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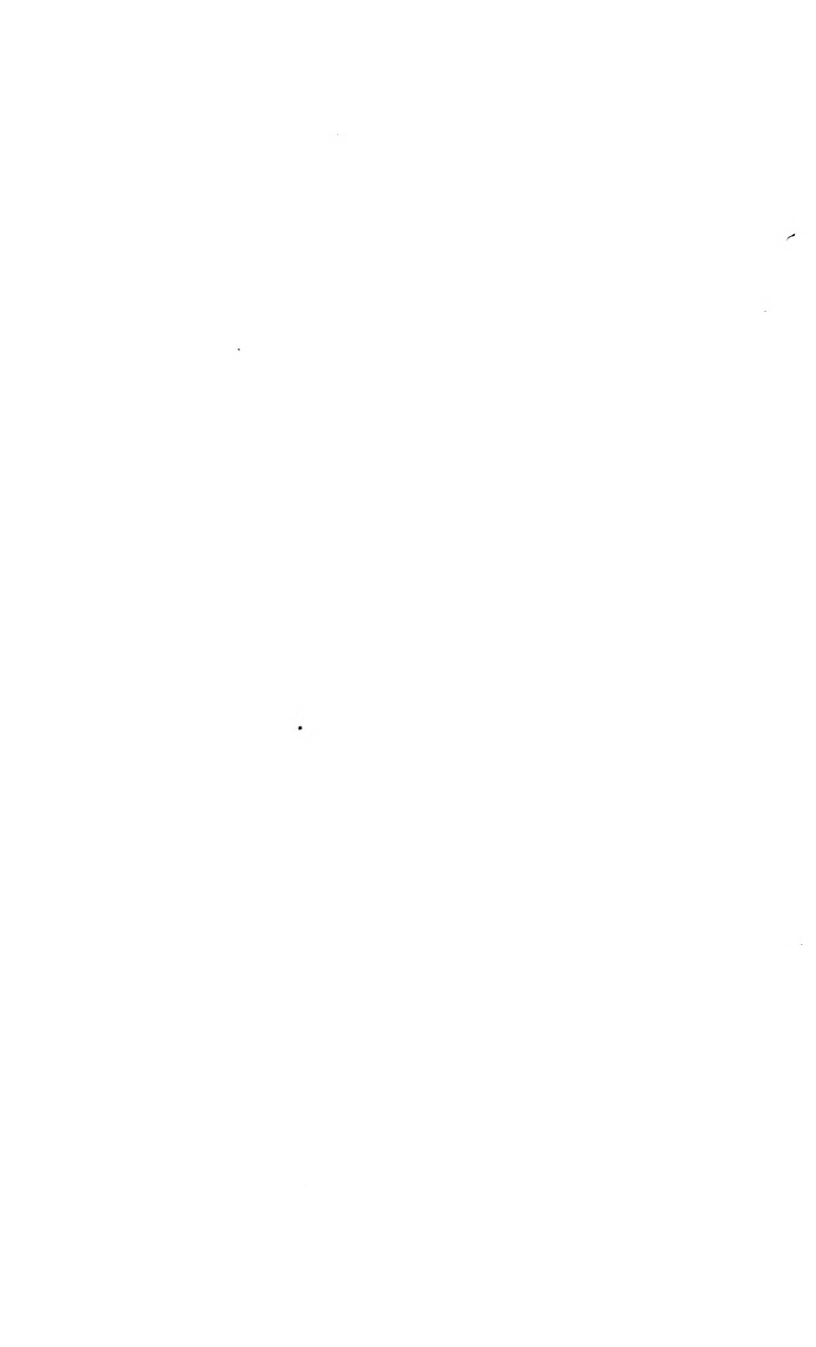
(From the "Edinburgh Daily Review.")

THE REV. JOHN KER'S SERMONS.

THIS volume will be hailed by very many who were wont, either regularly or occasionally, to listen to the eloquent words of the beloved preacher with admiration and delight, and who have regarded him with affectionate sympathy in those past years of his affliction during which his manly, persuasive voice in the pulpit has been seldom heard. Many more, we believe, will now cordially welcome this offering of his ministry for the universal Church, and rejoice, through means of it, to become acquainted with the noble utterances of one of the purest and most gifted minds among the religious teachers of the age. Mr. Ker furnishes incontestable evidence in these sermons of possessing genius of a high order, in rare combination with eminent wisdom and truest goodness. He displays great compass and exquisite balance of mental powers, all enriched by a high and varied culture. He is possessed of a glowing imagination, a clear understanding, a sound judgment, and a warm heart,—a logical faculty singularly strong in its grasp, and an intense sympathy with the true, the beautiful, and the good. He looks over the field of sacred thought with the soul of a true poet, and discourses on the great themes of revelation as one feeling the throb of the higher life; and hence every truth he touches is presented with a vividness and warmth of coloring which commends it at once to the approval of the reason and the acceptance of the heart. This living power he wields is greatly enhanced by an affluence of felicitous metaphor, in which a poetic fancy clothes profound and beautiful thoughts, making them instinct with life, and stamping them in lasting impression on the soul. It is thus he speaks of Christian struggles after trust of the Divine mercy, in memory of past sins: "This is one of the sorest trials of a renewed life, that it is built over dark dungeons, where dead things may be buried but not forgotten, and where, through the open grating, rank vapors still ascend." And thus he describes the longing of the human spirit for something higher than a knowledge of the facts and laws of the external world: "How sad would this be, to be ever enlarging our vision of endless mechanism, but never to come in sight of a great intelligent Maker, to perceive wondrous life in worlds around and beneath, but no life above or before; life only tending to death, and

never reflecting a life that lives for ever, — rain-drops dropping in a vault, and gravitating eternally to darkness, but no dew-drops returning the look of God, and drawn up as by sunbeams into his presence.” And thus he sets forth the union of working and watching in every true life: “In every soul there should be the sisters of Bethany, active effort and quiet thought, and both agreeing in mutual love and help. But Mary no longer sits at the feet of Christ and looks in his face. She stands at the door and gazes out into the open sky to watch the tokens of his coming, while in this hope her sister in the house still works.” The volume throughout sparkles with gems of thought such as these, and in many Scripture allusions new and deep meanings gleam out from the divine words, touching the springs of the inner life. The discourses embrace a wide range and diversity of subjects, not a few of which are out of the common course of pulpit ministration. They all revolve, however, around the central truth of the gospel — Christ crucified; but this is viewed in many fresh and varied lights. In these, special prominence is given to the Great Personality, the Word dwelling on earth, God’s Son and Man’s Brother, drawing human souls to Him in trust, in love, in sympathy, by the fulness of grace and truth He displays. Several of the sermons traverse the higher paths of Christian and philosophic research, and this with pre-eminent ability; they abound with many brilliant and original thoughts, while they evince consummate skill in conducting a lofty argument to successful issues. But the greater portion of the discourses are devoted to topics intimately connected with daily Christian faith and practice, and are marked throughout by an admirable exhibition of Scripture truth, of elevated sentiment, of genial sympathies, and of practical power. The style in all is in full harmony with the thought, flowing on in measured, musical cadence, — “as a very lovely song of one that can play well on an instrument,” — always luminous, elegant, vigorous, captivating, often deepening into tender pathos, or rising into lofty eloquence. Take it all in all, we do not know a volume of sermons superior to this in the language. Others may surpass them in some single feature of excellence, but in the manifold combination*of merits they possess we could not name any that take rank above them within the whole compass of our religious literature.

The Day Dawn and the Rain.



The Day Dawn and the Rain,

AND OTHER

SERMONS

BY

THE REV. JOHN KER,

GLASGOW, SCOTLAND.



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THE following Sermons have been given to the press chiefly for the sake of those whom the author was accustomed to address by the living voice, and whom he can, at present, reach but seldom through that means. His purpose will be served if the volume helps them in the way of remembrance, and more than served if, through God's blessing, it shall prove of any use beyond their circle. Most of the Sermons, though not all, have been preached, and the exception is referred to in order to account for some of them exceeding the limits which are ordinarily assigned to spoken discourse. The subjects have not been selected with any attempt at unity in the illustration of Christian doctrine or duty. An effort has rather been made to secure a variety of topics. When human knowledge and life are spreading out into ever wider circuits, the Christian ministry must seek to show itself a debtor to men of every class and character, and must endeavor to prove that there is no department of thought or action which cannot be touched by that Gospel which is the manifold wisdom of God. The more we study the way of God's commandments, the more shall we find it as broad as his other works, and increasingly rich to meet all the developments of human nature. At the same time, it is hoped that the

unity sought to be indicated by beginning and ending the volume with Christ Jesus, is not merely formal, and that, whatever may be the theme, it will be seen and felt to base itself on that One Foundation, and to strive, though all imperfectly, after the excellency of his knowledge.

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THE DAY-DAWN AND THE RAIN.

I.

Christ the Day-dawn and the Rain.

“His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain.” — HOSEA vi. 3.

THESE ancient Jews must have been very much like ourselves, neither better nor worse, and as we read about them, we can read our own hearts. The preceding chapter contains an account of their sins and backslidings, and of their vain attempts, under the miserable consequences, to find help in man. At last it concludes with a declaration on the part of God that he will return to his place, till they seek him, and with a promise that this shall not be in vain, “In their affliction they shall seek me early.”

The present chapter begins with a fulfilment of this promise. The children of Israel take with them words, and say, “Come and let us return unto the Lord.” It is not in the power of any creature to assuage the wounds of the heart, when they have been

felt in all their depth. It is only in Him who made the heart, then, to heal it ; and he can and will. The God who has established great laws around us for the preservation of his world, for giving man life and light and sustenance, has made his arrangements also, for the cure of our hearts' maladies, and the salvation of our souls. He has gathered all these arrangements closely around his own person. Our body's life may lie in knowing his laws ; but our soul's life consists in knowing *himself*. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD : his going forth is prepared as the morning ; and he shall come unto us as the rain."

These words were, no doubt, fulfilled in many a deliverance of the Jewish people ; but their own most ancient commentators find their last fulfilment in the great promised Messiah, to whom all the prophets gave witness. The promises of the Old Testament are waves which urge each other on, to rise and fall in many a deliverance, until at length they break on the great shore of all safety, — the salvation which is in Christ, with eternal glory. And it would surely be a shame for us Christians to do less than ancient Jewish doctors did, to fail in finding here a prophecy of the world's Redeemer. It is Christ, then, whom our faith must grasp under these two figures, the *Day-dawn* and the *Rain*.

The world is a great book of symbols for the soul of man to read God by, and they are never so interesting and beautiful as when, with the warrant of Scripture, the name of Christ is put within them, not for mutual obscuration, but that they may shine forth

illuminated and illuminating. The *Day-dawn* and the *Rain*, — there must be something of common likeness in them, for they both apply to the same great Person, and yet there must be something distinctive meant to be conveyed, for the word of God uses no vain repetitions, no mere figures of rhetoric. When we come to the New Testament, we find clearly revealed what the ancient prophets dimly suggested. There is a twofold coming of the Son of God, the first in his own person to establish and confirm the gospel, the second in his Holy Spirit to apply to the heart. The one of these may very fitly be compared to the morning, the other to the rain. Indeed, these are the two figures most frequently used in this connection all through the Bible. Christ himself is the Light of the world, the Sun of righteousness. His Spirit is poured forth as floods on the thirsty; and when, on the great day of the feast (John vii. 30), he invited men to come unto him and drink, “ he spake of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive.” We shall seek to apply these figures, then, to Christ, — to look upon his personal coming as represented by the morning, his coming in his Holy Spirit as symbolized by the *rain*, and to present them, first, in the common resemblances which they have; and, second, in some of their points of distinction.

I. The Day-dawn and the Rain represent some resemblances between the coming of Christ in his gospel and in his Spirit.

They have this resemblance, first, that they have the same manifest origin. The day-dawn comes from

heaven, and so also does the rain. They are not of man's ordering and making, but of God's. They are of the good and perfect gifts which come from above from the Father of lights. And they bear the imprint of God's hand upon them, — the morning, when it walks forth from the opening clouds of the east tinges the mountain-tops with gold, and floods the earth with glory, — and the rain, when it shakes its bountiful treasures far and wide over waiting lands, till the little hills rejoice on every side. Their height, their power, their breadth of range, mark them out from all man's works.

And it is not less so with the gospel and Spirit of Christ. Men neither invented them nor discovered them. It is that God "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness that shines into men's hearts the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." And to a man who can look aright they have the same impress of divinity. They carry their evidence with them, like heaven's sun and heaven's rain. They are above man's finding out, naturally above his conception. As the heavens are high above the earth, so are the great thoughts of God in them above man's thoughts. The Son of God coming from heaven to die for man, the Spirit of God coming from heaven to live in man, to change man, the enemy of God, into his friend, his heir, and to do this for all who are but willing to make God's Son and Spirit welcome, these are thoughts which have a majesty and range so great and godlike that they show their origin. "This is not the manner of men, O Lord God!" Men may discuss these things hardly

and coldly when they are outside of them, and may admit or deny them, as a nation of the blind might the sunlight, or the tribes of the waterless desert the rain; but let them know and feel their power, and there is but one resource, to say, "It is of God." It is the sunlight within which lets men see the sun without. When a man is brought to say, "One thing I know, that, whereas, I was blind now I see," he becomes witness to a spiritual world opening around him in all its brightness and blessedness, with "its eyes like unto the eyelids of the morning;" and he can challenge all who would impugn its divine reality, "Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days, or made this day-spring to know its place?" If he come to feel the gracious showers of the Spirit of God upon his soul, in refreshment, in comfort, in strength for hard duty, in patience under sore trial; if he feel the weary heart revived as a flower after a sultry noon-day lifts its head amid the rain-drops; if he should learn that this experience belongs to many beside and around him, he can answer the scorner of a Divine Spirit, "Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds that abundance of waters may cover thee?" Here, then, let us seek to learn the origin of our faith in a study of the grandeur and comprehensiveness of its plan, and in a feeling of its power in our souls. The same God who makes morning to the world by the sun, gives the dawn of a new creation to the spirit of men through the Saviour.

The next point of resemblance we mention is that they have the same mode of operation on the part of God. That mode of operation is soft and silent.

The greatest powers of nature work most calmly and noiselessly. What so gentle as the day-dawn rising mutely in the brightening east, and pouring its light upon the eye so softly that, swift as are those rays, the tenderest texture of the eye endures no wrong? And what more soft than the spring's falling rain? It may come preceded by the thunder, but it is gentle itself, and when most efficacious descends almost as a spiritual presence, "as the small rain on the tender herb, and as showers that water the grass."

And like to these in their operations are the gospel and Spirit of Christ. When our Saviour came into the world it was silently and alone. All heaven was moved, and followed him down to the threshold, but few on earth knew it. One solitary star pointed to the humble birthplace, and sang hymns of it, heard only at night by the watching shepherds. He walked our world through years softly in the bitterness of his soul. He left where the common eye beheld but an ignominious sufferer, one of three, and men became aware that the Son of God had come and gone only when the clear light began to break in the eastern sky from that great work of his; and when the open gate of mercy was thrown back, with a cross before it, to call the lost and wandering home. And as it was with his descent into the world, so is it, in the general, with his entrance by his Spirit into the heart. There may be the thunder and the mighty rushing wind before it, the providences may be loud and violent, but the Spirit itself is like the rain. It moves from soul to soul among the rising generations, and there is no outward crisis to tell of the birth of souls. It is like

the dew that falls at night, and in the morning it is there, and man cannot tell when it formed itself, like a celestial guest, within the flower-cup. The kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation. And, even in times of revival more marked, for such times are promised and should be expected; yet even in such times, the Spirit's great work is not in the earthquake, or the mighty rushing wind, but in the still small voice. Unless it meet us there, in the secrecy of the soul, in the privacy of the closet, in the rising to seek Christ at his grave, in the quiet resurrection morn, when the busy world and all the guards are asleep, unless it bring the soul into close and secret communion with Christ himself, it meets us not at all. In his gospel and his Spirit, Christ is moving through the great inner world which men too much neglect, — the world of souls; and there in the solitude of the heart, alone with him, it must be ours to seek and find.

There is a further point of resemblance in this, that they have the same form of approach to us, — in perfect freeness and fulness. The morning light comes unfettered by any conditions, and so, also, descends the rain. They are, like God's great gifts, without money and without price; and they come with an overflowing plenty, for freeness and fulness go hand in hand. The morning sun shines with light for every eye, however many, and were there millions more there is enough for all. So it is with the rain. Every field and flower may have its full share, and none need envy or rob another. "Thou visitest the earth and waterest it, thou greatly en-

richest it with the river of God, which is full of water.”

And in this they are fit and blessed emblems of the way in which Christ approaches us, both with his gospel and his Spirit. That gospel opens on the world priceless and free as the light which waits but for the eye to be unclosed to see and share it all. And there it stands, as full as it is free. It is one thing, like the sun, for all, and it is all for each one. However many have come to Christ, there is enough for us in the Sun of Righteousness to-day, as if he had risen but for the first time, and there will be till the world's close. How plain and simple this is, and yet it needs an effort on our part to appreciate it in its simplicity, to appropriate it in its perfect freeness, to feel that we can do no more to earn Christ's grace than to earn the daylight, and that it is just as freely offered to us. Fellow-sinners and fellow-Christians, let us ask Himself to teach it to us, to teach it by appearing in his own person and work, as the light of life. “Behold me, behold me! Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth!” and then, blessed revelation! by that opening of the eyes to him, it shall be all our own! “They looked unto him and were lightened; and their faces were not ashamed.”

So free is the gospel, and so free, also, is the Spirit of Christ. He is that “free Spirit,” that “*liberal Spirit*,” of whom the Psalmist speaks, who waits but for our request to come down and fill our hearts with his refreshing rain. Nay, the petition we raise is of his prompting. He comes unasked, and when we think not of him, like the “dew of the Lord that

waiteth not for man nor tarrieth for the sons of men." The Spirit and the bride both say, "come!" Let us be firmly persuaded that Christ is offering his spirit as freely to us as his gospel. Nor has the Spirit less fulness. He is ready to pour water on the thirsty, and floods on the dry ground. It is his special work to exhibit the abundant freeness and riches of the gospel of Christ, to unfold and analyze it that we may see it in its manifold beauty, as the sunlight is analyzed by the glittering dew-drops, or held up before the world in the emerald rainbow. So Christ himself has said of the Spirit, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you (John xvi. 14). Therefore let us be assured that the Spirit of Christ draws near to us without any fettering condition, and without any restraining measure, even as the gospel does. "Behold I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." And let us carry this faith into our prayers. The promise of the Spirit by Christ is followed by this command, "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

The last point of resemblance we mention is, that they have the same object and end. It is the transformation of death into life, and the raising of that which lives into a higher and fairer form. The morning sun and the morning rain-cloud may seem wide apart in their purpose, may appear at times to obstruct each other, but they have one great aim. The sun and the rain come to the dying seed, and both together draw it from darkness to light, and build it up into the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the

ear, that God's world may live and praise his name. Both are rich in times of refreshment, — the sun after the dark night, the rain after the parched day ; and after both the flower raises its head, and the birds sing, and men are glad.

Here, too, they are emblems of the gospel and Spirit of Christ. These, in like manner, have the same aim, — life and revival. The gospel of Christ is the word of life. Its aim is to bring dead souls into contact with Him who has said, "I am come that they might have life." The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of life. It is for this that he urges, entreats, and strives with the soul in secret, — that he is so patient in waiting, and so loath to leave. Christ is no less earnest for our eternal life in the one than in the other. We are too ready to forget this, to think less of the love of the Spirit sinking down into the communings of the heart and conscience, and working there in silence and in secret, than of that transparent love which is written on the word with a beam of light ; but they unite in the same merciful purpose, and it will never be well with us until we meet Christ as willingly when he comes to strive with us in solitude, as when he openly proclaims his gracious call. And as both work together for life, so both must cooperate for revival. If God's heritage is to be refreshed when it is weary, it must be with the outpouring of the Spirit equally with the presentation of a clear, full gospel. The ancient Church was aware of this, as well as we who look back to the day of Pentecost. They knew that upon "the land of God's people shall come up thorns and briers, until

the Spirit is poured upon us from on high," and when the individual believer prayed for return of life to his soul, he bent his knees with these words, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit."

