attached to the incidents it narrates, and is also interesting because it looks at them from two different points of view. In the Gospel they are regarded as the end of the earthly life; in the Acts, as the beginning of the heavenly. And so, in the latter narrative, we have a fuller explanation of the power that the disciples were to wait for, and a clear statement of the great tasks which they were to do, when they were equipped with it, as well as the promise of the return of the Lord in the far-off future.

We have to bring the two narratives together in order to see the full significance of either.

Another point to be noticed is that, if we had only this Gospel before us, we might suppose that this

injunction and promise were given by our Lord on the day of His resurrection, but, with the further light thrown upon them by the Acts, we learn that the interval of waiting was very brief, since the words that prescribe it were spoken, if not on the very day of the ascension itself, at least very near it. And so there were about ten days of expectancy, and then came the rush of the promised spirit.

Now it seems to me that both the promise and the commandment of our text have a bearing, though in a modified way, upon us, as well as upon the original recipients. And whilst the greater part of Christendom is to-day thinking of that past gift of Pentecost, I in this sermon deal with its bearings on our present. I think I shall best reach my end if I simply ask you to look at the two things in our text, the promise and the instruction; the equipment for service, and the waiting for it. "Tarry ye in the city till ye be endued with power from on high."

I.—Note then, first, the equipment for service.

Now the metaphor that is concealed to an ordinary English reader under that archaic word "endued," is a very simple and beautiful one. The word means "clothed." As we read in other places of being "clothed with shame," or "clothed with zeal"; and of God as being "clothed with majesty"; in like manner the apostles speak to us of "putting on Christ," and being "clothed with Him," and of being "clothed upon" with the house that is from heaven. The ideas of abundant fulness of qualities, of a gift that is visible on the outside, and of something that wraps and veils and dignifies the naked humanity, lie in

that great word "*clothed* with power from on high."

Now, I need not remind you that, although in our text there is no distinct explanation of what this power consists in, the other narrative in the Acts supplies what is wanted in the interpretation of the metaphor, and identifies it with the gift of a Divine Spirit to the Church, and to the Church because to each individual member thereof.

The gift of Jesus Christ to the world—that is to say, to those in the world who believe on Him—is the gift of a new life, communicated by the actual indwelling of the Divine Spirit. I believe that truth has been far too much neglected by modern Christendom, and that in the neglect is to be found a large part of the reason why the neglected promise has been but partially realized, and why the Church of to-day is the poor thing that it so largely is. And there is little, as it seems to me, that is more needed by the consciousness of Christendom at large than to go back, with a clear understanding and with an unfaltering faith, to that ancient promise of the gift of a Divine Spirit, to dwell in every believing spirit.

Brethren, whether we believe that such a promise is a phantasm or a Divine revelation, whether we accept Christ's words or not, it seems to me that we cannot read them without seeing that He meant us to believe that He would give to them that love Him this greatest of all gifts. You may accept the words, or you may reject them, but you cannot twist them so as to exclude the meaning of a personal bestowment of a Divine Spirit, without doing violence to them.

We are not to weaken that great thought into metaphor or rhetoric, or a strong way of saying that the influence of Christ's teaching will last through the ages. It means a great deal more than that. It means the gift of a Divine Spirit to dwell with us and in us.

If we think of how much is taught us by the metaphors and epithets under which that gift is described to us, we shall still more clearly see, and I hope deeply feel, its importance and its blessedness. It is described as wind or breath, the source of life, the immaterial, invisible energy that sweeps through the world and brings freshness where it comes; that varies in intensity from the whispering zephyrs of some calm evening to the gale that destroys cities and lashes the ocean into tempest. It is fire that melts, that warms, that cleanses by consuming; it is oil that invigorates and supple, that drops upon the head as the designation to and the bestowment of fitness for office. It is water that refreshes, that fertilizes, that stimulates all growth, that is indispensable to life; and this stream flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It is the Dove, gentle, meek, heaven-sent, peace-bringing, calmly settling where it lights, and blessing where it settles. These are the emblems under which Scripture sets forth this great gift. And higher than all is the unfigurative fact, "I will send you My Spirit."

Then let us remember that this gift, the characteristic blessing which Jesus Christ has to bestow, with its manifold blessings, is by the pledge and prophecy of Pentecost a perennial gift. It is not correct, in-



tempted, to fall back upon other things. There is no antagonism between the lower forms of Divine gifts, by which men are adapted for various types of Christian service, and these higher, without which all the other are, as I believe, of no avail. Our natural gifts are heightened into spiritual gifts when there dwells in our hearts the Spirit of God. And anything that we can bring of eloquence, of genius, of perseverance, of diligence, of scholarship, or anything else is, by that gift, kindled into tenfold brightness, and exalted to an unreckonably higher power and efficacy. Plunge a candle into oxygen and it will flame the brighter. Our natural gifts and opportunities of whatever kind they may be, being reinforced and "clothed"—to take the metaphor of my text—with this Divine Spirit, are a thousandfold more than ever they were before.

And without it what are they all worth for Christian work? There have been churches that have relied upon creeds. There have been churches that have relied upon secularities, wealth, State recognition, position, and the like. There is a tendency in this day to rely on organizations, and the multiplication of effort and advertising, and drum-beating and trumpet-blowing, and general fussiness. They tried in America some little time ago to bring down rain by exploding gunpowder, and it did not answer. And it will not answer to try to bring down the success which is real success by any such noisy reverberations as these to which I am referring.

There is one thing by which all men that ever have done much for God and men have been marked. There

have been infinite diversities in them, differences of creed, differences of idiosyncrasies and cast of character, different ways of working, different grades of capacity. Some of them have been eloquent, like Isaiah; some of them have been of stammering tongue, like Moses; some of them have been wise, and some of them have been foolish. It does not matter. One thing they all have had, which the world calls personal magnetism, which the New Testament calls being filled with the Holy Ghost. Why is it that two men shall stand up and say the same thing; and from the lips of the one the words will drop cold and impotent, and from the other they will come flaming with power? There may be subordinate reasons for the difference; *the* reason lies in this, that the one man is speaking from personal contact with Jesus Christ and His Spirit, and the other man is chattering what he has learnt from men, or what he thinks it is the proper thing to say. The power that touches the world is the power of an indwelling Divine Spirit.

And now, brethren; one more word. If all this is true, what about the present condition of Christendom? There is no need to be pessimistic, or to indulge in exaggeration. I joyfully recognize a great deal that is good, a quickened sense of responsibility, a wider application of the conception of Christian duty, and Gospel preaching to civic and social and political questions, as well as to the salvation of the individual soul. I see and I rejoice in all that. And then I turn the page, and I see the other side. Churches with an enormous proportion of their

members sunk in gross worldliness ; churches of which thousands of their adherents live exactly like the men who do not pretend to have any religion at all. What about the enormous amount of work and the comparatively small results ? What about the lives of those who thus say that the Spirit of God dwells in them ? “Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened ? Are these *His* doings ?” Surely not. If it be true that that Divine Spirit has been given, how has all this come upon us ? and why this torpid, lagging, often recreant, and often futile Christianity ? Christianity is not “played out,” but it sometimes seems as if a good many of the organizations that profess to embody it are very nearly so.

So, dear friends, we all have need to ask ourselves whether the facts of the churches to which we belong correspond with the promise of Christ, and to set our hearts on this assurance, that that promise is of perpetual validity. The tongues of fire flickered into extinction, the miracle of speech ceased in a few moments, and the rushing mighty wind was hushed. But the gift remained after the fiery tongues that sat upon the heads of the disciples had disappeared, and the heads on which they sat had mouldered into dust.

II.—And now I have only time for a word or two about the second point of this text, and that is the waiting for equipment which our Lord here prescribes.

I have already said that the perpetuity of that Divine gift is not the perpetuity of a thing given once for all, but of a bestowment continually repeated. The river flows. There are variations in the cur-

rent and in the depth, but they are not due to intermittent pulsations coming from the source, but to obstacles that men place in the channel. Travellers tell us that at certain seasons of the year there form up on the main tributary of the Nile great banks of tropical weed which stop the flow, and that when these break the inundation comes that brings fertility away down in the Delta, thousands of miles off. And so Christian men may pile up dams between themselves and the continuous flow of the river; and whilst its waters are sparkling on the one side, there may lie a dreary expanse of parched and barren clay upon the other.

Think of these people in Jerusalem, for the ten days of waiting. It was no indolent waiting. How they must have felt solitary and helpless without their Master! How tremendous they must have felt the task that He had left them as a legacy! How keenly they must have felt their own impotence! How eagerly they must have desired that yet unknown equipment which He had promised them! And so they filled the days, not with mere passive waiting, but with a waiting screwed to the highest tension of expectation and yearning in the fulness of desire.

That is the sort of waiting that you and I have to exercise, brethren. We hear to-day of perpetual calls for work; this scheme here, that other one there, pressed upon all of us. I would not have less work, but I would have far more quiet waiting. We must "feed our minds by a wise passiveness." Silence is fruitful, like the calm autumn days when the year's

work is done, and the earth rests for next spring's and next summer's promise and fertility. We need far more habitual, quiet expectance. Time spent in waiting is not wasted. Such waiting has nothing in common with indolent repose.

We need for effectual Christian work more solitude on the part of the workers, and for depth of Christian life more solitude on the part of the liver. Solitude is the mother country of the strong. No man has ever done much worth doing in this world who has not lived very much apart. And no Christian has ever done much who has not lived very much apart with God. "I was left alone, and I saw this great vision." "Come ye apart and rest awhile." Brother, if we are to be fit for service, we must be familiar with the "secret place of the Most High," where He will whisper in our ears that which afterwards may be sounded from the housetops.

Solitude, silence, meditation, expectation, desire—all these have to be united if we do not want to stop the flow to us of the gift of the Divine Spirit. Leave some of your work undone. It is better to *be* than to *do*. Leave some of your work undone, that you may hold converse with your Christ, and you will afterwards do your work all the better.

The days of waiting were brief. If you and I will fill them as these men filled them, with supplication, with desire, with expectancy, then He will not forget His promise. A waiting Church or a waiting soul will, in a little time, be a Church or a soul filled with the Holy Spirit, and therefore mighty for Christian work.

*My heart is here &c*

## Memory, Hope, and Effort.

“THAT they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.”—PSALM lxxviii. 7.



IN its original application this verse is simply a statement of God's purpose in giving to Israel the Law, and such a history of deliverance. The intention was that all future generations might remember what He had done, and be encouraged by the remembrance to hope in Him for the future; and, by both memory and hope, be impelled to the discharge of present duty.

So, then, the words may permissibly bear the application which I purpose to make of them in this sermon, re-echoing only (and aspiring to nothing more) the thoughts which the season has already, I suppose, more or less, suggested to most of us. Smooth motion is imperceptible; it is the jolts that tell us that we are advancing. Though every day be a New Year's Day, still the alteration in our dates and our calendars should set us all thinking of that continual lapse of the mysterious thing—the creature of our own minds—which we call Time, and which is bearing us all so steadily and silently onwards.

My text tells us how past, present, and future—memory, hope, and effort may be ennobled and blessed. In brief, it is by associating them all with God. It is as the field of His working that our past is best remembered. It is on Him that our hopes may most wisely be set. It is keeping His commandments which is the consecration of the present. Let us, then, take the three thoughts of our text and cast them into New Year's recommendations.

I.—First, then, let us associate God with memory by thankful remembrance.

Now I suppose that there are very few of the faculties of our nature which we more seldom try to regulate by Christian principles than that great power which we have of looking backwards. Did you ever reflect that you are responsible for what you remember, and for how you remember it, and that you are bound to train and educate your memory, not merely in the sense of cultivating it as a means of carrying intellectual treasures, but for a religious purpose? The one thing that all parts of our nature need is God, and that is as true about our power of remembrance as it is about any other part of our being. The past is then hallowed, noble, and yields its highest results and most blessed fruits for us when we link it closely with Him, and see in it not only, nor so much, the play of our own faculties, whether we blame or approve ourselves, as rather see in it the great field in which God has brought Himself near to our experience, and has been regulating and shaping all that has befallen us. The one thing which will consecrate memory, deliver it from its errors and

abuses, raise it to its highest and noblest power, is that it should be in touch with God, and that the past should be regarded by each of us as it is, in deed and in truth, one long record of what God has done for us.

We can see His presence more clearly when we look back over a long connected stretch of days, and when the excitement of feeling the agony or rapture have passed, than we could whilst they were hot, and life was all hurry and bustle. The men on the deck of a ship see the beauty of the city that they have left behind, better than when they were pressing through its narrow streets. And though the view from the far-off waters of the receding houses may be an illusion, our view of the past, if we see God brooding over it all, and working in it all, is no illusion. The meanesses are hidden, the narrow places are invisible, all the pain and suffering is quieted, and we are able to behold more truly than when we were in the midst of it, the bearing, the purpose, and the blessedness alike of our sorrows and of our joys.

Many of us are old enough to have had a great many mysteries of our early days cleared up. We have seen at least the beginnings of the harvest which the ploughshare of sorrow and the winter winds were preparing for us, and for the rest we can trust. Brethren, remember your mercies; remember your losses; and "for all the way by which the Lord our God has led us these many years in the wilderness," let us try to be thankful, including in our praises the darkness and the storm as well as the light and the calm. Some of us are like people who, when they get

better of their sicknesses, grudge the doctor's bill. We forget the mercies as soon as they are past, because we only enjoyed the sensuous sweetness of them whilst it tickled our palate, and did not think, in the enjoyment of them, whose love it was that they spoke of to us. Sorrows and joys, bring them all in your thanksgivings, and "forget not the works of God."

Such a habit of cultivating the remembrance of God's hand, moving in all our past, will not, in the slightest degree, interfere with lower and yet precious exercises of that same faculty. We shall still be able to look back, and learn our limitations, mark our weaknesses, gather counsels of prudence from our failures, tame our ambitions by remembering where we broke down. And such an exercise of grateful God-recognizing remembrance will deliver us from the abuses of that great power, by which so many of us turn our memories into a cause of weakness, if not of sin. There are people, and we are all tempted to be of the number, who look back upon the past and see nothing there but themselves, their own cleverness, their own success; burning incense to their own net, and sacrificing to their own drag. Another mood leads us to look back into the past dolefully and disappointedly, to say, "I have broken down so often; my resolutions have all gone to water so quickly; I have tried and failed over and over again. I may as well give it all up, and accept the inevitable, and grope on as well as I can without hope of self-advancement or of victory." Never! If only we will look back to God we shall be able to look forward to a perfect self. To-morrow need never be determined by the

failures that have been. We may still conquer where we have often been defeated. There is no worse use of the power of remembrance than when we use it to bind upon ourselves, as the permanent limitations of our progress, the failures and faults of the past. "Forget the things that are behind." Your old fragmentary goodness, your old foiled aspirations, your old frequent failures—cast them all behind you.

And there are others to whom remembrance is mainly a gloating over old sins, and a doing again of these—ruminating upon them; bringing up the chewed food once again to be masticated. Some of us gather only poisonous weeds, and carry them about in the *hortus siccus* of our memories. Alas! for the man whose memory is but the paler portraiture of past sins. Some of us, I am sure, have our former evils holding us so tight in their cords that when we look back memory is defiled by the things which defiled the unforgettable past. Brethren, you may find a refuge from that curse of remembrance in remembering God.

And some of us, unwisely and ungratefully, live in the light of departed blessings, so as to have no hearts either for present mercies or for present duties. There is no more weakening and foolish misdirection of that great gift of remembrance than when we employ it to tear down the tender greenery with which healing time has draped the ruins; or to turn again in the wound which is beginning to heal the sharp and poisoned point of the sorrow which once pierced it. For all these abuses—the memory that gloats upon sin; the memory that is proud of success; the

memory that is despondent because of failures; the memory that is tearful and broken-hearted over losses—for all these the remedy is that we should not forget the works of God, but see Him everywhere filling the past.

II.—Again, let us live in the future by hope in Him.

Our remembrances and our hopes are closely connected; one might almost even say that the power by which we look backwards and that by which we look forwards are one and the same. At all events, Hope owes to Memory the pigments with which it paints, the canvas on which it paints, and the objects which it portrays there. But in all our earthly hopes there is a feeling of uncertainty which brings alarm as well as expectation. And he whose forward vision runs only along the low levels of earth, and is fed only by experience and remembrance, will never be able to say, “I hope with certitude, and I know that my hope shall be fulfilled.” For him “hopes, and fears that kindle hopes,” will be “an indistinguishable throng”; and there will be as much of pain as of pleasure in his forward glance.

But if, according to my text, we set our hopes on God, then we shall have a certainty absolute. What a blessing it is to be able to look forward to a future as fixed and sure, as solid and as real, as much our possession as the irrevocable past! The Christian man’s hope, if it be set on God, is not a “may be,” but a “will be”; and he can be as sure of to-morrow as he is of yesterday.

They whose hopes are set on God have a certain

hope, a sufficient one, and one that fills all the future. All other expectations are fulfilled, or disappointed, as the case may be, but are left behind and outgrown. This one only never palls, and is never accomplished, and yet is never disappointed. So if we set our hopes on Him, we can face very quietly the darkness that lies ahead of us. Earthly hopes are only the mirrors in which the past reflects itself, as in some king's palace you will find a lighted chamber, with a great sheet of glass at each end, which perpetuates in shining rows the lights behind the spectator. A curtain veils the future, and earthly hope can only put a mirror in front of it that reflects what has been. But the hope that is set on God draws back the curtain, and lets us see enough of a fixed, eternal future to make our lives bright and our hearts calm. The darkness remains; what of that, if "I know I shall not drift beyond His love and care"? Set your hopes on God, and they will not be ashamed.

III.—Lastly, let us live in the present by strenuous obedience.

After all, memory and hope are meant to fit us for work in the flying moment. Both should impel us to this keeping of the commandments of God; for both yield motives which should incline us thereto. A past full of blessing demands the sacrifice of loving hearts and of earnest hands. A future so fair, so far, so certain, so sovereign, and a hope that grasps it, and brings some of its sweet fragrance into the else scentless air of the poor present, ought to impel to service, vigorous and continual. Both should yield motives which make such service a delight.

If my memory weakens me for present work, either because it depresses my hope of success, or because it saddens me with the remembrance of departed blessings, then it is a curse and not a good. And if I dream myself away in any future, and forget the exigencies of the imperative and swiftly-passing moment, then the faculty of hope, too, is a curse and a weakening. But both are delivered from their possible abuses, if both are made into means of helping us to fill the present with loving obedience. These two faculties are like the two wings that may lift us to God, like the two paddles, one on either side of the ship, that may drive on steadily forward, through all the surges and the tempest. These find their highest field in fitting us for the grinding tasks and the heavy burdens that the moment lays upon us.

So, dear friends, we are very different in our circumstances and positions. For some of us Hope's basket is nearly empty, and Memory's sack is very full. For us older men the past is long, the earthly future is short. For you younger people the converse is the case. It is Hope whose hands are laden with treasures for you. Memory carries but a little store. Your past is brief; your future is probably long. The grains of sand in some of our hour-glasses are very heaped and high in the lower half, and running very low in the upper. But whichever category we stand in, one thing remains the same for us all, and that is duty, keeping God's commandments. That is permanent, and that is the one thing worth living for. "Whether we live we live unto the Lord; or whether we die we die unto the Lord."

So let us front this New Year, with all its hidden possibilities, with quiet, brave hearts, resolved on present duty, as those ought who have such a past to remember and such a future to hope for. It will probably be the last on earth for some of us. It will probably contain great sorrows for some of us, and great joys for others. It will probably be comparatively uneventful for others. It may make great outward changes for us, or it may leave us much as it found us. But, at all events, God will be in it, and work for Him should be in it. Well for us if, when its hours have slidden away into the grey past, they continue to witness to us of His love, even as, while they were wrapped in the mists of the future, they called on us to hope in Him! Well for us if we fill the passing moment with deeds of loving obedience! Then a present of keeping His commandments will glide into a past to be thankfully remembered, and will bring us nearer to a future in which hope shall not be put to shame. To him who sees God in all the divisions and particles of his days, and makes Him the object of memory, hope, and effort, past, present, and future are but successive calm ripples of that mighty river of Time which bears him on the great ocean of Eternity, from which the drops that make its waters rose, and to which its ceaseless flow returns.

## Unpossessed Possessions.

“AND the King of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the King of Syria?”—1 KINGS xxii. 3.



HIS city of Ramoth in Gilead was an important fortified place on the eastern side of the Jordan, and had, many years before our text, been captured by the northern neighbours in the kingdom of Syria. A treaty had subsequently been concluded and broken, a war followed thereafter, in which Benhadad, King of Syria, had bound himself to restore all his conquests. He had not observed that article of peace, and the people of Israel had not been strong enough to enforce it until the date of our text; but then, backed up by a powerful alliance with Jehoshaphat of Judah, they determined to make a dash to get back what was theirs, but whilst theirs was also not theirs.

Now, I have nothing more to do with Ahab and Jehoshaphat, but I want to turn the words of my text, and the thoughts that may come from them, into a direction profitable to ourselves. “Know ye

that Ramoth in Gilead is ours?" and yet it had to be got out of the hands of the King of Syria.

I.—What is ours and not ours.

Every Christian man has large tracts of unannexed territory, unattained possibilities, unenjoyed blessings, things that are his and yet not his. How much more of God you and I have a right to than we have the possession of! The ocean is ours, but only the little pailful that we carry away home to our own houses is of use to us. The whole of God is mine if I am Christ's, and a dribble of God is all that comes into the lives of most of us.

How much inward peace is ours! It is meant that there should never pass across a Christian's soul more than a ripple of agitation, which may indeed ruffle and curl the surface; but deep down there should be the tranquillity of the fathomless ocean, unbroken by any tempests, and yet not stagnant, because there is a vital current that runs through it, and every drop is being drawn upward to the surface and the sunlight. There may be a peace in our hearts deep as life; a tranquillity which may be superficially disturbed, but is never thoroughly, and down to the depths, broken. And yet, let some little petty annoyance come into my daily life, and what a pucker I am in! Then we forget all about the still depths that we ought to be living in; and fears and hopes and loves and ambitions disturb our souls, just as they do the spirits of the men that do not profess to have any holdfast in God. The peace of God is ours; but, ah! in how sad a sense it is true that the peace of God is *not* ours!

What "heights"—for Ramoth means "high places"—what heights of consecration there are which are ours according to the Divine purpose and according to the fulness of God's gift! It is meant, and it is possible, and well within the reach of every Christian soul, that he or she should live, day by day, in the continual and utter surrender of himself or herself to the will of God, and should say, "I do the little I can do, And leave the rest with Thee"; and should say again, "All is right that seems most wrong if it be His sweet will." But instead of this absolute submission and completeness and joyfulness of surrender of ourselves to Him, what do we find? Reluctance to obey, regret at providences, Self dominant or struggling hard against the partial domination of the will of God in our hearts. The mind which was in Jesus Christ, who was able to say, "It is written of Me, lo! I come to do Thy will, O Lord!" is ours by virtue of our being Christians; but, alas! in practical realization how sadly it is not ours!

What noble possibilities of service, what power in the world are bestowed on Christ's people! "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth," says He. "And He breathed on them, and said, As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." The Divine gift to the Christian community, and to the individuals that compose it—for there are no gifts given to the community, but to the individuals that make it up—is of fulness of power for all their work. And yet look how, all through the ages, the Church has been beaten by the corruption of the world; and who to-day many of us are standing, either utterly care-

less and callous about the things that we have the medicine to cure, or in desperation looking about for other healing for the social and moral condition of the community than that which is granted to us in Jesus Christ. "Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hands of the King of Syria?"

There is ever so much in the world which belongs to our Master, and therefore belongs to us, and which the Church is bound to lay its hand upon and claim for its own and for its Lord's. For remember, brethren, that all the things at which I have been glancing—and I might have largely increased the catalogue—all these things—spiritual endowments of peace, and safety, and purity, and joy, of religious elevation, and consecration, and power for service, and the like—are ours by a threefold title and charter. God's purpose, which is nothing less for every one of us than that we should be "filled with all the fulness of God," and that He should supply all our need, according to His riches in glory,"—that is the first of the parchments on which our title depends. And the second title-deed is Christ's purchase; for the efficacy of His death and the power of His triumphant life have secured for all that trust Him the whole fulness of this Divine gift. And the third of our claims and titles is the influence of that Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ gives to every one of His children to dwell in Him. There is in you, working in you, if you have any faith in that Lord, a power that is capable of making you perfectly pure, perfectly blessed, strong with an immortal strength,

and glad with a "joy that is unspeakable and full of glory."

Oh, then, let us think of the awful contrast between what is ours and what we have. It is ours by the Divine intention, by the Divine gift in its fulness and all-sufficiency, and yet think of the poor, partial realization of it that has passed into our experience. Be sure that you have what you have, and that you make your own what God has made yours.

II.—Then, let me suggest, again, how our text hints for us, not only the difference between possession and realization, but also our strange contentment in imperfect possession.

Ahab's remonstrances with his servants, which make the starting-point of my remarks, seem to suggest that there were two reasons for their acquiescence in the domination of a foreign power on a bit of their soil. They had not realized that Ramoth was theirs, and they were too lazy and cowardly to go and take it. Ignorance of the fulness of the gift, and slothful timidity in daring everything in the effort to make it ours, explain a great deal of the present condition of Christian people.

Is not that condition of passive acquiescence in their small present attainments, and of careless indifference to the great stretch of the unattained, the characteristic of the mass of professing Christians? They have got a foothold on a new continent, and their possession of it is like the world's knowledge of the map of Africa when we were children, which had a settlement dotted here and there along the coast, and all the broad regions of the interior were blank.

The settlers huddle together upon the fringe of barren sand by the salt water, and never dream of pressing forward into the heart of the land. And so, too, many of us are content with what we have got, a little bit of God, when we might have Him all; a settlement on the fringe and edge of the land, when we might traverse the whole length of it; and behold! it is all ours.

That unfamiliarity with the thought of unattained possibilities in the Christian life is a damning curse of thousands of people who call themselves Christians. They do not think, they never realize—and some of us are guilty in this respect—they never realize that it is possible for them to be all unlike what they are now, and that, instead of the miserable partial hallowing of their nature, and the poor, weak—I was going to say strength, but it is not worth calling strength, that they possess, they might be as the angels of God: “the weakest as David” and David as the very messenger of heaven itself. Why is it, why is it that there is this unfamiliarity?

7 - And then, another reason for the woeful disproportion between what we have and what we utilize is the love of ease, such as kept these Israelites from going up to Ramoth-Gilead. It was a long way off; there was a river to be forded; there were heights to be climbed; there were weary marches to be taken; there were hard knocks going in front of the walls of Ramoth before they got inside it; and on the whole it was more comfortable to sit at home, or look after their farms and their merchandise, than to embark on the quixotic attempt to win back a city that had not

been theirs for ever so long, and that they had got on very well without.

And so it is with hosts of us Christian people; we do not realize how much we have that we never get any good out of. And, in the second place, we had rather just stay where we are, and make the best of the world as it is, and the desires of our hearts go in another direction than for our increase in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Ah, brethren, if we had a claim to some great property, or anything else that we really cared about, should we be so very indifferent as to asserting our rights? Should we not fight to the death, some of us, for the last inch of soil, for the last ounce of treasure that belonged to us? When you really value a thing, you secure the greatest possible amount of it; and there is very little margin between what you own and what you use.