II. We come now to some of the points of distinction between them.

The first we mention is, that Christ's approach to men has a general, and yet a special aspect. The sun comes every morning with a broad, unbroken look, shining for all and singling out none. There is a universality of kindness about him which men with all their powers of limitation have never been able to abridge. The poorest man and the richest, all classes and all things, have the same access to his undivided effulgence. But the rain as it descends breaks into drops, and hangs with its globules on every blade. "God maketh small the drops of water." There is a wonderful individualizing power in rain. It comes to the minutest part of God's world with its separate message, trickles from joint to joint of every grass stem, creeps into the smallest crevice that is opening its parched lips, pierces to the blind roots of things, and, where it cannot carry God's light into darkness, seeks to allure from darkness up into the light of God.

There is this twofold aspect in the coming of Christ. The gospel of his grace enters the world with the broad, universal look of daylight. It is as wide and open to all, with its "Behold the Lamb of God!" It singles out none, that it may exclude none, — that it may be ready to bless a whole guilty

world with the same impartiality as the sun, as God himself when "He looketh abroad and seeth under the whole heaven." And this lies not only in the words of the gospel offer, but in the real provision of it. The arms of God are as wide as his call, and the power of Christ's atonement is as unlimited as the invitation to it. Each one of us knows here, not merely what God is doing for ourselves, but for every other man of the race, and can say with confidence, "Come with me into this broad and blessed sunlight; it is for thee as for me; nay, I could not know that it is for me unless I were sure that it is for thee also, and for every man, in as entire sincerity." But Christ comes after another manner with his spirit. Here no man can tell how God is dealing with another. He approaches the door of the single heart, and says, when there is no ear to listen, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." In the hour of thought, in the depth of night, in the shadow of trial, in the agony of remorse, he makes the soul feel that it is alone with Himself. With every one of us, surely, Christ has been thus dealing; taking us apart, and speaking to us of things that none knew but the soul and he; making our heart thrill and tremble as he touched it, till we have cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" If we have felt this, if we are feeling it, there is a terrible responsibility in it, where none can help but himself. He wrestles with us in the dark, that we may cling to, and cast ourselves on him who wrestles with us: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," — until, bearing the soul's burden, he

helps us from the dark into the daylight, and gives us the assurance of a love there that is also special and personal, "Christ loved me, and gave himself for me."

Our next remark is, that Christ's coming is constant, and yet variable. The sunrise is of all things the most sure and settled. What consternation would seize the world if it delayed one hour, if God had not commanded the day-spring to know its place! But for the rain man knows no fixed rule. It may come soon or late, in scanty showers or plentiful floods. This is dependent on arrangements which are no doubt certain, but which we have not ascertained, and never may. The sovereign hand of God, giving and withholding, appears distinctly in the rain, as if he wished that we should always have before our eyes in his working, the two great features of law and freedom.

And it is thus, too, with the coming of Christ. He visits men in his gospel, steady and unchanging as the sun. Wheresoever we open the pages of his book, his promises shine out sweet as the light and pleasant to the eyes. They come with a constant clearness and freshness which ought to make us feel that at every moment God is waiting to be gracious to us, — "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry." Whatever changes may take place in us, whatever sins and backslidings and fearful imaginings of unpardonable guilt, there, written in the Rock of Ages forever, stand the words, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." The sun of Christ's

gospel remains moveless in the midst of heaven till the world's day is closed, and makes it to every sinner a day of salvation and an acceptable time. But with the Holy Spirit it is otherwise. His coming may vary in time and place, like the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, or the rain, whose arrival depends on causes we have not fathomed. The gift of God's Spirit is no doubt regulated, also, by laws; but these laws are hidden from us in their final grounds. God has linked these more directly with his own absolute sovereignty, and reserved the ultimate moving powers of the universe in the hollow of his hand. The clouds of revival which pass from land to land, who can predict their course, or trace their laws, and say why they pass on, and why they fall in blessing? This one thing we do know, and it is the most practical, that prayer is closely connected with the outpouring of the Spirit. He who has bidden us ask our daily bread from our heavenly Father, and the rain that is to give it, has bidden us ask, also, from him this good gift of his Holy Spirit, and has assured us that he will not deny it. The spirit of prayer is itself, indeed, the spiritual rain begun, but we may detain it, and increase the refreshing showers. We can lift up our voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover us. And, if there be intermission in the coming of Christ by his Spirit, while there is constancy in his gospel, it is, that we may be kept from the presumption of spiritual delay. He who says to us all through life "Now is the day of salvation," says, also, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." If

it be in the early rain, or the latter, in the tender feelings of youth or the solemn thoughts of darkening years, let us beseech life from the quickening spirit while he is near, lest the gracious influences pass by, and our souls be left parched forever.

We observe, further, that Christ's coming may be with gladness, and yet also with trouble. What in the world can be more joyful than the returning sun! Every creature feels it, and wakes up in cries and songs; and the dead, dumb earth puts off its dark, and on its bright and many colored robes, when God covers it with light as with a garment. It is the emblem of God's sunrise in Christ, to the world and to every individual soul. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins. Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it! shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel!

But God comes also in the cloud, and there is a shade over the face of nature, — sometimes in the thunder-cloud, dark and threatening, and bird and beast shrink into their coverts, silent and awed. It represents the manner in which Christ sometimes comes, through his Spirit, in the conviction of sin. The conscience is shaken by the threatening thunder of his law, and his eye looks into the heart like lightning, while his voice declares, "Thou art the man." It was this coming that so shook the Jews at the preaching of Peter, and that made an earthquake in the soul of the Philipian jailer, more ter-

rible than that around him, till he cried, "What must I do to be saved?" These operations may seem at times to conflict with each other, but as the God of nature is consistent in all his works, so also is the great God our Saviour, Jesus Christ. The same wisdom and wonderful power of combination which are seen in the external creation, appear also in the spiritual universe, of which Jesus Christ is Lord and God. The things that are around us, in the world of matter and sense, are patterns of things in the heavens. We are not only destined for an eternal life, but we are in the midst of it, in so far as we realize a spiritual existence, and the symbols and shadows of it are pressing in upon us every day in these works of God which are not dead works, but to a true eye, spirit and life. And as God's sun and cloud in the world around us are not at variance, neither are the gladness that lies in the light of his gospel, and the trouble that may come from the convictions of his Spirit.

We remark, last of all, that Christ's coming in his gospel and Spirit may be separate for a while, but they tend to a final and perfect union. They are indispensable to each other. The sun may come and beat upon the earth, but it will make it only parched and dead without the rain. No more can the clearest shining of the gospel save the soul or comfort it without the Holy Spirit. Or again, the rain might come without the sunlight. The dew might lie all night long on the branches, but there will be no life nor gladness till the morning comes to change sorrow into joy, to brighten dewdrops into sparks of

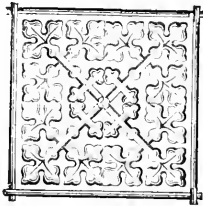
sunlight, and scatter them over all the boughs till they break out into the green of leaves and the hues of blossoms. No more could the sorrows of a broken heart and the convictions of the conscience give the Christian life, and its flower and fruit, without the presence of Christ in the gospel of his grace. The gospel without the Spirit, would be the sun shining on a waterless waste. The Spirit without the gospel, would be the rain falling in a starless night. Blessed be the Lord God, who hath showed us light, who hath sent us also rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons filling our hearts with food and gladness!

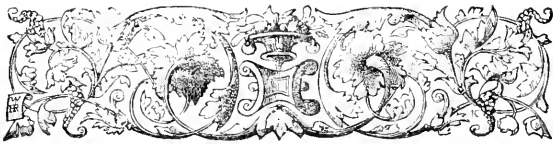
There are some Christians to whom Christ is present more in the cloud. His Spirit works in them by conviction of sin and depressing views of themselves, but they have only a small portion of the sunlight and the joy. What they need is to keep before them the clear, simple view of Christ in the gospel, doing all, suffering all, and leaving us only to receive with thankful hearts, — becoming all our salvation, that he may be all our desire. There are others who have a very distinct perception of the gospel in its freeness and fulness, but they have ceased to derive from it the comfort they once enjoyed. They need the rain. They have been too neglectful of the secret life of religion, which is its soul. They have been, if not falling into habitual sin, yet treading only the hard round of some outward duties, and avoiding communion of soul with God. This is to grieve the Holy Spirit, and so to lose his seal. What these need is, more earnest prayer for his refreshing influences, and a heart open to welcome them and use them: "I

will be as the dew unto Israel ; and they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine." Our souls can only live and grow when the sun and the showers intermingle ; when the Spirit's dew comes by night, and the gospel brings in the day. Then it shall be with us as " the light of the morning when the sun ariseth, even a morning without clouds ; as the tender grass springeth out of the earth, by the clear shining after rain.

It must not be forgotten, with all this, that there are those who know Christ neither as the morning nor the rain, who have been resisting alike invitation and conviction. It is possible to be in the midst of light and remain blind, to have the dews of God falling thick and free, and to continue in the centre of them parched and dry. It is well to think of another appearance which is as sure as this. He who visits us now as the morning shall come as the consuming fire ; and who may abide that day of his coming ? He who makes his descent now like the rain, shall cause it to be as " the storm that shall sweep away the refuges of lies, and as the waters that shall overflow the hiding-place." This coming is also prepared, as sure as sunrise, fixed as the great ordinances of heaven, which approach us with incessant and silent steps when we think not of them. How dreadful to have the brightness of his coming flash upon our sins till we cry to mountains and rocks to hide us ! Prepare to meet thy God ! and may he himself prepare us by inclining our souls now to open to that Saviour who has long been visiting us, morning by morning, that we may be ready to welcome his final appearance

as the end of all our sorrows, the sum of all our hopes, and the dawn of an everlasting and ever blessed day.





II.

Christ and his Words.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep my words.” — JOHN xiv. 23.



IN this very significant verse there is a twofold love spoken of, with the consequence that flows from each. There is the love of man to Christ and its result, and then the love of the Father to the lover of Christ, with its corresponding result. Either of these is more than enough for one subject of discourse, and we select at present the former — the love of man to Christ, and its effect.

There is no necessity for occupying much time in explaining terms. “To love Christ” is to have the heart go forth to him when, in his wonderful life, and still more wonderful death, he has become the object of faith to the soul. It is love not to an abstraction, but to a great living personality — “the man Christ Jesus” — “God manifest in the flesh.” “To keep his words” is not merely to preserve them in the memory, but to put them into the heart, and, deeper still, into the conscience, and then to let them

come forth in the life as visible and practical things, just as seed, if put into the right soil, will, by God's ordinance and through his blessing, spring up into blade and flower and fruit. Of all this we cannot now treat, for the subject is as large as practical Christianity, and we confine our attention to two things: the connection between Christ and his words, and the connection between loving Christ and keeping his words.

The first thing to be considered here is the connection between Christ and his words. It is worthy of remark that Christ himself sets these two objects distinctly before us, as standing over against each other, separate and yet related. We must fix our eye attentively on them; and this leads us to observe that Christ and his words are both very fully made known to us. This is not always the case with those whose names have gone far and wide among men as teachers of the race. Sometimes we may have a great personality who has stirred his own and subsequent generations, and given a mighty impulse to the world, but we have few or none of his words. That there was immense power in him, we cannot doubt, but it is impossible for us rightly to estimate it. Its secret has died with the man. He himself stands there, looming grandly in the distance; but he stands mute. We listen eagerly across the breadth of centuries, but there is no voice, or, at most, a few broken echoes that have come down by a seeming accident. Many such are found in the Gentile world, eminent evidently in their day, among crowds of admiring disciples; but the source of their strength is dead

like themselves. The name of Pythagoras rises as one of these,—great, and yet we scarcely know why. In the Bible history there are also many such. Noah, the preacher of righteousness, is one of them, and “ Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who prophesied,” is well-nigh another, but for the floating fragment, like “ a wandering voice,” on which an apostle has set the seal of verity. Such, also, to a great extent, is Abraham. He rises, a grand and venerable figure in the dim past, in the gray morning of the Church’s history ; but there are few utterances from him, and his life speaks to us only because Christ shines back on it : “ Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.” He may be compared to that statue of the Egyptian Memnon, dumb through the dark night, and uttering a sound only when the rising sun touches him with his rays.

Or, on the other hand, we may have great and noble words from a man, but we may know little of his personality. How much of fire and passion there is in the greatest poet of Greece, how much of human wisdom and the experience of life in the greatest poet of England, and yet how little we know of their history to enable us to see how they became what they were, or to let us read their words by the light of their life ! There are thoughts and aspirations in Plato, perhaps the most marvellous in any man uninspired ; but how dim a view we have of the path along which he moved in the midst of his contemporaries ! To come again to Scripture, what glorious utterances we have from Isaiah, to elevate and warm even the Christian heart, while he looks all down the

ages to the grand consummation of the church and world ; and yet what do we know of himself ? And many of those prophets whose words have descended to us as the most precious legacy of the ancient dispensation, when “ they spoke of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow,” have disappeared in their theme like the lark in the sunlight which it sings.

But in Christ both the personality and the words have been brought out into the clearest and fullest illumination. It is evident that in the plan of God both of them were meant to be of supreme value to man. The inspiring Spirit has been careful to breathe them side by side into the sacred record, and Divine Providence has preserved them from age to age, that all men may look on and listen to these two — the person and the words of Jesus Christ.

We have not only the words of his inspired apostles, which are in the truest sense Christ's, but we have his own personally uttered words. We would have felt unsatisfied unless we had heard the law of love from his own lips, the very thoughts that breathed, and the very words that burned when the divine Wisdom spoke, and our wish is met. The recording witnesses have been so minute, so loving, in giving us the scene, the incidents, the very looks, that the living fragrance is still in the utterances, and the dew of youth upon them, and we can sit down with his disciples on the hill, or by the lake, or in the house, and listen to the great Teacher, as if he were in the midst of us, while we wonder at the gracious words that proceed out of his mouth, and set them

above all other words beside. "Never man spake like this man."

And with the words, God has been pleased to give us the life, as never a life was given, by those four, each different, yet each the same ; a separate mirror to take in the side presented to it, but all disclosing in life-like harmony the one grand person, each so absorbed in his theme that he himself is forgotten, his personality lost in the object, — all eye, all ear, all heart for Christ alone. If this were not divine, we might say that it is the perfection of biography ; it makes the historian nothing ; it makes him he looks at all in all, and it puts every one of us where the witness himself stood, and lets us take in the great life as he did. It is one testimony to the greatness of the life that it so burned and fused itself into these men that they can do nothing but reflect it again, with this unconsciousness which is higher than the highest art. There was inspiration guiding them, true, but this inspiration took, as its most powerful instrument, the overmastering might of that wonderful personality. When we look to it there, it stands so grand and godlike in its outline, so minute and human in its details. It seems marvellous to us when we reflect how these little touches never bring down the grandeur of the whole, that his person there presented should be so lofty, above all men's previous thoughts of loftiness, and yet so near us, so accessible, so simply human. It is for this, without doubt, that we have glimpses into his infancy and youth, that we may know him to carry the heart of a child of humanity all through ; for this that he is brought into

contact with the most varied relations of man's life, mingling with and hallowing them. We become acquainted with him not only in the great congregation, but in the house of Bethany, at the marriage and at the funeral. He speaks words of wisdom which the wisest men have not yet measured, and he takes children in his arms. When he is dying, and completing that grandest work of man's redemption, we behold his heart opening on every side to let us see what is in it, — to his mother, to his friends, to the dying criminal by his side, to his persecutors, to his Father ; and, when he rises to occupy his throne in heaven, we see his human heart then in the last look we have of him as he turns round with outstretched arms to bless those he leaves behind. There is no life we know so well as that life which it concerns us most of all to know, no personality to which we can come so close as the greatest personality that ever appeared on earth. Our dearest friends have a curtain that they draw between a part of their nature and us. It is right they should ; for the utmost personality is for God alone. Sometimes we feel as if we had not fathomed our own souls. A gulf opens up which we had not suspected, that makes us start back as from the chasm of an earthquake. But we know and feel that we can touch the inmost life of Jesus Christ. He has nothing to conceal ; and whatever of the wonderful may grow up for our admiration, nothing strange can start forth to affright us. It has been so ordered of God, because our own soul and life are to rest on him. He is to be more to us, for security and peace than any friend, — more to us than we are to ourselves.

The words of Christ, then, and Christ himself, are both fully made known to us. It is necessary it should be so. The gospel has its expression in his words, but its power and spirit are in his life. He is himself the "Word made flesh," — the greatest utterance in the greatest person; and the language of his apostles is "What we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us."

There is this further to be observed, that as they are made known to us, there is a perfect harmony between Christ and his words. It is implied in this saying of our Lord that he and his words are in agreement, else they could not co-exist and coalesce as he says they must do. This is not always the case with a man and his words. Sometimes we can love and esteem a man, and yet we cannot keep his words. Our hearts are drawn to him with strong affection as amiable and generous; but there is a strange and painful revulsion when we come to his utterances. They carry neither conviction to the understanding nor moving power to the soul. Or, again, we may admire and approve the words, but we cannot love and esteem the man. All that comes from him may be stamped with wisdom and lighted up with a perception of the noble and elevated, but the man himself is hard and unsympathetic, or feeble in moral resolve. It is with pain that we turn from the words of Bacon to his life, and from the scorn of worldly ambition, by the author of the "Night Thoughts," to his eager pursuit of it in courtly circles. One of the most melancholy contrasts is between the words of

the wisest of men and the exemplification which he himself gave of wisdom. How different when we come to Christ! Our deepest moral nature sets the seal of approval on his words. "The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times," and our emotional nature is drawn to himself with the strongest love and reverence. "He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." We can take his words and himself and set them side by side, and interweave them, like music, with thought in perfect harmony. "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips, therefore God hath blessed thee forever." When he inculcates humility, he himself "is among the disciples as one that serveth." When he speaks of purity, "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." When he urges the law of kindness, "he goes about doing good." When he asks us to make sacrifice for others, he dies on a cross for his enemies. There are many who praise the noble morality of Christ, but they fail to observe sufficiently the personality which illuminates and glorifies it, which makes it sparkle and glow with innumerable lights like those of the firmament, and which gives it, like his love, "a height and depth, a length and breadth, that passes knowledge."

While the words and life are in harmony, it is yet true that the life is greater than the words, and, indeed, this is necessary to full harmony in any really grand character. A man should always be more than his expression. We feel when we are in contact with some men, that there is a reserve of power be-

hind their highest utterances, that whatever they may say or do, they are capable of something above it, and that no outcome of their strength enables us to feel we have measured their mind. This is pre-eminently true of the Lord Jesus Christ. What the poet says of his victory over the apostate spirits in heaven, is true of every manifestation he gave on this earth ; “yet half his strength he put not forth.” The people felt it when, it is said, they heard him speak “as one having authority ;” and we feel it still when we come not to the words, but to him through them. It is not that he puts life into them, but that the life in them is felt to come from a life beyond them in himself. He gives drink “as out of great depths.” We rise to the understanding of his own climax — “the way, the truth, the life,” — and know what a different book the gospel record would have been, if, in some abstract way, all the sayings of it had been preserved, and the grand Presence, which floods it with light and life, blotted out.

Now, this superiority of the person of Christ to his words, great as they are, is not, as we have remarked, destructive of harmony ; it is the highest reach of it. In all things that perfectly agree, there must be a great and a greater, in some such way as God agrees with his universe, which is his expression of himself, while yet he remains in an infinite behind it, making it, in the language of the Bible, “the hiding of his power.” It is one of the most important steps a man can take in his spiritual history, when he passes from listening to the sayings, to looking up into the face of the person of Christ, and learns that the words are

only rays from the countenance of the "Eternal life," the natural breathings from him who is "the Word made flesh." It is like passing from report to reality, from Christ's echoes to the living Christ, and can be expressed in the manner of those Samaritans, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, but because we ourselves have seen him, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Saviour of the world;" or, in that of the beloved disciple, "He dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, — the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."

We come now to the second thing to be considered, — the connection between loving Christ and keeping his words. And we remark, that the way in which our Lord states this, brings before us the central truth of Christian doctrine, namely, that, in some way, there must be a change of heart before there is a change of life. We must begin to love Christ before we can keep his words. Christ is the law-giver of God's world, and before we can obey his laws we must be on terms of amity with himself. This implies that we know him to be at peace with us, for as we are made, we cannot love where we dread. God's friendship must come before God's service. Now, the very opposite of this is frequently taught, — that there is to be service before there can be friendship, and that peace can only be purchased by obedience. We need not so much consult the Bible to see the falsehood of this, as look into our own hearts, where we may feel the impossibility of doing anything that will bear the look of service, in a spiritual sense, until the heart is in it.

But there comes in here a view which admits this, which dwells upon it very strongly and beautifully, and which has done much to bring out the value of the personality of Christ in its bearing on our service. It shows how he creates a new power in the soul, not by his example, merely, but by his whole being, — not simply by teaching us and moving before us, — but by, in a manner, transfusing himself unto us. This would be all right, if it did not say, or imply without saying it, that this is all. The true view includes this and much more, for truth takes in all that is true in error. The vital deficiency in this partial representation is that there is no sufficient note taken of sin. It passes over the whole of this part of the question with a casual reference, or a hazy indistinctness. Sometimes it seeks to depreciate the Epistles which bring out so forcibly the contrasts of guilt and atonement, and hints at a Christianity which would be purer if it were confined entirely to Christ himself, as if a man should say that he preferred the sun to his beams, and proposed, for the sake of simplicity, that his radiance should be confined to his disk. But, apart from this, the view we refer to does not enter into the central power of either the words or the life of Christ. He himself speaks, all through, of sin and salvation, as strongly as the Epistles. The lost sheep, the prodigal son in his alienation and misery, and the toil and pain of recovery, what are these but his way of putting before us guilt and redemption? The love borne to his person, he emphatically tells us, is in proportion to the sense of forgiveness. Little love where there is little sense

of sin and pardon ; abounding love where this has taken possession of the soul. It fails to take in the greatness of Christ's person. It may hold a divinity in him as long as the warmth of old views linger in its veins ; but his person must fall as his work fades, and at last sink to a bare humanity. His agony ceases to have any meaning ; his darkness of soul loses its mystery ; his cry no more shakes the heart ; his cross awakens no burning fire ; and the love of Christ, shrinking from its shoreless length and breadth, is still more robbed of the height and depth which have given it, and always will, its power over the soul of man.

Irreconcilable with the letter and spirit of Christ's own teaching and life, this view fails to deal fully with the problem of man's nature, which demands a solution. We have to decide this, not by single instances of pure and self-denying lives, which will appear in the most opposite systems, but by what the mass of humanity require in all time, and in every possible extremity. No remedy is sufficient which does not touch the worst case. Whatever system does not answer the deepest cry of an awakened conscience, cannot long retain the homage of the heart, and loses its power to regenerate the life. It is no undue assertion to say that the system commonly known as evangelical, has been tested over a breadth of field, and at an intensity of strain that the other cannot lay claim to. That other may look well oftentimes as a picture, but it has yet to be proved that it will not break down under the hard stress of the real world, the stern requisitions of duty, the assault of temptations, the fierce outbursts of passion and, worse than

all these, the slow, insidious corrosion of a fallen nature. Let us take but one word of Christ, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me ;" (Luke ix. 23) and if we consider what it means we shall feel that the strongest motive that can help a man to aim at the steady observance of this, is the view of Christ himself bearing his own cross, till, lifted up on it, he bears our sin. This, at least, we can affirm, that, in past times, when other lines of battle have been pierced through and utterly broken, it was falling back on this reserve which gained the victory.

Now, that Christ should here lay down love to himself as the foundation of all our fidelity to him, does not, indeed, of itself, prove his atonement ; but it is in the firmest bond of union with it, and taken in connection with all his teaching and life and death, it receives a power of meaning which no other view of Christ can give to it. Love to him can face every duty and dare every danger and endure every sacrifice, when it sees him filling the universe from the throne of heaven to the grave of earth, with self-sacrifice for man, and self-sacrifice to save him from the most terrible of all evils, exclusion from the favor and life of the God who made him. Less than this cannot explain either the Epistles or Gospels, neither can it, in the last extremity, bear the weight of what Christ requires of those who own his allegiance.

We remark, next, that the connection between loving Christ, and keeping his words brings before us the Christian philosophy of morality. As Christians, we believe that the morality of Christianity is supe-

rior to any other in the kind of duties it gives prominence to, and the light in which it presents them ; and candid men, who profess to stand outside, generally admit this. But what is often overlooked is that the superiority of Christian morality does not consist so much in these details, as in its central principle of action. It lies much more in its moving power than in its mechanism. There is no system but Christianity that has gathered all the grand motives to morality round a person, and made the strength and essence of them spring from love to him. The ancient Gentile teachers had, no doubt, a personal influence over their disciples ; but they constantly pointed to duty, as something apart from themselves, and founded its claims on its inherent fitness or rightness. In the Old Testament there is a foreshadowing of the Christian principle in God descending into personal relations to men, saving and blessing them, and founding on this a claim to obedience. "I am the Lord thy God that brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt: Keep my precepts." In the Christian morality, this is the one grand motive, love to the person of Christ, flowing out into submission to his will. He himself puts it thus, and so does all the New Testament.

There would be a fatal objection to this, if He were either less than he is, or if he had done less for man than he has done. If he were less than God, his claim of implicit obedience would be impious ; and if he had done less for man than save him from the lowest depth, he could not require all his nature to be given up to him. But here, again, the morality of

the gospel is seen to be closely connected with its doctrines. The divinity of Christ forbids the charge of assumption on his part, and his atonement prevents the feeling that there is over-exaction from us. No other view will make Christian morality and doctrine cohere. When we take this view, the morality all centres most fitly in obedience to Christ, because he is all in all to the soul, its Lord and God, and because he has conferred on it the infinite and eternal benefit of deliverance from sin. Then the Christian morality rises into a clearness, a consistency, and grandeur worthy of a divine revelation. The great God, from whose life and likeness his intelligent creature, man, has fallen away, restores him to obedience by leaving the throne of judgment, and coming down to him as a Friend and Saviour. In the successive ages of a preparatory system, he descends, step by step, into closer relations of alliance, clothes himself with personal attributes, and binds men to himself by personal ties, until he reaches the lowest step, which is also the highest, for lowest condescension is highest love. He becomes one with men, in nature, in history, through life, and through death (deepest mystery of all!); becomes one with them in his becoming sin, that he may establish the claim of love, which makes him Lord and Legislator on a new ground, that he may qualify himself for creating obedience by attraction, instead of commanding it by law. The supreme Governor changes his throne, or, to speak more correctly, returns to it in a new and higher relation; and the moral homage of his human creatures, and, as we believe, of all his intelligent universe, gathers round

him in Christ, — love saving moral order, or, as the Old Testament expresses it, “mercy embracing truth.”

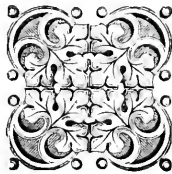
This we understand to be our Lord’s teaching of morality and that of his apostles, and to be something not only larger than any other morality, but in its principle altogether different. Those who have studied it at all are aware that it is from this principle it derives its power; and that those men who speak of detaching the gospel morality from the gospel doctrine, are as rational as the men who would pluck a blossom from a tree, and think to have it come to fruit.

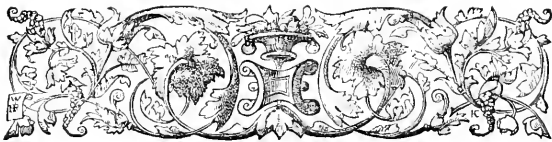
There are only three conceivable ways in which morality can be thought of as springing up in man. The first is by something like an instinct, and that this does exist in man we are far from denying. But how feeble, how fluctuating, how contradictory it is when left to itself, we have only to look abroad on the world to see. If it were perfect in all its parts on any such principle, morality by instinct would be morality mechanical. The second way is by reason, and that reason can do much for morality must also be admitted. It can trace it to the source of right, see it to be fit, and branch it out in its details; but it can never furnish it with sufficient motive power; it becomes weakest when passion is strongest; it can fall back only on one part of our nature, and that the hardest, the practical understanding. Hence, reason in morality is much more a thing for the philosopher in his closet than for the mass of men in the struggle and strain of life. The only third way is an appeal

to love, and love going forth to a person. It is this way that Christianity has chosen. It sets before men the person of Jesus Christ, noblest and most beautiful in itself, and infinitely attractive in its self-sacrifice for them. To love him is an impulse of the heart, and this impulse is the spring of all morality. This can touch all men from the highest to the lowest, from the philosopher to the child. It does not exclude reason in morality, for Christ, while drawing morality round his person, appeals to its fitness, and urges its right. He does not even neglect its instincts. By his spiritual quickening he develops these, and furnishes them with the highest object. He raises morality up to a new and loftier instinct, which does not rob it of freedom, making it the outflow of the new nature which he creates within. And then, finally, all this morality is found to rest, not in homage to a created intelligence, either within or without us, but in submission to the highest personality, the supreme God, out of love, and in the sharing of his life and likeness. To enter in any way into the conception of these truths is to perceive signs of their divine origin.

If, then, we would be partakers of this noble Christian morality, the true way, the only way, is to come closer to the person of Christ as set before us in God's word, looking on him, and learning to love him. The Christian character is not built up like a cold and lifeless column, stone by stone, it grows like a tree from within, and its root is love to Christ. Love will be the interpreter of all his words. We can read doubtful meanings and solve the casuistries of duty, when we look through the eye of a friend into

his heart. Love will be the recorder of all his words. It imprints them when they come from lips that are dear, and brings them up with all their tones and echoes till they fill our soul. And love will carry them all out into our life again. It will baptize his words in his own spirit, and point to every one of them with sacramental power, "This do in remembrance of me."





III.

Christ in Simon's House. The Pharisee's Mistake.

“Now when the Pharisee, which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.” — LUKE vii. 39.

THE woman in this narrative was some open sinner of the city, shunned by all who made any pretensions to religion. She had come in the way of Jesus of Nazareth, and had looked on and listened to him. She perceived in him more than in the common religionists of the day, a holiness of which the rest made only a profession, and which smote her to the soul with a sense of her own vileness, and with this a strange, unearthly compassion that drew her to him and changed her. She heard some of his words, it may be those of the lost sheep, or wandering prodigal, till her heart was melted and she entered the kingdom of heaven by that door which bears above it, written by its Monarch's hand, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.” She followed Christ to the Pharisee's house, but when he entered it, the light of her soul seemed to vanish, and she was left without, cold and dark.

An atmosphere surrounded him there which closed her heart and chilled her hopes. Yet there was an attraction in the guest stronger than the repulsion from the owner. She pressed through to the Saviour's feet, and gave, in the act recorded here, the most touching expression of her contrition and love: "She stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment." The shame of deepest unworthiness, and the unutterable gratitude of a saved soul, were struggling within. Words are poor at such a moment. A divinely-taught instinct gave her the expression, and the world has been filled with fragrance. But the Pharisee did not perceive it; he was surprised at her daring and at Christ's forbearance. Respect for his guest kept him silent, but he had hard thoughts about it. The character of the great Teacher convinced him that he could not think lightly of sin. What then can account for his accessibility to such a sinner? He must surely be less acquainted with the secrets of human hearts than is believed. "This man," he thinks, "if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is; for she is a sinner."

It is not at all necessary to set down this Pharisee as an empty hypocrite. There is an easy off-hand way of dealing with him and all his brethren, which is consistent neither with truth nor charity, and which leaves out of view some of the most instructive sides of human nature. So far as we can see, he had

a very sincere regard for Christ, and an honest reverence for the law of God as he knew it. But the law was to him very like a human statute-book that takes note of the external conduct, and its transgressors were to be treated like outlaws and criminals. The view of the law, as a deep, spiritual, all-embracing element, had scarcely dawned upon him,—a view which gives an unspeakably more profound idea of the evil of sin, but at the same time, a more tender sympathy with those who are infected with it. With such a view of law and sin, he could see a very little into the character and plan of Christ, who came not to cut off decayed branches, but to operate upon the roots and vital powers, that he might save and change and regenerate. The picture of this sinful woman with Christ and the Pharisee on either hand, is another of those instances which show the gospel to be a book for all time. The two ways of dealing with sin are still to be met with,—the hard repulsion of formal righteousness, and the sympathy of Divine love. Sympathy has wonderful eyes, but nothing is so blind as spiritual pride; and we shall endeavor to look at the mistake this Pharisee committed:—

I. AS IT REGARDED CHRIST. He could not read Christ's nature, and undervalued it. He imagined that Christ's accessibility to this woman arose from want of knowledge, when it came from the greatness of his compassion. The Pharisee, from his narrow circle of view, was pitying the ignorance of Christ that he could be so easily deceived, while Christ was looking into the Pharisee's thoughts, and about to

give a striking proof of his knowledge of them. He saw into the woman's heart and life deeper than the Pharisee did. He judged them by a law far higher, and loathed sin as no man ever will do while he dwells in the clay. But he did not gather up his garments from the touch of the sinner, because in his heart there was an infinite fountain of mercy. What a difference was this from the conception of the Pharisee! The forbearance of Christ had its source, not in ignorance, but in the deep, far-reaching vision of infinite love, which wills not the death of any sinner, but that he should turn and live; and which made him ready not only to receive the lost, and wipe away their tears, but to pour out his own soul unto the death to save them. But every man reads another by the heart in his own bosom; and the hard, self-righteous Pharisee is utterly unable to comprehend him who does not break the bruised reed, and who has a joy greater than all the angels of heaven over one sinner that repenteth.

Here is a man with his natural reason in presence of the most glorious object in God's universe, — a contrite heart and a compassionate Saviour, — and he is as blind to the sight, as were those who passed by the cross of Calvary reviling and wagging their heads. It is proof that the natural man did not invent the gospel, since he cannot comprehend it. The mercies, like the judgments of God, are "far above out of his sight." "As the heavens are high above the earth, so are God's thoughts higher than man's thoughts." In regard to Christ, he mistook also his way of rescuing from sin. If it entered into the

Pharisee's thought at all to rescue from sin, it would be by keeping the sinner back from him, thanking God, and even feeling a selfish kind of thankfulness that he was not like him. The sinner must be made fully sensible of his exclusion from the sympathy of all good men, and no door of access can be opened till purity is restored. Any other way would seem encouragement to transgression. Christ's way is the very reverse of this. It is the grand discovery of the gospel, the spiritual law of attraction. His way was to come from an infinite height into this world, that he might be near sinners, able to touch them, and ready to be touched. It was to take their nature upon him in the likeness of sinful flesh, that they might feel him closer still, and that "He might not be ashamed to call them brethren." It was "to become sin for them, though he knew no sin;" that he might bear it, first by pity, then by sacrifice, and at last by pardon. This is the great and godlike plan the very heart of the reason why "he lifted up his feet to the long desolation," and touched the soil of our sin-stricken earth. And now he is only carrying out his grand plan in one of its applications when he draws this sinner near him, and suffers her to clasp his feet that she may feel she is in contact with God's infinite and saving mercy. It is a ray of the glorious Sun of Righteousness, whose going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it which has glanced into this woman's soul and strayed across the Pharisee's threshold, that he may show men how he came to win back their hearts, and that he may prove to them, while he hates sin,

that he loves the sinner with yearning, quenchless compassion. If the sinner's heart is ever gained, thus it must be, when he who in his character is "undefiled and separate from sinners," comes so close to them in sympathy, and stretches out a hand to them, stainless in purity, but filled with pardon. The Pharisee when he sees it sets it down as folly. But wisdom is justified of her children, and God "hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence," because he hath abounded "in the riches of his long-suffering."

II. As it regarded the woman, the Pharisee thought that as a sinner she was to be despised. He saw only what was repulsive in her; and had he confined his view to the sin, his feeling had right with it. But he included the sinner. It was a look of pride, without any pity; and pride, above all, spiritual pride, without pity, is as cold and blind as the polar ice. Such pride could not see a human soul with infinite destinies, though degraded, a precious gem incrusting with miry clay, yet capable of reflecting the brightest rays of the divine glory. For there that soul was great in its origin and nature, and ready to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. He saw it, who knew the soul's capacity, for he made it, and did not over-estimate its value when he gave his life for it. He had said, "What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And measuring in his compassion the infinite loss, he paid for it the infinite price.

And surely we ought to feel that in every fellow man, however degraded, there is a kindred and im-

mortal nature which can never be cut off in this world from the possibility of the highest rise. To be suffered to remain on God's footstool is to be within reach of the steps to his throne. The man is a sharer, not only of our original nature, but of that which the Son of God took upon himself. Christ entered this house of our humanity that every one might feel emboldened, as this woman did, to come near and touch him with contrition and faith, and draw from him help and hope. Should not the thought of this community of nature melt our hearts when we look upon poor outcast humanity? And shall we ever think ourselves more pure than the Son of God, and seek to shake ourselves free from its touch?

As regarded the woman, he did not see that a new life had entered. A man who is so blind as not to perceive the deep capacity of the old nature will not discover the dawning tokens of the new. Was it nothing to find her pressing close to Christ, clinging to his feet, bathing them with weeping? The outward signs were before him, if he had known how to read them, of the greatest change that can befall a human soul. These sobs and tears, and this irrepressible emotion, are the cries of the new creature in Christ Jesus, which must find its way to him who is its life and joy. Penitence was there, too deep for words, the broken and contrite heart which God will not despise, a loathing of sin which this Pharisee cannot understand, and a glowing love that made his frown forgotten in the irresistible attraction to a Saviour's feet. What worlds of emotion may be pass-

ing within, where man cannot look, a bitterness of grief which the heart alone knows, and a joy with which no stranger can intermeddle! He knows it who is its Author and its end. He sees the birth of an immortal spirit, the glow and grandeur of a second creation, better than the first, and welcomed with gladder songs. But all this while the poor Pharisee, in presence of its tokens, can understand it no more than he can hear the angels who rejoice over it, and he complacently charges with ignorance him who searches the heart, and proudly condemns her who is being acquitted by the Judge of all!

III. THE PHARISEE'S MISTAKE AS IT REGARDED HIMSELF.—There is no error that ends in its own first circle; and every serious mistake in the moral world has this in it, that it recoils at last on the man who is guilty of it. “Who art thou that judgest another, for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself?”

The Pharisee showed that he did not know his own heart. Had he been better acquainted with it he would have found sufficient there for dissatisfaction. If not committing the sins which he condemned, he might have known that he had the seeds of them in his nature. If he was keeping them down by inward struggle, this should have made him lenient, and, if cherishing the love of them, he was a publican wearing a cloak. Every unrenewed heart has the fire of corruption smouldering, though it may not show the flame. The grace of God alone can extinguish the fire of any one sin, and even then

the man is a brand plucked from the burning, ready to be rekindled, and therefore bound to humility.