And if there is such a tremendous difference between the breadth of the one and the narrowness of the other in our Christian life, there can be no reason for it except this, that we do not care enough about spiritual blessings and forces to make the effort that is needed to win and keep, and get the good of all that is ours.

And is not that something like despising the birth-right? Is it not a criminal thing for Christian people thus to neglect, and to put aside, and never to seek to obtain, all these great gifts of God? There they lie at our doors, and they are ours for the taking. Suppose a carrier brought you a whole wagon full of precious goods, and put them down at your door, and

you were not at the trouble to open your doors, or to carry the goods into your cellars. That would not look as if you cared much either for the goods or for the giver. And I wonder how many of us are chargeable with that criminal despising of God's gifts, which is clearly the explanation of our letting them lie rotting, as it were, at our gates. We are starving; paupers in the midst of plenty.

"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus," says Paul. You have the right to them all. Draw cheques against the capital that is lodged in your name in that great bank.

III.—And so, lastly, my text suggests the effort that is needed to make our own ours.

"We be still, and take it not out of the hands of the King of Syria." Then these things that are ours, by God's gift, by Christ's purchase, by the Spirit's influence, will need our effort to secure them. And that is no contradiction, nor any paradox. God does exactly in the same way with regard to a great many of His natural gifts as He does with regard to His spiritual ones. He gives them to us, but we hold them on this tenure, that we put forth our best efforts to get and to keep them. His giving them does not set aside our taking. However much we tried we could not take them out of His hand if it were clenched. Open as His hand is, and stretched out to us as it is, the gifts that sparkle in it are not transferred to our hands unless we ourselves put forth an effort. So let me say that one large part of the discipline by which men make their own their own is by

familiarizing themselves with the thought of the larger possibilities of unattained possessions which God has given them. That is true in everything. To recognize our present imperfection, and to see stretching before us glorious and immense possibilities, opening out into a vista where our eyesight fails us to travel to its end, is the very salt of life in every region. Artist, student, all of us "are saved by hope," in a very much wider sense than the Apostle meant by that great saying. And whosoever has once lost, or found becoming dim, the vision before him of a possible better than his present best, in any region, is in that region condemned to grow no more. If we desire to have any kind of advancement, it is only possible for us, when there gleams ever before us the untravelled road, and we see at the end of it unattained brightnesses and blessings.

And we Christian people have an endless prospect of that sort stretching before us. Oh, if we looked at it oftener, "having respect unto the recompense of the reward," we should find it easier to dash at any Ramoth-Gilead, and get it out of the hands of the strongest of the enemies that may bar our way to it. Let us familiarize ourselves with the thought of our present imperfection, and of our future, and of the possibilities which may become actualities, even here and now; and let us not fitfully use what power we have, but make the best of what graces are ours, and enjoy and expatiate in the spiritual blessings of peace and rest which Christ has already given to us. "To him that hath shall be given." And the surest way to lose what we have is to neglect the increasing of it.

And, above all, let us keep nearer to our Master, will and live more in fellowship with our Lord, and that help us to deny ourselves to ungodliness and worldly lusts. It is the prevalence of these, and the absence of self-denial, that ruins most of the Christian lives that are ruined in this world. If a man wants to be what he is not, he must cease to be what he is.

Self-sacrifice, and the emptying of our hearts of trash and trifles, is the only way to get our hearts filled with God and with His blessing. Let us keep near Jesus Christ. If we have Him for ours we have peace, we have power, we have purity. "He of God is made unto us" all in all. And every gift that may adorn humanity, and make our lives joyous and ourselves noble, is given to us in Jesus Christ. Let us put away from ourselves, then, this slothful indifference to our unattained possessions. "Know ye that Ramoth is ours?" "Let us be still" no longer. "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours if ye are Christ's."

## Christ our Lesson and our Teacher.

“BUT ye have not so learned Christ ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught *in* Him.”—EPH. iv. 20, 21.



HE Apostle has been describing in very severe terms the godlessness and corruption of heathenism. He reckons on the assent of the Ephesian Christians when he paints the society in which they lived as alienated from God, insensible to the restraints of conscience, and foul with all uncleanness. That was a picture of heathenism drawn from the life and submitted to the judgment of those who knew the original only too well. It has been reserved for modern eulogists to regard such statements as exaggerations. Those who knew heathenism from the inside knew that they were sober truth. The colonnades of the stately temple of Ephesus stank with proofs of their correctness.

Out of that mass of moral putridity these Ephesian Christians had been dragged. But its effects still lingered in them, and it was all about them with its pestilential miasma. So the first thing that they needed was to be guarded against it. The Apostle, in the subsequent context, with great earnestness, gives

a series of moral injunctions of the most elementary kind. Their very simplicity is eloquent. What sort of people must they have formerly been who needed to be bade not to steal and not to lie ?

But before he comes to the specific duties, he lays down the broad general principle of which all these are to be but manifestations—viz., that they and we need, as the foundation of all noble conduct and of all theoretical ethics, the suppression and crucifixion of the old self and the investiture with a new self. And this double necessity, says the Apostle in my text, is the plain teaching of Jesus Christ to all His disciples.

Now the words which I have selected as my text are but a fragment of a closely concatenated whole, but I may deal with them separately at this time. They are very remarkable. They lay, as it seems to me, the basis for all Christian conduct ; and they teach us how there is no real knowledge of Jesus Christ which does not effloresce into the practice of these virtues and graces which the Apostle goes on to describe.

I.—First, Christ our Lesson and Christ our Teacher.

Mark the singular expression with which this text begins. “Ye have not so learned *Christ*.” Now, we generally talk about learning a subject, a language, a science, or an art ; but we do not talk about learning people. But Paul says we are Christ’s disciples, not only in the sense that we learn of Him as Teacher—which follows in the next clause—but that we learn Him as the theme of our study.

That is to say, the relation of the person of Jesus Christ to all that He has to teach and reveal to the

world is altogether different from that of all other teachers of all sorts of truth, to the truth which they proclaim. You can accept the truths and dismiss into oblivion the men from whom you got them. But you cannot reject Christ and take Christianity. The two are inseparably united. For, in regard of all spiritual and of all moral truth—truth about conduct and character—Jesus Christ *is* what He teaches. So we may say, turning well-known words of a poet in another direction: “My lesson is in Thee.”

But that is not all. My text goes on to speak about another thing: “Ye have learned Christ if so be that ye have *heard Him* and been taught.” Now that “if so be” is not the “if” of uncertainty or doubt, but it is equivalent to “if, as I know to be the case,” or “*since* ye have heard Him.” Away there in Ephesus, years and years after the crucifixion, these people who had never seen Christ in the flesh, nor heard a word from the lips “into which grace was poured,” are yet addressed by the Apostle as those who had listened to Him and heard Him speak. They had “heard Him and been taught.” So He was Lesson and He was Teacher. And that is as true about us as it was about them. Let me say only a word or two about each of these two thoughts.

I have already suggested that the underlying truth which warrants the first of them, is that Jesus Christ's relation to His message and revelation is altogether different from that of other teachers to what they have to communicate to the world. Of course we all know that, in regard of the wider sphere of religious

and Christian truth, it is not only what Christ said, but even more what He did and was, that makes His revelation of the Father's heart. Precious as are the words which drop from His lips, which are spirit and are life, His life itself is more than all His teachings; and it is when we learn, not *from* Him, but when we learn *Him*, that we see the Father. But my text has solely reference to conduct, and in that aspect it just implies this thought, that the sum of all duty, the height of all moral perfectness, the realised ideal of humanity, is in Christ, and that the true way to know what a man or a nation ought to do is to study Him.

How strange it is, when one comes to consider it, that the impression of absolute perfection, free from all limitations of race or country or epoch or individual character—and yet not a vague abstraction but a true living Person—has been printed upon the minds and hearts of the world by these four little pamphlets which we call gospels! I do not think that there is anything in the whole history of literature to compare with the impression of veracity and historical reality and individual personality which is made by these fragmentary narratives. And although it has nothing to do with my present subject, I may just say in a sentence that it seems to me that the character of Jesus Christ as painted in the gospels, in its incomparable vividness and vitality, is one of the strongest evidences for the simple faithfulness as biographies, of these books. Nothing else but the Man seen could have resulted in such compositions.

But apart altogether from that, how blessed it is

that we have not to enter upon any lengthened investigations, far beyond the power of average minds, in order to get hold of the fundamental laws of moral conduct! How blessed it is that all the harshness of "Obey this law or die" is by His life changed into "Look at Me, and, for My love's sake, study Me and be like Me!" This is the blessed peculiarity which gives all its power and distinctive characteristic to the morality of the Gospel, that law is changed from a statuesque white ideal, pure as marble and cold and lifeless as it, into a living Person with a throbbing heart of love, and an outstretched hand of help, whose word is, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments, and be like Me."

Christian men and women! study Jesus Christ. That is the Alpha and Omega of all right knowledge of duty and of all right practice of it. Learn Him, His self-suppression, His self-command, His untroubled calmness, His immovable patience, His continual gentleness, His constant reference of all things to the Father's will. Study these. To imitate Him is blessedness; to resemble Him is perfection. "Ye have learned Christ" if you are Christians at all. You have at least begun the alphabet, but oh! in Him "are hid all the treasures," not only "of wisdom and knowledge," but of "whatsoever things are lovely and of good report"; and "if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise," we shall find them in Him who is our Lesson, our perfect Lesson.

But that is not all. Lessons are very well, but—dear me!—the world wants something besides lessons. It has had plenty of teaching. The trouble is not that

we are not instructed, but that we do not take the lessons that are laid before us. And so my text suggests another thing besides the wholly inadequate conception, as it would be if it stood alone, of a mere exhibition of what we ought to be.

“If so be that we have *heard* Him.” As I said, these Ephesian Christians, far away in Asia Minor, with seas and years between them and the plains of Galilee and the Cross of Calvary, are yet regarded by the Apostle as having listened to Jesus Christ. We, far away down the ages, and in another corner of the world, as really, without metaphor, in plain fact, may have Jesus Christ speaking to us, and may hear His voice. These Ephesians had heard Him, not only because they had heard about Him, nor because they had heard Him speaking through His servant Paul and others, but because, as Paul believed, that Lord, who had spoken with human lips words which it was possible for a man to utter when He was here on earth, when caught up into the third heaven was still speaking to men, even according to His own promise, which He gave, at the very close of His career, “I have declared Thy name unto My brethren, and *will* declare it.” So, though “He began both to do and to teach” before He was taken up, after His ascension He continues both the doing and the tuition. And, in verity, we all may hear His voice speaking in the depths of our hearts; speaking through the renewed conscience; speaking by that Spirit who will guide us into all the truth that we need; speaking through the ages to all who will listen to His voice.

The conception of Christ as a Teacher which is

held by many who deny His redeeming work and dismiss as incredible His divinity seems to me altogether inadequate, unless it be supplemented by the belief that He now has and exercises the power of communicating wisdom and knowledge and warning and stimulus to waiting hearts; and that when we hear within the depths of our souls the voice saying to us, "This is the way, walk ye in it," or saying to us, "Pass not by, enter not into it," if we have waited for Him, and studied His example and character, and sought, not to please ourselves, but to be led by His wisdom, we may be sure that it is Christ Himself who speaks. Reverence the inward monitor, and when He within thy heart, by His spirit, calls thee, do thou answer, "Speak, Lord! Thy servant heareth." "Ye have learned Christ if so be that ye have hearkened to Him."

II.—Secondly, mark the condition of learning the Lesson and hearing the Teacher.

Our Authorized Version, in accordance with its very frequent practice, has evacuated the last words of my text of their true force by the substitution of the more intelligible "*by Him*" for what the Apostle writes—"in Him." The true rendering gives us the condition on which we learn our Lesson and hear our Teacher. "*In Him*" is no mere surplusage, and is not to be weakened down, as this translation of ours does, into a mere "*by Him*," but it declares that, unless we keep ourselves in union with Jesus Christ, His voice will not be heard in our hearts, and the lesson will pass unlearned.

You know, dear brother, how emphatically and

continually in the New Testament this doctrine of the dwelling of the believing soul in Christ, and the reciprocal dwelling of Christ in the believing soul, is insisted upon. And I, for my part, believe that one great cause of the unsatisfactory condition of the average Christianity of this day is the slurring over and minimizing of these twin great and solemn truths. I would fain bring you back to the Master's words, as declaring the deepest truths in relation to the connection between the believing soul and the Christ in whom it believes:—"Abide in Me, and I in you." I wish you would go home and take this Epistle to the Ephesians, and read it over, putting a pencil mark below each place in which occur the words "in Christ Jesus." I think you would learn something if you would do it.

But all that I have to say at present is that, if we would keep ourselves, by faith, by love, by meditation, by aspiration, by the submission of the will, and by practical obedience, in Jesus Christ, enclosed in Him as it were—then, and then only, shall we learn His lesson, and then, and then only, shall we hear Him speak. Why! if you never think about Him, how can you learn Him? If you seldom, or sleepily, take up your Bibles and read the gospels, of what good is His example to you? If you wander away into all manner of regions of thought and enjoyment instead of keeping near to Him, how can you expect that He shall communicate Himself to you? If we keep ourselves in touch with that Lord, if we bring all our actions to Him, and measure our conduct by His pattern, then we shall

learn His lesson. What does a student in a school of design do? He puts his feeble copy of some great picture beside the original, and compares it touch for touch, line for line, shade for shade, and so corrects its errors. Take your lives to the Exemplar in that fashion, and go over them bit by bit. Is *this* like Jesus Christ; is *that* what He would have done? Then "*in Him*," thus in contact with Him, thus correcting our daubs by the perfect picture, we shall learn our lesson and listen to our Teacher.

Still your passions, muzzle your inclinations, clap a bridle on your will, and, as some tumultuous crowd would be hushed into silence that they might listen to the king speaking to them, make a great silence in your hearts, and you will "hear Him" and be taught "in Him."

III.—Lastly, the test and result of having learned the Lesson and listened to the Teacher is unlikeness to surrounding corruption.

"Ye have *not so* learned Christ." Of course the hideous immoralities of Ephesus are largely, but by no means altogether, gone from Manchester. Of course, nineteen centuries of Christianity have to a very large extent changed the tone of society and influenced the moral judgments and practices even of persons who are not Christians. But there still remains a *world*, and there still remains unfilled up the gulf between the worldly and the godly life. And I believe it is just as needful as ever it was, though in different ways, for Christians to exhibit unlikeness to the world. "Not so," must be our motto; or, as

the Jewish patriot said, "So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord."

I do not want you to make yourselves singular ; I do not want you to wear conventional badges of unlikeness to certain selected evil habits. A Christian man's unlikeness to the world consists a great deal more in doing or being what it does not do and is not than in not doing or being what it does and is. It is easy to abstain from conventional things ; it is a great deal harder to put in practice the unworldly virtues of the Christian character.

There are wide regions of life in which all men must act alike, be they saints or sinners, be they believers, Agnostics, Mohammedans, Turks, Jews, or anything else. There are two ways of doing the same thing. If two women were sitting at a grindstone, one of them a Christian and the other not, the one that pushed her handle half round the circle for Christ's sake would do it in a different fashion from the other one who took it from her hand and brought it round to the other side of the stone, and did it without reference to God.

Brethren, be sure of this, that if you and I do not find in ourselves the impulse to abstain from coarse enjoyments, to put our feet upon passions and desires, appetites and aims, which godless men recognize and obey without qualm or restraint, we need to ask ourselves: "In what sense am I a Christian, or in what sense have I heard Christ?" It is a poor affair to fling away our faithful protest against the world's evils for the sake of receiving the world's smile. Modern Christianity is often not vital enough to be

hated by a godless world ; and it is not hated because it only deserves to be scorned. Keep near Jesus Christ, live in the light of His face, drink in the inspiration and instruction of His example, and the unlikeness will come, and no mistake. Dwell near Him, keep in Him, and the likeness will come, as it always comes to lovers, who grow to resemble that or those whom they love. "It is enough for the disciple to be as his Teacher, and for the slave that he be like his Lord."

## Unclothed and Clothed Upon.

‘ THAT ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. . . . And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.’—EPHES. iv. 22, 24.



WE saw in the last sermon, in considering the previous context, that the Apostle there sets forth Christ as being both the Lesson and the Teacher of the Christian man. In the words of our present text we have the sum and substance of the lesson which in Christ we receive. I have ventured to take these words, omitting some others which are difficult and important, because by bringing them into immediate connection with the thoughts in the preceding verses we get a clear view of the general trend of the Apostle's thought.

The great lesson for Christian people, which tests the reality of their discipleship, is this double exhortation: "put off the old, . . . put on the new." The sum and substance of all Christian duty and conduct may be set forth as being that we denude ourselves of ourselves, and invest ourselves with new selves. It is a paradox, but it is the meaning of the Christian life.

I.—We have here, first, the actual self which must be got rid of.

The picture which the Apostle draws is a very dark one. He does not mean it to be a complete statement of what human nature is, apart from Christ. But he does mean it to be a description of what exists in every man, however it may be restrained by better influences.

I need not remind you that his venturesome anatomy is only in accordance with ordinary usage, by which we are accustomed to speak of "our better" and "our worse selves," of "our old" and "of our present selves"; and so on. The Apostle simply carries a familiar division a step further.

Now, note, that this old self has for its characteristic that it is governed and shaped by lust. That word, in apostolic and Scriptural meaning—and I suppose in English at the date of our translation—had not shrunk to the narrow and foul sense which it now carries. It is a singularly eloquent testimony to the tremendous power and widespread extent of these sensual appetites that they have monopolized a word which originally had a much wider meaning. For the Greek and the English alike mean, not merely animal appetites or passions connected with our physical organization, but they mean desires of all sorts: the goings out of the mind and will after anything apart from God, conceived of as good. Paul's notion of "the lusts of the flesh" includes not only gluttony and drunkenness and uncleanness of other sorts, but also the most purely mental desires, such as ambition and love of fame, and all the other

more refined forms, by which men let themselves go out in longing after created things lower than God Himself. This is what he means by lusts : strong desires set upon creatures.

And is it not true that, whilst there are other elements in all men, yet, speaking broadly and on the whole, men are governed by their desires far more than by their consciences or their judgments? Clearly enough, if we will think of it for a moment, these appetites, which are excited by external things conceived to be good, were never meant to be on the quarter-deck, and to have command of the ship. Clearly they bear upon their very fronts, like the Hindoos with their caste-mark on their foreheads, the tokens of their destination for service. They are meant to stimulate to action, but they are meant to take their orders from another part of our nature. And if a man is ruled by his desires, then he has failed to be what he should be.

And I maintain that, speaking broadly and generally, and not for a moment denying the fact that in men there are motions towards good, and strong recalcitrations of conscience and of judgment against the slavery to the worse part, still, on the whole, it remains true that, apart from Jesus Christ, desires fashion men. There has been rebellion in the little kingdom within, and the mob has got command, and the rulers are in prison.

Then the Apostle's next thought is : these desires are liars. "Deceitful lusts" our translation represents him as saying, but that is scarcely the full rendering of his word. "Lusts of deceit" is the literal and the

more forcible translation. But, substantially, the meaning is that the desires to which we submit tell us lies, and so they govern us.

And is not that true? What does it mean that men have got two names for almost all sorts of vices; one of which they apply to their own sins, one which they keep for other people's? Why is licentiousness called "sowing wild oats"? Why is miserliness called "prudence"? Why is what in the one is "flat blasphemy" in the other but "a choleric word"? Why has every sin a pet name—a euphemism, as they say—but because our desires are liars? When they would coax us into the toils they say, "Come, is it not a little one?" and when they have got us, they turn round and say, "It is too great a one for you ever to get rid of it." They lie to us in describing the essential nature of the acts to which they tempt us.

And they lie to us in another way, by holding out to us a promise that will never be fulfilled. They are all "juggling fiends, that palter with us in a double sense." Remember the old story, out of Roman history, of the woman that was tempted to betray her country by the promise of receiving from the invaders "that which they wore on their left arms." She meant the golden bracelets. They promised, and when the treason was consummated they crushed her below their shields.

So it is with every evil thing that appeals to our quickly stimulated desires. It promises satisfaction of the desire, and that promise may be kept, but the satisfied desire leaves the man unsatisfied. Children think that there is a pot of gold at the foot of the

rainbow, and when they get to it they find only wet vapour, with a deceitful glister of the sunshine on it for a moment.

And then, says the Apostle, these desires which lie make the man that obeys them steadily progressive in corruption. For the word which is rendered in my text "corrupt" fully means "being corrupted." And it points to that solemn thought, that if once we take wishes or inclinations of the coarser or of the more refined kind for our guides, in the exact proportion in which we let them have the control they drive us into steadily increasing deterioration, and we get more and more scurfed over with foul leprosy. There is nothing more certain than that tragic necessity of a downward course with accelerated rapidity, if once we put our feet on the fatal slope. And so, dear brethren, all surface refinements are vain and futile, and lives that are yielded as some of ours are, if not unconditionally and exclusively, at least predominantly, to the sway of inclinations, are like some stagnant ponds with an iridescent scum on the top, which shows prismatic colours, but is the outcome of putrefaction. So, many a life, very fair in external appearance, is really in its depths rotting away by self-indulgence, corrupting with "lusts of deceit."

Now, I do not say that that is the whole of you. I do not say that that is all of any man; but I do say that is a part of every man. And so this exhortation comes in, reiterating the teaching of all the moralists that ever were; and if we separate it from its context it is as vain as all their moralities. "Put off the old man." The image, of course, is taken from a garment

Bid Hercules put off the shirt of Nessus that is on him! It was killing him; and the old myth tells us that extrication from it was hopeless; and that there was no remedy but the funeral pyre, which would burn Hercules and his shirt together. How can I separate myself from myself? Are not my desires as much me as my conscience and my will? The problem is insoluble within human limits. And yet Paul, without seeming to think that he is requiring anything at all difficult, calmly says, "Put off the old man. Denude yourself of yourself." He has made an impossible requirement; until we go a step further, and hear what else he has to say.

II.—So that brings me to the next point in my text—the new self which may be put on.

I have omitted the intervening clause, not because I consider it of little importance, but because I wish to bring together the main line of the Apostle's thoughts. We have here the new man set in direct antithesis to the old. The antitheses are still more complete if we adhere a little more closely to the original. Note how, in point of fact, he contrasts the actual self and the possible one in every point. The one is "the old," the other is "the new." The one is "tending to corruption," the other is, by a Divine act of power, "created." The one is "after lusts," fashioned in their likeness; the other is "after God," fashioned in His. The one obeys "lusts of deceit," the other is "created in righteousness and holiness of truth." As deceit is the characteristic of the one, so truth is the origin and source of the other. And thus the contrast is made out, and the Apostle

suggests by these characteristics the motives for, and the possibility of, realizing this magnificent ideal, and being renewed in ourselves by a new self, which has no affinity with corruption, but is a creation of God's, which is made in His own likeness, which is fed by His Divine Spirit, which is moulded by the truth that will produce righteousness and holiness.

So, then, here are the thoughts which he thus packs together. First of all, a Divine creative act in Jesus Christ is ready to give to every one of us a real new self, and a new life straight from God. Brethren, that is the very central message of the Gospel that I have to bring. Jesus Christ is the life, and He will be your life and mine if we will let Him. What is the meaning of the Christian word "regeneration"? What is it to be born again, but to receive into our hearts a new source and fountain of being, which will not, indeed, make new persons of us, but which will give a new power for obedience, new tastes, a new direction to our desires, new energies, new thoughts. "Behold! If any man is in Christ Jesus he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. All things are become new." Oh! would that I could get you to believe and to feel far more than you do that that is the simple truth, that it is no mere exaggeration, nor any lofty metaphorical way of saying something very much smaller than it sounds at first, but that really the very central idea of Christ's gift is that it is the gift of a new nature. This Prometheus has come down from heaven with a spark in the reed of His weak humanity, and the reed being broken by His death upon the cross, His longing is

being fulfilled, and the fire of a new life is kindled upon earth.

It is no use to say to any one, "Put on the new man," as if he were to make a new character for himself. But the injunction assumes an altogether different aspect when we bid him put on what has been created, and take for his own the new self which God is ready to give.

Then, further, our text declares that this possible new life will be fashioned after the Divine likeness. It is created "after God" instead of being moulded by the pressure of these earth-born and earth-desiring lusts. It is made like that Divine nature. The true likeness of man to God, which is lost in man's sin, lies in his moral nature, his love of good, his hatred of evil. There is a likeness of God inseparable from humanity, which consists in a man's being able to say, "I," and consequently to turn to Him and say, "Thou"; the likeness which consists in personality, in spiritual being, in volition, and the like. But the quintessence of the likeness of man to God lies here, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity." And this life of likeness—sympathy with God in good, and sympathy with God in antipathy to evil—may be ours. It is quickened by the Divine Spirit; it is nourished and strengthened by the truth in Jesus Christ.

The problem does not look so insoluble now, does it? It is not such a heartless piece of irony to say to the poor, broken man, "Get up and walk! put off the old self," when you can show him a Divine creation of a new self glittering in its likeness to God; or, in

another image, a robe of righteousness waiting for him if he will put it on. The actual self is corrupt; the possible self is pure and God-created.

III.—So, lastly, note our double task—put off, put on.

Now, I suppose that in the very initial and most faltering steps by which any of us become Christians these two commandments begin to be fulfilled. Because, whensoever a man thoroughly hates and repents of his sin he has put off the old man, and whensoever he opens his heart to the reception of Christ's saving power and quickening love he has put on—though it be but in germ or in infancy—the better self. But then there must follow all through the life the repetition and increase of these two acts. We must daily, not only be thwarting our inclinations, for that is a poor affair, but be getting rid of the inclinations themselves, which is the only real conquest over them.

And we must be growing, by daily efforts, more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Now, notice that these commands, "put off," "put on," are really but diverse aspects of the same thing. The surest way to put off the old is to put on the new. There have been great blunders about that. The great fault of the mystical writers in Christianity, which goes a long way to counterbalance their great excellences, is that so largely they preach self-suppression and self-denial as a preparation for the receiving of the better nature and the higher life. It is a mistake. The same blunder besets the salvation-by-works people, and the same blunder besets a great

many modern social reformers. "Get rid of the evil and then assimilate the good." That is putting the cart before the horse. The withered leaves hang on the beech trees all through the winter, but they drop off when the new life begins to force its way up, and drives them from their precarious foothold. You cannot destroy the desires, but you can divert them. Make a new bed for the river and the old bed will soon be left dry. Which, being translated into plain English, is just this—the more we fill our hearts with Jesus Christ, the less room will there be for the "lusts of deceit." The cup brimming with the new wine of the kingdom has no room for baser liquors; and the man whose desires and the whole current of whose being set towards Jesus Christ will not be the slave of lying lusts which lead to corruption.

Brethren! since this new life is to be found in Him, the truest way to secure it is to keep close to Him in whom it is found. Since it is nourished and sustained by the Divine Spirit, the truest way to possess it is to open our hearts to the entrance of that Spirit. Since it is nourished and fed by the truth which is in the word of the Gospel, the way to increase it is to be familiar in heart and mind with the motives and promises and commandments of that Gospel. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

So, dear friends, it is not hopeless to say to any one, "Put off the old self," if we can say to him at the same time, "Take on the new, the creation of God." The world, and our own weak hearts, may well ask in despair, "Who can bring a clean thing out

of an unclean?" and have to answer in sadness, "Not one"! It is hopeless. If we continue to be ourselves we have got *bacteria* enough in us to kill us, and we cannot but continue ourselves, unless we listen to Him, who said "Behold! I make all things new," and will let Him "create in us clean hearts, and renew right spirits within us."

## How to Own Ourselves.

“THEY that believe to the saving of the soul.”—HEB. x. 39.



THE writer uses a somewhat uncommon word in this clause, which is not altogether adequately represented by the translation “saving.” Its true force will be apparent by comparing one or two of the few instances in which it occurs in the New Testament. For example, it is twice employed in the Epistles to the Thessalonians; in one case being rendered, “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain” (or, more correctly, to *the obtaining of*) “salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ”; and in another, “called to the obtaining of glory through Jesus Christ.” It is employed twice besides, in two other places of Scripture, and in both of these it means “possession.” So that, though practically equivalent to the idea of salvation, there is a very beautiful shade of difference which is well worth noticing.

The thought of the text is substantially this—those who believe *win* their souls; they acquire them for their possession. We talk colloquially about “people that cannot call their souls their own.” That

is a very true description of all men who are not lords of themselves through faith in Jesus Christ. "They who believe to the gaining of their own souls" is the meaning of the writer here.

And I almost think that we may trace in this peculiar expression an allusion, somewhat veiled but real, to similar words of our Lord's. For He said, when, like the writer in the present context, He was encouraging His disciples to steadfastness in the face of difficulties and persecutions, "In your patience"—in your persistent adherence to Me, whatever might draw you away—"ye shall win"—not merely *possess*, as our Bible has it, and not a commandment, but a promise—"in your patience ye shall win your souls." Whether that allusion be sustainable or no matters comparatively little; it is the significant and beautiful thought which underlies the word to which I wish to turn, and to present you with some illustrations of it.

I.—First, then, if we *lose* ourselves we *win* ourselves.

All men admit in theory that a self-centred life is a blunder. Jesus Christ has all moralists and all thoughtful men wholly with Him when He says, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life shall find it." There is no such way of filling a soul with enlargement and blessedness and of evolving new powers and capacities as self-oblivion for some great cause, for some great love, for some great enthusiasm. Many a woman has found herself when she held her child in her arms, and in the self-oblivion which comes from maternal affections and cares has sprung into a loftier new life. Many a heart, of

husband and wife, can set its seal to this truth, that the blessedness of love is that it decentralizes the soul, and substitutes another aim for the wretched and narrow one that is involved in self-seeking. And even if we do not refer to these sacred heights of maternal or of wedded love, there are many other noble counterpoises to the degrading influence of self-absorption, which all men recognize and some men practise. Whoever has once tasted the joy and rapture of flinging himself into some great enthusiasm, and has known how much fuller life is when so inspired than in its ordinary forms, needs no words to convince him that the secret of blessedness, elevation, and power, if it is to be put into one great word, must be put into this one, "self-oblivion."

But whilst all these counterpoises to the love of self are, in their measure and degree, great and noble and blessed, not one of them, nor all of them put together, will so break the fetters from off a prisoned soul and let it out into the large place of utter and glad self-oblivion as the course which our text enjoins upon us when it says: If you wish to forget yourselves, to abandon and lose yourselves, fling yourselves into Christ's arms, and by faith yield your whole being, will, trust, purposes, aims, everything—yield them all to Him; and when you can say, "We are not our own," then first will you belong to yourselves and have won your own souls.

There is nothing except that absolute departure from all reliance upon our own poor powers, and from all making of ourselves our centre and aim in life, which gives us true possession of ourselves. Nothing else is

comparable to the talismanic power of trust in Jesus Christ. When thus we lose ourselves in Him we find ourselves, and find Him in ourselves.

I believe that, at bottom, a life must either spin round on its own axis, self-centred and self-moved, or else it must be drawn by the mass and weight and mystical attractiveness of the great central sun, and swept clean out of its own little path to become a satellite round Him. Then only will it move in music and beauty, and flash back the lustre of an unfading light. Self or God—one or other will be the centre of every human life.

It is well to be touched with lofty enthusiasms ; it is well to conquer self in the eager pursuit of some great thought or large subject of study ; it is well to conquer self in the sweetness of domestic love ; but through all these there may run a perverting and polluting reference to myself. Affection may become but a subtle prolongation of myself, and study and thought may likewise be tainted, and even in the enthusiasm for a great cause there may mingle much of self-regard ; and on the whole there is nothing that will sweep out, and keep out, the seven devils of selfishness except to yield yourselves to God, drawn by His mercies, and say, " I am not my own ; I am bought with a price." Then, and only then, will you belong to yourselves.

II.—Secondly, if we will take Christ for our Lord we shall be lords of our own souls.

I have said that self-surrender is self-possession. It is equally true that self-control is self-possession ; and it is as true about this application of my text as

it was about the former, that Christianity only says more emphatically what all moralists say, and suggests and supplies a more efficient means of accomplishing the end which they all recognize as good. For everybody knows that the man who is a slave to his own passions, lusts, or desire is not his own master. And everybody knows that the man who is the sport of circumstance, and yields to every temptation that comes sweeping round him, as bamboos bend before every blast; or the man who is guided by fashion, conventionality, custom, and the influence of the men amongst whom he lives, and whom he calls "the world," is not his own master. He "dare not call his soul his own."

What do we mean by being self-possessed, except this, that we can so rule our more fluctuating and sensitive parts as that, notwithstanding appeals made to them by external circumstances, they do not necessarily yield to these? He possesses himself who, in the face of antagonism, can do what is right; who, in the face of temptation, will not do what is wrong; who can dare to be in the right with one or two; and who is not moulded by circumstances, howsoever they may influence him, but reacts upon them as a hammer, and is not as an anvil. And this superiority over the parts of my nature which are meant to be kept down; and this assertion of independent power in the face of circumstances and this freedom from the dominion of cliques and parties and organs of opinion and loud voices round us, this is best secured in its fulness and completeness by the path which my text suggests.

Trust in Jesus Christ, and let Him be your Commander-in-Chief, and you have won your souls. Let Him dominate them, and you can dominate them. If you will give your wills into His hands, He will give them back to you and make you able to subdue your passions and desires. Put the reins into Christ's hands and say, "Here, O Lord, guide Thou the horses and the chariot, for I cannot coerce them, but Thou canst." Then He will come and bring a new ally in the field, and cast a new weight into the scale, and you will no longer be the slave of the servile and inferior parts of your nature; nor be kicked about, the football of circumstances; nor be the echo of some other body's views, but you will have a voice of your own, and a will of your own, and a soul of your own, because you have given it to Christ, and He will help you to control it. Such a man—and I verily believe, from the bottom of my heart, such a man only—in the fullest sense, is

"Free from slavish bands  
Of hope to rise or fear to fall;  
Lord of himself, though not of lands,  
And, having nothing, yet has all."

What does some little rajah, on the edge of our great Indian Empire, do when troubled with rebels that he cannot subdue? He goes and makes himself a feudatory of the great central Power at Calcutta, and then down comes a regiment or two, and makes very short work of the rebellion that the little kinglet could do nothing with. If you go to Christ and say to Him, "Dear Lord, I take my crown from my head and lay it at Thy feet. Come Thou to help me to

rule this anarchic realm of my own soul," you will win yourself.

III.—Thirdly, if we have faith in Christ we acquire a better self.

The thing that most thoughtful men and women feel after they have gone a little way into life is not so much that they want to possess themselves, as that they want to get rid of themselves—of all the failures and shame and disappointment and futility of their lives; and that desire may be accomplished. We cannot strip ourselves of ourselves by any effort. The bitter old past keeps living on, and leaves with us seeds of weakness and memories that sometimes corrupt, and always enfeeble: memories that seem to limit the possibilities of the future in a tragic fashion. Ah, brethren, we can get rid of ourselves; and, instead of continuing the poor, sin-laden, feeble creatures that we are, we can have pouring into our souls the gift most real—though people now-a-days, in their shallow religion, call it mystical—of a new impulse and a new life. The old individuality will remain, but new tastes, new aspirations, aversions, hopes, and capacities to realize them may all be ours, so that "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature"; and in barter for the old garment he receives the robe of righteousness. You can lose yourselves, in a very deep and earnest sense, if, trusting in Jesus Christ, you open the door of the heart to the influx of that new life which is His best gift. Faith wins a better self, and we may each experience, in all its fulness and blessedness, the paradox of the Apostle when he said, "I live" now, at last, in triumphant possession of this

better life: "I live" *now*—I only existed before—"yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And with Christ in me I first find myself.

IV.—Lastly, if by faith we win our souls here, we save them from destruction hereafter.

I have said that the word of my text is substantially equivalent to the more frequent and common expression "salvation"; though with a shade of difference, which I have been trying to bring out. And this substantial equivalence is more obvious if you will note that the text is the second member of an antithesis, of which the first is, "we are not of them which draw back into perdition."

So, then, the writer sets up, as exact opposites of one another, these two ideas—perdition or destruction on the one hand, and the saving or winning of the soul on the other. Therefore, whilst we must give due weight to the considerations which I have already been suggesting, we shall not grasp the whole of the writer's meaning unless we admit also the thought of the future. And that the same blending of the two ideas, of possession and salvation in the more usual sense of the word, was implied in the Lord's saying, of which I have suggested there may be an echo here, is plain if you observe that the version in St. Luke gives the text which I have already quoted: "In your patience ye shall win your souls"; and that of St. Matthew, in the same connection, gives, instead, the saying, "he that *endureth*"—which corresponds with *patience*—"he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

So, then, brethren, you cannot be said to have won

your souls if you are only keeping them for destruction. And such destruction is clearly laid down here as the fate of those who turn away from Jesus Christ.

Now, it seems to me that no fair interpretation can eject from that word "perdition," or "destruction," an element of awe and terror. However you may interpret the ruin, it is ruin utter of which it speaks. And I am very much afraid that in this generation eager discussions about the duration of punishment, and the final condition of those who die impenitent, have had a disastrous influence on a great many minds and consciences in reference to this whole subject, by making it rather a subject of controversy than a solemn truth to be pondered. However the controversies be settled, there is terror enough left in that word to make us all bethink ourselves.

I lay it on your hearts, dear friends—it is no business of mine to say much about it, but I lay it on your hearts—and on my own; and I beseech you to ponder it. Do not mix it up with wholly independent questions about what is to become of people that never heard about Jesus Christ. "The Judge of all the earth will do right." What this verse says applies to people that *have* heard about Him—that is, to you and me—and to people that do not accept Him—and that is some of us; and about them it says that they "draw back unto perdition."

Now, remember, the alternative applies to each of us. It is a case of "either—or" in regard to us all. If we have taken Christ for our Saviour, and, as I said, put the reins into His hands and given ourselves to Him by love and submission and confidence, then

we own our souls, because we have given them to Him to keep, "and He is able to keep that which is committed to Him against that day."

But I am bound to tell you, in the plainest words I can command, that if you have not thus surrendered yourself to Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, His intercession, His quickening Spirit, then I know not where you are to find one foothold of hope that upon you there will not come down the overwhelming fate that is darkly portrayed in that one solemn word.

Oh, brethren, let us all ponder the question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

## XVII.

### Salted with Fire.

“EVERYONE shall be salted with fire.”—MARK ix. 49.



OUR Lord has just been uttering some of the most solemn words that ever came from His gracious lips. He has been enjoining the severest self-suppression, extending even to mutilation and excision of the eye, the hand, or the foot that might cause us to stumble. He has been giving that sharp lesson on the ground of plain common sense, and enlightened self-regard. It *is* better, obviously, to live maimed than to die whole. The man who elects to keep a mortified limb, and thereby to lose life, is a suicide and a fool. It is a solemn thought that a similar mad choice is possible in the moral and spiritual region.

To these stern injunctions, accompanied by the awful sanctions of that consideration, our Lord appends the words of my text. They are obscure, and have often been misunderstood. This is not the place to enter on a discussion of the various explanations that have been proposed of them. A word or two is all that is needful to put you in possession of the

point of view from which I wish to lay them on your hearts at this time.

I take the "everyone" of my text to mean not mankind generally, but every individual of the class whom our Lord is addressing—that is to say, His disciples. He is laying down the law for all Christians. I take the paradox which brings together "salting" and "fire" to refer, not to salt as a means of communicating savour to food, but as means of preserving from putrefaction. And I take the "fire" here to refer, not to the same process which is hinted at in the awful preceding words, "the fire is not quenched," but to be set in opposition to that fire, and to mean something entirely different. There is a fire that destroys and there is a fire that preserves; and the alternative for every man is to choose between the destructive and the conserving influences. Christian disciples have to submit to be "salted with fire" lest a worse thing befall them.

I.—And so the first point that I would ask you to notice here is—that fiery cleansing to which every Christian must yield.

Now I have already referred to the relation between the words of my text and those immediately preceding, as being in some sense one of opposition and contrast. I think we are put on the right track for understanding the solemn words of this text if we remember the great sayings of John the Baptist, where, in precisely similar fashion, there are set side by side the two conceptions of the chaff being cast into the unquenchable fire (the same expression as in our text), and "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

The salting fire, then, which cleanses and preserves, and to which every Christian soul must submit itself, to be purged thereby, is, as I take it, primarily and fundamentally the fire of that Divine Spirit which Christ Himself told us that He had come to cast upon the earth, and yearned, in a passion of desire, to see kindled. The very frequent use of the emblem in this same signification throughout Scripture, I suppose I need not recall to you. It seems to me that the only worthy interpretation of the words before us, which goes down into their depths, and harmonizes with the whole of the rest of the teaching of Scripture, is that which recognizes these words of my text as no unwelcome threat, as no bitter necessity, but as a joyful promise bringing to men, laden and burdened with their sins, the good news that it is possible for them to be purged from them entirely by the fiery ministration of that Divine Spirit. Just as you take a piece of foul clay and put it into the furnace, and can see, as it gets red hot, the stains melt away, as a cloud in the blue, from its surface, so if we will plunge ourselves into the influences of that Divine power which Christ has come to communicate to the world, our sin and all our impurities will melt from off us, and we shall be clean. No amount of scrubbing with soap and water will do it. The stain is a great deal too deep for that, and a mightier solvent than any we can apply, unaided and unsupplied from above, is needed to make us clean. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean," especially when the would-be bringer is the unclean thing himself? Surely not one. Unless there be a power *ab extra*, unparticipant of man's

evils, and yet capable of mingling with the evil man's inmost nature, and dealing with it, then I believe that universal experience and our individual experience tell us that there is no hope that we shall ever get rid of our transgression.

Brethren, for a man by his own unaided effort, however powerful, continuous, and wisely directed it may be, to cleanse himself utterly from his iniquity, is as hopeless as it would be for him to sit down with a hammer and a chisel and try by mechanical means to get all the iron out of a piece of ironstone. The union is chemical, not mechanical. And so hammers and chisels will only get a very little of the metal out. The one solvent is fire. Put the obstinate crude ore into your furnace, and get the temperature up, and it will run clear. There should be mountains of scoriæ, the dross and relics of our abandoned sins, around us all.

If we want to be delivered, let us go into the fire. It will burn up all our evil, and it will burn up nothing else. Keep close to Christ. Lay your hearts open to the hallowing influences of the motives and the examples that lie in the story of His life and death. Seek for the fiery touch of that transforming spirit, and be sure that you quench it not, nor grieve it. And then thy weakness will be reinvigorated by celestial powers, and the live coal upon thy lips will burn up all thine iniquity.

But, subordinately to this deepest meaning, as I take it, of the great symbol of our text, let me remind you of another possible application of it, which follows from the preceding. God's Spirit cleanses men mainly

by raising their spirits to a higher temperature. For coldness is akin to sin, and heavenly warmth is akin to righteousness. Enthusiasm ennobles always, delivers men, even on the lower reaches of life and conduct, from many a meanness and many a sin. And when it becomes a warmth of spirit kindled by the reception of the fire of God, then it becomes the solvent which breaks the connection between me and my evil. It is the cold Christian who makes no progress in conquering his sin. The one who is filled with the love of God, and has the ardent convictions and the burning enthusiasm which that love ought to produce in our hearts, is the man who will conquer and eject his evils.

Nor must we forget that there is still another possible application of the words. For whilst, on the one hand, the Divine Spirit's method of delivering us is very largely that of imparting to us the warmth of ardent, devout emotion; on the other hand, a part of this method is the passing of us through the fiery trials and outward disciplines of life. "Everyone shall be salted with fire" in that sense. And we have learned, dear brethren, but little of the loving kindness of the Lord if we are not able to say, "I have grown more in likeness to Jesus Christ by rightly accepted sorrows than by anything besides." Be not afraid of calamities; be not stumbled by disaster. Take the fiery trial which is sent to you as being intended to bring about, at the last, the discovery unto praise and honour and glory "of your faith, that is much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire." "Everyone

shall be salted with fire." The Christian law of life is, submit to the fiery cleansing. Alas! alas! for the many thousands of professing Christians who are wrapping themselves in such thick folds of non-conducting material that that fiery energy can only play on the surface of their lives, instead of searching them to the depths. Do you see to it, dear brethren, that you lay open your whole natures, down to the very inmost roots, to the penetrating, searching, cleansing power of that Spirit. And let us all go and say to Him, "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me."

II.—Notice the painfulness of this fiery cleansing.

The same ideas substantially are conveyed in my text as are expressed, in different imagery, by the solemn words that precede it. The "salting with fire" comes substantially to the same thing as the amputation of the hand and foot, and the plucking out of the eye that cause to stumble. The metaphor expresses a painful process. It is no pleasant thing to submit the bleeding stump to the actual cautery, and to press it, all sensitive, upon the hot plate that will stop the flow of the blood. But such pain of shrinking nerves is to be borne, and to be courted, if we are wise, rather than to carry the hand or the eye that led astray unmutilated into total destruction. Surely that is common sense.

The process is painful because we are weak. The highest ideal of Christian progress would be realized if one of the metaphors with which our Lord expresses it were adequate to cover the whole ground, and we grew as the wheat grows, "first the blade, then the

ear, after that the full corn in the ear." But the tranquillity of vegetable growth, and the peaceful progress which it symbolizes, are not all that you and I have to expect. Emblems of a very different kind have to be associated with the quiet serenity of the growing corn, in order to describe all that a Christian man has to experience in the work of becoming like his Master. It is a fight as well as a growth; it is a building requiring our continuity of effort, as well as a growth. There is something to be got rid of as well as much to be appropriated. We do not only need to become better, we need to become less bad. Squatters have got upon the land, and cling to it and hold it *vi et armis*; and these have to be ejected before peaceful settlement is possible.

One might go on multiplying metaphors *ad libitum*, in order to bring out the one thought that it needs huge courage to bear being sanctified, or if you do not like the theological word, to bear being made better. It is no holiday task, and unless we are willing to have a great deal that is against the grain done to us, and in us, and by us, we shall never achieve it. We have to accept the pain. Desires have to be thwarted, and that is not pleasant. Self has to be suppressed, and that is not delightful. A growing conviction of the depth of one's own evil has to be cherished, and that is not a grateful thought for any of us. Pains external, which are felt by reason of disciplinary sorrows, are not worthy to be named in the same day as those more recondite and inward agonies. But, brother, they are all light, as compared with the exceeding weight of glory in conformity

to the example of our Master, which they prepare for us.

And so I bring you Christ's message: He will have no man to enlist in His army under false pretences. He will not deceive any of us by telling us that it is all easy work and plain sailing. Salting by fire can never be other than to the worse self an agony, just because it is to the better self a rapture. And so let us make up our minds that no man is taken to heaven in his sleep, and that the road is a rough one, judging from the point of view of flesh and sense; but rough, narrow, often studded with sharp edges, like the plough coulter that they used to lay in the path in the old rude ordeals, it still leads straight to the goal, and bleeding feet are little to pay for a seat at Christ's right hand.

III.—Lastly, notice the preservative result of this painful cleansing.

Our Lord brings together, in our text, as is often His wont, two apparently contradictory ideas, in order, by the paradox, to fix our attention the more vividly upon His words. Fire destroys; salt preserves. They are opposites. But yet the opposites may be united in one mighty thing, a fire which preserves and does not destroy. The deepest truth is that the cleansing fire which the Christ will give us preserves us, because it destroys that which is destroying us. If you kill the germs of putrefaction in a bit of dead flesh, you preserve the flesh. And if you bring to bear upon a man the power which will kill the thing that is killing him, its destructive influence is the condition of its conserving one.

And so it is, in regard of that great spiritual influence which Jesus Christ is ready to give to every one of us. It slays that which is slaying us. For our sins destroy in us the true life of a man, and make us but parables of walking death. When the three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace in Babylon, the flames burned nothing but their bonds, and they walked at liberty in the fire. And so it will be with us. We shall be preserved by that which slays the things that would otherwise slay us.

Let me lay on your hearts before I close the solemn alternative to which I have already referred, and which is suggested by the connection of my text with the preceding words. There is a fire that destroys and is not quenched. Christ's previous words are much too metaphorical for us to build dogmatic definitions upon. But Jesus Christ did not exaggerate. If here and now sin has so destructive an effect upon a man, oh, who will venture to say that he knows the limits of its murderous power in that future life, when retribution shall begin with new energy and under new conditions ?

Brethren, whilst I dare not enlarge, I still less dare to suppress ; and I ask you to remember that not I, or any man, but Jesus Christ Himself, has put before each of us this alternative : either the fire unquenchable, which destroys a man, or the merciful fire, which slays his sins and saves him alive.

Social reformers, philanthropists, you that have tried and failed to overcome your evil and who feel the loathly thing so intertwined with your being that to pluck it from your heart is to tear away the very

heart's walls themselves, here is a hope for you. Closely as our evil is twisted in with the fibres of our character, there is a hand that can untwine the coils, and cast away the sin, and preserve the soul. And although we sometimes feel as if our sinfulness and our sin were so incorporated with ourselves that it made one's self, with a man's head and a serpent's tail, let us take the joyful assurance that if we trust ourselves to Christ, and open our hearts to His power, we can shake off the venomous beast into the fire and live a fuller life, because the fire has consumed that which would otherwise have consumed us.

## XVIII.

### Copies of Christ's Manner.

“AND Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole : arise, and make thy bed. . . . But Peter put them all forth, and knelt down and prayed ; and, turning to the body, said, Tabitha, arise !”—ACTS ix. 34, 40.



HAVE put these two miracles together, not only because they were closely connected in time and place, but because they have a very remarkable and instructive feature in common.

They are both evidently moulded upon Christ's miracles ; are distinct imitations of what Peter had seen Him do. And their likenesses to and differences from our Lord's manner of working are equally noteworthy. It is to the lessons from these two aspects, common to both miracles, that I desire to turn now.

I.—First, notice the similarities and the lesson they teach.

The two cases before us are alike, in that both of them find parallels in our Lord's miracles. The one is the cure of a paralytic, which pairs off with the well-known story in the Gospels concerning the man that was borne by four, and let down through the roof into Christ's presence. The other of them, the

raising of Dorcas, or Tabitha, of course corresponds with the three resurrections of dead people which are recorded in the Gospels.

And now, note the likenesses. Jesus Christ said to the paralyzed man, "Arise, take up thy bed." Peter says to Æneas, "Arise, and make thy bed." The one command was appropriate to the circumstances of a man who was not in his own house, and whose command over his long-disused muscles in obeying Christ's word was a confirmation to himself of the reality and completeness of his cure. The other was appropriate to a man bedridden in his own house; and it had precisely the same purpose as the analogous injunction from our Lord, "Take up thy bed and walk." Æneas was lying at home, and so Peter, remembering how Jesus Christ had demonstrated to others, and affirmed to the man himself, the reality of the miraculous blessing given to him, copies his Master's method, "Æneas, make thy bed." It is an echo and resemblance of the former incident, and is a distinct piece of imitation of it.

And then, if we turn to the other narrative, the intentional moulding of the manner of the miracle, consecrated in the eyes of the loving disciple, because it was Christ's manner, is still more obvious. When Jesus Christ went into the house of Jairus there was the usual hubbub, the noise of the loud Eastern mourning, and He put them all forth, taking with Him only the father and mother of the damsel, and Peter, with James and John. When Peter goes into the upper room, where Tabitha is lying, there is the usual noise of lamentation and the clack of many

tongues, extolling the virtues of the dead woman. He remembers how Christ had gone about His miracle, and he, in his turn, "put them all forth." Mark, who was Peter's mouthpiece, in his Gospel gives us the very Aramaic words which our Lord employed when He raised the little girl, *Talitha*, the Aramaic word for "a damsel," or young girl; *cumi*, which means in that language "arise." Is it not singular and beautiful that Peter's word by the bedside of the dead Dorcas is, with the exception of one letter, absolutely identical? Christ says, *Talitha cumi*. Peter remembered the formula by which the blessing was conveyed, and he copies it. "Tabitha cumi"; arise! Is it not clear that he is posing after the Master's attitude; that he is, consciously or unconsciously, doing what he remembered so well had been done in that other upper room, and that the miracles are both of them shaped after the pattern of the miraculous working of Jesus Christ?

Well now, although we are no miracle workers, the very same principle which underlay these two works of supernatural power is to be applied to all our work, and to our lives as Christian people. I do not know whether Peter *meant* to do like Jesus Christ or not; I rather think that he was rather unconsciously and instinctively dropping into the fashion that to him was so sacred. Love always delights in imitation; and the disciples of a great teacher will unconsciously catch the trick of his intonation, even the awkwardness of his attitudes, the peculiarities of his way of looking at things—only, unfortunately, outsiders are a good deal more easily imitated than insiders. And

many a man copies such external trifles, and talks in the tones that have, first of all, brought blessed truths to him, whose resemblance to his teacher goes very little further. The principle that underlies these miracles is just this. Get near Jesus Christ, and you will catch His manner. Dwell in fellowship with Him, and whether you are thinking about it or not, there will come some faint resemblance to that Lord into your characters, and your way of doing things, so that men "will take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus." The poor bit of cloth which has held some precious piece of solid perfume will retain fragrance for many a day afterwards, and will bless the scentless air by giving it forth. The man that keeps close to Christ, and has folded Him in his heart, will, like the poor cloth, give forth a sweetness not his own that will gladden and refresh many nostrils. Lie in the light, and you will become light. Keep near Christ, and you will be Christlike. Love Him, and love will do to you what it does to many a wedded pair, and to many kindred hearts: it will transfuse into you something of the characteristics of the object of your love. It is impossible to trust Christ, to obey Christ, to hold communion with Him, and to live beside Him, without becoming like Him. And if such be our inward experience, so will be our outward appearance.

But there may be a specific point given to this lesson in regard of Christian people's ways of doing their work in the world and helping and blessing other folk. Although, as I say, we have no miraculous power at our disposal, we do not need it in order to

manifest Jesus Christ and His way of working in our work. And if we dwell beside Him, then, depend upon it, all the characteristics, far more precious than the accidents of manner, or tone, or attitude in working a miracle—all the characteristics so deeply and blessedly stamped upon His life of self-sacrifice and man-helping devotion will be reproduced in us. Jesus Christ, when He went through the wards of the hospital of the world, was overflowing with quick sympathy for every sorrow that met His eye. If you and I are living near Him, we shall never steel our hearts nor lock up our sensibilities against any suffering that it is within our power to staunch or to alleviate. Jesus Christ never grudged trouble, never thought of Himself, never was impatient of interruption, never repelled importunity, never sent away empty any outstretched hand. And if we live near Him, self-oblivious willingness to spend and be spent will mark our lives, and we shall not consider that we have a right of possession or of sole enjoyment of any of the blessings that are given to us. Jesus Christ, according to the beautiful and significant words of one of one of the Gospels, "healed them that had need of healing." Why that singular designation for the people that were standing around Him but to teach us that wide as men's necessity was His sympathy, and that broad as the sympathy of Christ were the help and healing which He brought? And so, with like width of compassion, with like perfectness of self-oblivion, with equal remoteness from consciousness of superiority or display of condescension, Christian men should go amongst the sorrowful and the sad and the outcast

and do their miracles—greater works than those which Christ did, as He Himself has told us, after the manner in which He did His. If they did, the world would be a different place, and the Church would be a different Church, and you would not have people writing in the newspapers to demonstrate that Christianity was “played out.”