It deserves to be remarked that the man who is saved from sin by love is softened by the love which saves him ; but the man who is kept from sin only by pride is made more hard. He may be as near the sin in his real heart as ever, but he maintains a false outward character, and builds an unsafe barrier in his nature against open sin by being very severe upon sinners. This is the reason why a mere external reformation brings in vanity and pride, and all uncharitableness, sins which, if not so disreputable in the sight of men, are as hateful in the view of God.

As regarded himself, he did not see that in condemning this woman, he was rejecting the salvation of Christ. If he could have established his point that it was unworthy of the Saviour to hold intercourse with sinners, what hope would there have been for him ? Shutting the door of his house upon this woman who sought Christ, he would have shut the door upon Christ himself. Publican and Pharisee, open transgressor and moral formalist, can only enter heaven by the same gate of free, unconditional mercy. Nay, had the Pharisee seen it, he was farther from the kingdom of God than she with all her sins about her ; and it was not so wonderful that Christ should permit this poor woman to touch his feet, as that he should sit down as a guest at the Pharisee's table. This, too, was in the way of his work, to bring in a contrite sinner with him, and touch, if it might be, the hard, self-righteous heart.

If the Pharisee had known himself, and who it was that spoke to him, he would have taken his place beside her he despised. "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." He would have rejoiced in her reception as the ground of hope for himself, and as a proof that Christ is "able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God through him." Let us trust that he learned the lesson.

Having looked at the mistake of the Pharisee in some of its aspects, it would not be well to close without adverting to some of the truths which we may learn from it.

Those who profess religion should be careful how they give a false view of it by uncharitable judgments and by assumptions of superiority. It matters little whether this is done under the guise of zeal for orthodoxy of doctrine or morality of life. If it want the spirit of meekness and sympathy, it has not the spirit of the gospel. The greatest proof of the Divine is that it is deeply and tenderly human. God became man to show this. Those who have struggled nearest to the centre of truth and life in Christ are those who will have most sympathy with men striving amid waves of doubt to plant their feet on some spiritual certainty; and they who have risen highest in purity of heart will be most ready to stretch out their hand to help a sinner to retrieval. The reason is plain. It is these men who are acquainted with the misery of the conflict and the blessedness of the calm. We know of no greater enemies to Christianity than a hard orthodoxy desti-

tute of the insight of charity, and a cold, self-satisfied morality which seeks its own comfort in being saved, and gathers up its skirts from the touch of what it calls the sinful world. What that world wants at all times, and in our time more than ever, is sympathy ; and it would be a good thing for Christian men to look less to the Pharisee as their model, and more to Christ.

On the other side, we must remind those who profess to be seeking religion, that they are bound to form their judgment of it from its Author. Many say they have been repelled from Christianity by the coldness and inconsistency of its professors, and they reckon this a sufficient excuse. It might be so if we had to plead our case at last before these professors. But the answer must be given in before Him with whom we have to do. Nothing will avail then, unless we can make it clear that we honestly and earnestly appealed to himself, and were repelled. It will be very hard to show this. Honest, earnest men should feel bound to take their estimate of Christianity only from Christ. It is surely a case of sufficient importance to justify this, when the interests of the soul and eternity are involved in the issue. To indulge in childish recriminations when these are at stake is not reasoning, but trifling. We are all on our way to the Judge, and he will settle the question of mutual blame ; but the question of sin must be settled between him and each one of us alone. If men have felt the pressure of guilt and want, and their need of a Saviour, they will find their way to him through all the cold looks of professed disciples

and proud formalists. That there are Pharisees who misrepresent him is only a stronger reason why we should take his name and bear it in truth.

If there are some who have advanced farther in search, who are deeply depressed by a sense of sin, and ready to think they will be loathed by all who know them as they are, there is comfort in this view of Christ. He knows what is in man, and has a view of sin deeper than any that can darken a stricken conscience. He felt sin's overpowering weight when he bore it for us, and had a mysterious agony then, the cries out of which make us feel that we understand but a little part of its evil. Yet how compassionate he is to the sinner, whose worst of sin he knows. It is not pity merely that comes from him, but sympathy; and how wide the difference between these the struggling heart understands. "Let the humble see this and be glad, and let their heart live who seek God." Our comfort does not begin in forgetting our sins, but in remembering them, and in bringing them all under the view of his mercy, which is as wide and wakeful as his omniscience. "O God! thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee." Our confidence is sustained by thinking that as his knowledge of us is far larger than our own, as he is greater than our hearts, and sees secret sins we overlook, and past sins we forget, so his mercy is exalted above our conception, "as high as heaven is above the earth," and ready to put our sins away "as far as east is from the west." Let such only make full proof of the Christ who forgave this woman. Let them press close to him as he comes near to them, a

great present spiritual Saviour, looking up in his face, clasping his feet with simple, humble faith, as he will teach the heart to do if it inquires of him ; and then will come that word, " Thy sins are forgiven thee," and in due time the other which makes all sure, " Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace."

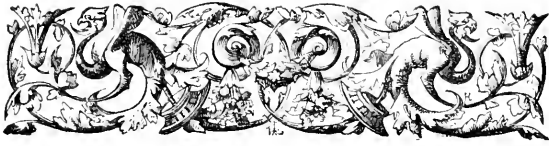
Besides all these classes, there is still another to which we would refer in closing. There are some who have cast themselves with a feeling of trustfulness upon the mercy of God in Christ ; but they have a hard struggle to maintain, with memories of sin which rise up out of the past, and with present evil imaginings, which are the product of a bygone state of life and heart. This is one of the sorest trials of a renewed life, that it is built over dark dungeons, where dead things may be buried but not forgotten, and where, through the open grating, rank vapors still ascend. They are compelled to bear this burden all alone, and sometimes they feel it too heavy.

Now, consider this, that it is in wisdom and kindness God has closed the depth of the human heart against every eye but his own. We can sympathize with this part of the Pharisee's feeling that men would shrink from one another if they saw each other's sins and sinful thoughts laid bare. When we think of our nearest friends looking in upon our soul, we recoil with shame. Could the sacredness of our friendship stand such openness ? It can scarcely be believed. In this world we are all alike stained with sin, and this very sin makes us intolerant. It shrinks from being seen, and it is shocked at its own reflection in another's heart. It could not even bear

its own consciousness, if it were not blinded by self-love and habitude. God has, therefore, concealed our hearts from each other, and left them open only to himself, or, if in any way to others, only so far to beings of a better world, who can look in upon our paths with larger and more loving eyes. And yet, merciful as the arrangement is, many feel it to be a terrible burden to bear all alone; to walk side by side with friends, and to be solitary with such memories and thoughts; to go down into deep, bitter graves of the past with no fellow-man to hold them by the hand. It is this that has led some, in their agony, to seek disclosure in any way as a relief, and that has formed a system which invites it. It is a great testimony to the power of conscience in man, and to the difficulty of bearing the awakened conviction of sin, in utter, echoless solitude. It is, indeed, a poor resource to make a confessor out of an accomplice; for the sinful heart into which we pour our acknowledgment of sin has its own memories of guilt, and these make it hard and misjudging to the transgressor, even where it is tolerant to the transgression. Christ himself, the pure and spotless, asked no confession of secret guilt when he forgave. There were things not to be spoken to his human ear, but only to be submitted to his divine eye; dark struggles and sins that must be dumb, that come before him like this woman with tears and groans, and which only know and feel in their muteness that he knows them all. The remedy for the solitary, sinful heart is here. It is to approach so close to Christ, the divine and human, as to feel that he is acquainted with the whole, and can

sustain under the consciousness of it ; to make him a constant partner in all our thoughts, the darkest and the deepest. It is the highest purity which is capable of the tenderest sympathy, and they are both in Christ. He will not despise the sin and misery of those who appeal to him, and he has the power to help them in the conflict. It is thus that God saves the sacredness of our personality, — suffers no human foot to profane the dread solitude reserved for himself, — and yet gives us the presence of a personal human friend in all our lonely struggles.

If we seek that presence, and take that aid, we may reach a state where our souls may lie more unreservedly open to one another than here they can do. It must be part of the happiness of a future world to look deeper into mutual hearts, and to know that we have nothing to pain us in looking, and nothing to shrink from in disclosing. Souls sometimes yearn through their prison bars so to meet, and then it may be safely granted. It may be part of that happiness also to cast the eye down into our former selves and read all the past, while we feel that we have no sympathy with the evil which once dwelt there. It will be regarded as an utterly extinct and alien thing, leaving nothing in the memory but endless gratitude to him who has freed us from it, and a more intense joy in the life which he has bestowed. The course to this is now to submit the whole, with the unreserved transparency of a contrite heart, and with simple faith, to his eye who sees all to pardon it, and to lead from pardon on to purity and perfect peace.



IV.

God's Word suited to Man's Sense of Wonder.

"Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." — PSAL. CXIX. 18.



THE word of God is the great subject of this psalm, and it is surprising how much this man found in it, when we think how small a part of that word was then in his hands. We can only account for it when we light upon a prayer like this, which shows such a desire to use it to full advantage, and an earnest request that God would help him in doing so. The great end of the word of God then, as now, was practical ; but there is a secondary use here referred to, which is worthy of consideration, — its power of meeting man's faculty of wonder. God knows our frame, for he made it, and he must have adapted the Bible to all its parts. If we can show this, it may be another token that the book comes from him who made man ; and it may be an inducement to some who neglect it to study it with more interest, and perhaps lead them to find in it, through the blessing of God, that which is its great subject, eternal life, his free gift.

I. We shall make some remarks on the sense of wonder in man, and on what generally excites it.

That God has bestowed upon man such a faculty we all know. It is one of the first and most constant emotions in our nature. We can see this in children, and in all whose feelings are still fresh and natural. It is the parent of the desire to know, and all through life it is urging men to inquire. There are some who pretend to have risen above wonder, and who put on a stolid apathy whatever may appeal to them in the way of the strange or the grand. It is a very poor affectation, which speaks as little for the clearness of the head as for the warmth of the heart, and which generally takes its revenge in this, that the defrauded feeling seeks nourishment either in trifles or in morbid and unnatural shapes. It is a great thing not to lose the sense of wonder, and yet to keep it for right objects. There is a true and a false cultivation of it, as of everything else, and the true way is to turn it to those things that are simple and noble, where wonder may rise into admiration and affection for the pure and the good. The greatest minds and the truest hearts preserve this feeling fresh to the very last, and go through life finding new cause for intelligent wonder day after day.

The feeling may be excited by different objects. One of the first causes of wonder is the new or unexpected. Man's mind cannot long remain in a state of monotony without something like pain, or, if it does, it is a sign of the low level to which the mind has sunk. It has a craving after the fresh, and God has provided for this in the form of his world. He

has made the works of nature pass before us with a perpetually diversified face. He has created summer and winter, and ordered the sun, so that he has never probably set with the same look since man first saw him. Those works of nature are constantly turning up new subjects of thought and study, and will do during the world's existence; while, at the same time, the world itself is weaving an ever-shifting and many-colored web of history. In all this there is a stimulus to man to lead him to look and think.

A second source of wonder is to be found in things beautiful and grand. This is higher than the mere love of the new, and leads on from wonder to admiration. They are the smaller number who rise to this, and yet there is here a very real and true part of our nature. There is a chord in the human heart to which the beautiful and sublime respond, whether these appear in the material or spiritual world. If we could only take men away for a little out of the dull dead round, and from the corroding and often debasing things that draw them down in their common life, there are objects such as these appealing to them daily and hourly, and asking them if they have not a soul. Rich sunsets and moonlit skies are there, requiring only eyes to see them, and acts of self-devotion and heroism are being performed, and lives of patient suffering led, under our sight, which are as capable of thrilling as anything recorded in history.

There is still a third source of wonder in the mysterious which surrounds man. To feel this, at least to feel it in its truth and depth, calls out a still superior part of our nature, and lifts us above admira-

tion, to awe. It comes from the sense of what we can touch with our thought but cannot comprehend. A reflective mind can take but a very few steps in thinking till it comes upon this. It is not so much that there are things unknown around us, as that there are things unknowable, that there is an infinite and a mystery in the universe which we cannot now penetrate, and which may forever stretch beyond us. The tokens of man's highest nature lie not in his being able to comprehend, but in his ability to feel that there are things which he cannot comprehend, and which he yet feels to be true and real, before which he is compelled to fall down in reverent awe. It is here, above all, that man comes into contact with religion, with a God, with an eternity, and he in whom there is little sense of wonder, or in whom it has been blunted and degraded, will have a proportionately feeble impression of these grand subjects which the soul can feel to be real, but can never fully grasp.

These seem to comprise the chief, if not the entire sources of wonder in man — things new, things beautiful and grand, things mysterious and infinite, appealing to the mind, to the soul, to the spirit with which God has endowed his human creature.

II. We shall now proceed to show that God has made provision for this sense of wonder in his revealed word. We would expect it to be so if the faculty is an original part of human nature, and if there is food for it in God's world. The Bible is from the same Author, it must have the same great

features of wisdom and kindness, and it must be fitted to touch, though in a different proportion, the full breadth of man's nature. Unless it did so, we would have difficulty in believing it to be divine. The Bible exhorts us to consider "the wondrous works of God," and to talk of them all. It represents this as a fitting exercise not only in this world, but in another. As knowledge rises, wonder does not become less, and those who stand on "the sea of glass mingled with fire," sing, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. xv. 3).

The Bible addresses our sense of wonder by constantly presenting the new and unexpected to us. There are some who have a morbid fear of anything novel, and who will have it that the pure gospel lies very much in going a certain round of texts and doctrines in a certain fixed way, a traditionalism which is always leading to another and more dangerous extreme. But this way of looking at the Bible is in accordance neither with its form nor its spirit. As to its form, it has gone on from first to last to add something new and fresh to all it had said before, and if its circle has now closed, it is because it is already wide enough never to become old. There is in it sufficient spiritual truth for man to study and apply with never-failing interest as long as he remains in his present sphere. God closes the Bible as he closes creation in our world, that our field of work may be definite.

In its now completed form it is so constructed as always to offer the incentive of the new. It spreads over such a breadth of time, and such varied phases

of life and thought, and it has such a freedom and naturalness, like that of creation, that we feel we can never exhaust it. The very difficulties connected with its form, which have led to such disputes of criticism and interpretation, have been, we believe, permitted by God that a perpetual interest may be preserved in his word, and that new discoveries may turn up with every fresh research. He chooses that there should be difficulty and discussion rather than stagnation.

And then as to the *spirit* of the Bible, we know how it exhorts us to search, to meditate, to "dig for wisdom, as for hid treasures," which must mean that we should bring out the fresh and unexplored. We know how it compares truth to a running well, which must be because it should be in movement, visiting and watering new pastures. It is, indeed, certain that the principles of the doctrine of Christ (Heb. vi. 1) always remain the same, and yet the apostle exhorts us that we are "to leave them and go on unto perfection," that is, to leave them and yet never to abandon them, as a tree leaves its root and yet never quits hold of it, as it has the vital sap from that constant source, and yet spreads away into branches and blossoms and fruit, without which it could never be a tree, and might as well lie dead. If we think that we honor the Bible by reiterating certain formulas caught from it without taking in the manifold illustrations of God's word, and the manifold applications in human life, we shall find that the Divine life deserts these formulas, and that a class of men spring up who deny in them the truth they have. It would

be well for us then to recognize the craving for what is fresh which exists in the human mind, and to meet it honestly and healthfully, not by going outside God's word, or neglecting the essential truths that are in it, but by taking them and proving that they are filled with an endless variety of interest, when we ask God to give us the ear of the learned, and to waken us morning by morning and spread over them the dew of youth. The good house-holder seeks "to bring out of his treasure things new and old."

While the Bible makes provision for constantly new views of truth, it sets before us also things beautiful and grand, without which the new would be a matter of idle curiosity. Even in regard to the natural world, much of the admiration with which we regard its features has been learned from the word of God. The men of the ancient classical age, so far as we can judge from their writings, had the love of natural scenery imperfectly developed. We find only glimpses of it shut up amid the limitations of human passion and action. With all their pantheism and worship of material powers, the comparative absence of what may be called a feeling of the spirit of nature itself is very remarkable, and would seem to show that creation cannot be appreciated until we have, shining through it, the light of a personal God. We find the love of nature everywhere in the Bible, in the Psalms and Prophets, in the framework of the Gospels, and even in the views of a future existence; and, in the modern world, it is only among Christian nations that it has come out into clear, full form, that it has been set free from human limitation, and has had

cast upon it some reflection of the infinite and divine. In setting free the human soul, the Bible has also liberated nature. Our literature owes far more to this source than it confesses or sees, and if the common mind has awakened to the perception of the tender, the beautiful and sublime in the dew-drops and flowers, in the strength of the everlasting hills, in the calm majesty of the moon walking in brightness, — to the sense of the infinite in the great and wide sea and the depths of the open heaven, it owes much of the feeling, and even of the expression, to the great book which has unclosed the spirit's eye. But far beyond these are the forms of the moral and spiritual with which the Bible is so filled, and which it is its supreme aim to present to men, — what it terms emphatically “the beauty of the Lord” — the pure and merciful, the heroic and self-devoted, singly and in groups, flaming up into great deeds, or flowing on in the calm current of a life; and among these, those transformations the most wonderful, from the impure to the holy, from the meanest human mould to the loftiest shapes of magnanimity and self-devotion. Does any book, or do all other books together present such scenes of moral grandeur and tenderness with such everlasting freshness in them?

And then, if we come to the third source of wonder, that which raises it to awe, it is the peculiar province of the Bible to deal with this. Its aim is, all through, to lead us to such subjects as the soul, and God and the eternal world, and sin, the great mystery and root of mysteries, and the marvellous remedy

which has been provided for it in the descent of the divine nature to the human, that great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh." These are the subjects of never-dying interest round which the thoughts of man can never cease to revolve, because they touch his deepest nature and affect his everlasting destiny. If the "powers of the world to come" have anything in them to excite wonder and awe, the Bible, beyond all other books, holds them in its hand.

It is impossible, in thinking of these things, to forget that there is one centre in which all these elements of wonder in the Bible are found united — Jesus Christ. He is the keystone of its arch, and it falls or stands with him. He is more; he is the firmament that holds all its stars and its brightness. But for him there would have been no Bible, and if we read it without him it has no coherence and no guiding thought. All the struggling aspirations of the ancient church converge to him as rays to a focus, and all the great forces of truth and goodness now in the world emerge from him, whether they know it or not. One of the prophets who spoke of him declares his name to be "Wonderful," "Counselor," and an apostle assures us that "in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." If the claims of Jesus Christ are to be maintained, as they must and will be, it is not by lessening but by enlarging them. We must hold that there is nothing good or true or pure among men but in some way it has its source in him, for "He is the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the

world." The outer circle of human history and the inner circle of the Divine must be read in and regulated by his coming. Every breathing after the Divine life, wherever it appeared, went to him who is "the desire of all nations," and could only come from his own Spirit. When we take this view what a field of ever-growing thought is opened up in Christ! All the aspirations of the human soul, as far as they are natural and just, will be found to be met in him and satisfied. When the Athenians, whose delight it was to hear "some new thing," came to Paul, he preached unto them "Jesus and the resurrection;" and those whose craving is after the fresh may still find room for its gratification in this same study. There is scope enough for it in the preparation for his first coming, the depth of his words, the far-reaching result of his life and death, the application of his principles to man and to human history till the world's close, and in the opening vistas into the eternal beyond. The greatest mind can do but little to such a subject, the course of Christian literature seems only beginning to deal with some parts of it, and we feel that if the bearing of the whole word of God upon Christ, and of Christ upon man, were to be fully treated, the world could not contain the books that should be written.