II.—Further, note the differences and the lessons from them.

Take the first of the two miracles. “Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed.” That first clause points to the great difference. Take the second of the two, “Jesus Christ put them all forth, and stretched out His hand, and said, Damsel, arise!” “Peter put them all forth, . . . and said, Tabitha, arise!” But between the putting forth and the miracle he did something which Christ did not do, and he did not do something which Christ did do. “He kneeled down and prayed.” Jesus Christ did not do that. “And Jesus put forth His hand, and said, Arise!” Peter did not do that. But he put forth his hand *after* the miracle was wrought; not to communicate life, but to help the living woman to get to her feet; and so, both by what he did in his prayer and by what he did not do after Christ’s pattern, the extension of the hand that was the channel of the vitality, he drew a broad distinction between the servant’s copy and the Master’s original.

The lessons from the differences are such as the following.

Christ works miracles by His inherent power; His servants do their works only as His instruments and

organs. I need not dwell upon the former thought ; but it is the latter to which I wish to look for a moment. The lesson, then, of the difference is that Christian men, in all their work for the Master and for the world, are ever to keep clear before themselves, and to make very obvious to other people, that they are nothing more than channels and instruments. The less the preacher, the teacher, the Christian benefactor of any sort puts himself in the foreground, or in evidence at all, the more likely are his words and works to be successful. If you hear a man, for instance, preaching a sermon, and you see that he is thinking about himself, he may talk with the tongues of men and of angels, but he will do no good to anybody. The first condition of work for the Lord is—hide yourself behind your message, behind your Master, and make it very plain that His is the power, and that you are but a tool in the Workman's hand.

And then, further, another lesson is, Be very sure of the power that will work in you. What a piece of audacity it was for Peter to go and stand by the paralytic man's couch and say, "Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." Yes, audacity ; unless he had been in such constant and close touch with his Master that he was sure that the Master was working through Him. And is it not beautiful to see how absolutely confident he is that Jesus Christ's work was not done when He went up into heaven ; but that there, in that little stuffy room, where the man had lain motionless for eight long years, Jesus Christ was present, and working ? Oh, brethren, the Christian Church does not half enough believe in the actual

presence and operation of Jesus Christ, here and now, in and through all His servants! We are ready enough to believe that He worked when He was in the world long ago, that He is going to work when He comes back to the world, at some far-off future period. But do we believe that He is verily putting forth His power, in no metaphor, but in simple reality, at present and here, and, if we will, through us?

“Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” Be sure that if you keep near Christ, if you will try to mould yourselves after His likeness, if you expect Him to work through you, and do not hinder His work by self-conceit and self-consciousness of any sort, then it will be no presumption, but simple faith, that He delights in and will vindicate, if you, too, go and stand by paralytics and say, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole,” or go and stand by people dead in trespasses and sins and say, after you have prayed, “Arise.”

We are here for the very purpose for which Peter was in Lydda and Joppa—to carry on and copy the healing and the quickening work of Christ by His present power, and after His blessed example.

## “Me a Christian!”

‘THEN Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’—ACTS xxvi. 28.



HIS Agrippa was son of the other Herod of whom we hear in the Acts as a persecutor. This one appears, from other sources, to have had the vices, but not the force of character, of his bad race. He was weak and indolent, a mere hanger-on of Rome, to which he owed his kingdom, and to which he stoutly stuck during all the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem. In position and in character (largely resulting from the position) he was uncommonly like those semi-independent rajahs in India, who are allowed to keep up a kind of shadow of authority on condition of doing what Calcutta bids them. Of course frivolity and debauchery become the business of such men. What sort of a man this was may be sufficiently inferred from the fact that Bernice was his sister.

But he knew a good deal about the Jews, about their opinions, their religion, and about what had been going on during the last half century amongst

them. On grounds of policy he professed to accept the Jewish faith—of which an edifying example is given in the fact that, on one occasion, Bernice was prevented from accompanying him to Rome, because she was fulfilling a Nazarite vow in the Temple at Jerusalem.

So the Apostle was fully warranted in appealing to Agrippa's knowledge, not only of Judaism, but of the history of Jesus Christ, and in his further assertion, "I know that thou believest." But the home-thrust was too much for the king. His answer is given in the words of our text.

They are very familiar words, and they have been made the basis of a great many sermons upon being all but persuaded to accept of Christ as Saviour. But, edifying as such a use of them is, it can scarcely be sustained by their actual meaning. Most commentators are agreed that our Authorised Version does not represent either Agrippa's words or his tone. He was not speaking in earnest. His words are sarcasm, not half melting into conviction. And the Revised Version gives what may, on the whole, be accepted as being a truer representation of their intention when it reads, "with but little persuasion thou wouldst fair make me a Christian."

He is half amused and half angry at the Apostle's presumption in supposing that so easily, or so quickly, he was going to land his fish. "It is a more difficult task than you fancy, Paul, to make a Christian of a man like me." That is the real meaning of his words. And I think that, rightly understood, they yield lessons of no less value than those that have been

so often drawn from them, as they appear in our Authorised Version. So I wish to try and draw out and urge upon my friends here at this time these lessons :—

I.—First, then, I see here an example of the danger of a superficial familiarity with Christian truth.

As I said, Agrippa knew, in a general way, a good deal not only about the prophets, and the Jewish religion, but the outstanding facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul’s assumption that he knew would have been very quickly repudiated if it had not been based upon fact. And the inference from his acceptance without contradiction of the Apostle’s statement is confirmed by his use of the word “Christian,” which had by no means come into general employment when he spoke; and in itself indicates that he knew a good deal about the people that were so named. Mark the contrast, for instance, between him and the bluff Roman official at his side. To Festus, Paul’s talking about a dead man’s having risen, and a risen Jew becoming a light to all nations, was such utter nonsense that, with characteristic Roman contempt for men with ideas, he breaks in, with his rough, strident voice, “Much learning has made thee mad.” There was not much chance of that cause producing that effect on Festus. But he was, apparently, utterly bewildered at this entirely novel and unintelligible sort of talk. Agrippa, on the other hand, knows all about it; has heard that there was such a thing, and has a general rough notion of what Paul believed as a Christian.

And was he any better for it? No! He was a

great deal worse. It took the edge off a good deal of his curiosity. It made him fancy that he knew beforehand all that the Apostle had to say. It stood in the way of his apprehending the truths which he thought that he understood.

And although the world knows a great deal more about Jesus Christ and the Gospel than he did, the very same thing is true about hundreds and thousands of people who have all their lives long been brought into contact with Christianity. Superficial knowledge is the worst enemy of accurate knowledge. For the first condition of knowing a thing is to know that we do not know it. And so there are a great many of us who, having picked up since childhood vague and partially inaccurate notions about Christ and His Gospel, and what He has done, are so satisfied on the strength of these that we know all about it, that we listen to its preaching about it with a very languid attention. The ground in our minds is preoccupied with our own vague and imperfect apprehensions. I believe that there is nothing that stands more in the way of hundreds of people (among whom I have no doubt that there are scores in this chapel to-night) coming into real intelligent contact with Gospel truth than the half knowledge that they have had of it ever since they were children. You fancy that you know all that I can tell you. Very probably you do. But have you ever taken a firm hold of the plain central facts of Christianity—your own sinfulness and helplessness, your need of a Saviour, the perfect work of Jesus Christ who died on the Cross for you, and the power of simple faith therein to join you to Him, and

if followed by consecration and obedience to make you partakers of His nature, and heirs of the inheritance that is above? These are but the fundamentals, the outlines of Gospel truth. But you see them, far too many of you, in such a manner as you see the figures cast upon a screen when the lantern is not rightly focussed, a blurred outline. And the blurred outline keeps you from seeing the sharp-cut truth as it is in Jesus. In all regions of thought inaccurate knowledge is the worst foe to further understanding. And eminently is this the case in religion. Brethren, some of you are in that position.

Then there is another way in which such knowledge as that of which the man in our text is an example is a hindrance, and that is, that it is knowledge which has no effect on character. What do hundreds of us do with our knowledge of Christianity? Our minds seem built in watertight compartments, and we keep the doors of them shut very close, so that truths in the understanding have no influence on the will. Plenty of you believe the Gospel intellectually, and it does not make a hair's breadth of difference to anything that you ever either thought or wished or did. And because you so believe it, it is utterly impossible that it should ever be of any use to you. "Agrippa! believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." "Yes! believest the prophets; and Bernice sitting by thy side there—believest the prophets, and livest in utter bestial godlessness." What is the good of a knowledge of Christianity like that? And is it not such knowledge of Christianity that blocks the way with some of you for anything more real and

more operative? There is nothing more impotent than a firmly believed and utterly neglected truth. And that is what the Christianity of some of you is, when it is analyzed.

II.—Now, secondly, notice how we have here the example of a proud man indignantly recoiling from submission.

There is a world of contempt in Agrippa's words, in the very putting side by side of the two things. "Me! Me," with a very large capital M—"Me a Christian?" He thinks of his dignity, poor creature. It was not such a very tremendous dignity after all. He was a petty kinglet, permitted by the grace of Rome to live and to pose as if he were the real thing. And yet he struts and claps his wings and crows on his little hillock as if it were a mountain. "Me a Christian?" "The great Agrippa a *Christiān!*" And he uses that word "Christian" with the intense contempt which coined it and adhered to it until the men to whom it was applied were wise enough to take it and bind it as a crown of honour upon their head. The wits at Antioch first of all hit upon the designation. They meant a very exquisite piece of sarcasm by their nickname. These people were "Christians," just as some other people were Herodians—Christ's men; the men of this impostor who pretended to be a Messiah. That seemed such an intensely ludicrous thing to the wise people in Antioch that they coined the name; and no doubt thought they had done a very clever thing. It is only used in the Bible in the notice of its origin; here, with a very evident connotation of contempt; and once more, when Peter in his

letter refers to it as being the indictment on which certain disciples suffered. So when Agrippa says, "Me a Christian," he puts all the bitterness that he can into that last word. As if he said, "Do you really think that I—I—am going to bow myself down to be a follower and adherent of that Christ of yours? The thing is too ridiculous! With but little persuasion you would fain make me a Christian. But you will find it a harder task than you fancy."

Now, my dear friends, the shape of this unwillingness is changed, but the fact of it remains. There are two or three features of what I take to be the plain Gospel of Jesus Christ which grate very much against all self-importance and self-complacency, and operate very largely, though not always consciously, upon very many amongst us. I just run them over, very briefly.

The Gospel insists on dealing with everybody in the same fashion, and regarding all as standing on the same level. Many of us do not like that. Let us get away from Agrippa and Palestine. "I am a well-to-do Manchester man. Am I to stand on the same level as my office boy?" Yes! the very same. "I, a student, perhaps a teacher of science, or a cultivated man, a scholar, a lawyer, a professional man—am I to stand on the same level as people that scarcely know how to read and write?" Yes! exactly. So, like the man in the Old Testament, "he turned and went away in a rage." Many of us would like that there ought to be a little private door for us in consideration of our position or acquirements or respectability, or this, that, or the other thing. At any rate, we are

not to be classed in the same category with the poor and the ignorant and the sinful and the savage all over the world.

But we are so classed. Do not you and the men in Patagonia breathe the same air? Are not your bodies subject to the same laws? Have you not to be contented to be fed in the same fashion, and to sleep and eat and drink in the same way? "We have all of us one human heart"; and "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The identities of humanity, in all its examples, are deeper than its differences in any. We have all the one Saviour, and are to be saved in the same fashion. It is a humbling thing for those of us that stand upon some little elevation, real or fancied, but it is only the other side of the great truth that God's love is world-wide, and that Christ's Gospel is meant for humanity. Naaman, to whom I have already referred in passing, wanted to be treated as a great man who happened to be a leper; Elisha insisted on treating him as a leper who happened to be a great man. And that makes all the difference. I remember seeing somewhere that a great surgeon had said that the late Emperor of Germany would have had a far better chance of being cured if he had gone *incognito* to the Hospital for Throat Diseases. We all need the same surgery, and we must be contented to take it in the same fashion. So some of us recoil from humbling equality with the lowest and worst.

Then, again, another thing that makes people shrink back from the Gospel sometimes is that it insists upon everybody being saved solely by de-

pendence on Another. We would like to have a finger in it ourselves, and most of us would rather do anything in the way of sacrifice or suffering or penance than take this position :

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.

Corrupt forms of Christianity have taken a wise measure of the worse parts of human nature when they have taught men that they can eke out Christ's work by their own, and have some kind of share in their own salvation. Dear brethren, I have to bring to you another gospel than that, and to say, All is done for us, and all will be done in us, and nothing has to be done by us. Some of you do not like that. Just as a man drowning is almost sure to try to help himself, and get his limbs inextricably twisted round his would-be rescuer, and drown them both, so men will not, without a struggle, consent to owe everything to Jesus Christ, and to let Him draw them out of many waters, and set them on the safe shore. But unless we do, we have little share in His Gospel.

And another thing stands in the way—namely, that the Gospel insists upon absolute obedience to Jesus Christ. Agrippa fancied that it was an utterly preposterous thing that he should lower his flag, and doff his crown, and become a servant of a Jewish peasant. A great many of us, though we have a higher idea of our Lord than that, do yet find it quite as hard to submit our wills to His, and to accept the condition of absolute obedience, utter resignation to Him, and entire subjection to His commandment. We say, "Let my own will have a little bit of play in a corner."

Some of us find it very hard to believe that we are to bring all our thinking upon religious and moral subjects to Him, and to accept His word as conclusive, settling all controversies. "I, with my culture; am I to accept what Christ says as the end of strife?" Yes! absolute submission is the plainest condition of real Christianity. The very name tells us that. We are Christians, Christ's men; and unless we are we have no right to the name. And some of us had rather be our own masters, and enjoy the miseries of independence and self-will, and so be the slaves of our worse selves, than bow ourselves utterly before that dear Lord, and so pass into the freedom of a service love-inspired, and by love accepted. "Thou wouldst fain persuade *me* to be a *Christian*," is the recoil of a proud heart from submission. Brethren, let me beseech you that it may not be yours.

III.—Again, we have here an example of instinctive shrinking from the personal application of broad truths.

Agrippa listened half amused, and a good deal interested, to Paul, as long as he talked generalities, and described his own experience. But when he came to point the generalities and to drive them home to the hearer's heart, it was time to stop him. That question of the Apostle's, keen and sudden as the flash of a dagger, went straight home. And the king at once gathers himself together into an attitude of resistance. Ah! That is what hundreds of people do. You will let me preach as long as I like—only you will get a little weary sometimes—you will let me preach generalities *ad libitum*. But when I come to

“And thou?” then I am “rude,” and “inquisitorial,” and “personal,” and “trespassing on a region where I have no business,” and so on, and so on. And so you shut up your heart if not your ears.

And yet, brethren, what is the use of toothless generalities? What am I here for if I am not here to take these broad blunt truths, and sharpen them to a point, and try to get them in between the joints of your armour? Can any man faithfully preach the Gospel who is always flying over the heads of his hearers with universalities, and never goes straight to their hearts with “Thou—thou art the man!” “Believest thou?”

And so, dear friends, let me press that question upon you. Never mind about other people. Suppose you and I were alone together and my words were coming straight *to thee*. Would they not have more power than they have now? They are so coming. Think away all these other people, and this place, ay! and me too, and let the word of Christ, which deals with no crowds, but with single souls, come to you in its individualizing force. “Believest *thou*?” You will have to answer that question one day. Better to face it now, and try to answer it, than to leave it all vague until you get yonder, where “each one of us shall give account of *himself* to God.”

IV.—Lastly, we have here an example of a soul close to the light, but passing into the dark.

Agrippa listens to Paul; Bernice listens to Paul; Festus listens. And what comes of it? Only this, “And when they were gone aside they talked between themselves, saying, This man hath done nothing

worthy of death or of bonds." May I translate into a modern analogy:—And when they were gone aside they talked between themselves, saying, "This man preached a very impressive sermon," or, "This man preached a very wearisome sermon," and there an end.

Agrippa and Bernice went their wicked way, and Festus went his, and none of them knew what a fateful moment they had passed through. Ah, brethren, there are many such in our lives when we make decisions that influence our whole future, and no sign shows that the moment is any way different from millions of its undistinguished fellows. It is eminently so in regard to our relation to Jesus Christ and His Gospel. These people had been in the light; they were never so near it again. Probably they never heard the Gospel preached any more, and they went away, not knowing what they had done when they silenced Paul and left him.

Now you will probably hear plenty of sermons yet. You may, or you may not. But be sure of this, that if you go away from this one, unmelted and unbelieving, you have not done a trivial thing. You have added one more stone to the barrier that you yourself build, to shut you out from holiness and happiness, from hope and heaven. It is not I that ask you the question. It is not Paul that asks it. Jesus Christ Himself says to you, as He said to the blind man, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" or, as He said to the weeping sister of Lazarus, "Believest thou this?" Oh, dear friends, do not answer like this arrogant bit of a king, but cry with tears, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

## The Christian Sacrifice.

“BY Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”—HEB. xiii. 15, 16.



MUCH attention is given now to the study of comparative religion. The beliefs and observances of the rudest tribes are narrowly scrutinized, in order to discover the underlying ideas. And many a practice which seems to be trivial, absurd, or sanguinary is found to have its foundation in some noble and profound thought. Charity and insight have both gained by the study.

But, singularly enough, the very people who are so interested in the *rationale* of the rights of savages will turn away when anybody applies a similar process to the ritual of the Jews. That is what this Epistle to the Hebrews does. It translates altar, ritual festivals, priests, into thoughts; and it declares that Jesus Christ is the only adequate and abiding embodiment of these thoughts. We are not dressing Christian truth in a foreign garb when we express the substance of its revelation in language borrowed from

the ritualistic system that preceded it. But we are extricating truths, which the world needs to-day as much as ever it did, from the form in which they were embodied for one stage of religion, when we translate them into their Christian equivalents.

So the writer here has been speaking about Christ as, by His death, sanctifying His people. And on that great thought, that He is what all priesthood symbolizes, and what all bloody sacrifices reach out towards, he builds this grand exhortation of my text, which is at once a lofty conception of what the Christian life ought to be, and a directory as to the method by which it may become so. "By Him let us offer sacrifices continually, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Now, it seems to me that there are here mainly three points to be looked at. First, the basis of; second, the material of; and third, the Divine delight in, the sacrifices of the Christian life. And to these three points I ask your attention.

I.—First, then, note here the emphatic way in which the one basis of Christian sacrifice is laid down.

Anybody who can consult the original will see, what indeed is partially expressed in our translation, that the position of these two words "through" (or by) "Him" underscores and puts great emphasis upon them. There are two thoughts which may be included in them; the one, that Jesus is the Priest by whose mediation we come to God, and the other that He is the Sacrifice, on the footing of which we can present our sacrifices. It seems to me, however,

that it is the latter idea principally that is in the writer's mind here. And on it I touch lightly in a few words.

Now, let me recall to you, as a world-wide fact which is expressed in the noblest form in the ancient Jewish ritual, that there was a broad line of distinction drawn between two kinds of sacrifices, differing in their material and in their purpose. If I wanted to use mere theological technicalities, which I do not, I should talk about the difference between sacrifices of propitiation and sacrifices of thanksgiving. But let us put these well-worn phrases on one side, as far as we can, for the moment. Here, then, is the fact that all the world over, and in the Mosaic ritual, there was expressed a double consciousness — one, that there was, somehow or other, a black dam between the worshipper and his Deity, which needed to be swept away; and the other, that when that barrier was removed there could be an uninterrupted flow of thanksgiving and of service. So on one altar was laid a bleeding victim, and on another were spread the flowers of the field, the fruits of the earth, all things gracious, lovely, fair, and sweet, as expressions of the thankfulness of the reconciled worshippers. One set of sacrifices expressed the consciousness of sin; the other expressed the joyful recognition of its removal.

Now I want to know whether that world-wide confession of need is nothing more to us than a mere piece of interesting reminiscence of a stage of development beyond which we have advanced. I do not believe that there is such a gulf of difference between the lowest savage and the most cultivated nineteenth

century Englishman, but that the fundamental needs of the one, in spirit, are almost as identical as are the fundamental needs of the one and the other in regard of bodily wants. And sure I am that, if the voice of humanity has declared all the world over, as it has declared, that it is conscious of a cloud that has come between it and the awful Power above, and that it seeks by sacrifice the removal of the cloud, the probability is that that need is your need and mine; and that the remedy which humanity has divined as necessary has some affinity with the remedy which God has revealed as provided.

I am not going to attempt theorizing about the manner in which the life and death of Jesus Christ sweep away the barrier between us and God, and deal with the consciousness of transgression, which lies coiled and dormant, but always ready to wake and sting, in human hearts. But I do venture to appeal to each man's and woman's own consciousness, and to ask, Is there not something in us which recognizes the necessity that the sin which stands between God and man shall be swept away? Is there not something in us which recognizes the blessedness of the message, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin"? Oh, brethren, do not fancy that it is a mere theological doctrine of an atonement that is in question. It is the possibility of loving access to God, as made possible through Jesus, and through Him alone, that I want to press upon your hearts. "Through Him let us offer."

II.—Secondly, notice the light which our text throws upon the material or contents of the Christian sacrifice.

I need not dwell at all, I suppose, upon the explanation of the words, which are plain enough. The writer seems to me to divide the sacrifice of praise, which he prescribes, into two parts, the praise of the lip and the praise of the life.

But before I deal with this twofold distribution of the thought, let me fix upon the main general idea that is expressed here, and that is that the highest notion, the noblest and purest of what a Christian life is, is that it is one long sacrifice. Have we risen to the height of that conception? I do not say, Have we attained to the fulfilment of it? The answer to the latter question one knows only too well. But has it ever dawned upon us that the true ideal of the Christian life which we profess to be living is this—a sacrifice?

Now that thought involves two things. One is the continuous surrender of self, and that means the absolute suppression of our own wills; the bridling of our own inclinations and fancies; the ceasing obstinately to adhere to our own purposes and conceptions of what is good; the recognition that there is a higher will above us, ruling and guiding, to which we are to submit. Sacrifice means nothing if it does not mean surrender; and surrender is nothing if it is not the surrender of the will. It was a great deal easier for Abraham to take the knife in his hand, and climb the hill with the fixed intention of thrusting it into his son's heart, than it is for us to take the sword of the Spirit in our hands and slay our own wills. And I am here to say that unless we do we have very little right to call ourselves Christians.

But, then, surrender is only half the conception of the sacrifice which has to be accomplished in our whole days and selves. Surrender to God is the full meaning of sacrifice. And that implies the distinct reference of all that I am, and all that I do, to Him, as not only commanding, but as being the aim and end of my life. We are to labour on as at His command. You in your counting-houses, and mills, and shops, and homes; and we students in our studies, and laboratories, and lecture-rooms, are to link everything with Him, with His will, and with the thought of Him. What vice could live in that light? What meanness would not be struck dead if we were connected with that great reservoir of electric force? What slothfulness would not be spurred into unhesitating and unresting zeal if all our work were referred to God? Unless thus our lives be sacrifice, in the full sense of conscious surrender to Him, we have yet to learn what is the meaning and the purpose of the propitiatory sacrifice on which we say our lives are built.

I need not, I suppose, remind you at any length of how our text draws broad and deep the distinction between the nature and the scope of the fundamental offering made by Christ, and the offerings made by us. The one takes away the separating barrier; the other is the flow of the stream where the barrier had stood. The one is the melting away of the cloud that hid the sun; the other is the flashing of the mirror of my heart when the sun shines upon it. Our sacrifice is thanksgiving. Then there will be no reluctance because duty is heavy. There will be no grudging

because requirements are great. There will be no avoiding of the obligations of the Christian life, and rendering as small a percentage by way of dividend as the creditor up in the heavens will accept. If the offering is a thankoffering, then it will be given gladly. The grateful heart does not hold the scales like a scrupulous retail dealer afraid of putting the thousandth part of an ounce more in than can be avoided.

Give all thou canst, high heaven rejects the love  
Of nicely calculated less or more.

Power is the measure of duty, and they whose offering is the expression of their thankfulness will heap incense upon the brazier, and cover the altar with flowers.

Ah, brethren, what a blessed life it would be for us, if indeed all the painfulness and harshness of duty, with all the efforts of constraint and restriction and stimulus which it so often requires, were transmuted into that glad expression of infinite obligation for the great sacrifice on which our life and hopes rest!

I do not purpose to say much about the two classes of sacrifice into which our writer divides the whole. Words come first, work follows. That order may seem strange, because we are accustomed to think more of work than word. But the Bible has a solemn reverence for man's utterances of speech, and many a protest against "God's great gift of speech abused." And the text rightly supposes that if there is in us any deep, real, abiding, life-shaping thankfulness for the gift of Jesus Christ, it is impossible that our tongues should cleave to the roofs of our mouths, and that we

should be contented to live in silence. Loving hearts must speak. What would you think of a husband that never felt any impulse to tell his wife that she was dear to him; or a mother that never found it needful to unpack her heart of its tenderness, even in perhaps inarticulate croonings over the little child that she pressed to her heart? It seems to me that a dumb Christian, a man that is thankful for Christ's sacrifice and never feels the need to say so, is as great an anomaly as either of these I have described.

Brethren, the conventionalities of our modern life, the proper reticence about personal experience, the reverence due to sacred subjects, all these do prescribe caution and tact, and many another thing, in limiting the evangelistic side of our speech; but is there any such limitation needful for the eucharistic, the thanksgiving side of our speech? Surely not. In some monasteries and nunneries there used to be a provision made that at every hour of the four and twenty, and at every moment of every hour, there should be one kneeling figure before the altar, repeating the psalter, so that night and day prayer and praise went up. It was a beautiful idea, beautiful as long as it was an idea, and, like a great many other beautiful ideas, made vulgar and sometimes ludicrous when it was put into realization. But it is the symbol of what we should be, with hearts ever occupied with Him, and the voice of praise rising unintermittently from our hearts, singing a quiet tune, all the day and night long, to Him that has loved us and given Himself for us.

And then the other side of this conception of sacri-

fice that my text puts forth is that of beneficence amongst men, in the general form of doing good, and in the specific form of giving money. Two aspects of this combination of word and work may be suggested. It has a message for us professing Christians. All that the world says about the uselessness of singing psalms, and praying prayers, while neglecting the miserable and the weak, is said far more emphatically in the Bible, and ought to be laid to heart, not because sneering, godless people say it, but because God Himself says it. It is vain to pray unless you work. It is sin to work for yourselves unless you own the bond of sympathy with all mankind, and live "to do good and to communicate." That is a message for others than Christians. There is no real foundation for a broad philanthropy except a deep devotion to God. The service of man is never so well secured as when it is the corollary and second form of the service of God.