If we think again of the beautiful, the grand, the mysterious, to speak of them in one, where shall we find such views of them as in the person and life and death of Christ? An atheist who denies his divinity, or the divine in any sense, need not be ashamed to own the exceeding beauty of his life, and may say,

with another meaning than ours, "Thou art fairer than the children of men ;" "The ideal is so beautiful that, alas ! I cannot think it possible ;" and we know the saying of an unbeliever concerning his death, "Jesus Christ died like a god." We who find in him the highest ideal joined to the most perfect reality (for there must be some such union, else the aspirations of man and his struggles will be at perpetual war), we, who hold this, find in him an object of ever-increasing admiration and reverence. The hope of a sinful suffering world, if there be hope at all, must be found when the Divine is seen stooping through him to the human, the infinitely holy to the low and the lost, and when the love of the Father flows out to his ungrateful and rebellious children in the life and death of the Eternal Son. There is room in this, not for the wonder of earth only, but of heaven. New studies and new songs spring up from it there, and all his holy and intelligent creatures find a fresh light cast upon his relations to them, in coming ages and in distant worlds.

III. We come now, in the last place, to the means we are to use in order to have God's Word thus unfolded. The prayer of the Psalmist may be our guide — "Open thou mine eyes that I may see."

Now, here it may be remarked that he asks for no new revelation. It was in God's hand to give this, and he did it in his own time to those ancient believers; but to all of them at every time there was enough given for the purposes of life. The request is not for more, but that he may employ well that

which he possesses. Still better does such a form of request suit us, to whom life and immortality have been brought to light in Christ. If we do not find sufficient to exercise our thoughts with constant freshness, and our soul with the grandest and most attractive subjects, it is because we want the eyesight. It is of great importance for us to be persuaded of this truth, that there are many things in the Bible still to be found out, and that if we come in the right spirit, we may be made discoverers of some of them. These things disclose themselves, not so much to learning, though that is not to be despised, as to spiritual insight, to a humble, loving heart. And this at least is certain, that we shall always find things that are new to ourselves. However frequently we traverse the field, we shall perceive some fresh golden vein turning up its glance to us, and we shall wonder how our eyes were formerly holden that we did not see it. It was all there waiting for us, and we feel that more is waiting, if we had the vision. There is a great Spirit in it that holds deeper converse with our souls. This, to a true student, may be a token not merely of divinity in the substance of the Bible, but of an inspiring breath, define it as we will, which has presided over the form.

This further may be observed, that the Psalmist asks for no new faculty. The eyes are there already, and they need only to be opened. It is not the bestowal of a new and supernatural power which enables a man to read the Bible to profit, but the quickening of a power he already possesses. In one view it is supernatural, as God is the author of the illumination

by a direct act of his Spirit ; in another it is natural, as it operates through the faculties existing in man's soul. God gives " the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, that the eyes of man's understanding may be enlightened " (Eph. i. 17). It is important to remember this also, for here lies our responsibility, that we have the faculty, and here also is the point at which we must begin action with the help of God. A man will never grow into the knowledge of God's word by idly waiting for some new gift of discernment, but by diligently using that which God has already bestowed upon him, and using at the same time all other helps that lie within his reach. There are men and books that seem, beyond others, to have the power of aiding insight. All of us have felt it in the contact of some affinity of nature which makes them our best helpers ; the kindred clay upon the eyes by which the great Enlightener removes our blindness (John ix. 6). Let us seek for such, and if we find them let us employ them without leaning on them. Above all, let us give our whole mind in patient, loving study to the book itself ; and where we fail, at any essential part, God will either send his evangelist Philip to our aid (Acts viii.) or instruct us himself. But it is only to patient, loving study that help is given. God could have poured all knowledge into us by easy inspiration ; but it is by earnest search alone that it can become the treasure of the soul.

But if so, it may still be asked, what is the meaning of this prayer ? and why does the Bible itself insist so often on the indispensable need of the Spirit

of God to teach? Now, there is a side here as true as the other, and in no way inconsistent with it. If prayer without effort would be presumptuous, effort without prayer would be vain. The great reason why men do not feel the power and beauty of the Bible is a spiritual one. They do not realize the grand evil which the Bible has come to cure, and they have not a heart to the blessings which it offers to bestow. The film of a fallen nature, self-maintained, is upon their eyes while they read. "The eyes of their understanding are darkened, being alienated from the life of God" (Eph. iv. 18). All the natural powers will never find the true key to the Bible, till the thoughts of sin and redemption enter the heart, and are put in the centre of the book. It is the part of the Father of lights, by the teaching of his Spirit, to give this to the soul; and he will, if it humbly approaches him with this request. Thus we shall study, as one might a book with the author at hand, to set forth the height of its argument, or as one might look on a noble composition, when the artist breathes into us a portion of his soul, to let us feel the centre of its harmonies of form and color. Those who have given to the Bible thought and prayer will own that these are not empty promises.

We may say in the close, that there are two classes of persons who may learn something from this prayer of the Psalmist. There are those first — and many of them good Christians — who do not take so large a view of the Bible as they ought. They confine themselves to some doctrines and precepts, central and needful, and they read the Bible to find these in

constantly recurring forms, just as some men look on flowers chiefly as verifying some botanical theory. This reduces the book of God to a set of doctrinal moulds, and often makes what should be the most interesting of all books, one to which they have to urge themselves by a constraint of conscience, when they might be drawn to it by the attraction of constant freshness and growing beauty. For our own sakes, and for the sake of presenting it in its true light to the world, let us seek to study it in all the vividness of life and variety of color, with which God has set it forth. The special want of our time is to make the Bible more human without making it less divine. Christ and the great truths of his gospel must always stand in the centre and pervade the whole ; but we should seek to make them do it, as the Bible itself does, touching man's nature and his history in every varied way. There is no Christian, however humble, who may not grow into the habit of such a study of the Bible, and thus make it to himself not only a divinely true, but an ever new book ; life in its heart, manifold light in all its modes of presentation, till he can enter into the spirit of this same speaker, "O, how love I thy law ; it is my study all the day."

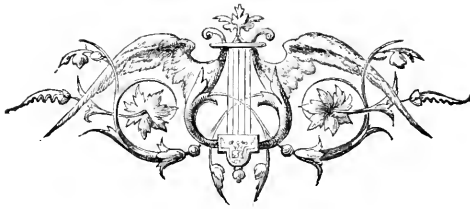
There is, however, still another class who may have given much thought to the Bible, and obtained from it fresh views of man and nature and God, but they have not yet lifted up the heart with this petition, "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." They have not felt their need of any such enlightenment, because they have not felt the presence of sin, nor realized the darkness that it

pours over the spiritual vision. It is much to be feared that this class is a large, and in our days an increasing one. The progress of a kind of moral education, and the decent restraints of society, have had such a general outward effect upon character that numbers take rest in this, and go no further. They very willingly use the Bible as a book of culture, but they do not think of its one great end, — the deliverance of human nature from the terrible penalty and taint of sin. Yet, till this is felt and sought, the book for its main purpose lies all unread. Any interest found in it without this has narrow limits. It cannot go very deep nor last very long. It is when sin and redemption are seen to be its burden, that it receives an interest and grandeur as deep as the nature of the soul, and as large as eternity. If there are some who feel or who fear that there is a spiritual disease within them yet little thought of, and a depth in the Bible not yet dealt with, let them ask of its author the divine eye-salve with which he anoints the eyes. Its first revelations may be unwelcome, and men may be startled to see how fancied wealth and fulness sink into spiritual poverty and misery.

But continued vision will open up divine remedies, gold tried in the fire, and white raiment, the value of which will only be enhanced by growing insight. And all the discoveries of the Bible will have this to commend them, that they speak to us in the language of personal friendship and love. They come laden with messages from the heart of the great God, and as his truths are new, his compassions which are in them “are new also every morning.” When he

opens our eyes to see his greatness it is like the chariots and horses of fire ranged on the surrounding mountains for our safety, and when he reveals the tenderness of his character, it is, like the well revealed to Hagar in the desert, ready for our consolation. Of all the new things which his word has promised, let us desire first that new heart which insures the new eyesight. It is brought nearer to us than ever before, by him who has come as the life of men that he may be their light (John i. 4). " And Jesus stood and commanded him to be brought unto him, and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight and followed him, glorifying God " (Luke xviii. 40-43).





V.

Increase of Knowledge, Increase of Sorrow.

“He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” — Ecc. i. 18.

THIS is a very strange declaration to come from the man who had made wisdom his choice, as the supreme thing in life, and who had been approved of by God for the decision. He had prosecuted the study of knowledge with all ardor, and was rewarded with success. He knew every plant, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop which springeth from the wall, and the Book of Proverbs proves his acquaintance with the heart of man. How are we to explain this? The explanation lies in this, that in the present utterance God is left out of view. The Book of Ecclesiastes is a dialogue between two men, or two states of mind, in which, at one time, scepticism prevails, and, at another time, faith; and here we have a view of knowledge without faith. As Solomon had attempted to find happiness without God, he had tried to find wisdom also without Him. None ever tried it under better auspices. He had the highest

powers of mind, and the largest resources at command. But he failed in this too, that he might be brought back to the true wisdom from which he had wandered: — “Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” The declaration of the text, then, may be considered as the expression of a soul that seeks satisfaction in mere earthly knowledge. We shall attempt to illustrate it by the various fields of human inquiry.

I. *Mere earthly knowledge is unsatisfactory in its nature.* — Take as an illustration of this the field of creation. There is around man in space a world with facts and laws which he feels impelled to study. He must arrange and generalize the facts, and trace the laws from lower up to higher. It is work made for him, and there is happiness in the prosecution of it. But to be told, or to be made to feel, that there is nothing but facts and laws, would not this be sorrowful? And the higher he rises in research, and finds that there is nothing more, would it not be increase of sorrow? The knowledge of facts and laws can employ man’s reason, but it cannot ultimately satisfy it, and still less can it soothe his soul, or meet the longings of his spirit. This deeper part of his nature cries out for nourishment, and it will not take a stone for bread. How sad would this be, to be enlarging our vision of endless mechanism, but never to come in sight of a great intelligent Maker? — to perceive wondrous life in worlds around and beneath, but no life above nor before: life only tending to death, and never reflecting a life that lives for ever? — rain-drops

dripping in a vault, and gravitating eternally to darkness, but no dew-drops returning the look of God, and drawn up as by sunbeams to his presence? How solitary would it be to ascend amid all the spheres, and learn only names of forces, and hear the din of iron wheels, and never feel a heart beating through them, nor listen to a voice like that of the angels singing together as the sons of God, and shouting for joy from world to world? Law everywhere cannot permanently satisfy man without a Lawgiver; order, without a primordial reason; forms of skill and beauty, without a great Thinker, from whom they are emanations, and whom our own thoughts can touch, as they touch kindred souls, till we can say, "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God!"

II. *Mere earthly knowledge is painful in its contents.* — For an illustration of this, we may go from creation to history, from space to time. Here we have to contemplate man in his wonderful works and ways, the crown of this lower world, who studies its laws and softens its rudeness, and adds new touches to its face of beauty. Let us think what the world would be without man to comprehend it by science, and represent it in art, and cast over it the glow of imagination, making it a better, brighter world than the sun shines on; and yet not so, for that beauty must in some way be there if man discovers it. God has hidden it, and given to man the faculty, that he may have the pleasure of finding it out.

And yet how melancholy is the history of man when written down! Such oppression and wrong, and suf-

fering and crime, and ever-engulfing death! How sad to disentomb Egyptian and Assyrian monuments, and gaze on endless trains of miserable captives and insulting conquerors, and to see events writing similar subjects for history even now! Is this all? If the thought of God comes, there is some security for progress, some hope even of retrieval. With all the mystery there is not despair. The past is not utterly past. The ruins of nations become like the strata that are platforms for new worlds, and their ruins have had a life in them which is still capable of reconstruction. Take away our hope in God, and history becomes a sea of tumbling billows, dark and shoreless; nations rising only to fall; great souls shooting across the horizon like dying meteors; and all the spiritual longings of the past written down but to tell us of the vanity of our own efforts. We could bear to study history only as we forget all the higher ends it might serve as a school of training for immortal souls, and as the steps of a Divine Architect through the broken scaffolding and scattered stone-wreck upward to a finished structure. The very glimpse of this is reviving, but to give up at once Architect and end, and see human lives shattered and strewn across weary ages, and human hearts torn and bleeding, with no abiding result, this surely would fill a thoughtful mind with pain. The more of such history, the more of sorrow.

III. *Mere earthly knowledge is hopeless in its issue.*— For an illustration of this we may take the field of abstract thought. The ultimate object of man's search is to find the centre of knowledge which commands

the whole field. The man who begins the search after truth is generally more satisfied with his progress than he who has been long in the course. Those things which, like the stem of a tree, seem simple and easily grasped, spread away beneath into interminable roots, where we can never count them all nor reach the end of any one. Let a man try to master a single subject, and he will find it so. The road becomes longer and the field wider as he proceeds. Side-paths strike off, related sciences penetrate his special subjects of study, which must be known if he is to understand his own department thoroughly, till he feels how "brief is life and how long is knowledge." No mind can touch all these things, far less contain them. The more one knows the more one feels it; and the wider human science grows as a whole, the less is the portion that can be overtaken by each individual. It is surely painful to reflect that if there be not an infinite mind, the universe can never, even as a material thing, be comprehended in thought. Each mind is like a glow-worm with its little spot of light round it, but there is no broad sun pouring illumination on the whole. It would then be no *universe*, no one thing to any one mind; and the increase of knowledge would only make this more apparent, showing the unknown to be always more than the known.

And if a man should feel impelled to go beyond the surface of things, and to inquire into the origin of being and the end of all things, without accepting a God, doubt and darkness would only gather at every step. If he is sustained by faith — by that magnetic attraction of the soul to God which goes straight to

Him by an intuition of the nature — he can keep his hold in the midst of maze and obscurity. However pleasant sight may be, it is not indispensable where he can feel, where he is assured that there is one Mind which grasps all from end to end, and to whose infinite reach his own finite spirit can advance for ever. At one bound his soul gains the centre, and then his reason can patiently travel up to it, and calmly wait the removal of every difficulty. But let a man renounce this, and seek the origin and end of things without God, and doubt grows as search deepens, for doubt is on the face of all things if it be in the heart of the inquirer. With no lamp in the soul there is no light in the world. His own being and end become an increasing perplexity. He grows in unquietness and irresolution, which men do not feel who have not entered on such a search. As he enlarges the circumference of knowledge he enlarges the encircling darkness, and even the knowledge yields no ray of true satisfaction.

IV. *Mere earthly knowledge is discouraging in its personal results.* — We may consider here the moral nature of man. Earthly science can do very much to improve man's external circumstances. It can occupy his reason, it can refine and gratify his taste; but there are greater wants that remain. If the man seeks something to fill and warm his heart, all the wisdom of this world is only a cold phosphorescence. He pursues its waters like thirsty Tantalus, and they touch his lips and flee from them. He must say with Goethe, "Alas that the yonder is never here!" The tree of knowl-

edge never becomes the tree of life. Man may bury the sense of this disappointment in intellectual toil; but in some yearning, thoughtful hour the conviction comes that the head may be filled with knowledge and the heart be a painful void; that one look of the living God would outweigh acquaintance with all his works.

And if the man have an impression of the value of a moral element in human nature, experience proves how little way he can advance in moving others or himself, if God and the soul's true worth be left out of view. We know what Christianity has done for the humblest and most abject by the recognition of these; but we have yet to see what mere science and taste can do without them. To increase one's knowledge of human nature, with the feeling that there is no basis of spiritual principle in it, — that we are creating a surface of intelligence and refinement with no substance of *soul-life* beneath, is surely not an increase of joy to any one who considers to what height the possession of a spirit might raise man. It is remarkable that the great dramatist has made Hamlet, who had most knowledge of this sort, one of the most unhappy of his characters. To have our view of human nature consolatory, we must feel that there is in it a spark of the Divine.

If the man is desirous to have his own moral nature rise to a noble elevation, he must be equally disappointed with the result of bare knowledge; not merely with what is accomplished by it, for here we may all be sad enough, but with what is promised by it. It may have its negative value in occupying thought and

time, which might be devoted to ignoble uses ; but it cannot conquer passion, nor renew a nature that has felt the degradation of sin. The great heights of holiness may sometimes rise before such a man, and the sublime form of duty may gleam out and beckon him to the sun-lit peak of perfection ; but there is no power, out of God, to help him to it, — “ The depth saith it is not in me,” and such an ideal, rising without the power or hope to reach it, can only fill the man with a more profound sadness.

V. *Mere earthly knowledge has so brief a duration.* — Here we may contemplate life as a whole. If the thought of God be admitted, all real knowledge has the stamp of immortality. His touch turns the world’s commonest things to gold, and his image and super-scription coin them in heaven’s mint and make them current for all time. The happy seeker of truth is he who feels that in gaining it he is taking possession of a perpetual treasure, and beginning a quest which is to be enlarged by a new life in new words. But if there be nothing of this, “ in one day all man’s thoughts perish,” — “ The wise man dieth and the fool also.” The sweeter truth is to the taste, the more bitter must be the thought of leaving the pursuit of it for ever.

“ It is
 A tower that crowns a country. But, alas !
 The soul now climbs it, just to perish there,
 For thence we have discovered, ’tis no dream,
 That there’s a world of capability
 For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,
 Inviting us : and still the soul craves all,
 And death replies — Take no jot more
 Than ere thou climbed’st the tower to look abroad.”

Now, it is very true that there are some men who pursue earthly knowledge with unwearied ardor, and who seem to have none of these sensations of disappointment in view of what we feel to be its shallowness without a God, and its shortness without an immortality. They follow it with deepest interest, rejoice in its acquisition, and die without an apparent regret. What are we to say to this? If we knew all and could pierce beneath the seeming indifference, which becomes at times a philosophical fashion, we might find the same instinct in them as in other men — the yearning cry of the heart for an infinite Friend and an eternal life. We would rather believe it so. To deny these high hopes may be some sad perversion of the intellect, but to slight them gives a view of human nature which affects one with something like dismay. If the indifference be assumed, it is a poor enough affectation; but the learned as well as unlearned have their weaknesses. There were great heathens who were free from it, whom the very conception of immortality fired to enthusiasm; and it is a pity there should be those, under the light of Christianity, who take this way of showing that they are superior to vulgar hopes. But if there be some who have brought their inward feelings down to such an outward fashion, and who are really as indifferent to God and immortality as they seem, their case cannot affect the general rule. Every man must here judge from the testimony of his own nature, and the humblest have the elements of decision as near them as the most learned. In some respects they have them nearer, for the constant study of material law leads a man to exaggerate and idolize it, unless he

maintain that spiritual insight and that communion with his soul which are the proper counterpoise. Material laws may be made, not a window through which to look out at the real universe, but a dead wall to hide it. After all, it is a question in which the head cannot answer without inquiring at the heart. It is this, Can any progress of earthly science reconcile us to the loss of God and of the hope of immortality? and we feel assured that, with the immense mass of men, when their inner nature is truly consulted, the answer would be found here — “The increase of knowledge is the increase of sorrow.” Whatever we may come to know, if God be not, and earth be all, “Vanity of vanities” is the epitaph of life.

There are others, again, who accept this conclusion sorrowfully, in some such way as this speaker seems to have done. They say, “It is true that the aspirations of faith are the grandest thing in our nature, but the progress of reason, in our researches, appears to thrust them ever further from us. Our eternal hopes are slowly perishing before the remorseless march of science and criticism, and we can but weep over their grave.” It is impossible here to enter on so large a question, but this may be observed, that there have been, and there are, men whose names stand highest in human knowledge, who have found it not only possible, but necessary, to unite science and faith — to believe at the same time in a universe of law, and in an infinite all-controlling Spirit. They have felt that only by admitting both, can they account for the facts around and within them.

One way to attain to this is to look on law not as

occupying the place of the spiritual element, thrusting it back, as it were, from one domain to another till it leaves it no foothold, but as itself the revelation of the spiritual agency which is working everywhere and always. God hides Himself *behind* law, and yet reveals Himself *through* it, for every fresh discovery brings us face to face with power directed by intelligence.

The next thing, and still more important, is to question our own inner nature regarding its need of a God, and all that He can do for it. There are facts which reveal themselves here as real as any in the external world, and which are far too deep, too constant and universal, to be set aside as fancies. In this region the greatest philosopher and the humblest mind stand upon common and equal ground—the requirements of the heart and conscience, and the everlastingly momentous questions of sin and duty, with the *whence* and the *whither* of the soul of man. God meets all men here on the same grand level, and Christ returned special thanks for this, that He revealed Himself not to “the wise and prudent,” that is, not to them as such, but unto babes. If human wisdom has the grace, for the time, to forget itself and to commune reverently with the sense of spiritual need, side by side with common humanity, it will find the presence of a God of life and love as readily as the most unlearned, and then no union on earth or in heaven can be nobler than that of the lofty intellect and lowly heart, fearing no path of inquiry, and rejoicing everywhere to find the footsteps of God.

Let this further be considered, whether it is reasonable to suppose that man should be formed to love

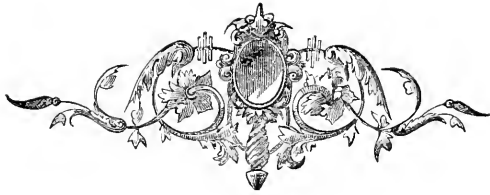
knowledge and pursue it, and yet that knowledge should only increase his sorrow! It would do this, though it were to give him the utmost he could contain of the finite, and end by robbing him of the infinite; for the share that a life's research can yield us of this world's science must be felt to be incalculably less than the prospect of eternal progress. The man would then act wisely who followed the example of the magnanimous king, when he surrendered all his conquests to his captains, and reserved for himself *hope*. There are some things, the idea of which is a greater power and joy than all material possessions; and, among these, the chief are, God and an eternal life. This would be true, were they no more than an idea, how much higher when they can be felt even here as a fixed reality.

It is so, then, that man is urged on to the search after knowledge, and nothing can stay him from it. To learn is one of the deep, insatiable thirsts of his nature; and yet, to learn on these conditions would be to grow in pain and doubt. Can an all-wise Nature, not to name a God, have made him thus, and established this everlasting disharmony between the impulse of his mind and the craving of his heart? It cannot be imagined, and therefore there must be a way of reconciliation. It is to include God in the universe, and to behold spirit behind matter everywhere. It is to feel that the present life is an education for souls, and that all the mysteries of time can find their solution in eternity. Then the impulse to know is seen to be the gift of God, and becomes filled with peace and

hope. It is there because truth is to be found; and truth is not death, but life. Creation becomes then instinct with spiritual meaning, and history receives a key, and thought is based on reality, and moral power keeps pace with mental progress, and the conviction comes that whatever is interrupted in the lessons of this life shall be resumed again; for God's broken tables are always rewritten, and when the stone records perish they pass within into spirit and life. Let us but take God into our system, and man's highest ideal becomes real, for God's performance must be above man's thought. If so be that we take God into our system—and can we refuse this?—it is not merely to put a controlling mind into the universe, but a throbbing heart. To reveal this to us, the Divine Wisdom left the Father's bosom and came down — “rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men.” His life and death and revival are the power of God and the wisdom of God, and open a new world in the soul of man greater than that around him. Let us but take Him into our heart, and how sweet shall all “the words of knowledge be unto our taste!” A break will appear in the clouds of darkest doubt, a new light on sea and shore, and the door of death be changed into the gate of a glorious temple where study and adoration walk side by side, and angels who know clasp hands with angels who burn. If now for a time these seem separated, it is but for a time. The age of faith without knowledge may for a while have its recoil in the pride of a knowledge that undervalues faith,

but the soul must assert its rights, and God cannot be dethroned, and light shall rejoice in life, and “wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of our times and strength of salvation — and the fear of the Lord our treasure.”





VI.

God Declining First Offers of Service.

“And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.” — JOSHUA xxiv. 19.



IF there be any one thing true in the Bible, it is that God welcomes the very first approach which man makes to Him. The Bible has no other end than to give men the invitation to return to God. Christ, who fills the Bible from first to last, has no word on his lips but “Come;” and God himself has declared: “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” Yet here Joshua offers a repulse to men who wish to avow themselves on the side of God. Are we to suppose that he spoke unadvisedly? He was a wise man; it was a solemn and well-weighed occasion; and there is every ground for believing that he was under Divine direction. Are we to conclude, then, that the people were insincere? We have no evidence of this, but the reverse, in their

subsequent conduct. There must be some reason for the manner in which they are met, and we shall try to discover it.

First, however, we shall seek to show that this procedure on the part of God is not so unusual. If we can do so it will bring the matter more home to ordinary experience, and make the consideration of it more practical.

A number of instances might easily be found in the Bible of such obstacles thrown in the way of men who offer themselves to the service of God. You may recollect how the band of Gideon was chosen. Not all who presented themselves were accepted, but time after time the troop was cut down till three hundred alone remained as God's chosen soldiers. When the wise men from the East came seeking Christ, the star seemed to desert them, and they met with disappointment and perplexity from all their inquiries in Jerusalem. When the Jews, stirred up to expect the coming Messiah, sent messengers to John, in the hope that they had found their desire, "he confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ." We cannot forget the strange treatment of the woman of Canaan by the Lord himself; how she cried after Him, and was not answered, and met at length what appeared a contemptuous rejection. In the same way He acted to the scribe who came to Him with such an unconditional offer of discipleship: "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." "This is no common pleasure-walk," was the reply; "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." And after his

resurrection, when He accompanied the two who were going to Emmaus, and they were about to enter the house, "He made as though He would have gone further." They needed "to constrain Him" before He went in "to tarry with them." Such examples might be multiplied to almost any extent, and they show that coldness to first offers of approach is not an uncommon thing in the path of those who seek God.

There is another way of finding the same result in the Bible. Consider, for example, the view that is given of the character of God. He is presented to us not only as good, and ready to forgive, but as just and righteous, — a God who cannot look on sin without displeasure. For a long time this is the most prominent view. Sinai casts a great shadow, and prolongs its thunders, before the gospel comes distinctly with its still small voice of peace. There are many terrible threatenings, many dreadful judgments against sin and sinners, which have all this language in them: "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God." Even in Calvary, Sinai is not forgotten. The steps of the earthquake are felt beneath the Cross, thick darkness overshadows it, a piercing voice that tells of the fearful evil of sin descends from it, and we are addressed in the gospel: "Wherefore let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 28, 29).

When we leave Bible representations, and come to the experience of individuals, we meet with many similar illustrations. In regard to the general evidence of the divinity of the Bible, we can see that

God has not constructed it on the plan of overpowering the conviction of any man at first sight. Many men feel great difficulties about it, and it would be false to say that these men are insincere. They often come with a true desire to find God's way, and put themselves among his servants, and yet they are met with obstacles, outside the Bible and inside it, which keep them standing and struggling for a long time. There is no use in denying this, or in casting obloquy and suspicion on every misgiving. It is far better to be brought to see that this is in accordance with the plan of the Bible, in many other instances, — that there is after all a way of overcoming honest doubts and reaching perfect certainty, — and that there are wise ends gained by the method God has chosen. And even when a man has come to the entire conviction that the gospel is Divine, that there is "none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus Christ," he is not assured thereby of perfect peace of heart. Many a one has to cry again and again for his soul, as the woman of Canaan for her child, before he is heard, or has to lift his voice like the blind men by the wayside, and has to endure the rebukes of the passers-by, and the silence of Christ, till his eyes are opened. To speak of entire comfort and acceptance being found at first, and always, when a man comes to Christ, would be to offend against the generation of God's children, and to wrong the experience of many of the most earnest inquirers. And then, though a man may trust that he is resting upon the mercy of God in Christ, and that he has been fully and freely pardoned, there may come a

deep sense of responsibility at the thought of taking upon himself the vows of Christian service. There is a light and easy way of doing it on the part of some, without considering very well what is required, or what may be the consequences to the name of Christ if they walk unworthy of it. Many profess Christianity with far more irreverence than some others keep aloof from it. The highest thing, indeed, is to feel it to be dutiful, and advance to it deliberately and in humble reliance on the grace of God; but there are thoughtful and self-distrustful natures which have long and deep shrinking, because their eye has seen the purity of God and the poverty of self. It was the feeling of the centurion, — “Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof;” and of Peter, when his natural boldness failed him at sight of Christ’s majesty, — “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Within certain limits the feeling is true, and most becoming. It is God repeating in a humble heart the words of Joshua: “Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God.”

Second, Having sought to show that this procedure, on the part of God, is not so unusual, we may now attempt to find some reasons for it.

As a first reason we may assign this, that *it sifts the true from the false seeker*. We refer here not to arriving at the profession of Christianity, but at the principle of it in the heart. Many reach the profession who have never found the reality, and some find the reality who never make the profession. We speak of a man arriving at the root and ground of Christianity in his heart and character. It seems part of God’s plan

that this should not be reached without struggle, in order that the spiritual element in the new man may be tested. We are told of Christ when He entered the world that He was "to be set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which should be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." The gospel comes into the world to be a touchstone of human nature — to be Ithuriel's spear among men. There is enough in it to attract and convince at last every man who has a sense of spiritual need and a desire of spiritual deliverance, but it is presented in such a form as to try whether the soul really possesses this, and therefore we may have obstacles of various kinds at the very entrance. "When Pliable and Christian came to the Slough of Despond which lay before the wicket-gate, they both fell in and wallowed for a time in the mire, unable to escape. Pliable was offended, and angrily said to his fellow: Is this the happiness you have told us of all this while? So, after a desperate struggle or two he got out of the mire on that side of the Slough which was next his own house, and away he went, and Christian saw him no more. But Christian endeavored to struggle to that side of the Slough which was furthest from his own house, and next to the wicket-gate, and so he escaped and came at last upon sound ground." Both of them met with discouragement, but this made the difference, that Christian struggled to the side of the Slough which was "furthest from his own house and nearest to the wicket-gate." He did not give up for the first repulse, because his desire was to be out of sin, and beyond it, and to find God, and so he "came at last upon dry ground."

It may seem a strange and unworthy thing that such an obstacle should meet a man in the very commencement of such a journey; but, after all, let it be remembered that what makes it an obstacle is the state of heart of the man himself. The Slough is not so much to be found without the heart as within it, and if one followed up the matter to its source we should find that the difficulty was not on the side of God, but in the soul of the individual. This further may be said, that no one will be able to complain of any real wrong from such obstacles. The false seeker is not injured, because he never sincerely sought at all. There was no sense of sin's evil, no wish to be saved from it, and till this exists nothing can be sought, and nothing found. The true seeker is not injured, for never was such an one disappointed. When the flickering phosphorescence glimmers out, the spark, although as faint as in the smoking flax, lives on and rises to a flame. True need asks and seeks and knocks, increases its appeal with every difficulty, cries after Christ like the woman of Canaan, and wrestles till it conquers at the breaking of the day.

Next, *it leads the true seeker to examine himself more thoroughly.* If a man is accepted, or thinks he is accepted, at once, he takes many things for granted which it would be well for him to inquire into. Very specially is this the case in regard to the nature of sin, and the light in which God regards it. Almost all the errors of our time, or of any time, have their root here, and it would be well for many to be sent back for reflection with the words of Joshua—"He is an holy God, He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your

transgressions nor your sins." Not that Joshua would lead them to doubt God's mercy, but he would have them to see that it is a more difficult question than men in general fancy. The easy complacency with which some talk of pardon, and their assurance of it, often springs more from dulness of conscience than strength of faith. They have not stood and studied the great subjects of the sinfulness of sin and the terrible havoc it has made, of the inflexible claims of law, and the grandeur and terror of the view of a God of justice of whose nature moral law is an essential and unbending part. They have never looked on Sinai till they have felt that they are under the curse, nor on God's purity till they have cried out, "Behold I am vile." It is said, and said truly, that a man will learn these things most perfectly in the light of the cross of Christ; but it is also true that unless he knows and feels something of them already the cross of Christ will have no light for him. We cannot think too highly of the mercy of God, or cast ourselves on it too soon, but we shall never understand it nor cast ourselves on it at all until we feel something of the evil of sin and the claims of the law of God. The vague and careless talk about a God of mercy, so much indulged in by multitudes, has spread the conception of a gospel that is no gospel, which neither reveals to man the infinite compassion of God, nor his infinite abhorrence of moral evil, deliverance from which is the one only salvation. The natural result of such a defective view is, that when a man enlists with it in God's service, he does so without any distinct idea of what he is to aim at. He is very ready to think that the

great end of the gospel is to deliver him from a certain amount of suffering and procure him a certain quantity of happiness. He does not see that the gospel binds us to the service of a God of truth and purity, and that only in this way can its blessings be enjoyed. When we accept the gospel, we not only receive something from God, we give something to Him. In the language of the apostle, "we yield ourselves unto God." Where this is forgotten altogether, where service is passed by, it is what the apostle terms "receiving the grace of God in vain," and, where it is put into the background, it produces a weak, sinewless Christianity, which seeks a comfortable home for itself, and does small work for the cause of either God or man. It is very good for a man, then, if he is in danger of too hasty acquiescence, that he should be compelled to examine himself both about his view of God's character in the pardon of sin, and what this requires of him in the way of self-surrender to God.

Further, *it binds a man to his profession by a stronger sense of consistency.* There is a paper of obligations put into our hands to sign, and, when we take the pen, we are bidden read it over and ponder it, that we may subscribe with clear consciousness of the contents. God will beguile no man into his service by false pretences. He stops us when we would rush into it thoughtlessly, tells us the nature of the work, what his own character gives Him a right to expect of us, and then, if we still go forward, He can say, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve Him," and we are compelled to own "we are witnesses." There is nothing that a Christian man

meets with in his course through life, however difficult or painful, but he might have anticipated it all if he had only studied the chart drawn out in the Word of God. He need never complain that "some strange thing has happened to him." If he encounters worldly losses, cross-currents which try his patience and temper, sore bereavements that lay waste his heart, it was written down, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." If his adherence to principle should make him disliked by some, and smiled at by others, he might have known it—"They shall speak evil of you falsely, for my name's sake;" and if we have much less of this than Christ foretold, it may be very much because we are not acting up to what Christ enjoined. If there are inward assaults of evil thoughts or hours of languor and depression, God's Word has spoken of "fiery darts," of "hands that hang down and feeble knees." If sometimes these accumulate and threaten utter ruin, we may be reminded of "deep calling unto deep," of the "great fight of afflictions," and that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Probably none of us realize these things fully till they come upon us, and then we open the Bible and read it with a new light, but it is well for us to have at least some idea of them beforehand, that we may be kept from the murmurs and backsliding of men taken by utter surprise. And so, in different ways, by outward warnings in the Bible and inward difficulties of heart, God brings men to a pause till they fully consider the case and count the cost. Then "we are witnesses against ourselves." We knew it, or we might have known it. We have put our hand to the plough, and we cannot go back.

Lastly, *it educates us to a higher growth and greater capacity of happiness.* When we see the wind shaking a young tree, and bending it to the very earth, it may seem to be retarding its rise, but it is furthering it. It is making it strike its roots deeper into the ground, that its stem may rise higher and stronger, till it can struggle with tempests, and spread its green leaves to a thousand summers. The winds and storms are the educators of the tree no less than the sunbeams and the dew. In the intellectual world a strong mind thrives on difficulties. There is no falser method of education than to make all smooth and easy, and remove every stone before the foot touches it. God himself has hidden the knowledge of his creation in the depths of the sky and the bosom of the earth. He has demanded toil and travail, keen and patient thought, till study has become a weariness to the flesh, in order that man's intellect may rise to its proper stature. It would have been a strange thing if the spiritual world had been an exception. Even in an unfallen state, if there is to be a progressive nature, there must be struggle, and if struggle there must be obstacles. Much more where the alloy of sin has entered and needs to be smelted out by the hot furnace. And, therefore, God who sets man to battle with Nature, "that hard nurse," and to win the bread of knowledge from her by the sweat of brain, enters the lists Himself as an antagonist to the soul, that He may call out all its energies, and make it a more worthy child and heir. The time is not past when He comes down to wrestle in the seasons of the night with men, to be a seeming opponent to them in the great conflicts of the soul, and

not surrender his blessing until it has sometimes been wrung from Him by agonies of importunity; but all the while He wrestles on their side, and draws out their strength that it may lay hold of his, and so prevail. Nor can we surely forget another agony, that of Christ himself, which had in it a part that was peculiarly his own, but a part also that is common to us, if we are to share his sufferings and enter fully into his joy. He had his conflict with a hidden face, from which the veil could be drawn only by strong crying and tears; and, in proportion as we have fellowship with Him in this, we become "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;" and then it follows, as the apostle declares (Eph. iii. 16, 19), that "we are filled with all the fulness of God." This is the course appointed to those whom God would make very strong and very glad, and, so far as we can see in this world, there is a necessary chain in it.

Read the manner in which such men as Paul and Luther and Pascal passed through the gate of life, not easily and complacently, but with fears within and fightings without, and you will see how God made them grow such men as they became. And, though we are far distant from that mark, very humble plants in the garden of God beside those great trees of righteousness, yet, if we are to rise to any thing, it must be in the same way, not by soft indulgent nurture, but by endurance of hardship, and pressing on against repulse. It is very sore to do it at times, sorest of all, when the coldness and repulse are from God. "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?" (Job xiii. 24). But it is then that the soul's strength

rises most conspicuous, and becomes, through God's grace, competent to struggle with God himself; "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." It is to this issue God wishes to bring it, and then He gladly gives way. "The kingdom of heaven," as Christ has declared, "suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," that the man may prove himself the better soldier, and receive of God at last a brighter crown.

It is in entire accordance with all these things that a bar is here thrown, for a time, across the path of these Israelites, in the words of Joshua, "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God; He will not forget your transgressions nor your sins." There are most blessed truths in the Bible which assure us that God is ever first to seek, that He is ready to save, and that His salvation is free as it is priceless; but there is another side of truth in the Word of God which needs also to be brought out — that numbers feel difficulty in entering the way of life, and that God himself does not at once give them a conscious sense that He has accepted their service. If we were to affirm the reverse it would be a false view of the gospel, and against the experience of many who are seeking God very sincerely. I do believe that all the while He is most willing to receive, — far more willing than the seeker is to be accepted; but He has his own ways of leading men to Himself, and may appear to withdraw that He may attract the more strongly, and to hide that He may be found in truer and deeper possession.

If there be some who have been seeking God, as they think, in vain, and have given up the search as fruitless, what can we do but urge them to renew the

application? Come, as these Israelites did, with the words, "Nay; but we will serve the Lord." I can suppose a twofold class who have ceased to seek. There are some, perhaps, with a feeling of wounded pride or petulance. They say they have done their best, and it is useless. They have gone through a course of inquiry and search and prayer, and they have found neither comfort nor hope. Would it not be worth the while of such to reconsider this part of it, and to see whether some of the blame may not lie with themselves? If the blame must lie either in men or in God, it is not likely that it is entirely with Him. Are they quite sure they have sought Him with a renunciation of the pride of self-righteousness, and with the desire to be freed from sin, casting themselves on His mercy and grace through Jesus Christ? If they can affirm all this, is it too much that they should have to wait, when God has already waited for them, and when their waiting may be only to try their earnestness, and to increase it? How much it needs trial and increase, their very conduct shows. If they still refuse to seek God any more, let them consider on whom they are taking revenge. Their service is not so necessary to Him as his help and favor can be to them, and the time may come when they cannot so well want Him as they think they can. Still, "if it seem evil to them to serve the Lord, let them choose this day whom they will serve." Has the world, its honor, its pleasure, its profit, rewarded all the labor they have bestowed on it, or have they resolved also to turn their back on it for every repulse? If men would but seek God and eternity with half the earnestness with which

they strive for time and earth, they would not have to complain of want of success, and if they refuse peevishly to follow after God, because He does not at once meet their desire, it only proves that they have never truly sought Him at all. Their poor excuse may please themselves now, but it will avail very little when they enter into judgment with Him.