III.—And so, lastly—and only a word—note the Divine delight in such sacrifice.

Ah! that is a wonderful thought, "With such sacrifices God is well pleased." Now I take it that that "such" covers both the points on which I have been dwelling, and that the sacrifices which please Him are, first, those which are offered on the basis and footing of Christ's sacrifice, and, second, those in which word and work accord well, and make one music. "With *such* sacrifices God is well pleased."

We are sometimes too much afraid of believing that there is in the Divine heart anything corresponding to our delight in gifts that mean love, because we are

so penetrated with the imperfection of all that we can do and give; and sometimes because we are influenced by grand philosophic ideas of the Divine nature, so that we think it degrading to Him to conceive of anything corresponding to our delight as passing across it. But the Bible is wiser and more reverent than that. And it tells us that, however stained and imperfect our gifts, and however a man might reject them with scorn, God will take them, if they are "*such*"—that is, offered through Jesus Christ. I daresay there are many parents in this congregation who have laid away amongst their treasures some utterly useless thing that one of their little children once gave them. No good in it at all! No. But it meant love. And, depend upon it, "if ye, being evil, know how to *take* good gifts"—though they are useless—"from your children, much more will your Heavenly Father accept" your stained sacrifices if they come through Christ.

Dear brethren, my text preaches to us what is the true sacrifice of the true priesthood in the Christian Church. There is one Priest who stands alone, offering the one Sacrifice, that has no parallel nor second. No other shares in His priesthood of expiation and intercession. But around, and deriving their priestly character from Him, and made capable of rendering acceptable sacrifices through Him, stand the whole company of Christian people. And besides these there are no priesthoods and no sacrifices in the Christian vocabulary or in the Christian Church. Would that a generation that seems to be reeling backwards to the beggarly elements of an official

priesthood, with all its corruptions and degradations of the Christian community, would learn the lesson of my text! “Ye”—all of you, and not any selected number from amongst you—“ye, all of you are a royal priesthood.” There are only two sacrifices in the Christian Church: the one offered once for all on Calvary, by the High Priest Himself; the other the sacrifices of ourselves, by ourselves, thankofferings for Christ and His name, which are the true Eucharist.

## The Psalmist's Remonstrance with his Soul.

“WHY art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the health of my countenance, and my God.”—PSALMS xliiii. 5.



HIS verse, which closes this psalm, occurs twice in the previous one. It is a kind of refrain. Obviously this little psalm, of which my text is a part, was originally united with the preceding one. That the two made one is clear to anybody that will read them, by reason of structure, and tone, and similarity of the singer's situation, and the recurrence of many phrases, and especially of these significant words of my text.

The Psalmist is in circumstances of trouble and sorrow. We need not enter upon them particularly, but the thing that I desire to point out is that three times does the Psalmist take himself to task and question himself as to the reasonableness of the emotions that are surging in his soul, and checks these by higher considerations. Thrice he does it; twice in vain, for the trouble and anxiety come rolling back upon him in spite of the moment's respite, but the third time he triumphs.

I.—We note, then, first, that moods and emotions should be examined and governed by a higher self.

In the Psalmist's case, his gloom and despondency, which could plead good reasons for their existence, had everything their own way at first, and swept over his soul like the first rush of waters which have burst their bounds. But, presently, the ruling part of his nature wakes, and brings the feebler lower soul to its tribunal, and says, in effect, "Now! now that I am here, what hast thou to say about these sorrows that thou hast been complaining about? *Why* art thou cast down, O my soul? *Why* art thou disquieted?  
. . . Hope in God!"

I shall have a word or two to say presently about the details of this remonstrance, but the main point that I make, to begin with, is just this, that however strong and reasonably occasioned by circumstances a man's emotions and feelings, either of the bright or the dark kind, may be, they are not to be indulged, unless they have passed muster and examination by that higher and better self. It is necessary to keep a very tight hand upon *all* our feelings, whether they be the natural desires of the sensuous part of our nature, or whether they be the sentiments of sadness, or doubt, or anxiety, or perplexity, which are the natural results of outward circumstances of trial; or whether, on the contrary, they be the bright and buoyant ones which come, like angels, along with prosperous hours. But that necessity, commonplace as it is of all morals and all religion, is yet a thing which, day by day, we so forget that we need to be ever and anon reminded of it.

There are plenty of people who, making profession of being Christians, do not habitually put the break on their moods and tempers, and who seem to think that it is a sufficient vindication of gloom and sadness to say that things are going badly with them in the outer world, and who act as if they supposed that no joy can be too exuberant and no elation too lofty if, on the other hand, things are going rightly. It is a miserable travesty of the Christian faith to suppose that its prime purpose is anything else than to put into our hands the power of ruling ourselves because we let Christ rule us.

And so, dear brethren, though it be the A B C of Christian teaching, suffer this word of exhortation. It is only "milk for babes," but it is milk that the babes are very unwilling to take. Learn from this verse before us the solemn duty of rigid control, by the higher self, of the tremulous, emotional lower self which responds so completely to every change of temperature or circumstances in the world without. And remember that there should be a central heat which keeps the temperature substantially the same, whatever be the weather outside.

As the wheelhouse, and the steering gear, and the rudder of the ship proclaim their purpose of guidance and direction, so eloquently and unmistakably does the make of our inward selves tell us that emotions and moods and tempers are meant to be governed, often to be crushed, always to be moderated, by sovereign will and reason. In the Psalmist's language, "my soul" has to give account of its tremors and flutterings to "Me," the ruling Self, who should be

Lord of temperament, and control the fluctuations of feeling.

II.—Note that there are two ways of looking at causes of dejection and disquiet.

The whole preceding parts of both the psalms, before this refrain, are an answer to the question which my text puts. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" "My soul" has been talking two whole psalms, to explain why it is cast down. And after all the eloquent torrent of words to vindicate and explain its reasons for sadness—separation from the sanctuary, bitter remembrances of bright days, which the poet tells us are "a sorrow's crown of sorrow," taunts of enemies and the like—after all these have been said over and over again, the Psalmist says to himself: "Come now, let us hear it all once more. *Why* art thou cast down? Why art thou disquieted within me? Thou hast been telling the reasons abundantly. Speak them once again, and let us have a look at them."

There is a court of appeal in each man, which tests and tries his reasons for his moods; and these, which look very sufficient to the flesh, turn out to be very insufficient when investigated and tested by the higher spirit or self. We should "appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober." And if a man will be honest with himself, and tell himself why he is in such a pucker of terror, or why he is in such a rapture of joy, nine times out of ten the attempt to tell the reasons will be the condemnation of the mood which they are supposed to justify. If men would only bring the causes or occasions of the tempers and feelings, which they allow to direct them, to the bar of com-

mon sense, to say nothing of religious faith, half the furious boilings in their hearts would stop their ebullition. It would be like pouring cold water into a kettle on the fire. It would end its bubbling.

Everything has two handles. The aspect of any event depends largely on the beholder's point of view. "There's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" The answer is often very hard to give; the question is always very salutary to ask.

III.—Note that no reasons for being cast down are so strong as those for elation and calm hope.

"Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God." I need not deal here with the fact that the first of the three occurrences of this refrain is, in our Bible, a little different from the other two. That is probably a mistake in the text. In all three cases the words ought to stand the same.

Try to realize what God is to yourselves—"My God" and "the health of my countenance." That will stimulate sluggish feeling; that will calm disturbed emotion. He that can say "My God!" and in that possession can repose, will not be easily moved, by the trivialities and transitorinesses of this life, to excessive disquiet, whether of the exuberant or of the woeful sort. There is a wonderful calming power in realizing our possession of God as our portion—not stagnating, but quieting. I am quite sure that the troubles of our lives, and the gladnesses of our lives, which often distract, would

be far less operative in disturbing, if we felt more that God was ours and that we were God's.

Brethren, "there is no joy but calm." To be at rest is better than rapture. And there is no way of getting and keeping a fixed temper of still tranquillity unless we go into that deep and hidden chamber, in the secret place of the Most High, where we cannot "hear the loud winds when they call," but dwell in security, whatever storms harass the land. "Why art thou cast down," or lifted "up," and, in either case, "disquieted?" "Hope in God," and be at rest.

IV.—Note that the effort to lay hold on the truth which calms is to be repeated in spite of failures.

The words of our text are thrice repeated in these two psalms. In the two former instances they are followed by a fresh burst of pained feeling. A moment of tranquillity interrupts the agitation of the Psalmist's soul, but is soon followed by the recurrence of "the horrible storm" that "begins afresh." A tiny island of blue appears in his sky, and then the pale, ugly, grey rack drives across it once more. But the guiding self keeps the hand firm on the tiller, notwithstanding the wash of the water and the rolling of the ship, and the dominant will conquers at last. And at the third time the yielding soul obeys and is quiet, because the Psalmist's will resolved that it should be quiet, and it hopes in God because He, by a dead lift of effort, lifts it up to hope.

No effort at tranquillizing our hearts is wholly lost; and no attempt to lay hold upon God is wholly in vain. Men build a dam to keep out the sea, and the

winter storms make a breach in it, but it is not washed away altogether, And next season they will not need to begin to build from quite so low down; but there will be a bit of the former left, to put the new structure upon. And so by degrees it will rise above the tide, and at last will keep it out.

Did you ever see a child upon a swing, or a gymnast upon a trapeze? Each oscillation goes a little higher; each starts from the same lowest point, but the elevation on either side increases with each renewed effort, until at last the destined height is reached and the daring athlete leaps on to a solid platform. So we may, if I might so say, by degrees, by reiterated efforts, swing ourselves up to that steadfast floor on which we may stand high above all that breeds agitation and gloom.

It is possible, in the midst of change and circumstances that excite sad emotions, anxieties, and fears—it is possible to have this calmness of hope in God. The rainbow that spans the cataract rises steadfast above the white, tortured water beneath, and persists whilst all is hurrying change below. And there are flowers on the grim black rocks by the side of the fall, whose verdure is made greener and whose brightness is made brighter, by the freshening of the spray of the waterfall. And so we may be “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” and may bid dejected and disquieted souls to hope in God and be still.

## A Good Man's Estimate of Himself.

“BY the grace of God I am what I am ; and the grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain.”—1 COR. xv. 10.



THE Apostle was, all his life, under the hateful necessity of vindicating his character and Apostleship. Thus here, though his main purpose in the context is simply to declare the Gospel which he preached, he is obliged to turn aside in order to assert, and to back up his assertion, that there was no sort of difference between him and the other recognized teachers of Christian truth. He was forced to do this by persistent endeavours in the Corinthian Church to deny his Apostleship, and the faithfulness of his representation of the Christian verities. The way in which he does it is eminently beautiful and remarkable. He fires up in vindication of himself, and then he checks himself. “By the grace of God I am”—and he is going to say what he is, but he bethinks himself, as if he had reflected,—“No! I will leave other people to say what that is! By the grace of God I am—what I am ; whatever that be. And all that I have to say is that God made me, and that I

helped Him. For the grace of God which was bestowed upon me was not in vain. You Corinthians may judge what the product is. I tell you how it has come about." So there are thoughts here, I think, well worth our pondering and taking into our hearts and lives.

I.—First, as to the one power that makes men.

"By the grace of God I am what I am." Now that word "grace" has got to be worn threadbare, and to mean next door to nothing, in the ears and minds of a great many continual hearers of the Gospel. But Paul had a very definite idea of what he meant by it; and what he meant by it was a very large thing, which we may well ponder for a moment as being the only thing which will transform and ennoble character and will produce fruit that a man need not be ashamed of. The grace of God, in Paul's use of the words, which is the Scriptural use of them generally, implies these two things which are connected as root and product—the active love of God, in exercise towards us low and sinful creatures, and the gifts with which that love comes full charged to men. These two things, which at bottom are one, love and its gifts, are all, in the Apostle's judgment, gathered up and stored, as in a great storehouse, in Jesus Christ Himself, and through Him are made accessible to us, and brought to bear upon us for the ennobling of our natures, and the investing of us with graces and beauties of character, all strange to us apart from these.

Now it seems to me that these two things, which come from one root, are the precise things which you

and I need in order to make us nobler and purer and more Godlike men than otherwise we could ever become. For what is it that men need most for noble and pure living? These two things precisely: motive and power to carry out the dictates of conscience.

Every man in the world knows enough of duty and of right to be a far nobler man than any man in the world is. And it is not for want of clear convictions of duty, it is not for want of recognized models and patterns of life, that men go wrong; but it is because there are these two things lacking: motives for nobler service, and power to do and be what they know they ought to be. And precisely here Paul's Gospel comes in, "By the grace of God I am what I am." That grace, considered on its two sides of love and of giving, supplies all that we want.

It supplies motives. There is nothing that will bend a man's will like the recognition of Divine love, which it is blessedness to come in contact with and to obey. You may try to sway him by motives of advantage and self-interest, and to thunder into his ears the pealing words of Duty and Right and "ought," and there is no adequate response. You cannot soften a heart by the hammers of the law. You cannot force a man to do right by brandishing before him the whip that punishes doing wrong. You cannot sway the will by anything but the heart; and when you can touch that deepest spring it moves the whole mass.

You have seen some ponderous piece of machinery, which resists all attempts of a puny hand laid upon it

to make it revolve. But down in one corner is a little hidden spring. Touch that, and with majestic slowness and certainty the mighty bulk turns. You know those rocking-stones down in the South of England; tons of weight poised upon a pin point, and so exquisitely balanced that a child's finger rightly applied may move the mass. So the whole man is made mobile only by the touch of love; and the grace that comes to us, and says, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," is, as I believe, the sole motive which will continuously and adequately sway the rebellious, self-centred wills of men, to obedience resulting in nobility of life.

The other aspect of this same great word is, in like manner, that which we need. What men want is, first of all, the will to be noble and good; and, second, the power to carry out the will. It is God that worketh in us both the willing and the doing. I venture to affirm that there is no power known, either to thinkers, or philanthropists, or doctrinaires, or strivers after excellence in the world — no power known and available which will lift a life to such heights of beauty and self-sacrificing nobility as will the power that comes to us by communication of the grace that is in Jesus Christ

I am perpetually trying to insist, dear brethren, upon this one thought, that the communication of actual new life is the central gift of the Gospel; and this new life it is, this nature endowed with new desires, hopes, aims, capacities, which alone will raise the whole man into unwonted regions of beauty and serenity. It is the grace of God, the gift of His

Divine Spirit that will dwell with all of us, if we will, which alone can be trusted to make men good.

And now, if that be true, what follows? Surely this, that for all you who have, in any measure, caught a glimpse of what you ought to be, and have been more or less vainly trying to realize your ideal, and reach your goal, there is a better way than the way of self-centred and self-derived and self-dependent effort. There is the way of opening your hearts and spirits to the entrance and access of that great power, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which will do in us and for us all that we know we ought to do, and yet feel hampered and hindered in performing.

Oh, dear friends, there are many of you, I believe, who have more or less spasmodically and interruptedly, but with a continual recurrence to the effort, sought to plant your feet firmly in the paths of righteousness, and have more or less failed. Listen to this Gospel, and accept it, and put it to the proof. The love of God which is in Christ Jesus, and the life which that love brings in its hands, for all of us who will trust it, will dwell in you if you will, and mould you into His own likeness. And the law of spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus will make us free from the law of sin and death.

All noble living is a battle. Can you and I, with our ten thousand, meet him that cometh against us with his twenty, the temptations of the world, and of its Prince? Send for the reinforcements, and Jesus Christ will come and teach your hands to war and your fingers to fight. All noble life is self-denial, coercion, restraint; and can my poor feeble hands

apply muscular force enough to the brake to keep the wheels clogged, and prevent them from whirling me downhill into ruin? Let Him come and put His great gentle hand on the top of yours, and that will enable you to scotch the wheels, and make self-denial possible. All noble life is a building up by slow degrees from the foundation. And can you and I complete the task with our own limited resources and our own feeble strengths? Will not "all that pass by begin to mock" us and say, "This man began to build and was not able to finish"? That is the epitaph written over all moralities, and over all lives which, catching some glimpse of the good and the true and the noble, have tried, apart from Christ, to reproduce them in themselves. Frightful gaps, and an unfinished, however fair, structure end them all. Go to Him! "His hand hath laid the foundation of the house, His hand shall also finish it." He who is Himself the foundation-stone is also the headstone of the corner, which is brought forth with shouting of "Grace! Grace unto it!"

I need not, I suppose, linger to remind you what important and large lessons these thoughts carry, not only for men who are trying to work at the task of mending and making their own characters, but, on the larger scale, for all who seek to benefit and elevate their fellows. Brethren, it is not for me to depreciate any workers who, in any department, and by any methods, seek, and partially effect, the elevation of humanity. But I should be untrue to my own deepest convictions, and unfaithful to the message which God's providence has given it to me as my life's task

to proclaim, if I did not declare that nothing will truly *re-form* humanity, society, the nation, the city, except that which re-creates the individual: "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" entering into their midst.

II.—And so, secondly, and very briefly, notice the lesson we get here as to how we should think of our own attainments.

I have already pointed out that there are two beautiful touches in my text. The Apostle traces everything that he is, in his character and in his Christian standing and in his Apostolic work and success, to that grace that has come down upon him, and clothed his nakedness with so glorious a garment. And then, in addition to that, he modestly, and with a fine sense of dignity, refrains from parading his attainments or his achievements, and says, "It is not for me to estimate what I am; it is for you to do it." True, indeed, in the next verse he does set forth, in very lofty language, his claims to be in nothing behind the very chiefest of the Apostles, and "to have laboured more abundantly than they all." But still the spirit of that humble and yet dignified silence runs through the whole context. "By the grace of God I am—what I am."

Well, then, it is not necessary for a man to be ignorant, or to pretend that he is ignorant, of what he can do. We hear a great deal about the unconsciousness of genius. There is a partial truth in it; and possibly the highest examples of power and success, in any department of mental or intellectual effort, are unaware of their achievements and stature.

But if a man can do a certain kind of service, there is no harm whatever in his recognizing the fact that he can do it. The only harm is in his thinking that because he can, he is a very fine fellow, and that the work itself is a great work; and so setting himself up above his brethren. There is a vast deal of hypocrisy in what is called unconsciousness of power. Most men who have been chosen and empowered to do a great work for God or for men, in any department, have been aware that they could do it. But the less we think about ourselves, in any way, the better. The more entire our recognition of the influx of grace on which we depend for keeping our reservoir full, the less likelihood there will be of touchy self-assertion, the less likelihood of the misuse of the powers that we have. If we are to do much for God; if we are to keep what we have already attained; if we are to make our own lives sweet and beautiful; if we are to be invested with any increase of capacity, or led to any higher heights of nobleness and Christlikeness, we must copy, and make a conscious effort to copy, these two things, which marked the Apostle's estimate of himself—a distinct recognition that we are only reservoirs and nothing more—"What hast thou that thou hast not received? Why then dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"—and a humble waiving aside of the attempt to determine what it is that we are. For however clearly a man may know his own powers and achievements, it is hard for him to estimate the relations of these to his whole character.

So, dear brethren, although it is a very homely piece of advice, and may seem to be beneath the

so-called dignity of the pulpit, let me venture just to remind you that self-conceit is no disease peculiar to the ten-talented people, but is quite as rife, if not a good deal rifer, among those with one talent. They are very humble when it comes to work, and are quite contented to wrap the one talent up in a napkin then; but when it comes to self-assertion, or what they expect to receive of recognition from others, they need to be reminded quite as much as their betters in endowment that "by the grace of God I am what I am."

III.—And so, lastly, one word about the responsibility for our co-operation with the grace, in order to the accomplishment of its results.

"The grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain," says Paul. "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me, and so I laboured more abundantly than they all." That is to say, God in His giving love, Christ with His ever out-flowing Spirit, play round our hearts, and desire to enter. But the grace, the love, the gifts of the love may all be put away by our unfaithfulness, by our non-receptivity, by our misuse, and by our negligence. Paul yielded himself to the grace that was brought to work upon him. Have you yielded yourselves?

Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am." He could not have said that, could he, if he had known that the most part of what he was was dead against God's will and purpose? Has God anything to do with making you what you are, or has it been the devil that has had the most share in it? This

man, because he knew that he had submitted himself to the often painful searching, crucifying, self-restraining and stimulating influences of the Gospel and Spirit of Christ, could say, "God's grace has made me what I am, and I helped Him to make me." And can you say anything like that?

Take your life. In how many of its deeds has there been present the consciousness of God and His love? Take your character. How much of it has been shot through and through, so to speak, by the fiery darts of that cleansing, warming, consuming grace of God? Are you daily being baptized in that Spirit, searched by that Spirit, condemned by the grace? Is it the grace of God, or nature and self and the world and the flesh that have made you what you are?

Oh, brethren, let us cultivate the sense of our need of this Divine help, for it does not come where men do not know how weak they are, and how much they want it. The mountain tops are high. Yes! and they are dry; there is no water there. The rivers run in the green valleys deep down. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Let us see that we open our hearts to the reception of these quickening and cleansing influences, for it is possible for us to cover ourselves over with such an impenetrable covering that that grace cannot pass through it. Let us see to it that we keep ourselves in close contact with the foundation of all this grace, even Jesus Christ Himself, by desire, by faith, by love, by communion, by meditation, approximation, by

sympathy, by service. And let us see that we use the grace that we possess. "For to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not"—not possessing in any real sense because not utilising for its appointed purpose—"shall be taken away even that he hath." Wherefore, brethren, I "beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."

## “That Which was Lost.”

“A HUNDRED sheep . . . . ten pieces of silver . . . . two sons.”—LUKE xv. 4, 8, 11.



THE immediate occasion of these three inimitable parables, which have found their way to the heart of the world, needs to be remembered in order to grasp their import and importance. They are intended to vindicate Christ's conduct in associating with outcasts and disreputable persons whom His Pharisaical critics thought a great deal too foul to be touched by clean hands. They were not meant to set forth with anything like completeness either what wanderers had to do to go back to God, or what God had done to bring wanderers back to Himself. If this had been remembered, many misconceptions, widespread and mischievous, especially affecting the meaning of the last of the three parables—that of the Prodigal Son—would have been avoided. The purpose of the parables accounts for Christ's accepting the division which His antagonists made of men, into “righteous,” like themselves, and “unclean,” like the publicans and sinners. There was a far deeper truth to be spoken about the condition of humanity than

that. But for the purposes of His argument Christ passes it by. The remembrance of the intention of the parables explains their incompleteness as a statement of what people call “the way of salvation.” They were not meant to teach us that, but they were meant to show us that a human instinct which prizes lost things because they are lost has something corresponding to it in the Divine nature, and so to vindicate the conduct of Christ.

I venture to isolate these three statements of the subjects of the parables, because I think that looking at the threefold aspect in which the one general thought is presented may help us to some useful considerations.

I.—I ask you, then, to look with me, first, at the varying causes of loss.

The sheep was lost, the *drachma* was lost, the son was lost. But in each case the reason for the loss was different. Whilst I should avoid all fanciful inserting into our Lord’s words of more than they can fairly bear, I should also avoid superficial evacuating them of any of their depth of significance. So I think it is not unintentional nor unimportant that in these three metaphors there are set forth three obviously distinct operative causes for man’s departure from God.

The sheep did not intend to go anywhere, either to keep with or to leave the shepherd. It simply knew that grass was sweet, and that there, ahead of it, was another tuft, and it went after that. So it nibbled itself away out of the path, out of the shepherd’s care, out of the flock’s companionship. It was heedless; and therefore it was lost.

Now that is a fair statement of facts in regard to thousands of men, of whom I have no doubt there are some listening to me now. They do not intend any mischief, they have no purpose of rebellion or transgression, but they live what we call animal lives. The sheep knows only where the herbage is abundant and fresh; and it goes there. An animal has no foresight, and is the happier because it cannot look before and after. It has only a rudimentary conscience, if it has that. Its inclinations are restrained by no sense of obligation. Many men live just so, without restraint upon appetite, without checking of inclination, without foresight except of the material good which a certain course of conduct may get. So, all unwitting, meaning no mischief, they wander further and further from the right road, and find themselves at last in a waterless desert.

Dear friends, am I speaking to any now who have too much yielded to inclinations, who have been unwilling to look forward to the end, and ask themselves what all will come to at the last, and who scarcely know what it is to take heed unto their ways, except in so far as worldly prudence may dictate certain courses of conduct for the purpose of securing certain worldly and perishable ends? I would plead, especially with the younger portion of my congregation, to take the touching picture of this first parable as a solemn prophecy of what certainly befalls every man who sets out upon his path without careful consideration of whither it leads to at the last; and who lives for the present, in any of its forms, and who lets himself be led by inclinations or appetites. The

animal does so, and, as a rule, its instincts are its sufficient guide. But you and I are blessed or cursed, as the case may be, with higher powers, which, if we do not use, we shall certainly land in the desert. If a man who is meant to guide himself by intelligence, reason, will, foresight, conscience, chooses to go down to the level of the beast, the faculties that serve the beast will not serve the man. And even the sheep is lost from the flock if it yields only to these.

But how it speaks of the Lord's tender sympathy for the wanderers that He should put in the forefront of the parables this explanation of the condition of men, and should not at first charge it upon them as sin, but only as heedlessness and folly! There is much that in itself is wrong and undesirable, the criminality of which is diminished by the fact that it was heedlessly done, though the heedlessness itself is a crime.

Now turn to the second parable. The coin was heavy, so it fell; it was round, so it rolled; it was dead, so it lay. And there are people who are things rather than persons, so entirely have they given up their wills, and so absolutely do they let themselves be determined by circumstances. It was not the *drachma* that lost itself, but it was the law of gravitation that lost it, and it had no power of resistance. This also is an explanation—partial, as I shall have to show you in a moment, but still real—of a great deal of human wandering. There are masses of men who have no more power to resist the pressure of circumstances and temptations than the piece of silver had when it dropped from the woman's open palm

and trundled away into some dark corner. That lightens the darkness of much of the world's sin.

But for you to abnegate the right and power of resisting circumstances is to abdicate the sovereignty with which God has crowned you. All men are shaped by externals, but the shape which the externals impose upon us is settled by ourselves. Here are two men, for instance, exposed to precisely the same conditions: but one of them yields, and is ruined; the other resists, and is raised and strengthened. As Jesus Christ, so all things have a double operation. They are "either a savour of life unto life or a savour of death unto death." There is the stone. You may build upon it, or you may stumble over it: you take your choice. Here is the adverse circumstance. You may rule it, or you may let it rule you. Circumstances and outward temptations are the fool's masters, and the wise man's servants. It all depends on the set of the sail and the firmness of the hand that grasps the tiller, which way the wind shall carry the ship. The same breeze speeds vessels on directly opposite courses, and so the same circumstances may drive men in two contrary directions, sending the one further and further away from, and drawing the other nearer and nearer to, the haven of their hearts.

Dear friends, as we have to guard against the animal life of yielding to inclinations and inward impulse, of forgetting the future, and of taking no heed to our paths, so, unless we wish to ruin ourselves altogether, we have to fight against the mechanical life which, with a minimum of volition,

lets the world do with us what it will. And sure I am that there are men and women in this audience at this time who have let their lives be determined by forces that have swept them away from God.

In the third parable the foolish boy had no love to his father to keep him from emigrating. He wanted to be his own master, and to get away into a place where he thought he could sow his wild oats and no news of it ever reach the father's house. He wanted to have the fingering of the money, and to enjoy the sense of possession. And so he went off on his unblest road to the harlots and the swine's trough.