There may, however, be another class who have left off seeking God, from very different motives, not in petulance but in despondency, who have not so much turned their back on search, as sat down, wearied and hopeless, in the midst of it. It is very sad, and I know that earnest souls have often been brought to this condition, all the more felt by them for their very earnestness — nay, that their deepest grief and fear are that they have never been in earnest at all. Their very grief is, to all except themselves, the proof of their earnestness, and the assurance of their success. Let them consider that they have to do with One who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax ; that the heart of God is with them ; that the darkness and death of Christ, now changed to the strength of intercession, are on their side, and all those heavenly promises which are Yea and Amen in Him, and which, as bright and as many as the stars in their courses, all fight for them. Let them think of Jacob's wrestling, of David's tears, of Paul's three-fold prayer, of the woman of Canaan, of Christ himself, who was always heard, and yet had to cry in agony ; and let them be sure that if they continue to look to God they shall be lightened, and find there were good reasons for the cloud and darkness, even

very abundant dews of God in them, to prepare them for coming sunshine. And, if all these considerations fail, let them still take up this language, "Nay; but we will serve the Lord," "We cannot force from Him a sense of his favor, but we can humbly and perseveringly offer Him our service — not as a price, but as a humble tribute to Him, whose we are and whom we ought to serve. On this we are resolved, whatever be the issue, for this is just and right, and all his own." Let us bless God if any one is brought to this resolve, for now, to say it in a word, it is to this that God would bring us. The delay which Christians have in gaining a sense of acceptance with God, arises often from making the sense of acceptance the main object of pursuit. But there is something higher — to serve God whether we have the sense of acceptance or no — to come back to this as the one great purpose of life and end of our being: "Nay; but we will serve the Lord." If we could only be more concerned about the will of God than our own comfort, — if, with a noble oblivion, we could forget self and remember Him and the obedience which we owe, we should soon find, "by patient continuance in well-doing," that "glory, honor, and immortality," and present acceptance with God, which is the beginning of them, are his free gift to us in Jesus Christ, never far from them that wait for Him — from the soul that seeketh Him.





VII.

A Worldly Choice, and its Consequences.

“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere. . . . Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan. . . . But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” — GEN. xiii. 10-13.



THAT Lot was a good man in the ground of his character there is no reason to doubt. The course of the narrative shows it, in which, though sorely punished, he is finally delivered, and the apostle Peter (2 Peter ii. 7) expressly terms him “just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.” But good men have their besetting sins. Lot’s was worldliness, and it cost him dear.

I. One of the first things we shall attempt to show is, some of the *features* of the choice which Lot here made.

One of these is this, that *worldly advantage was the chief element in determining his place in life.* “He lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.”

The volcanic fires, slumbering beneath, made that vale so fertile that its riches have become proverbial; and the Jordan, which has now so short a course to the Dead Sea, then wandered through the plain, like the rivers of Eden. Lot's eye regarded neither the dangers sleeping beneath, nor the light of God above, but only the corn and wine and verdant pastures. It is not the part of religion to teach us to despise natural beauty, or make us prefer to cultivate barren soil if we can get better. Asceticism is no feature of the Bible, from first to last. But to make outward advantage the first and main object in choosing our path in life, is certainly not the guidance of the Word of God; and either Lot was without true principle at the time, or he had for the season forgotten it. Wealth, or the chance of making it, is not the one thing needful; and that man pursues a very unwise and unchristian course who rushes straight at it, without taking other things into account. There are many signs of materialism in our age, and this among them, that the acquisition of money is one of the first things which men think of in choosing a profession for themselves or their children. Our natural capability of mind is one thing to be considered, for only as we cultivate it can we be most useful to our fellow-men, and most happy in ourselves. It is not with impunity that a man can do violence to his own nature, or crush that of his child, with no other motive than hasting to be rich. And still higher than natural taste is principle. The question, Can I, with a clear sense of duty, enter into such a line of pursuit? Am I not venturing into relationships where it will be hard, if not impossible,

for me to maintain a conscience void of offence? These points do not seem at all to have troubled Lot, or they were lightly put aside in view of his material interests. We do him no injustice, for he remained clinging to Sodom, years afterwards, though he must have felt the deleterious atmosphere. He returned to Sodom when he had lost all, and had recovered it again through Abraham. That sharp warning was ineffectual, and he needed to be forced from the place by God's destroying angel. What weighed with him all the while was that which determined him at first, — the rich returns of the fertile soil. When, in any step of life, the readiest thought which occurs to a man is not duty, or benevolence, or mental taste and capability, but bare worldly advantage, let him look at it well in other lights. Such a motive, if indulged, is certain to end by shutting out his view of all that is high and true in life, and to lead him into dark and miry ways.

A second feature of Lot's choice was, that *it betrayed a great want of generosity*. Abraham, to preserve good feeling, proposed that their encampments should be kept apart, and he gave Lot the selection of place. It was in accordance with the noble nature of Abraham; and had Lot shared, or been capable of appreciating it, he would have declined to avail himself of the offer. But he grasped at it eagerly, and took the richest side. It may be he had the slightest possible feeling of contempt for Abraham's unworldliness and simplicity, and congratulated himself on his own shrewdness. This is one of the mean things in life, to gloat over a gain that may have dropped from the generosity, or may have been stolen from the simplicity, of a friend who

scorns to be always standing on the extreme edge of his rights. It is a "blessing of himself by the covetous which the Lord abhors." And yet there are too many under the name of Christian who rejoice to "gather where they have not strawed," who snatch at every favor without scruple or compensation, and delight greatly in men of generous natures, because they can make their own use of them. They salve it to their conscience by the excuse, "to him it is nothing, and since he does not feel the loss I may take the benefit — if I do not, another will." Whether the man is a Christian who can act so may be a question, but this is sure, that Christianity has very little to do with this part of his character. One comfort we can take is, that if religion has sometimes its Lots, it has also its Abrahams; and that the Bible, in its narratives and precepts, shows unmistakably on which side its sympathies lie. This observation may be made in regard to such men, that they are the most unsatisfactory of all friends, paining us constantly in intercourse by their narrow selfishness, and failing us in the hour of need. Love of the world unfits for the duties of friendship much more than many other faults that are more glaring, and in forming our associations it may be well to bear this in mind.

A third feature of Lot's choice was, that *it showed disregard of religious privileges*. "The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." This is said in connection with Lot's choice, as if to intimate to us that it was full in his view when he came to a decision. Their sins were of a peculiarly gross and inhuman kind; and were the growth of that

very luxuriance of soil which made Lot choose it for his home. The prophet Ezekiel (xvi. 49) enumerates these three causes of the sins of Sodom, "pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness." And how they are still the parents of vice in prosperous communities we know full well. It shows how widespread and inveterate the wickedness of the community was, that when the fiery deluge came down, not one beyond Lot's family was counted worthy to escape. Can there be conceived a more unpromising place for a man who had a spark of religion in him to enter, if he wished to keep it still burning? Had it been very warm and bright he would not have ventured there; for this is observable, that in general those who have least religion to lose are most ready to thrust it into danger. It is very likely that if Lot thought at all of the question of religious privilege, and the hazard of evil association to himself and his children, he had a number of ways of smoothing his choice to his conscience. One of these, common enough yet, might be that he was going there to do a great deal of good. Their wickedness made it the very spot for him to work in, and set a different example. If this were genuine, it might be very well; but when it is merely a pretext, the man cannot cover it comfortably from himself, and it is somehow found out still sooner by the sinners who are to be converted. Nothing prejudices religion more than to use its interests as a mask for covetousness. He who enters a den of wickedness for the sake of worldly profit is not likely to make a very successful missionary, and his self-seeking is sure to peep out in all his actions. He may speak a great deal about

another world, but if he shows himself so bent upon making the most of this, the place would on the whole be more improved by his absence. It is a sad thing that we should have cast in our face the example of many professing Christians who talk so cheaply of the present world, and yet show themselves so anxious to buy it. For the sake of religion, it would be well if they either dropped such language, or adopted different conduct.

We cannot affirm that all this was true of Lot to the letter, but this at least is clear, that when he was compelled to quit Sodom, he could not count a single convert, nor carry with him one religious friend. The best thing we know of him is what is said by the apostle Peter, "that his soul was grieved by their conversation;" but if it was so, and if from fear of the consequences, or despair of doing any good, he had left off all efforts to reform them, the sooner he quitted Sodom the better. When a man ceases to strive against evil, he yields to it; and it can be no one's duty, in such a case, to remain where his holiest feelings are lacerated, his conscience deadened, and his family exposed to the corruption of a debasing atmosphere. Unhappily, the longer he continues, the less able he becomes to move, for conscience offers less remonstrance, associations strengthen their hold, and the only thing that saves him is the shock of some sore judgment. The more carefully therefore should every Christian weigh the first choice.

It is not always an easy question, how far a man should go in surrendering religious privileges when he has to select some path of life. Every one must

admit that it is too much left out of account. If a man quits Christian ordinances and friends for the sake of extending gospel truth, let him be sure it is for this end, and not with the covert object of gaining some worldly advantage. His own conscience should be clear, and, if possible, the case be beyond reach of mistake by others. Few sacrifices can be felt to be greater by a right man than to leave all wells of Christian refreshment behind him and venture out into the dry wide desert to seek the lost; but if it be to seek the lost, God will open rivers in the wilderness for him. Let no man, however, enter Sodom for gain under pretence of being a missionary. He endangers the little religion he has, and may come off in the end with unspeakable shame and loss.

We can suppose many a case in which a man is reduced by stern necessity to quit high religious privileges, and go where there are few or none, in order to provide subsistence for himself and his family. But if he carries true regret for the loss, and goes in the right spirit, he is in the path of duty, and may not only have his own religion preserved, but be made useful in kindling new life. This, however, is a very different case from one where it is only a question of more or less gain. The evil is, that many Christians are quite willing to run great risks with their soul for a very little comfort to their body. They do not reflect that there is a "life which is more than meat."

II. We may now look at some of the *consequences* of Lot's choice, and, in doing so, we shall take the three features already indicated, and show how each one brought its own sting and loss.

As he made worldly advantage his chief aim, he failed in gaining it. We are far from saying that this will always be the case. If a man be a mere man of the world, and set himself to prosecute its objects at any cost, he will frequently succeed. "Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward." This is their choice, and they get it. But if a man is really a child of God, and is in danger of losing his soul from worldly temptations, his salvation may lie in his failure; and that failure may sometimes arise from the compromise he is attempting. When an utterly regardless man may succeed, another who is encumbered with scruples will be defeated. This is no reason why he should throw scruples away, but very good reason why he should not enter a path where he is so strongly urged to tamper with them.

Now, see how Lot's choice came back on him. He grasped recklessly at worldly advantage, and twice he lost his entire possessions,—the second time, as it would seem, beyond recovery. In the first instance, the kings of the East plundered Sodom, and carried off Lot and all he had. "They took Lot *and his goods*,"—an emphatic conjunction. There was much property, and it was much to him, for his heart was in it. No doubt it was a sore blow to Lot, and was meant as a warning to quit the place. But he refused to take it, and the stroke came next time direct from God, and with more crushing weight. He who would not leave Sodom of his own free will, must be driven from it by the sword of the avenging angel. He went out poorer than he entered, and all his wealth perished with the men of Sodom. So when God punishes open

sinners, He can judge the sins of his own people by the way. He can mingle judgment with mercy, but also mercy with judgment, and Lot was made to feel it when he fled from the fiery rain, stripped of the labors of years, and did not dare to look behind on the ruin of his hopes. If we are God's people, and have a cherished sin, He will burn it in spite of us. It is His promise, "When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned," but this does not include the evil desire of our heart. Nay, it must be burned if we are to be preserved, and for this the fire of trial is kindled. Lord, spare us not the fire, but save us from choosing the road that needs it!

Next, let it be observed, that *as Lot failed in generosity to Abraham, he was repeatedly brought under the weightiest obligations to him.* If this did not make him blush, it should have done so. Lot took what may be called an unfair advantage, and trusted perhaps that he was in a clear way to outstrip Abraham in wealth, but, ere many years had passed, he owed all he had — family, property, liberty — to Abraham's timely and courageous interposition. Abraham never reproached him, but let us hope Lot's own heart did. Time came round, and when Sodom was ripe for destruction Abraham's voice was raised for it. That Lot was there, was no doubt one reason why he pleaded so urgently. Sodom could not be spared, but Lot was rescued, and Abraham's intercession, no less than Lot's own character, had to do with that result (Gen. xix. 29). The friend with whom he had dealt so ungenerously fought with men and wrestled with God for him, and, in both conflicts, like a prince he prevailed. In his old days,

when reduced to poverty, it is every way likely that Lot was again indebted to Abraham for succor. Certainly, if it was needed, it was given, and given without upbraiding. We may believe that regret for his past course, and something like shame, filled Lot's heart when he saw his own selfish conduct brought into contrast with the noble character of his friend. If a man will not blush for his own ungenerous acts, God can make him blush for the barren results of them. So old are the maxims under which we still live: "The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand;" "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

And then there is this last, *that Lot's disregard of spiritual privileges brought upon him a bitter entail of sin and shame.* There can be little doubt that Lot's own religious character suffered from the long sojourn in Sodom. A man cannot voluntarily expose himself to the worst of influences, from the mere love of gain, without his religious sensibilities being deadened; and this only can account for the grievous termination to the history of Lot, which is among the most melancholy records in the Word of God. It is one of those cases which we must contemplate because it is there, — very terrible, and very necessary to be thought of; but we would wish to look at it as Abraham did at the ruin of Sodom (Gen. xix. 27), standing in the place where we have met God, and looking at it "a great way off." There is a general consistency in the lives of men; and such a deplorable spiritual catastrophe could not well have happened to one who strove to

maintain warm religious feeling, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. To Lot's family the disregard of all religious associations was even worse. It is not improbable that he professed a concern for their interests when he made his choice of the riches of the cities of the plain. It was to secure them a good provision and position in the world, — for men spoke then as they do now. But when such things are sought in the face of principle, they may be gained with lamentable deductions. His wife caught the infection of the place, and became in love, deep and unholy, with its fashions. It may have been her influence which prevented Lot from leaving sooner, and, with all the urgency of doom behind, he could not carry her with him. The family of Lot mingled with the men of Sodom, and learned their ways. When the poor father, alarmed for his children's safety, implored his sons-in-law — "Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city," "he seemed as one that mocked." We can perceive, in this closing scene, how much Lot must have had to bear from those who were most nearly related to him. We know what sins followed the fall of Sodom, and what a salvation Lot still needed from the fearful pit and from the miry clay into which he was led. Of the remainder of his life we know nothing. There are those who, we have reason to believe, were good men, that pass before their death into a cloud, for our warning. We cherish the hope that the sore lessons of God's chastisement were gathered up, and that contrition marked the close; but their repentance is not obtruded on us. It would be well if some learned this modest reticence of the Bible, and

did not parade before us the boisterous assurance of notorious criminals when we would rather see them walk softly in the bitterness of their soul. The Bible drops the veil of that silence, which has its lesson, over such cases as Adam and Solomon, and here also over Lot. The root of the matter, we believe, was in him; but he was one of those good men who teach us more by their faults than their attainments, — standing as beacons on the edge of terrible breakers, rather than moving like lights to lead us to places of refuge, and the chief purpose of whose life seems to be to show how far a good man may go astray, and yet leave ground for believing that he was saved, as by fire, through the grace of God.

If there be a life in the Bible which warns against the spirit of worldliness, it is that of Lot. There is no sin so insinuating, none that can hide itself under so many fair excuses to the self-deception of the possessor, and that ends with more destructive results. If it is the sin of God's people, it must be burned out of them in some way; but it frequently needs a funeral pile of all they have to effect it.

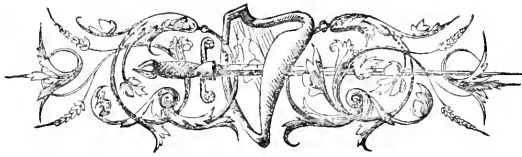
It is a great pity when a religious man is marked by a want of generosity. Self-control and rigid attention to our means and expenditure lie at the root both of justice and true benevolence, and he acts no Christian part who neglects them; but they are entirely reconcilable with a spirit above all meanness. Doing justly is the first step to loving mercy, and the men in the Bible who lived nearest to God were most marked by the nobility of soul that seeks to owe no man any thing

but love. Such men were Abraham and Moses and Paul, and if there were others, like Jacob and Lot, who had the taint of meanness in their nature, the providence of God set its brand on their conduct. Few things would more commend religion to honorable men of the world than that Christians should be found seeking, not only what is just and pure, but what is lovely and of good report.

Christian parents should specially be careful how they strive for the worldly advancement of their children at the hazard of their spiritual interests. It fills one at times with a kind of despair to see how those who profess to regard religion as all-important, subordinate it to almost every other thing in life; how educational accomplishments, and choice of pursuits, and friendships, and alliances, are discussed and fixed without this ever coming into serious view. Were it bodily infection, it would fill them with alarm, but spiritual danger is lightly passed by. It is one great reason why Christianity makes so little progress, and why Christian families are constantly melting away into the worldliness around them; while the parents have to see their children lost, not only to vital religion, but even to that strength of mind and steadiness of purpose which are necessary to any firm position in life. Both worlds frequently slip from the grasp in the miserable attempt to gain the false glitter of the present, and the bitter waters of disappointment sweep, like the Sea of Sodom, over the ruins of fortune and fame coveted at the cost of consistent principle. Let the kingdom of God and his righteousness be sought and

maintained in the first place; if worldly position follows, it will be honorably borne and usefully employed, and if God does not see fit to give it, there will be sufficient compensation in the pure and imperishable treasures with which He can fill the soul.





VIII.

Is Man Entirely Selfish?

“Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?” — JOB i. 9.

WE shall not enter into the question of how we are to regard the Book of Job, and especially this part of it, in relation to real history. Let us only say that, believing in the personality of a great power of evil, we hold to the general truths in the representation here, though veiled in dramatic form. The verse we have selected is entirely in the spirit of him from whose mouth it comes. Goethe, in the poem which gives his view of the world, has depicted Satan more in accordance with what we would imagine of the ultimate essence of evil than our own Milton has done. His last and lowest form is not the defiant strength of despair, but the weakness of a sneer. His language here is a scoff cast in the face of God against the nature of the universe He has made. That universe, Satan insinuates, is at its heart false and hollow. What seems most pure and beautiful is, when you dissect it, base and vile. The man who

professes to serve God is, after all, only serving himself, and is making God nothing more than a convenience, a purveyor to his own selfish profit and pleasure. Man, he suggests, is a poor hypocrite, and God is willing to be deceived by his fawning worship; for when Satan strikes at man, it is because he thinks he thereby reaches God.