And *that* is no parable; that is a picture. The other two were parabolical representations; this is the thing itself. For carelessness of the bonds that knit a heart to God; hardness of an unresponsive heart unmelted by benefits; indifference to the blessedness of living by a Father's side and beneath His eye; the uprising of a desire of independence and the impatience of control; the exercise of selfwill—these are causes of loss that underlie the others of which I have been speaking, and which make for every one of us the essential sinfulness of our sin. It is rebellion, and it is rebellion against a Father's love.

Now, notice, that whilst the other two that we have been speaking about do partially explain the terrible fact that we go away from God, their explanation is only partial, and this grimmer truth underlies them. There are modern theories, as there were ancient ones, that said: “Oh! sin is a theological bugbear. There is not any such thing. It is all indifference, ignorance,

error." And then there are other theorists that say: "Sin! There is no sin in following natural laws and impulses. Circumstances shape men; heredity shapes them. The notion that their actions are criminal is a mere figment of an exploded superstition."

Yes! and down below the ignorance, and inadvertence, and error, and heredity, and domination of externals, there lies the individual choice in each case. The man knows—however he sophisticates himself, or wishes other people to provide him with sophistries—that he need not have done that thing unless he had chosen to do it. You cannot get beyond or argue away that consciousness. And so I say that all these immoral teachings, which are very common to-day, omit from the thing that they profess to analyse the very characteristic element of it, which is, as our Lord taught us, not the following inclination like a silly sheep; not the rolling away, in obedience to natural law, like the drachma; but the rising up of a rebellious will that desires a separation, and kicks against control, as in the case of the son.

So, dear friends, whilst I thankfully admit that much of the darkness of human conduct may be lightened by the representations of our two first parables, I cannot but feel that we have to leave to God the determination in each case of how far these have diminished individual criminality; and that we have to remember for ourselves that our departure from God is not explicable unless we recognize the fact that we have chosen rather to be away from Him than to be with Him; and that we like better

to have our goods at our own disposal, and to live as it pleases ourselves.

II.—So note, secondly, the varying proportions of loss and possession.

A hundred sheep; ten drachmas; two sons. The loss in one case is 1 per cent., a trifle; in the other case 10 per cent., more serious; in the last case 50 per cent., heartbreaking. Now, I do not suppose that our Lord intended any special significance to be attached to these varying numbers. Rather they were simply suggested by the cast of the parable in which they respectively occurred. A hundred sheep is a fair average flock; ten pieces of silver are the modest hoard of a poor woman; two sons are a family large enough to represent the contrast which is necessary to the parable. But still we may permissibly look at this varying proportion in order to see whether it, too, cannot teach us something.

It throws light upon the owner's care and pains in seeking. In one aspect, these are set forth most strikingly by the parable in which the thing lost bears the smallest proportion to the thing still retained. The shepherd might well have said: "One in a hundred does not matter much. I have got the ninety and nine." But he went to look for it. But, in another aspect, the woman, of course, has a more serious loss to face, and possibly seeks with more anxiety. And when you come up to the last case, where half the household is blotted out, as it were, then we can see the depth of anxiety and pains and care which must necessarily follow.

But beyond the consideration that the ascending

proportion suggests increasing pains and anxiety, there is another lesson, which seems to me even more precious, and it is this, that it matters very little to the loser how much he keeps, or what the worth of the lost thing is. There is something in human nature which makes anything that is lost precious by reason of its loss. Nobody can tell how large a space a tree fills until it is felled. If you lose one tiny stone out of a ring, or a bracelet, it makes a gap, and causes annoyance altogether disproportionate to the lustre that it had when it was there. A man loses a small portion of his fortune in some unlucky speculation, and the loss annoys him a great deal more than the possession solaced him, and he thinks more about the hundreds that have vanished than about the thousands that remain. Men are made so. It is a human instinct, that apart altogether from the consideration of its intrinsic worth, and the proportion it bears to that which is still possessed, the lost thing draws, and the loser will take any pains to find it.

So Christ says if a woman will light a candle and sweep the house and search diligently till she finds her lost sixpence (for the drachma was worth little more), and will bring in all her neighbours to rejoice with her, that is like God; and the human instinct which prizes lost things, not because of their value, but because they are lost, has something corresponding to it in the heart of the Majesty of the heavens. It is Christ's vindication, of course, as I need not remind you, of His own conduct. He says in effect, to these Pharisees, "You are finding fault with Me for doing what we all do. I am only acting in

accordance with a natural human instinct; and when I thus act God Himself is acting in and through Me.”

If I had time I think I could show that this principle, brought out in my texts, really sweeps away one of the difficulties which modern science has to suggest against Evangelical Christianity. We hear it said, “How can you suppose that a speck of a world like this, amidst all these flaming orbs that stud the infinite depths of the heavens, is of so much importance in God’s sight that His Son came down to die for it?” The magnitude of the world, as compared with others, has nothing to do with the question. God’s action is determined by its moral condition. If it be true that here is sin, which rends men away from Him, and that so they are lost, then it is supremely natural that all the miracles of the Christian revelation should follow. The *rationale* of the Incarnation lies in this, “A certain man had a hundred sheep. . . . One of them went astray . . . and He went into the wilderness and found it.”

III.—Now I meant to have said a word about the varying glimpses that we have here, into God’s claims upon us, and His heart.

Ownership is the word that describes His relation to us in the first two parables; love is the word that describes it in the third. But the ownership melts into love, because God does not reckon that He possesses men by natural right of creation or the like, unless they yield their hearts to Him, and give themselves, by their own joyful self-surrender, into His hands. But I must not be tempted to speak upon that matter; only, before I close, let me point you to

that most blessed and heart-melting thought, that God accounts Himself to have lost something when a man goes away from Him.

That word "the lost" has another, and in some senses a more tragical, significance in Scripture. The lost are lost to themselves and to blessedness. The word implies destruction; but it also carries with it this, that God prizes us, is glad to have us, and, I was going to say, feels an incompleteness in His possessions when men depart from Him.

Oh, brethren, surely such a thought as that should melt us; and if, as is certainly the case, we have strayed away from Him into green pastures, which have ended in a wilderness, without a blade of grass; or if we have rolled away from Him in passive submission to circumstances; or if we have risen up in rebellion against Him, and claimed our separate right of possession and use of the goods that fall to us, if we would only think that He considers that He has lost us, and prizes us because we are lost to Him, and wants to get us back again, surely, surely it would draw us to Himself. Think of the greatness of the love into which the ownership is merged, as measured by the infinite price which He has paid to bring us back. And let us all say, "I will arise and go to my Father."

## The Fruit of the Light.

“THE fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.”—EPH. v. 9 (Revised Version).



HIS is one of the cases in which the Revised Version has done service by giving currency to an unmistakably accurate and improved reading. That which stands in our Authorized Ver-

sin, “the fruit of the spirit,” seems to have been a correction made by someone who took offence at the violent metaphor, as he conceived it, that “light” should bear “fruit,” and desired to tinker the text so as to bring it into verbal correspondence with another passage in the Epistle to the Galatians, where “the fruits of the spirit” are enumerated. But the reading, “the fruit of the *light*,” has not only the preponderance of manuscript authority in its favour, but is preferable because it preserves a striking image, and is in harmony with the whole context.

The Apostle has just been exhorting his Ephesian friends to walk as “children of the light,” and before he goes on to expand and explain that injunction, he interjects this parenthetical remark, as if he would

say, To be true to the light that is in you is the sum of duty, and the condition of perfectness, "*for* the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." That connection is entirely destroyed by the substitution of "spirit." The whole context, both before and after my text, is full of references to the light as working in the life; and a couple of verses after it we read about "the unfruitful works of darkness," an expression which evidently looks back to my text.

So please to understand that our text in this sermon is—"The fruit of the *light* consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth."

I.—Now, first of all, I have just a word to say about this light which is fruitful.

Note—for it is, I think, not without significance—a minute variation in the Apostle's language in this verse and the context. He has been speaking of "light," now he speaks of "*the* light"; and that, I think, is not accidental. The expression "walk as children of light" is more general and vague. The expression "the fruit of *the* light" points to some specific source from which all light flows. And observe, also, that we have in the previous context, "Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light *in the Lord*," which evidently implies that the light of which my text speaks is not natural to men, but is the result of the entrance into their darkness of a new element.

Now I do not suppose that we should be entitled to say that Paul here is formally anticipating the deep teaching of the Apostle John that Jesus Christ is "*the* Light of men," and especially of Christian men. But

he is distinctly asserting, I think, that the light which blesses and hallows humanity is no diffused glow, but is all gathered and concentrated into one blazing centre, from which it floods the hearts of men. Or to put away the metaphor, he is here asserting that the only way by which any man can cease to be, in the doleful depths of his nature, darkness in its saddest sense is by opening his heart through faith, that into it there may rush, as the light ever does where an opening—be it only a single tiny cranny—is made, the light which is Christ, and without Whom is darkness.

I know, of course, that, apart altogether from the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ, there do shine in men's hearts rays of the light of knowledge and of purity; but if we believe the teaching of Scripture, these, too, are from Christ, in His universally-diffused work, by which, apart altogether from individual faith, or from a knowledge of revelation, He is "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world." And I hold that, wheresoever there is conscience, wheresoever there is judgment and reason, wheresoever there are sensitive desires after excellence and nobleness, *there* is a flickering of a light which I believe to be from Christ Himself. But that light, widely diffused as humanity, fights with, and is immersed in, darkness. In the physical world, light and darkness are mutually exclusive: where the one is the other comes not; but in the spiritual world the paradox is true that the two co-exist. Apart from revelation and the acceptance of Jesus Christ's person and work by our humble faith, the light struggles

with the darkness, and the darkness obstinately refuses to admit its entrance, and "comprehendeth it not." And so, ineffectual but to make restless and to urge to vain efforts and to lay up material for righteous judgment, is the light that shines in men whose hearts are shut against Christ. The fruitful light is Christ within us. And, unless we know and possess it by the opening of heart and mind and will, the solemn words before my text are true of us: "Ye were sometime darkness." Oh, brother! do you see to it that the subsequent words are true of you: "Now are ye light in the Lord." Only if you are in Christ are you truly light.

II.—Now, secondly, notice the fruitfulness of this indwelling light.

Of course the metaphor that light, like a tree, grows and blossoms and puts forth fruit, is a very strong one. And its very violence and incongruity help its force. Fruit is generally used in Scripture in a good sense. It conveys the notion of something which is the natural outcome of a vital power. And so, when we talk about the light being fruitful, we are setting, in a striking image, the great Christian thought that, if you want to get right conduct, you must have renewed character; and that if you have renewed character you will get right conduct. This is the principle of my text. The light has in it a productive power; and the true way to adorn a life with all things beautiful, solemn, lovely, is to open the heart to the entrance of Jesus Christ.

God's way is—first, new life, then better conduct. Men's way is, "cultivate morality, seek after purity,

try to be good." And surely conscience and experience alike tell us that that is a hopeless effort. To begin with what should be second is an anachronism in morals, and will be sure to result in failure in practice. He is not a wise man that tries to build a house from the chimneys downwards. And to talk about making men's doings good before you have secured a radical change in the doer, by the infusion into him of the very life of Jesus Christ Himself, is to begin at the top story, instead of at the foundation. Many of us are trying to put the cart before the horse in that fashion. Many of us have made the attempt over and over again, and the attempt always has failed and always will fail. You may do much for the mending of your characters and for the incorporation in your lives of virtues and graces which do not grow there naturally and without effort. I do not want to cut the nerves of any man's strugglings, I do not want to darken the brightness of any man's aspirations, but I do say that the people who, apart from Jesus Christ, and the entrance into their souls by faith of His quickening power, are seeking, some of them nobly, some of them sadly, and all of them vainly, to cure their faults of character, will never attain anything but a superficial and fragmentary goodness, because they have begun at the wrong end.

But "make the tree good," and its fruit will be good. Get Christ into your heart, and all fair things will grow as the natural outcome of His indwelling. The fruitfulness of the light is not put upon its right basis until we come to understand that the light is Christ Himself, who, dwelling in our hearts by faith,

is made *in* us as well as "*unto* us wisdom, and righteousness, and salvation, and redemption." The beam that is reflected from the mirror is the very beam that falls on the mirror. And the fair things in life and conduct which Christian people bring forth are in very deed the outcome of the vital power of Jesus Christ which has entered into them. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," is the Apostle's declaration in the midst of his struggles; and the perfected saints before the throne cast their crowns at His feet, and say, "Not unto us! not unto us, but unto Thy name be the glory." The talent is the Lord's, the spending of it alone is the servant's. And so the order of the Divine appointment is, first, the entrance of the light, and then the conduct that flows from it.

Note, too, how this same principle of the fruitfulness of the light gives instruction as to the true place of effort in the Christian life. The main effort ought to be to get more of the light into ourselves. "Abide in Me, and I in you." And so, and only so, will fruit come.

And such an effort has to take in hand all the circumference of our being, and to fix thoughts that wander, and to still wishes that clamour, and to empty hearts that are full of earthly loves, and to clear a space in minds that are crammed with thoughts about the transient and the near, in order that the mind may keep in steadfast contemplation of Jesus, and the heart may be bound to Him by cords of love that are not capable of being snapped, and scarcely of being stretched, and the will may in patience stand saying.

“Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth”; and the whole tremulous nature may be rooted and built up in and on Him. Ah, brother! if we understand all that goes to the fulfilment of that one sweet and merciful injunction, “Abide in Me,” we shall recognise that there is the field on which Christian effort is mainly to be occupied.

But that is not all. For there must be likewise the effort to appropriate, and still more to manifest in conduct, the fruit-bringing properties of that indwelling light. “Giving all diligence add to your faith.” “Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.” We are often told that just as we trust Christ for our forgiveness and acceptance, so we are to trust Him for our sanctifying and perfecting. It is true, and yet it is not true. We are to trust Him for our sanctifying and our perfecting. But the faith which trusts Him for these is not a substitute for effort, but it is the foundation of effort. And the more we rely on His power to cleanse us from all evil, the more are we bound to make the effort in His power and in dependence on Him, to cleanse ourselves from all evil, and to secure as our own the natural outcomes of His dwelling within us, which are “the fruits of the light.”

III.—And so, lastly, notice the specific fruits which the Apostle here dwells upon.

They consist, says he, in all goodness and righteousness and truth. Now “goodness” here seems to me to be used in its narrower sense, just as the same Apostle uses it in the Epistle to the Romans, in con-

trast with "righteousness," where he says, "for a good man some would even dare to die." There he means by "good," as he does here by "goodness," not the general expression for all forms of virtue and gracious conduct, but the specific excellence of kindness, amiability, or the like. "Righteousness," again, is that which rigidly adheres to the strict law of duty, and carefully desires to give to every man what belongs to him, and to every relation of life what it requires. And "truth" is rather the truth of sincerity, as opposed to hypocrisy and lies and shams, than the intellectual truth as opposed to error.

Now, all these three types of excellence—kindness, righteousness, truthfulness—are apt to be separated. For the first of them—amiability, kindness, gentleness—is apt to become too soft, to lose its grip of righteousness. And it needs the tonic of the addition of those other graces, just as you need lime in water if it is to make bone. Righteousness, on the other hand, is apt to become stern, and needs the softening of goodness to make it human and attractive. The rock is grim when it is bare; it wants verdure to drape it if it is to be lovely. Truth needs kindness and righteousness, and they need truth. For there are men who pride themselves on "speaking out," and take rudeness and want of regard for other people's sensitive feelings to be sincerity. And, on the other hand, it is possible that amiability may be sweeter than truth is, and that righteousness may be hypocritical and insincere. So Paul says, "Let this white light be resolved in the prism of your

characters into the threefold rays of kindliness, righteousness, truthfulness.”

And then, again, he desires that each of us should try to make our own a fully developed, all-round perfection—all goodness and righteousness and truth; of every sort, that is, and in every degree. We are all apt to cultivate graces of character which correspond to our natural disposition and make. We are all apt to become *torsos*, fragmentary, one-sided, like the trees that grow against a brick wall, or those which stand exposed to the prevailing blasts from one quarter of the sky. But we should seek to appropriate types of excellence to which we are least inclined, as well as those which are most in harmony with our natural dispositions. If you incline to kindliness, try to brace yourselves with righteousness; if you incline to righteousness, to take the stern, strict view of duty, and to give to every man what he deserves, remember that you do not give men their dues unless you give them a great deal more than their deserts, and that righteousness does not perfectly allot to our fellows what they ought to receive from us, unless we give them pity and indulgence and forbearance and forgiveness when it is needed. The one light breaks into all colours—green in the grass, purple and red in the flowers, flame-coloured in the morning sky, blue in the deep sea. The light that is in us ought, in like manner, to be analysed into, and manifested in, “whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.”

And so, dear friends, here is a test for us all. Devout emotion, orthodox creed, practical diligence

in certain forms of benevolence and philanthropic work, are all very well; but Jesus Christ came to make us like Himself, and to turn our darkness into light that betrays its source by its resemblance, though it be a weakened one, to the sun from which it came. We have no right to call ourselves Christ's followers unless we are, in some measure, Christ's pictures.

Here is a message of cheer and hope for us all. We have all tried, and tried, and tried, over and over again, to purge and mend these poor characters of ours. How long the toil, how miserable and poor the results! A million candles will not light the night; but when God's mercy of sunrise comes above the hills, beasts of prey slink to their dens, and birds begin to sing, and flowers open, and growth resumes again. We cannot mend ourselves except partially and superficially; but we can open will, heart, and mind, by faith, for His entrance; and where He comes, there He slays the evil creatures that live in and love the dark, and all gracious things will blossom into beauty. If we are in the Lord we shall be light; and if the Lord, who is the Light, is in us, we, too, shall bear fruits of "all righteousness and goodness and truth."

## Pleasing Christ.

“PROVING what is acceptable unto the Lord.”—EPH. v. 10.



THESE words are closely connected with those which precede them in the 8th verse—“Walk as children of light.” They further explain the mode by which that commandment is to be fulfilled. They who, as children of light, mindful of their obligations and penetrated by its brightness, seek to conform their active life to the light to which they belong, are to do so by making experiment of, or investigating and determining, what is “acceptable to the Lord.” It is the sum of all Christian duty, a brief compendium of conduct, an all-sufficient directory of life.

There need only be two remarks made by way of explanation of my text. One is that the expression rendered “acceptable” is more accurately and forcibly given, as in the Revised Version, by the plainer word “well-pleasing.” And the other is that “the Lord” here, as always in the New Testament—unless the context distinctly forbids it—means Jesus Christ. Here the context distinctly demands it. For only a

sentence or two before the Apostle has been speaking about "those who were sometime darkness having been made light in the Lord"—which is obviously in Jesus Christ.

And here, therefore, what pleases *Christ* is the Christian's highest duty, and the one prescription which is required to be obeyed in order to walk in the light is, to do that which pleases Him.

I.—So, then, in these brief words, so comprehensive, and going so deep into the secrets of holy and noble living, I want you to notice that we have, first, the only attitude which corresponds to our relations to Christ.

How remarkable it is that this Apostle should go on the presumption that our conduct affects Him, that it is possible for us to please, or to displease Jesus Christ now. We often wonder whether the beloved dead are cognizant of what we do; and whether any emotions, of something like either our earthly complacency or displeasure, can pass across the undisturbed calm of their hearts, if they are aware of what their loved ones here are doing. That question has to be left very much in the dark, however our hearts may sometimes seek to enforce answers. But this we know, that that loving Lord, not merely by the omniscience of His divinity, but by the perpetual knowledge and sympathy of His perfect manhood, is not only cognizant of, but is affected by, the conduct of His professed followers here on earth. And since it is true that He now is not swept away into some oblivious region where the dead are, but is close beside us all, cognizant of every act, watching

every thought, and capable of having something like a shadow of a pang passing across the Divine depth of His eternal joy and repose, at the right hand of God, then, surely, the only thing that corresponds to such a relationship as at present subsists between the Christian soul and the Lord is that we should take as our supreme and continual aim that "whether present or absent, we should be well-pleasing to Him." Nor does that demand rest only upon the realities of our present relation to that Lord, but it goes back to the past facts on which our present relation rests. And the only fitting response to what He has been and done for us is that we should, each of us, in the depths of our hearts, and in the widest circumference of the surface of our lives, enthrone Him as absolute Lord, and take His good pleasure as our supreme law. Jesus Christ is King because He is Redeemer. The only adequate response to what He has done for me is that I should absolutely submit myself to Him, and say to Him, "O Lord! truly I am Thy servant! Thou hast loosed my bonds." The one fitting return to make for that Cross and Passion is to enthrone His will upon my will, and to set Him as absolute Monarch over the whole of my nature. Thoughts, affections, purposes, efforts, and all should crown Him King, because He has died for me. The conduct which corresponds to the relations which we bear to Christ as the present Judge of our work, and the Redeemer of our souls by His mighty deed in the past is this of my text, to make my one law His will, and to "please Him that hath called me to be His soldier."

The meaning of being a Christian is that, in return for the gift of a whole Christ, I give my whole self to Him. "Why call ye me Lord! Lord! and do not the things which I say?" If He is what He assuredly is to every one of us, nothing can be plainer than that we are thereby bound by obligations which are not iron, but are more binding than if they were, because they were woven out of the cords of love and the bands of a man, bound to serve Him supremely, Him only, Him always, Him by the suppression of self, and the making His pleasure our law.

II.—Now, secondly, let me ask you to notice that we have here the all-sufficient guide for practical life.

It sounds very mystical, and a trifle vague, to say, Do everything to please Jesus Christ. It is all-comprehensive; it is mystical in the sense that it goes down below the mere surface of prescriptions about conduct. But it is not vague, and it is capable of immediate application to every part, and to every act, of every man's life.

For what is it that pleases Jesus Christ? His own likeness; as, according to the old figure—which is, I suppose, true to spiritual facts, whether to external facts or not—the refiner knows that the metal is ready to flow when he can see his own face in it. Jesus Christ desires most that we should all be like Him. That we are to bear His image is as comprehensive, and at the same time as specific, a way of setting forth the sum of Christian duty, as are the words of my text. The two phrases mean the same thing.

And what is the likeness to Jesus Christ which it

is thus our supreme obligation and our truest wisdom and perfection to bear? Well! we can put it all into two words—self-suppression and continual consciousness of obedience to the Divine will. The life of Jesus Christ, in its brief records in Scripture, is felt by every thoughtful man to contain within its narrow compass adequate direction for, and to set forth the ideal of, human life. That is not because He went through all varieties of earthly experience, for He did not. The life of a Jewish peasant nineteen centuries ago was extremely unlike the life of a Manchester merchant, of a college professor, of a successful barrister, of a struggling mother, in this present day. But in the narrow compass of that life there are set forth these two things, which are the basis of all human perfection—the absolute annihilation of self-regard, and the perpetual recognition of a Divine will. These are the things which every Christian man and woman is bound by the power of Christ's Cross to translate into the actions correspondent with their particular circumstances. And so the student at his desk and the sailor on his deck, the miner in his pit, the merchant on Change, the worker in various handicrafts, may each be sure that they are doing what is pleasing to Christ if, in their widely-different ways, they seek to do what they can do in all the varieties of life—crucify self, and commune with God.

That is not easy. Whatever may be the objections to be brought against this summary of Christian duty, the objection that it is vague is the last that can be sustained. You try it, and you will find out that

it is anything but vague. It will grip tight enough, depend upon it. It will go deep enough down into all the complexities of our varying circumstances. If it has a fault (which it has not) it is in the direction of too great stringency for unaided human nature. But the stringency is not too great when we depend upon Him to help us, and an impossible ideal is a certain prophet of its own fulfilment some day.

So, brethren, here is the sufficient guide, not because it cumbers us with a mass of wretched little prescriptions such as a martinet might give, about all sorts of details of conduct. That is left to profitless casuists like the ancient rabbis. But the broad principles will effloresce into all manner of perfectnesses and all fruits. He that has in his heart these thoughts, that the definition of virtue is pleasing Jesus Christ, that the concrete form of goodness is likeness to Him, and that the elements of likeness to Him are these two, that I should never think about myself, and always think about God, needs no other guide or instructor to fill his life, with "whatsoever things are lovely and of good report," and to make his own all that the world calls virtue, and all which the consciences of good men have conspired to praise.

But not only does this guide prove its sufficiency by reason of its comprehensiveness, but also because there is no difficulty in ascertaining what at each moment it prescribes. Of course, I know that such a precept as this cannot contain in itself guidance in matters of mere practical expediency. But, apart from these—which are to be determined by the ordinary exercise of prudence and common sense—in

regard to the right and the wrong of our actions, I believe that if a man wants to know Christ's will, and takes the way of knowing it which Christ has appointed, he shall not be left in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

For love has a strange power of divining love's wishes, as we all know, and as many a sweetness in the hearts and lives of many of us has shown us. If we cherish sympathy with Jesus Christ we shall look on things as He looks on them, and we shall not be left without the knowledge of what His pleasure is. If we keep near enough to Him the glance of His eye will do for guidance, as the old psalm has it. They are rough animal natures that do not understand how to go, unless their instructors be the crack of the whip or the tug of the bridle. "I will guide thee with Mine eye." A glance is enough where there are mutual understanding and love. Two musical instruments in adjoining rooms, tuned to the same pitch, have a singular affinity, and if a note be struck on the one the other will vibrate to the sound. And so hearts here that love Jesus Christ and keep in unison with Him, and are sympathetic with His desires, will learn to know His will, and will re-echo the music that comes from Him. And if our supreme desire is to know what pleases Jesus Christ, depend upon it the desire will not be in vain. "If any man wills to do His will he shall know of the doctrine." Ninety per cent. of all our perplexities as to conduct come from our not having a pure and simple wish to do what is right in His sight, clearly supreme above all others. When we have that wish it is never left unsatisfied.

And even if sometimes we do make a mistake as to what is Christ's pleasure, if our supreme wish and honest aim in the mistake have been to do His pleasure, we may be sure that He will be pleased with the deed. Even though its body is not that which He willed us to do, its spirit is that which He does desire. And if we do a wrong thing, a thing in itself displeasing to Him, whilst all the while we desired to please Him, we shall please Him in the deed which would otherwise have displeased Him. And so two Christian men, for instance, who take opposite sides in a controversy, may both of them be doing what is well-pleasing in His sight, whilst they are contradicting one another, if they are doing it for His sake. And it is possible that the inquisitor and his victim may both have been serving Christ. At all events, let us be sure of this, that whensoever we desire to please Him, He will help us to do it, and ordinarily will help us by making clear to us the path on which His smile rests.

III.—Again, notice that we have here an all-powerful motive for Christian life.

The one thing which all other summaries of duty lack is motive power to get themselves carried into practice. But we all know, from our own happy human experience, that no motive which can be brought to bear upon men is stronger, when there are loving hearts concerned, than this simple one, "Do it to please me." And that is what Jesus Christ really says. That is no piece of mere sentiment, brethren, nor of mere pulpit rhetoric. That is the deepest thought of Christian morality, and is the distinctive peculiarity which gives

the morality of the New Testament its clear supremacy over all other. There are precepts in it far nobler and loftier than can be found elsewhere. The perspective of virtues and graces in it is different from that which ordinarily prevails amongst men. But I do not think that it is in the details of its precepts so much as in the communication of power to obey them, and in the suggestion of the motive which makes them all easy, that the difference of Christ's ethics from all the teaching of the world beside is most truly to be found.

And here lies the excellence thereof. It is a poor, cold thing to say to a man, "Do this because it is right." It is a still more powerless thing to say to him, "Do this because it is expedient." "Do this because, in the long run, it leads to happiness." It is all different when you say, "Do this to please Jesus Christ, to please that Christ who pleased not Himself but gave Himself for you." That is the fire that melts the ore. That is the heat that makes flexible the hard, stiff material. That is the motive which makes duty delight, which makes "the rough places plain" and "the crooked things straight." It does not abolish natural tastes, it does not supersede natural disinclinations, but it does smooth and soften unwelcome and hard tasks, and it invests service with a halo of glory, and changes the coldness of duty into rosy light; as when the sunrise strikes on the peaks of the frozen mountains. The one motive which impels men, and can be trusted to secure in them whatsoever things are noble, is to please Him.

So we have the secret of blessedness in these words.

For self-submission and suppression are blessedness. Our miseries come from our unbridled wills, far more than from our sensitive organizations. It is because we do not accept providences that providences hurt. It is because we do not accept the commandments that the commandments are burdensome. Those who have no will, except as it is vitalised by God's will, have found the secret of blessedness, and have entered into rest. In the measure in which we approximate to that condition, our wills will be strengthened as well as our hearts set at ease.

And blessedness comes, too, because the approbation of the Master, which is the aim of the servant, is reflected in the satisfaction of an approving conscience, which points onwards to the time when the Master's approval shall be revealed in the servant's glory.

I was reading a day or two ago about a religious reformer who arose in Eastern lands a few years since, and gathered many disciples. He and his principal follower were seized and about to be martyred. They were suspended by cords from a gibbet, to be fired at by a platoon of soldiers. And as they hung there, the disciple turned to his teacher, and as his last word on earth said, "Master! are you satisfied with me?" His answer was a silent smile; and the next minute a bullet was in his heart. Dear brethren, do you turn to Jesus Christ with the same question, "Master! art Thou satisfied with me?" and you will get His smile here; and hereafter, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

## XXVI.

### The Christian Attitude to Social Sins.

“AND have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”—EPH. v. 11.



WE have seen in a former sermon that “the fruit,” or outcome, “of the Light” is a comprehensive perfection, consisting in all sorts and degrees of goodness and righteousness and truth. Therefore, the commandment, “Walk as children of the light,” sums up all Christian morality. Is there need, then, for any additional precept? Yes; for Christian people do not live in an empty world. If there were no evil round them, and no proclivity to evil within them, it would be amply sufficient to say to them, “Be true to the light which you behold.” But since both these things are, the commandment of my text is further necessary. We do not work in *vacuo*, and therefore friction and atmosphere have to be taken account of; and an essential part of “walking as children of the light” is to know how to behave ourselves when confronted with “the works of darkness.”

These Ephesian Christians lived in a state of society honeycombed with hideous immorality, the centre of which was the temple, which was their city's glory

and shame. It was all but impossible for them to have nothing to do with the works of evil, unless, indeed, they went out of the world. But the difficulty of obedience does not affect the duty of obedience, nor slacken in the smallest degree the stringency of a command. This obligation lies upon us as fully as it did upon them, and the discharge of it by professing Christians would bring new life to moribund churches.

I.—Let me ask you to note with me, first, the fruitlessness inherent in all the works of darkness.

You may remember that I pointed out, in a former discourse, on the context, that the Apostle, here and elsewhere, draws a very significant distinction between “works” and “fruit,” and that distinction is put very strikingly in the words of my text. There are works which are barren. It is a grim thought that there may be abundant activity which, in the eyes of God, comes to just nothing; and that pages and pages of laborious calculations, when all summed up, have for result a great round O. Men are busy, and hosts of them are doing what the old fairy stories tell us that evil spirits were condemned to do—spinning ropes out of sea-sand; and their life-work is naught when you come to reckon it up.

I have no time to dwell upon this thought, but I wish, just for a moment or two, to illustrate it.

All godless life is fruitless, inasmuch as it has no permanent results. Permanent results of a sort, indeed, follow everything that men do, for all our actions tend to make character, and they all have a share in fixing that which depends upon character—viz., destiny, both here and yonder. And thus the most fleeting of our

deeds, which in one aspect is as transitory as the snow upon the great plains when the sun rises, leaves everlasting traces upon ourselves and upon our condition. But yet acts concerned with transitory things may have permanent fruit, or may be as transient as the things with which they are concerned. And the difference depends on the spirit in which they are done. If the roots are only in the surface-skin of soil, when that is pared off the plant goes. A life that is to be eternal must strike its roots through all the superficial *humus* down to the very heart of things. When its roots twine themselves round God, then the deeds which blossom from them will blossom unfading for ever.

Think of men going empty-handed into another world, and saying, "O Lord! I made a big fortune in Manchester when I lived there, and I left it all behind me"; or, "I mastered a science, and one gleam of the light of eternity has antiquated it"; or, "I gained prizes, won my aims, and they have all dropped from my hands, and here I stand, having to say in the most tragic sense: Nothing in my hands I bring." And another man dies in the Lord, and his "works do follow" him. It is not every vintage that bears exportation. Some wines are mellowed by crossing the ocean; some are turned into vinegar. The works of darkness are unfruitful because they are transient.

And they are unfruitful because, whilst they last, they yield no real satisfaction. The Apostle could say to another Church with a certainty as to what the answer would be, "What fruit had ye *then*"—

when ye were doing them—"in the things whereof ye are now ashamed?" And the answer is "None!" Of course, it is true that men do bad things because they like them better than good. Of course, it is true that the misery of mankind is that they have no appetite in the general for the only real satisfaction. But it is also true that no man who feeds his heart and mind on anything short of God is really at rest in anything that he does or possesses. Occasional twinges of conscience, dim perceptions that after all they are walking in a vain show; glimpses of nobler possibilities, a vague unrest, an unwillingness to reflect and look the facts of their condition in the face, like men that will not take stock because they half suspect that they are insolvent—these are the conditions that attach to all godless men's lives. There is no real fruit for their thirsty lips to feed upon. The smallest man is too large to be satisfied with anything short of Infinity. The human heart is like some narrow opening on a hill-side, so narrow that it looks as if a glassful of water would fill it. But it goes away down, down, down into the depths of the mountain, and you may pour in hogsheads and no effect is visible. God, and God alone, brings to the thirsty heart the fruit that it needs.

Another solemn thought illustrates the unfruitfulness of a godless life. There is no correspondence between what such a man does and what he is intended to do. Think of what the most degraded and sensuous wretch that shambles about the slums of a city, sodden with beer and rotten with profligacy, could be. Think of the raptures of devout contempla-

tion and the energies of holy work which are possible for that soul, and then say—though it is an extreme case, the principle holds in less extreme cases—Are these things that men do apart from God, however shining, noble, illustrious they may be in the eyes of the world, and trumpeted forth by the mouthpieces of popular opinion, are these things worth calling fruits fit to be borne by such a tree? No more than the cankers on a rose-bush or the galls on an oak-tree are worthy of being called fruit are these works that some of you have as the only products of a life's activity. "Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes."

II.—And now, secondly, notice the plain Christian duty of abstinence.

"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Now, the text, as it stands in our version, seems to suggest that these dark works are personified as companions whom a good man ought to avoid; and that, therefore, the bearing of the exhortation is, "Have nothing to do, in your own individual lives, with evil things that one man can commit." But I take it that, important as that injunction and prohibition is, the Apostle's meaning is somewhat different, and that my text would perhaps be more accurately translated if another word were substituted for "have no fellowship with." The original expression seems rather to mean, "Do not go partners with other people in works of darkness, which it takes more than one to commit." Or, to put it into other language, the Apostle is regarding Christian people here as members of society, and exhorting them to a

certain course of conduct in reference to plain and palpable existing evils around them. And such an exhortation to the duty of plain abstinence from things that the opinion of the world around us has no objection to, but which are contrary to the light, is addressed to all Christian people.

The need of it I do not require to illustrate at any length. But let me remind you that the devil has no more cunning way of securing a long lease of life for any evil than getting Christian people and Christian churches to give it their sanction. What was it that kept slavery alive for centuries? Largely, that Christian men solemnly declared that it was a Divine institution. What is it that has kept war alive for all these centuries? Largely, that bishops and preachers have always been ready to bless colours, and to read a Christening service over a man-of-war—and, I suppose, to ask God that an eighty-ton gun might be blessed to smash our enemies to pieces, and not to blow our sailors to bits. And what is it that preserves the crying evils of our community, the immoralities, the drunkenness, the trade dishonesty, and all the other things that I do not need to remind you of in the pulpit? Largely this, that professing Christians are mixed up with them. If only the whole body of those who profess and call themselves Christians would shake their hands clear of all complicity with such things, they could not last. Individual responsibility for collective action needs to be far more solemnly laid to heart by professing Christians than ever it has been.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, with what fatal

effects on the Gospel and the Church itself all such complicity is attended. Even the companions of wrongdoers despise, whilst they fraternise with, the professing Christian who has no higher standard than their own. What was it that made the Church victorious over the combined forces of imperial persecution, pagan superstition, and philosophic speculation? I believe that among all the causes that a well-known historian has laid down for the triumph of Christianity what was as powerful as—I was going to say even more than—the gospel of peace and love which the Church proclaimed was the standard of austere morality which it held up to a world rotting in its own filth. And sure I am that wherever the Church says, “So do not I, because of the fear of the Lord,” it will gain a power, and will be regarded with a possibly reluctant, but a very real, respect which no easy-going coming down to the level of popular moralities will ever secure for a silver-slippered Christianity. And so, brethren, I would say to you, Do not be afraid of the old name *Puritan*. Ignorant people use it as a scoff. It should be a crown of glory. “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.”

But how is this to be done? Well, of course, there is only one way of abstaining, and that is, to abstain. But there are a great many different ways of abstaining. Light is not fire. And the more that Christian people feel themselves bound to stand aloof from common evils, the more are they bound to see that they do it in the spirit of the Master, which is meekness. It is always an invidious position to take up.

And if we take it up with any heat and temper, with any lack of moderation, with any look of ostentation of superior righteousness, or with any trace of the Boanerges spirit which says, "Let us call down fire from heaven and consume them," our testimony will be weakened, and the world will have a right to say to us, "Jesus we know, and Paul we know; but who are ye?" "Who made this man a judge and a divider over us?" "In meekness instructing them that oppose themselves."

III.—Lastly, note the still harder Christian duty of vigorous protest.

The further duty beyond abstinence which the text enjoins is inadequately represented by our version, "but rather reprove them." For the word rendered in our version "reprove" is the same which our Lord employed when He spoke of the mission of the Comforter as being to "convince (or convict) the world of sin." And it does not merely mean "reprove," but so to reprove as to produce the conviction which is the object of the reproof.

This task is laid on the shoulders of all professing Christians. A *silent* abstinence is not enough. No doubt, the best way, in some circumstances, to convict the darkness is to shine. Our holiness will convict sin of its ugliness. Our light will reveal the gloom. The presentation of a Christian life is the Christian man's mightiest weapon in his conflict with the world's evil. But that is not all. And if Christian people think that they have done all their duty, in regard of clamant and common iniquities, by simply abstaining from them and presenting a nobler

example, they have yet to learn one very important chapter of their duty. A dumb church is a dying church, and it ought to be. For Christ has sent us here in order, amongst other things, that we may bring Christian principles to bear upon the actions of the community; and not be afraid to speak when we are called upon by conscience to do so.

Now I am not going to dwell upon this matter, but I want just to point out to you how, in the context here, there are two or three very important principles glanced at which bear upon it. And one of them is this, that one reason for speaking out is the very fact that the evils are so evil that a man is ashamed to speak about them. Did you ever notice this context, in which the Apostle, in the next verse to my text, gives the reason for his commandment to "reprove" thus—"For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret"? Did you ever hear of a fantastic tenderness for morality so very sensitive that it is not at all shocked when the immoral things are *done*, but glows with virtuous indignation when a Christian man speaks out about them? There are plenty of people nowadays who tell us that it is "indelicate" and "indecent" and "improper," and I do not know how much else, for a Christian teacher or minister to say a word about certain moral scandals. But they do not say anything about the immorality and the indelicacy and the indecency of doing them. Let us have done with that hypocrisy, brethren. I am arguing for no disregard for proprieties; I want all fitting reticence observed, and I do not wish indiscriminate rebukes

to be flung at foul things; but it is too much to require that, by reason of the very inky cloud of filth that they fling up like cuttlefish, they should escape censure. Let us remember Paul's exhortation, and reprove *because* the things are too bad to be spoken about.

Further, note in the context the thought that the conviction of the darkness comes from the flashing upon it of the light. "All things when they are reproved are made manifest by the light." Which, being translated into other words, is this:—Be strong in your brave protest, because it only needs that the thing should be seen as it is, and called by its right name, in order to be condemned.

The Assyrians had a belief that if ever, by any chance a demon saw himself in a mirror, he was frightened at his own ugliness and incontinently fled. And if Christian people would only hold up the mirror of Christian principle to the hosts of evil things that afflict our city and our country, they would vanish like ghosts at sunrise. They cannot stand the light, therefore let us cast the light upon them.

And do not forget the other final principle here, which is imperfectly represented by our translation. We ought to read, "Whatever is made manifest is light." Yes. In the physical world when light falls upon a thing you see it, because there is on it a surface of light. And in the moral world the intention of all this conviction is that the thing disclosed to be darkness should, in the very disclosure, cease to be dark, should forsake its nature

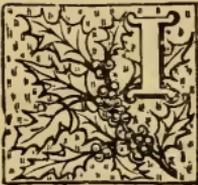
and be transformed into light. Such transformation is not always the case. Alas! there are ebon glooms on which the light falls, and it does nothing. But the purpose in all cases should be, and the issue in many will be, that the merciful conviction by the light will be followed by the conversion of darkness into light.

And so, dear brethren, I bring this text to your hearts, and lay it upon your consciences. We may not all be called upon to speak; we are all called upon to *be*. You can shine, and by shining show how dark the darkness is. The obligation is laid upon us all; the commandment still comes to every Christian which was given to the old prophet, "Declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sin." A quaint old writer says that the presence of a saint "hinders the devil's elbowroom to do his tricks." We can all rebuke sin by our righteousness, and by our shining reveal the darkness to itself. We do not walk as children of the light unless we keep ourselves from all connivance with works of darkness, and by all means at our disposal reprove and convict them. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch no unclean thing, saith the Lord."

## XXVII.

### Sylvanus.

“ BY Sylvanus, our faithful brother, as I account him, I have written unto you briefly.”—1 PETER v. 12 (R. V.).



ADOPT the Revised Version because, in one or two small points, it brings out more clearly the Apostle's meaning. This Sylvanus is, beyond all reasonable doubt, the same man who is known to us in the Acts of the Apostles by the name of Silas. A double name was very common amongst Jews, whose avocations brought them into close connection with Gentiles. You will find other instances of it amongst the Apostles: in *Paul* himself, whose Hebrew name was *Saul*; *Simon* and *Peter*; and probably in *Bartholomew* and *Nathanael*. And there is no reasonable doubt that a careful examination of the various places in which Silas and Sylvanus are mentioned shows that they were borne by one person.

Now let me put together the little that we know about this man, because it will help us to some lessons. He was one of the chief men in the church at Jerusalem when the dispute arose about the necessity for circumcision for the Gentile Christians. He was despatched to Antioch with the message of peace and

good feeling which the church at Jerusalem wisely sent forth to heal the strife. He remained in Antioch, although his co-deputy went back to Jerusalem; and the attraction of Paul—the great mass of that star—drew this lesser light into becoming a satellite, moving round the greater orb. So, when the unfortunate quarrel broke out between Paul and Barnabas, and the latter went sulkily away by himself with his dear John Mark, without his brethren's blessing, Paul chose Silas and set out upon his first missionary tour. He was Paul's companion in the prison and stripes at Philippi, and in the troubles at Thessalonica; and, though they were parted for a little while, he rejoined the Apostle in the city of Corinth. From thence Paul wrote the two letters to the Thessalonians, both of which are sent in the name of himself and Silas, or Sylvanus. There is one more reference to Sylvanus in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which mentions him as having been associated with Paul in the evangelization of the church there.

Then he drops out of the book altogether, and we never hear anything more about him, except this one passing reference, which shows us to him in an altogether new relation. He is no longer attached to Paul, but to Peter. Paul was probably either in prison, or, possibly, martyred. At all events, Sylvanus now stood to Peter in a relationship similar to that in which he formerly stood to Paul. He was evidently acquainted with and known to the churches to whom this letter was addressed, and, therefore, is chosen to carry Peter's message to them.

Now I would suggest, in passing, how Sylvanus'

relations to the two Apostles throws light upon the perfectly cordial alliance between them, and how it shatters into fragments the theory which was thought to be such a wonderful discovery some years ago, as to the "great schism" in the early Church between one section, led by Peter, and the more liberal party, headed by Paul. Instead of that, we find the two men working together, and the only division between them was not as to the sort of Gospel they preached, but as to the people to whom they preached. This little incident helps us to realise how natural it was for a man steeped in Paul's teaching to attach himself, if circumstances suggested it, to the person who has been said to have been antagonistic in the whole drift of his conceptions of Christianity to that Apostle.

But I do not wish to speak about that now. I take this figure of a man who so contentedly and continually took such a subordinate place—played second fiddle quite willingly all his days, and who toiled on without any notice or record, and ask whether it does not teach one or two things.

I.—First, then, I think we may see here a hint as to the worth and importance of subordinate work.

Not a syllable that Silas ever said is recorded in Scripture. He had been a chief man among the brethren when he was in Jerusalem, but, like some other chief men in little spheres, he came to be anything but a chief man when he got alongside of Paul, and found his proper work. He did not say, "I have always pulled the stroke oar, and I am not going to be second. I do not intend to be absorbed in this man's brilliant lustre. I would rather have a smaller

sphere where my light may not suffer by comparison than be overshadowed by him." By no means! He could not do Paul's work, but he could endure stripes along with him in the prison at Philippi, and he took them. He could not write as Peter could; it was not his work to do that. But he could carry one of Peter's letters. And so, "by Sylvanus, a faithful brother, I have written to you." Perhaps Sylvanus was amanuensis as well as letter-carrier, for I daresay Peter was no great hand with a pen; he was better accustomed to haul nets. At all events, subordinate work was what God had set him to do, and so he found joy in it.

Well, then, is not that a pattern for us? People in the world or in the Church who can do prominent work are counted by units; and those who can do valuable subordinate work are counted by thousands—by millions. "Those members which seem to be more feeble are the more necessary," says Paul. It is a great truth, which it would do us all good to lay more to heart.

It is hard to tell what is superior and what is subordinate work. I suppose that in a steam engine the smallest rivet is quite as essential as the huge piston, and that if the rivet drops out the piston-rod is very likely to stop rising and falling. So it is a very vulgar way of talking, to speak about A.'s work being large and B.'s work being small, or to assume that we have eyes to settle which work is principal and which subordinate.

The Athenians, who deemed themselves wisest in the world, thought there were few people of less

importance than the fanatical Jew who was preaching a strange story about what they knew so little of that they took Jesus and Resurrection to be the names of a pair of gods, one male and one female. But in the eyes that see truly—the eyes of God—the relative importance of Apostle and Stoic was otherwise appraised.

We cannot tell, as the book of Ecclesiastes has it, “which shall prosper—this or that.” And if we begin to settle which is important work, we shall be sure to make mistakes, both in our judgment about other people, and in our sense of the obligations laid upon ourselves. Let us remember that when a thing is to be done by the co-operation of a great many parts, each part is as important as any other, and each is indispensable. Although more glory may come to the soldiers who go to the front and do the fighting, the troops miles in the rear, that are quietly in camp, looking after the stores and keeping open the lines of communication, are quite as essential to the success of the campaign. Their names will not get into the gazette; there will probably not be any honours at the conclusion of the war showered upon them; but, if they had not been doing their subordinate work, the men at the front would never have been able to do theirs. Therefore, the old wise law in Israel was: “As his part is that goeth down into the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall part alike.”

And so it is good for people that have only one talent, and cannot do much, and must be contented to help somebody else that can do more, to remember

this pretty little picture of Sylvanus, "the faithful brother," contented all his life to be a satellite of somebody; first of all helping Paul, and then helping Paul's brother Peter. Let us not be too lazy, or too proud with the pride that apes humility, to do the little that we can do because it is little.

II.—Another lesson which is own sister to that first one, but which may be taken for a moment separately, is, the importance and obligation of persistently doing our task, though nobody notices it.

As I remarked, there is not one word of anything that Sylvanus said, or of anything that he did apart from Paul or Peter, recorded. And for all the long stretch of years—we do not know how many, but a very large number—that lie between this text of mine, where we find him in conjunction with Peter, and that day at Corinth, where we left him with Paul, the Acts of the Apostles does not think it worth while to mention his name. Was he sitting with his hands in his pockets all the while, do you think, doing no Christian work? Did he say, as some good people are apt to say now, "Well, I went to teach in Sunday-school for awhile, and I took an interest in this, that, or the other thing for a bit, but nobody took any notice of me; and I supposed I was not wanted, and so I came away!"

Not he. That is what a great many of us do. Though we sometimes are not honest enough to say it to ourselves, yet we do let the absence of "recognition" (save the mark) influence us in the earnestness of our Christian work to far too great an extent. And I dare say there are good friends in this audience

who, if they would be quite honest with themselves, would take the hint, and, if I may use such a word, the rebuke, to themselves.

Dear brethren, all the work that any of us do has to become unnoticed after a little while. It will not last. Nobody will know about you or me thirty years after we are dead. What does it matter whether they know anything about us, or say anything about us, or pat us on the back for anything that we do, or recognize our service whilst we live? Surely, if we are Christian men and women, we have a better reason for working than that. "*I will never forget any of their works.*" That ought to be enough for us, ought it not? Whoever forgets, He remembers; and if He remembers, He will not remain in our debt for anything that we have done.

So let us keep on, noticed or unnoticed; it matters very little which it is. There is a fillip, no doubt—and we should not be men and women if we did not feel it—in the recognition of what we have tried to do. And sometimes it comes to us; but the absence of it is no reason for slackening our work. And this man, so patiently and persistently "pegging away" at his obscure task during all these years which have been swallowed up in oblivion, may preach a sermon to us all.

Only let us remember that he also shows us that unnoticed work is noticed, and that unrecorded services are recorded. Here are you and I, nineteen centuries after he is dead, talking about him, and his name will live and last as long as the world, because, though written in no other history, it has been re-

corded here. Jesus Christ's record, the Book of Life, contains the names of "fellow-labourers" whose names have dropped out of every other record; and that should be enough for us. Sylvanus did no work that Christ did not see, and no work that Christ did not remember, and no work of which he did not, eighteen hundred years since, enter into the enjoyment of the fruit, and which he enjoys up there, whilst we are thinking about him down here.

III.—The last thing that I would suggest is—here is an example to us of a character which we can all earn, and which will be the best that any man can get.

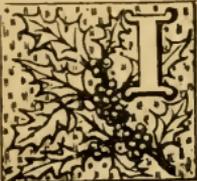
A great genius, a wise philosopher, an eloquent preacher, a statesman, a warrior, poet, painter? No! "A faithful brother." He may have been a commonplace one. We do not know anything about his intellectual capacity. He may have had very narrow limitations and very few powers, or he may have been a man of large faculty and acquirements. But these things drop out of sight; and this remains—that he was *faithful*. I suppose the eulogium is meant in both senses of the word. The one of these is the root of the other; for a man that is full of faith is a man who may be trusted, is reliable, and will be sure to fulfil all the obligations of his position, and to do all the duties that are laid upon him.

You and I, whether we are wise or not, whether we are learned or not, whether we have large faculties or not, whether we have great opportunities or very small ones, can all equally earn that name if we like. If the perfect judgment, the clear eye, of Jesus Christ,

beholds in us qualities which permit Him to call us by that name, what can we want better? "A faithful brother." Trust in Christ; let that be the animating principle of all that we do, the controlling power that restrains and limits and stimulates and impels. And then men will know where to have us, and will be sure, and rightly sure, that we shall not shirk our obligations, nor scamp our work, nor neglect our duties. And being thus full of faith, and counted faithful by Him, we need care little what men's judgments of us may be, and need desire no better epitaph than this—a faithful brother.

## An Apostolic Testimony and Exhortation.

“I HAVE written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God, wherein ye stand.”—1 PETER v. 12.

“ HAVE written briefly,” says Peter. But his letter, in comparison with the other epistles of the New Testament, is not remarkably short; in fact, is longer than many of them. He regards it as short when measured by the greatness of its theme. For all words, which are devoted to witnessing to the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ, must be narrow and insufficient as compared with that, and after every utterance the speaker must feel how inadequate his utterance has been. So in that word “briefly” we get a glimpse of the Apostle’s conception of the transcendent greatness of the Gospel which he had to proclaim. This verse seems to be a summary of the contents of the Epistle. And if we observe the altered translation of the latter portion of my text which is given in the Revised Version, we shall see that the verse is itself an example of both “testifying” and exhorting. For the last clause is not, as our Authorized Version renders it, “Wherein ye stand”—

a statement of a fact, however true that may be—but a commandment, “In which stand fast.” And so we have here the Apostle’s all-sufficient teaching, and this all-comprehensive exhortation. He “witnesses” that this is the true grace of God, and because it is, he exhorts, “stand fast therein.” Let us look at these two points.

I.—Peter’s testimony.

Now, there is a very beautiful, though not to superficial readers obvious, significance in this testimony. “This is the true grace of God.” What is meant by “*this*”? Not merely the teaching which he has been giving in the preceding part of the letter, but that which somebody else had been giving. Now, these churches in Asia Minor, to whom this letter was sent, were in all probability founded by the Apostle Paul, or by men working under his direction: and the type of doctrine preached in them was what people nowadays call Pauline. And here Peter puts his seal on the teaching that had come from his brother Apostle, and says: “The thing that you have learned, and that I have had no part in communicating to you, *this* is the true grace of God.” If such be the primary application of the words (and I think there can be little doubt that it is), then we have an interesting evidence, all the stronger because unobtrusive, of the cordial understanding between the two great leaders of the Church in apostolic times; and the figments that have been set forth, with great learning and little common sense, about the differences that divided these great teachers of Christianity melt away into thin air. Their division was only a division of the

field of labour. "They would that I should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision." All the evidence confirms what Paul says, "Whether it were they or I, so we preach, and so" all the converts "believed." Thus it is not without significance and beauty that we here see dimly through the ages Peter stretching out his hands to Paul's convert, and saying, "This—which my beloved brother Paul taught you—this is the true grace of God."

But, apart altogether from that thought, note two things; the one, the substance of this witness-bearing; and the other, Peter's right to bear it. As to the substance of the testimony; "grace," which has become a threadbare word in the minds of many people, used with very little conception of its true depth and beauty of meaning, is properly love in exercise towards inferior and sinful creatures who deserve something else. - *Condescending, pardoning, and active love*, is its proper meaning. And, says Peter, the inmost significance of the Gospel is that it is the revelation of such a love as being in God's heart.

Another meaning springs out of this. That same message is not only a revelation of love, but it is a communication of the gifts of love. And the "true grace of God" is shorthand for all the rich abundance and variety and exuberant manifoldness and all-sufficiency of the sevenfold perfect gifts for spirit and heart which come from faith in Jesus Christ. The truths that lie here in the Gospel, the truths which glow and throb in this letter of Peter's, are the revelation and the communication to men of the rich gifts of the Divine heart, which will all flow into that soul

which opens itself for the entrance of God's word. And what are these truths? The main theme of this letter is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, that was slain. "Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." He dwells upon Christ's innocence, upon Christ's meekness; but most of all upon the Christ that died, "whom, having not seen, we love, and in whom, though unseen, we believing, receive the end of our faith"—and the end of the Gospel—"even the salvation of our souls."

Thus, dear brethren, this Gospel, the Gospel of the Divine Christ that died for our sins, and lives to give His Spirit to all waiting hearts; this is the true grace of God. It is very needful for us to keep in view always that lofty conception of what this Gospel is, that we may not bring it down to the level of a mere theory of religion; nor think of it as a mere publication of dry doctrines; that we may not lose sight of what is the heart of it all, but may recognise this fact, that a Gospel out of which are struck, or in which are diminished, the truths of the sacrifice of Christ and His ever-living intercession for us, is not the true grace of God, and is neither a revelation of His love to inferior and sinful men, nor a communication of His gifts to our weakness. Let us remember Peter's witness. This—the full Gospel of incarnation, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension, and reign in glory, and return as Judge—this, and nothing else, "is the true grace of God." And this Gospel is not exalted to its highest place unless it is regarded as such by our waiting and recipient hearts.

Further, what right had this man to take this position and say, "I testify that this is the true grace of God"? He was no great genius; he did not know anything about comparative religion, which is nowadays supposed to be absolutely essential to understanding any one religion. He was not a scholar or a philosopher. What business had he to bring in his personality thus, as if he were an authority, and say, "I testify that this is the true grace of God"?

Well, there are two or three answers: one peculiar to him and others common to all Christian people. The one peculiar to him is, as I believe, that he was conscious, and rightly conscious, that Jesus Christ had bestowed upon him the power to witness, and the authority to impose his testimony upon men as a word from God. In the most inartificial and matter-of-course way Peter here lets us see the Apostolic conception of Apostolic authority. He had a right—not because of what he was himself, but because of the authority which Christ had conferred on him—to say to men, "I do not ask you to give heed to me, Peter. I myself also am a man (as he said to Cornelius), but I call on you to accept Christ's word, spoken through me, His commissioned messenger, when *I* testify, and through me Christ testifies, that this is the true grace of God."

Now, no one but an Apostle has the right to say that; but we Christian people have a right to say something like it, and, if we have not Apostolic authority, we may have what is very nearly as good, and sometimes as powerful in its effect upon other people, and that is authority based on personal ex-

perience. If we have plunged deep into the secrets of God, and lived closely and faithfully in communion with Him, and for ourselves have found the grace of God, His love and the gifts of His love, coming into our lives, and ennobling, calming, elevating each of us; then we, too, have a right to go to men and say, "Never mind about me; never mind about whether I am wise or foolish, I do not argue, but I tell you I have tasted the manna, and it is sweet. I have drunk of the water, and it comes cool and fresh from the rock. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. I believed, and therefore have I spoken, and on the strength of my own tasting of it, I testify that this, which has done so much for me, is the true grace of God." If we testify thus, and back up our witness with lives corresponding, some who are wholly untouched by a preacher's eloquence and controversialists' arguments, will probably be led by our attestation to make the experiment for themselves. "Ye are My witnesses," says God. He did not say, "Ye are My advocates." He did not bid us argue for Him, but He bid us witness for Him.

II.—Further, notice Peter's exhortation.

According to the right rendering the last clause is, as I have already said, "in which stand fast." The translation in the Authorised Version, "in which ye stand," gives a true thought, though not the Apostle's intention here. For, as a matter of fact, men cannot stand upright and firm unless their feet are planted on the rock of that true grace of God. If our heels are well fixed on it, then our goings will be established. It is no use talking to men about steadfastness of

purpose, stability of life, erect independence, resistance to antagonistic forces, and all the rest, unless you give them something to stand upon. If you talk so to a man who has his foot upon shifting sands or slippery clay; the more he tries the deeper will he sink into the one, or slide the further upon the other. The best way to help men to stand fast is to give them something to stand upon. And the only standing ground that will never yield, nor collapse, nor, like the quicksand with the tide round it, melt away, we do not know how, from beneath our feet, is "the grace of God." Or, as Dr. Watts says, in one of his now old-fashioned hymns :

"Lo! on the solid Rock I stand,  
And all beside is shifting sand."

However, that is not what the Apostle Peter meant. He says, "See that you keep firmly your position in reference to this true grace of God." Now I am not going to talk to this audience about intellectual difficulties in the way of hearty and whole-souled acceptance of the Gospel revelation—difficulties which are very real and very widespread in these days, but which possibly very slightly affect us, at least I hope so.

But whilst these slay their thousands, the difficulties that affect us all in the way of keeping a firm hold on, or firm standing in (for the two metaphors coalesce) the Gospel, which is the true grace of God, are those that arise from two causes working in combination. One is our own poor weak hearts, wavering wills, strong passions, unbridled desires, forgetful minds; and the other is all that army and babel of seductions

and inducements, in occupations legitimate and necessary, in enjoyments which are in themselves pure and innocent, in family delights, in home engagements, in pursuits of commerce or of daily business—all that crowd of things that tempt us to forget the true grace and to wander away in a foolish and vain search after vain and foolish substitutes.

Dear brethren, it is not so much because there are many adversaries in the intellectual world as because we are such weak creatures ourselves, and the world around us is so strong against us, that we need to say to one another and to ourselves, over and over again, "Stand ye fast therein." You cannot keep hold of a rope even, without the act of grasping tending to relax, and there must be a conscious and repeated tightening up of the muscles, or the very cord on which we hang for safety will slip through our relaxed palms. And however we may be convinced that there are no hope and no true blessedness for us except in keeping hold of God, we need that grasp to be tightened up by daily renewed efforts, or else it will certainly become slack, and we shall lose the thing that we should hold fast. So my text exhorts us against ourselves, and against the temptations of the world, which are always present with us, and are far more operative in bringing down the temperature of the Christian Church, and of its individual members, than any chilling that arises from intellectual doubts.

And how are we to obey the exhortation? Well, plainly, if "this" is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, "the true grace of God" which alone will give

stability to our feet, then we "shall not stand fast" in it unless we make conscious efforts to apprehend, and comprehend, and keep hold of it in our minds as well as in our hearts. May I say one very plain word? I am very much afraid that people do not read their Bibles very much now (or if they do read them, they do not study them), and that anything like an intelligent familiarity with the whole sweep of the great system (for it is a system) of Divine truth, evolved "at sundry times and in divers manners," in this Word, is a very rare thing amongst even good people. They listen to sermons, with more or less attention; they read newspapers, no doubt; they read good little books, and magazines, and the like; and volumes that profess to be drawn from Scripture. These are all right and good in their place. But sure I am that a robust and firm grasp of the Gospel "which is the grace of God," is not possible, with a starvation diet of Scripture. And so I would say, try to get hold of the depth and width of meaning in the Word.

Again, try to keep heart and mind in contact with it amidst distractions and daily duties. Try to bring the principles of the New Testament consciously to bear on the small details of everyday life. Do you look at your day's work through these spectacles? Does it ever occur to you, as you are going about your business, or your profession, or your domestic work, to ask yourselves what bearing the Gospel and its truths have upon these? If my ordinary, so-called secular, avocations are evacuated of reference to, and government by, the Word of God, I want to know what of my life is left as the sphere in which it is to work.

There is no need that religion and daily life should be kept apart as they are. There is no reason why the experience of to-day, in shop, and counting-house, and kitchen, and study, should not cast light upon, and make more real to me, "the true grace of God." Be sure that you desire, and ask for, and put yourself in the attitude of receiving, the gifts of that love, which are the graces of the Christian life. And when you have got them, apply them, "that you may be able to withstand in the evil day; and, having done all, to stand."

## The Church in Babylon.

“THE church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you.”—1 PETER v. 13.



WE have drawn lessons in previous addresses from the former parts of the closing salutations of this letter. And now I turn to this one to see what it may yield us. The Revised Version omits “the church,” and substitutes “she”; explaining in a marginal note that there is a difference of opinion as to whether the sender of the letter is a community or an individual. All the old MSS., with one weighty exception, follow the reading “she that is at Babylon.” But it seems so extremely unlikely that a single individual, with no special function, should be bracketed along with the communities to whom the letter was addressed, as “elected together with” them, that the conclusion that the sender of the letter is a church, symbolically designated as a “lady,” seems the natural one.

Then there is another question—where was Babylon? An equal diversity of opinion has arisen about that. I do not venture to trouble you with the arguments

*pro* and *con*, but only express my own opinion that "Babylon" means Rome.

We have here the same symbolical name as in the Book of Revelation, where, whatever further meanings are attached to the designation, it is intended primarily as an appellation for the imperial city, which has taken the place filled in the Old Testament by Babylon, as the concentration of antagonism to the Kingdom of God.

If these views of the significance of the expression are adopted we have here the Church in Rome, the proud stronghold of worldly power and hostility, sending its greetings to the scattered Christian communities in the provinces of what is now called Asia Minor. The fact of such cordial communications between communities separated by so many contrarities as well as by race and distance, familiar though it is, may suggest several profitable considerations, to which I ask your attention.

I.—We have here an object lesson as to the uniting power of the Gospel.

Just think of the relations which, in the civil world, subsisted between Rome and its subject provinces; the latter, with bitter hatred in their hearts to everything belonging to the oppressing city, having had their freedom crushed down and their aspirations ruthlessly trampled upon; the former, with the contempt natural to metropolitans in dealing with far-off provincials. The same kind of relationship subsisted between Rome and the outlying provinces of its unwieldy empire as between England, for instance, and its Indian possessions. And the same

uniting bond came in which binds the Christian converts of these Eastern lands of ours to England by a far firmer bond than any other. There was springing up amidst all the alienation and hatred and smothered rebellion a still incipient, but increasing, and even then strong bond that held together Roman Christians and Cappadocian believers. They were both "one in Christ Jesus." The separating walls were high, but, according to the old saying, you cannot build walls high enough to keep out the birds; and spirits, winged by the common faith, soared above all earthly-made distinctions and met in the higher regions of Christian communion. When the tide rises it fills and unifies the scattered pools on the beach. So the uniting power of Christian faith was manifest in these early days, when it bound such discordant elements together, and made "the church that was in Babylon" forget that they were to a large extent Romans by birth, and stretch out their hands, with their hearts in them, to the churches to whom this letter was sent.

Now, brethren, our temptation is not so much to let barriers of race and language and distance weaken our sense of Christian community, as it is to let even smaller things than these do the same tragical office for us. And we, as Christian people, are bound to try and look over the fences of our "denominations" and churches, and recognise the wider fellowship and larger company in which all these are merged. God be thanked! there are manifest tokens all round us to-day that the age of separation and division is about coming to an end. Yearnings for unity, which must

not be forced into acts too soon, but which will fulfil themselves in ways not yet clear to any of us, are beginning to rise in Christian hearts. Let us see to it, dear friends, that we do our parts to cherish and to increase these, and to yield ourselves to the uniting power of the common faith.

II.—We note, further, the clear recognition here of what is the strong bond uniting all Christians.

Peter would probably have been very much astonished if he had been told of the theological controversies that were to be waged round that word "elect." The emphasis here lies, not on "elect," but on "together." It is not the thing so much as the common possession of the thing which bulks largely before the Apostle. In effect he says, "The reason why these Roman Christians that have never looked you Bithynians in the face do yet feel their hearts going out to you, and send you their loving messages, is because they, in common with you, have been recipients of precisely the same Divine act of grace." We do not now need to discuss the respective parts of man and God in it, nor any of the interminable controversies that have sprung up around the word. God had, as the fact of their possession of salvation showed, chosen Romans and Asiatics together to be heirs of eternal life. By the side of these transcendent blessings which they possessed in common, how pitiably small and insignificant all the causes which kept them apart looked and were!

And so here we have a partial parallel to the present state of Christendom, in which are seen at work, on one hand, superficial separation; on the other, under-

lying unity. The splintered peaks may stand, or seem to stand, apart from their sister summits, or may frown at each other across impassable gorges, but they all belong to one geological formation, and in their depths their bases blend indistinguishably into a continuous whole. Their tops are miles apart, but beneath the surface they are one. And so the things that bind Christian men together are the great things and the deepest things; and the things that part them are the small and superficial ones. Therefore, it is our wisdom—not only for the sake of the fact of our unity and for the sake of our consciousness of unity, but because the truths which unite are the most important ones—that they shall bulk largest in our hearts and minds. And if they do, we shall know our brother in every man that is like-minded with us towards them, whatever shibboleth may separate us. I spoke a moment ago about the separate pools on the beach, and the tide rising. When the tide goes down, and the spiritual life ebbs, the pools are parted again. And so ages of feeble spiritual vitality have been ages of theological controversy about secondary matters; and ages of profound realization by the Church of the great fundamentals of Gospel truth have been those when its members were drawn together, they knew not how. Hence they can say of and to each other, “Elect together with you.”

Brethren, for the sake of the strength of our own religious life, do not let us fix our attention on the peculiarities of our sects, but upon the catholic truths believed everywhere, always, by all. Then we shall “walk in a large place,” and feel how many there are

that are possessors of "like precious faith" with ourselves.

III.—Then, lastly, we may find here a hint as to the pressing need for such a realization of unity.

"The church that is in Babylon" was in a very uncongenial place. Thank God, no Babylon is so Babylonish but that a Church of God may be found planted in it. No circumstances are so unfavourable to the creation and development of the religious life but that the religious life may grow there. An orchid will find footing upon a bit of stick, because it draws nourishment from the atmosphere; and they who are fed by the influx of the Divine Spirit may be planted anywhere, and yet flourish in the courts of our God. So "the church that is in Babylon" gives encouragement as to the possibility of Christian faith being triumphant over adverse conditions.

But it also gives a hint as to the obligation springing from the circumstances in which Christian people are set, to cultivate the sense of belonging to a great brotherhood. Howsoever solitary, and surrounded by uncongenial associations any Christian man may be, he may feel that he is not alone, not only because his Master is with him, but because there are many others whose hearts throb with the same love, whose lives are surrounded by the same difficulties. It is by no means a mere piece of selfish consolation which this same Apostle gives in another part of this letter, when he bids the troubled to be of good cheer, as remembering that the "same afflictions were accomplished in the brotherhood which is in the world." He did not mean to say, "Take comfort, for other people are as

badly off as you are," but he meant to call to the remembrance of the solitary sufferer the thousands of his brethren who were "dreeing the same weird" in the same uncongenial world.

If thus you and I, Christian men, are pressed upon on all sides by such worldly associations, the more need that we should let our hearts go out to the innumerable multitude of our fellows, companions in the tribulation, and patience, and kingdom of Jesus Christ. Precisely because the Roman believers were in Babylon, they were glad to think of their brethren in Asia. Isolated amidst Rome's splendours and sins, it was like a breath of cool air stealing into some banqueting house heavy with the fumes of wine, or some slaughter-house reeking with the smell of blood, to remember these far-off partakers of a purer life.

But if I might for a moment diverge, I would venture to say that in the conditions of thought, and the tendencies of things in our own and other lands, it is more than ever needful that Christian people should close their ranks, and stand shoulder to shoulder. For men who believe in a supernatural revelation, in the Divine Christ, in an atoning Sacrifice, in an indwelling Spirit, are guilty of suicidal folly, if they let the comparative trivialities that part them, separate God's army into isolated groups, in the face of the ordered battalions that are assaulting these great truths.

Because persecution was beginning to threaten and rumble on the horizon, like a rising thundercloud, it was the more needful, in Peter's time, that Christians parted by seas, by race, language, and customs, should

draw together. And for us, fidelity to our testimony, and loyalty to our Master, to say nothing of common sense, and the instinct of self-preservation, command Christian men in this day to think more, and to speak more, and to make more, of the great verities which they all possess in common.

Thus, brethren, living in Babylon, we should open our windows to Jerusalem; and though we dwell here as aliens, we may say, "We are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to an innumerable company of angels; to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to the Church of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven."

## “Marcus, my Son.”

“So doth Marcus, my son.”—1 PETER v. 13.



THE outlines of Mark's life, so far as recorded in Scripture, are familiar. He was the son of Mary, a woman of some wealth and position, as is implied by the fact that her house was large enough to accommodate the “many” who were gathered together to pray for Peter's release. He was a relative, probably a cousin (Col. iv. 10, Revised Version), of Barnabas, and, possibly, like him, a native of Cyprus. The designation of him by Peter as “my son” naturally implies that the Apostle had been the instrument of his conversion. An old tradition tells us that he was the “young man” mentioned in his Gospel who saw Christ arrested, and fled, leaving his only covering in the captor's hands. However that may be, he and his relatives were early and prominent disciples, and closely connected with Peter, as is evident from the fact that it was to Mary's house that he went after his deliverance. Mark's relationship to Barnabas made it natural that he should be chosen to accompany him and Paul on their first

missionary journey, and his connection with Cyprus helps to account for his willingness to go thither, and his unwillingness to go further into less known ground. We know how he left the Apostles, when they crossed from Cyprus to the mainland, and retreated to his mother's house at Jerusalem. We have no details of the inglorious inactivity in which he spent the time until the proposal of a second journey by Paul and Barnabas. In the preparations for it, the foolish indulgence of his cousin, far less kind than Paul's wholesome severity, led to a rupture between the Apostles, and to Barnabas setting off on an evangelistic tour on his own account, which received no sympathy from the church at Antioch, and has been deemed unworthy of record in the Acts.

Then followed some twelve years or more, during which Mark seems to have remained quiescent; or, at all events, he does not appear to have had any work in connection with the great Apostle. Then we find him re-appearing amongst Paul's company when he was in prison for the first time in Rome; and in the letters to Colossæ he is mentioned as being a comfort to the Apostle then. He sends salutations to the Colossians, and is named also in the nearly contemporaneous letter to Philemon. According to the reference in Colossians, he was contemplating a journey amongst the Asiatic churches, for that in Colossæ is bidden to welcome him. Then comes this mention of him in the text. The fact that Mark was beside Peter when he wrote seems to confirm the view that Babylon here is a mystical name for Rome; and that this letter falls somewhere about the same date

as the letters to Colossæ and Philemon. Here again he is sending salutations to Asiatic churches. We know nothing more about him, except that some considerable time after, in Paul's last letter, he asks Timothy, who was then at Ephesus, the headquarters of the Asiatic churches, to "take Mark," who, therefore, was apparently also in Asia, "and bring him" with him to Rome; "for," says the Apostle, beautifully referring to the man's former failure, "he is profitable to me for"—the very office that he had formerly flung up—"the ministry."

So, possibly, he was with Paul in his last days. And then, after that, tradition tells us that he attached himself more closely to the Apostle Peter; and, finally, at his direction and dictation, became the evangelist who wrote the "Gospel according to Mark."

Now that is his story; and from the figure of this "Marcus, my son," and from his appearance here in this letter, I wish to gather two or three very plain and familiar lessons.

I.—The first of them is the working of Christian sympathy.

Mark was a full-blooded Jew when he began his career. "John, whose surname was Mark," like a great many other Jews at that time, bore a double name—one Jewish, "John," and one Gentile, "Marcus." But as time goes on we do not hear anything more about "John," nor even about "John Mark," which are the two forms of his name when he is first introduced to us in the Acts of the Apostles, but he finally appears to have cast aside his Hebrew, and to

have been only known by his Roman name. And that change of appellation coincides with the fact that so many of the allusions which we have to him represent him as sending messages of Christian greeting across the sea to his Gentile brethren. And it further coincides with the fact that his gospel is obviously intended for the use of Gentile Christians, and, according to an old and reliable tradition, was written in Rome for Roman Christians. All of which facts just indicate two things, that the more a man has real operative love to Jesus Christ in his heart, the more he will rise above all limitations of his interests, his sympathy, and his efforts, and the more surely will he let himself out, as far as he can, in affection towards and toils for all men.

This change of name, though it is a mere trifle, and may have been adopted as a matter of convenience, may also be taken as reminding us of a very important truth, and that is, that if we wish to help people, the first condition is that we go down and stand on their level, and make ourselves one with them, as far as we can. And so Mark may have said, "I have put away the name that parts me from these Gentiles, for whom I desire to work, and whom I love; and I take the name that binds me to them." Why, it is the very same principle, in a small instance—just as a raindrop that hangs on the thorn of a rose-bush is moulded by the same laws that shape the great sphere of the central sun—it is a small instance of the great principle which brought Jesus Christ down into the world to die for us. You must become like the people that you want to help. "Forasmuch as

the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that He might deliver them." And so, not only the duty of widening our sympathies, but one of the supreme conditions of being of use to anybody, are set forth in the comparatively trifling incident, which we pass by without noticing it, that this man, a Jew to his fingertips, finally found himself—or, rather, finally was carried, for it was no case of unconscious drifting—into the position of a messenger of the Cross to the Gentiles; and, for the sake of efficiency in his work, and of getting close by the side of people whom he wanted to influence, flung away deliberately that which parted him from them. It is a small matter, but a little window may show a very wide prospect.

II.—The history of Mark suggests the possibility of overcoming early faults.

We do not know why he refused to bear the burden of the work that he had so cheerily begun. Probably the reason that I have suggested may have had something to do with it. When he started he did not bargain for going into unknown lands, in which there were many toils to be encountered. He was willing to go where he knew the ground, and where there were people that would make things easy for him; but when Paul went further afield, Mark's courage ebbed out at his finger ends, and he slunk back to the comfort of his mother's house in Jerusalem. At all events, whatever his reason, his return was a fault; or Paul would not have been so hard upon him as he was. The writer of the Acts puts Paul's view of the case strongly by the arrangement of clauses in

the sentence in which he tells us that the Apostle "thought not good to take him with them who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work." If he thus threw down his tools whenever he came to a little difficulty, and said, "As long as it is easy work, and close to the base of operations, I am your man, but if there is any sacrifice wanted you must look out for somebody else," he was not precisely a worker after Paul's own heart. And the best way to treat him was as the Apostle did; and to say to Barnabas' indulgent proposal, "No! he would not do the work before, and now he shall not do it." That is often God's way with us. It brings us to our senses, as it brought Mark to his.

We do not know how long it took to cure Mark of his early fault, but he was thoroughly cured. The man that was afraid of dangers and difficulties and hypothetical risks in Asia Minor became brave enough to stand by the Apostle when he was a prisoner, and was not ashamed of his chain. And afterwards, so much had he won his way into the Apostle's confidence, and made himself needful for him by his services and his sweetness, that the lonely prisoner, with the gibbet or headsman's sword in prospect, feels that he would like to have Mark with him once more, and bids Timothy bring him with himself, for "he is profitable to me for the ministry." "He can do a thousand things that a man like me cannot do for himself, and he does them all for love and nothing for reward." So he wants Mark once more. And thus not only Paul's generosity, but Mark's own patient effort had pasted a clean sheet over the one that was

inscribed with the black story of his desertion, and he became "profitable for" the task that he had once, in so petulant and cowardly a way, flung up.

Well, translate that from the particular into the general and it comes to this. Let no man set limits to the possibilities of his own restoration, and of his curing faults which are most deeply rooted within himself. Hope and effort should be boundless. There is nothing that a Christian man may not reach, in the way of victory over his worse self, and ejection of his most deeply-rooted faults, if only he will be true to Jesus, and use the gifts that are given to him. There are many of us whose daily life is pitched in a minor key; whose whole landscape is grey and monotonous and sunless; who feel as if yesterday must set the tune for to-day, and as if, because we have been beaten and baffled so often, it is useless to try again. But remember that the field on which the Stone of Help was erected, to commemorate the great and decisive victory that Israel won, was the very field on which the same foes had before contended, and *then* Israel had been defeated.

So, brethren, we may win victories on the very soil where formerly we were shamefully put to the rout; and our Christ with us will make anything possible for us, in the way of restoration, of cure of old faults, of ceasing to repeat former sins. I suppose that when a spar is snapped on board a vessel, and lashed together with spun yarn and lanyards, as a sailor knows how to do, it is stronger at the point of fracture than it was before. I suppose that it is possible for a man to be most impregnable at the point where he is

naturally weakest, if he chooses to use the defences that Jesus Christ has given.

III.—Take another lesson—the greatness of little service.

We do not hear that this John Mark ever tried to do any work in the way of preaching the Gospel. His business was a very much humbler one. He had to attend to Paul's comfort. He had to be his factotum, man of all work; looking after material things, the commissariat, the thousand and one trifles that someone had to see to if the Apostle's great work was to get done. And he did it all his life long. It was enough for him to do thoroughly the entirely "secular" work, as some people would think it, which it was in his power to do. That needed some self-suppression. It would have been so natural for Mark to have said, "Paul sends Timothy to be bishop in Crete; and Titus to look after other churches; Epaphroditus is an official here; and Apollos is a great preacher there. And here am I, grinding away at the secularities yet. I think I'll 'strike,' and try and get more conspicuous work." Or, he might perhaps deceive himself, and say, "more directly religious work," like a great many of us that often mask a very carnal desire for prominence under a very saintly guise of desire to do spiritual service. Let us take care of that. This "minister," who was not a minister at all, in our sense of the word, but only in the sense of being a servant, a private attendant and valet of the Apostle, was glad to do that work all his days.

That was self-suppression. But it was something

more. It was a plain recognition of what we all ought to have very clearly before us, and that is, that all sorts of work which contribute to one end are one sort of work; and that at bottom the man who carried Paul's books and parchments, and saw that he was not left without clothes, though he was so negligent of cloaks and other necessaries, was just as much helping on the cause of Christ as the Apostle when he preached.

I wonder if any of you remember the old story about an organist and his blower. The blower was asked who it was that played that great sonata of Beethoven's, or somebody's. And he answered, "I do not know who played, but I blew it." There is a great truth there. If it had not been for the unknown man at the bellows, the artist at the keys would not have done much. So Mark helped Paul. And as Jesus Christ said, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward."

IV.—Take as the last lesson the enlarged sphere that follows faithfulness in small matters.

What a singular change! The man who began with being a servant of Paul and of Barnabas ends by being the evangelist, and it is to him, under Peter's direction, that we owe what is possibly the oldest, and, at all events, in some aspects, an entirely unique, narrative of our Lord's life. Do you think that Peter would ever have said to him: "Mark! come here and sit down, and write what I tell you," if there had not been beforehand these long years of faithful service? So is it always, dear friends. "He that is faithful in

that which is least is faithful also in much." That is not only a declaration that faithfulness is one in kind, whatever be the diameter of the circle in which it is exercised, but it may also be taken as a promise, though that was not the original intention of the saying.

For quite certainly, in God's providence, the tools do come to the hand that can wield them, and the best reward that we can get for doing well our little work is to have larger work to do. The little tapers are tempted, if I may use so incongruous a figure, to wish themselves set up on loftier stands. Shine your brightest in your corner, and you will be "exalted" in due time. It is so, as a rule, in this world; sometimes too much so, for, as they say is the case at the English bar, so it is sometimes in God's Church, "There is no medium between having nothing to do and being killed with work." Still, the reward for work is more work. And the law will be exemplified most blessedly when Christ shall say, "Well done! good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

So this far-away figure of the minister-evangelist salutes us too, and bids us be of good cheer, notwithstanding all faults and failures, because it is possible for us, as he has proved, to recover ourselves after them all. God will not be less generous in forgiveness than Paul was; and even you and I may hear from Christ's lips, "Thou art profitable to Me for the ministry."







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