One object of this Book of Job is to prove that there is something genuine in man, something genuine, above all, when the grace of God has entered his heart, and this question of Satan's we shall seek to turn into another — *Is man entirely selfish?*

Satan puts his calumny, as many people have since done, into the form of a question. It is evident how he intended it to be answered. God has held up Job as a proof of his power to put true goodness into human nature, and the reply is that this seeming goodness is only self-interest. The man is religious because he makes a good thing out of it. The accuser has a belief in the philosophy of selfishness. It is a faith not uncommon in our day. There are some who seek a foundation for it in argument, and wish to prove that all virtue is merely self-interest largely and wisely interpreted, which is true in this respect, that goodness and self-interest will in the end coincide, but very false if it is meant that goodness has its origin in taking this end into account. There is a school of the literature of fiction which makes it the basis of all its portraitures of human nature, which delights to turn man inside out, that it may show his weakness and hollowness, and to anatomize him in his best affections and aspirations, that it may find only self-love and

vanity. If goodness is portrayed, it is a goodness we cannot respect, without strength or breadth; so that, with such views of human nature, the theory of its *simian* origin is quite in keeping, and contempt for our fellow-men and ourselves becomes almost justified. Providence and prayer and Divine interposition in behalf of such a creature become very idle talk to those who are thoroughly imbued with this view. The frivolous Epicureanism of one class of them is balanced by the bitter Cynicism of another, to whom the counsel of Job's wife, "Curse God and die," seems the fitting end of philosophy and of man.

We do the literature of the day no injustice when we say that much of it has this sneer of Mephistopheles on its face, that it ignores in man any depth beyond self, and any height that would betoken a capacity for the love and life of God. In general society we meet with not a few pervaded by the same spirit, who have a hearty distrust of all professions of religion, even of the quietest and most unobtrusive kind, a keen eye and strong memory for all Christian inconsistencies, and a lurking belief, with the old courtier, that "every man has his price." There is an age when numbers of the young are in danger of being carried away by this view, some from a naturally hard temperament, some from the desire to be considered shrewd and knowing, and some from having trusted too readily and been deceived, falling into an opposite and sadder extreme. The Bible itself has been quoted as sanctioning the idea that self-interest is, and ought to be, the spring of human action. Sin, it is said, is only self-interest unenlightened and wrongly directed, and true

religion is a proper and wise regard to our own happiness. The threatenings and promises both of the Old Testament and the New are referred to as proving this, and hell and heaven, the one as an external punishment, the other as an objective prize, are made the moving powers of the moral universe. It is a subject, then, well deserving of consideration, and surely very practical and pressing in our time. We shall look at it chiefly in the last light to which we have adverted,—the estimate of man's nature to be drawn from the Bible,—seeking to free that book from the obloquy which has been thrown on it by its enemies and by some of its friends. *First*, we shall attempt to show that *selfishness* is not the scriptural view of the proper nature of man; *second*, from the context, we shall try to develop some of the *results* of a belief in unmitigated selfishness; and, *third*, we shall point out the means that may be adopted for a *remedy* by those who are ready to fall into this melancholy faith.

FIRST, *That self-love is not the essence of human nature as presented in the Bible.*

Satan denies that there is unselfishness in Job, who is described as a "righteous man, who feared God and eschewed evil." He would imply that it is not in God's power to create a disinterested love of Himself, even in a regenerate creature,—that self-interest is the hidden worm at the root of every thing, good or bad.

Let us think, then, first, of the regenerate man, and see whether God's plan of forming him proceeds on

the principle of appealing to selfishness. That plan, in its great lineaments, has been the same in all ages, in the days of Job as in those of Paul, only that in the latter time there has been a fuller development, which enables us to understand it better. We consider it therefore under that clearer light.

Now, it is granted that the Bible, all through, presses men with threatenings of punishment, and holds out to them promises of happiness to lead them to a new life. But this is to be remembered, that it begins its work with men who are sunk in sin, and that the essence of sin is selfishness. It must arrest and raise them by motives adapted to their condition, provided that these motives are not wrong, and enlightened self-interest, that is, self-interest which is consistent with the good of others, is not wrong. The Bible is too broad and human not to bring all fair motives into exercise. It is too philosophical to lose itself in the over-refinements of some modern philosophies which touch fallen human nature as a needle might a coat of mail. It has its still small voice, but it has its thunder before it. The sleeper must be roused to listen; and *before* the gospel, and even *with* it, we must have Sinai's word, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." All through, in the Old Testament and also in the New, we have the principle, "If thou art wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself." "Behold I have set before thee death and life." We have every one of us felt the power of such appeals, and perhaps there is no stage in the Christian life when a man is entirely away from them. The apostle Paul was fearful "lest by any means he himself should be a castaway." But to af-

firm that this is the final, or even the prevailing, motive of the new life, is to mistake or misrepresent the Bible. If I rouse a man from the stupor of an opiate by force, and prevent him for a while from recurring to it by fear, it is that I may have an opportunity of going on to use reason and the persuasion of love. By these ultimate weapons, and by the spirit which with God's help is at last breathed into the man, my plan is to be judged. The Bible is constantly advancing from the domain of threatening and outward promise to that of free and unselfish love. Its strength of appeal from the very beginning lies in the mercy of God pardoning unconditionally,—a mercy which, when the clouds are severed, is seen to be the face of the Son of God and the Man of Sorrows devoting Himself for those who had no claim on Him but that of guilt and misery. He comes from a throne to a cross for them, and we see written on it, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us." This love comes from a Divine fountain through a human heart, that human hearts may feel the responsive throb, "We love Him who first loved us." When his law is inculcated, it is not that punishment may be escaped, but affection manifested. If heaven is promised, it is not a conditional reward, but a free and godlike gift; and this heaven in its essence is not a world of external delight, but of inward joy in the love and likeness of God, and deliverance from that sin and tyrant self, which are now our prison and our pain. As a man rises into the knowledge of the Divine plan he seeks and serves God, not from the hope of what he is to receive *from* Him, but from the

delight which he finds *in* Him,—in the true, the pure, the loving that dwell in the Father of Lights, and that in their present possession contain the pledge of eternal inheritance. If they still charge us with selfishness in seeking this, because it *is* our happiness,—as some modern philosophies which claim superhuman virtue seem to do,—we confess we know not what is meant by the charge. We seek God and find our joy in Him because it is in the new nature which He has given ; but we do not seek Him for the joy, we find the joy in seeking. Would it be more unselfish to forget God and seek sin, or coldly surrender Him and clasp annihilation ? Would they have us once obtain a view of that blessed and gracious face which is the sun of the universe, and then shut our eyes, not caring whether we ever open them on his light and love again,—take one draught of the water of truth and renounce the fountain ? The Christian doctrine of reward is, that if the universe were on one side and God on the other, we forsake it for Him alone,—“ Whom have I in heaven but Thee ? ” but to be willing to forsake Him for extinction, and to reckon this a proof of unselfish love, is one of the new objections against Christianity which may be left to answer itself. It is curious how from a very different school, that of Jonathan Edwards, a similar paradox at one time issued ; and it was held that a Christian should have such a desire for the glory of God that he should be willing to be condemned everlastingly if it would promote it. The futility of such a supposition is seen when it is put in the form of this question : “ Can a man so love God as to be willing, for any end, everlastingly to hate

Him?" These are such unnatural issues that it would be hard to prove God could ever propose them to intelligent creatures, or intelligent creatures realize them as possible, except in the over-refinement of speculation.

To return to the line of thought: God acts towards man on the principle of free undeserved love, that He may form in him the spirit and image of his own action, creating a spring of self-sacrifice which flows back to God and overflows to men. The Son of God, who knows what is in man, believed this possible. He had faith in human nature as having great capabilities and destinies. He held fast to his faith in the face of man's own opposition and scorn, of desertion and treachery. For this He lived and struggled and died, and did not fail. He struck the rock with his cross, and streams came out to freshen deserts. He made a John, a Paul, a Peter, a Stephen — hearts that drank of the cup of his self-sacrifice, and forgot themselves, and labored and suffered and died like Him for the world's good. They have had those who followed them in the hardest and coldest times, who have kept the fire of unselfish love burning on the world's hearth in the deepest night. In lone spots of the earth, far away, and far down in its misery, solitary among strangers, and strangers at home, humble and self-forgetful, they have been taking up the lesson of the Great Master, "Freely ye have received, freely give;" and, unnoticed and unknown of the busy world, they have been treading in his steps, to seek the lost sheep and wretched prodigal, with no reward but the throb of joy which fills their heart and heaven's homes when the

wanderer returns. It is good for our own hearts to think of it, and we bless them in our inmost soul for the faith to which they help us, that there is a fountain of free love on high, since such wells of loving-kindness are springing here. While some are taking up the ancient sneer that all is hollow, and human nature a contemptible and selfish thing, and while others would bring down the glorious gospel of the blessed God to a bargain of so much gain for so much service, they have been calmly pursuing their way, reckoning neither of profit nor praise, but "counting all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord."

It is certain, then, that the Bible proceeds on the principle of creating unselfish action in the regenerate heart. But we have this farther to remark, that, even in the case of unregenerate men, the Bible does not affirm that the only law at work is one of utter selfishness. It is true that the whole Bible scheme is based on the doctrine of the fall and depravity of human nature. Man is corroded to the core by sin, and needs a reconstruction which is described as a new creation. But it must be remembered that the elements of human nature are still there. They are not annihilated, neither are they demonized. The deep radical defect is God-ward, that man has by nature ceased to retain Him in his knowledge, and has expelled his love from his heart. But the temple, though shattered and empty of its divinity, has the fragments of its original greatness strewed around. The tree, though uprooted, continues to send forth shoots and blossoms from the lingering of the original sap which God does not suffer

yet to die. If God continue permanently excluded, die it must ; but, while the world remains, there shines many a fair tint on human nature, as there streams a fading beauty from the sun upward on the sky he has left. Whatever unrenewed men may be to God, — alas, how cold and ungrateful ! — they perform to their fellow-men, oftentimes, the most unselfish acts. They give hoping to receive nothing again. They relieve suffering, they extend sympathy to the poor and naked, they labor perseveringly and unostentatiously, and frequently shame those who call themselves Christians in their promptness and generosity. The Bible, which is a broad and candid book, so different from the narrowness of many of its opponents and of not a few of its friends, delights to recognize this, and records the genuine and the kindly in unrenewed men. Over against Abraham, sometimes in contrast with him, stands the courteous generosity of Ephron the Hittite and the candor of Abimelech. Naaman the Syrian is brought in from the Gentile world, and we have glimpses into his bearing to home and friends which tell us of a true and noble human heart. “The barbarians,” the shipwrecked apostle says, “showed us no little kindness ;” and Roman centurions pursued a course of strict integrity and tender care toward him which rebuked those who professed to deal with him according to the Word of God. There was a young man who came to Christ, of whom it is said that “looking on him, Jesus loved him.” There was in him, notwithstanding the fatal defect, something so amiable and truthful ; and our own experience tells us of not a few on whom we have looked with wistful regret, that they should have all

the setting of fairest human jewels, of loveliness and grace, while in the centre, the absence of the one thing needful, the pearl of price, revealed a profound and irreparable blank. The Bible view of man is sad enough, — without God in the world, wanting that hold of Him which is necessary to give the beauty that remains principle and permanence, unable in his kindness to his fellow-man to do him the deepest kindness, and “to care for his soul,” averse to send the roots of his affections, or to turn the thoughts of others to the eternal and unseen ; but let us thank God that He has not left human nature without gleams of his own kindness still reflected from it, that even in its ruin He has made it something not to be scoffed at and scorned, but to be regarded reverently, compassionately, and hopefully, as that which retains the glimmering relics of a primeval glory, and the tokens of what, through the grace of God, may be renewal to a loftier height. Neither let us think that we discredit the gospel, by seeming to leave these fair features of humanity outside its regenerating circle, but let us rather widen that circle to embrace them, and believe that, if there is any thing glorious upon earth, or beautiful in humanity, we owe it to the power of Christ’s death and the breath of his intercession. If the tree is there, with its leaves and blossoms, but wanting fruit, so attractive in its fairness, so saddening in its defect, it is his prayer which keeps it living, “Let it alone.” All that is good on earth is also ours to rejoice in, and we claim it for God, not only as made by Him in creation, but as spared through the grace of Him who is fairer than the children of men, and who works and waits and wearies

not, that He may include all beautiful things in the innermost circle of his redeemed.

Christianity, then, while it is far removed from that shallow view of man which sees little or nothing wrong in his constitution and relation to God, is equally distant from that sceptical and bitter estimate which professes to analyze his nature, — to find no more than a mixture of vanity and selfishness.

SECOND, We have to show from the context *the results of a belief in unmitigated selfishness*. We shall take the character of the accusing spirit here for an illustration of these results.

The first evident consequence in him who holds it *is a want of due regard for his fellow-creatures*. This is a faint enough way of putting it, so far as Satan is concerned, the spirit that moves through the world, deceiving and destroying, of whom Christ has said, “He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” With no belief in principle or goodness, he can cherish no reverence and feel no pity. All may be treated remorselessly where all are so contemptible. The belief and the moral nature must in the end come into harmony; and where a spirit sets itself only to doubt and deny, it sets itself also to tempt and seduce. It must prove its own theory valid. Hence, probably, what otherwise seems insanity — the temptation of the son of God, in whom there was no shade of sin. The mocking and sceptical spirit, which feels nothing but hollowness within, sees nothing else around and above it, and believes it possible to drag all that seems to be higher down to its own level.

And in so far as such a view of human nature enters into any man, it must produce like results. It may have much to counteract it, in a natural kindliness of heart, but it must always stand between the man and a deep genuine love for his race. In the mildest form, it can only scatter round temporary benefits with a cynical compassion, as we do among creatures which suffer a little, to perish and pass away for ever. In colder natures it becomes selfish indifference; in the more energetic, misanthropy; and in the vicious, it is the spirit of seduction without compunction or remorse. If ever we are to labor truly for the highest good of our fellow-creatures, we must learn to take reverent and loving views of them. The deeper and higher our estimate of the soul of man, the more shall we be filled with the pity and awe that are the strength of persevering labor in its behalf; and the more shall we share the mind and help the work of Him, who, knowing the soul's value, died for its eternal good.

The next consequence to the spirit which has no belief in unselfishness is *the want of any centre of rest within itself*. The condition of Satan is thus described, verse 7: "And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." Incessant wandering, "going about," "seeking rest and finding none," is the view given of him in Scripture. There is the constant endeavor to find a fixed point, and inability to discover it; and this may be the truth intended to be conveyed in that strange but significant narrative (Matt. viii. 28), where the evil spirit is urged from place to place

by the conquering power of good, till it is driven to beg for a refuge in the lowest and most grovelling forms of creation,—to find itself, even here too, rejected, and cast forth naked and shelterless. This is most certain, that if the heart does not give quiet, no place in the universe can, and the personal head of evil has been for ages making the attempt to find that quiet in vain.

And in the proportion in which a man partakes of this view, comfort must flee from him. It is love alone that can give the heart any place of repose. This is the ark it turns to when wearied with fluttering over a shoreless sea. But there can be no ark where the world is believed to be in its essence false and hollow ; where pleasant courtesies are flowers that clasp across and cover fathomless gulfs ; where friendships last as long as there is mutual benefit, and are chilled to frost by a few years' absence. The man who believes this, and yet yearns after true and deep affection, is wretched indeed,—pining for a treasure not to be found in the universe ; and if he does not yearn after it he is more wretched still. Can the man be satisfied who does not find in the whole world a place where he can trust his heart ? Nay, more, such a man, if he reflects, must turn round and loathe himself. He cannot have the vanity to believe that he is the only exception to the rule of selfishness. The nature he sees in others is his own, and, do what he may, he cannot escape from it, or rise above it. Analyze every thing, analyze his own best feelings, and he comes at last only to self—refined, it may be, sublimated to the most ethereal essence, but ever self, and nothing more. Can there be a more frightful sol-

itude than this,—to be convinced that no perfectly disinterested love can ever pass from any heart over into his, and, what is worse, that none can pass from his over into any other? Can there be a more ghastly universe than one where, under every damask rose, this hideous worm is lurking, and where the boast of the advanced philosophy is to discover that it is inevitable? Worse, is it not, than the old Northern legend of the snake that coils its scaly folds round the roots of the tree of life? If such men live, and live without betraying their pain, it must be because they drown the thought in occupation, or have resigned themselves to a settled despair, or contrive, with that curious inconsistency which belongs to us all, to live above, as some others live below, their theory.

There is still another effect to be remarked of this want of belief in unselfishness—*the failure of any real hold on a God*. It was so with the great spirit of evil. He could not deny God's existence. This was too plainly forced in upon him and felt by him, but he had no just views of a God of truth and purity and goodness, else he had never continued so to resist Him. He had a belief that made him tremble, but that never stirred him up to lay hold on God, because he saw only heartless power seated on the throne of the universe. It is within the sphere of every spirit to make and maintain its own world and its own God, and the God it makes bears the character of its world.

In as far, too, as any man comes to look upon all human nature as mean and selfish, he is on the way to lose faith in God's true character, and even in his existence. To perceive and feel genuine goodness in man

is to be prepared to believe in God, — for whence could this come but from the Father of lights? If any one has arrived at the conviction that there is such a thing as disinterested self-sacrificing love in the world, he must surely feel that this is the product of something more than dead matter. Refined matter may give refined self-love, but never self-sacrifice. This is the glorious attribute of spirit, the reflected ray of the Divine, and may lead us up to God, as the colors of the earth, in field and flower, lead our eyes to the fountain of life. When the people saw Christ's miracles "they praised God who gave such power to man;" and much more may we when we see truth and mercy and self-devotion in men, for these are greater than all miracles, and have the very essence of God in them. Therefore we are bound to thank Him for every disinterested act performed by any man, for every generous and heroic deed, for the search after truth, simply because it is truth, by those great minds that seek her as hid treasure, for unpaid devotion to the cause of suffering and want, for the blessed feet that seek out shame and sin, and the lips that plead with them to bring them home contrite and forgiven. These are all testimonies to the greatness of the soul of man, and therefore to the being of God. Those footsteps are echoes of the feet of Him who went about doing good, and help us to believe that He once walked our earth.

For this reason also we cannot think the love to any human friend can be too great if it does not keep the soul from looking upward, nor any sorrow for bereavement too deep if it does not sink into despair of God. We take pleasure in the measureless affections, even in

the fathomless griefs of the spirit, because they assure us of Him who made it, and for what it is made, and tell us of an Infinite that can heal all wounds and fill up all yearning desires. But if a man beholds no light reflected round him, can he see light dawning anywhere? If he can find only self-love in man, well directed it may be, fairly concealed or beautifully refined, but still self-love and nothing more, what God would He be who has either not the power or not the will to make a creature of a nobler kind? What comfort would there be in a sun which rays off its beams into the unreflecting and eternal dark, a life which beats with all its tide of love against the walls of everlasting sepulchres? The man who has come to take this view of the universe would ere long extend it to the great God himself, and think of Him as altogether like his world, or cease to hold his existence as a thing of price.

It is so, then, that a man fills the world beyond the skies with the properties of the world he sees around and feels within him. As he comes to know and be sure that there is more than dead matter or barren self, that there are disinterested love and unbought sympathy and boundless longings which spurn the false and soar above the finite, he becomes convinced that the source of them all must be in an infinite Spirit, and the end of them in an eternal life. What comes from Him must go back to Him again, according to its kind — that which is clothed with outward beauty to be changed as a vesture and again unfolded, that which feels the pulsations of his own life to be taken home to his heart and satisfied with his likeness.

And therefore it is that every one who values the highest interests of his race must look with deep pity upon the efforts of many whose chief aim it seems to be to depreciate humanity, and to show their ingenuity only by repeating, in every varied form, the old question of the mocking spirit, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" There is a literature which makes it its pleasure to depict affection that it may trace its slow decline, and to analyze human nature that it may exhibit its meanness, which when it paints goodness gives us the superficial gilding of a paltry amiability, and puts heart after heart into its crucible that it may reduce all to dross. It passes with many for deep knowledge of the world, and finds its refrain from some worn-out men of pleasure who repeat "vanity of vanities" with another aim than the "Preacher," and from some younger men who affect the worn-out style as lending them, at an easy price, the air of insight and old experience. After all, it is a shallow philosophy, and unhappy as shallow, which degrades human nature and casts doubt on the Divine, and leaves us to infer that dust and ashes are all that is.

THIRD, We shall pass on to consider *some means that may be adopted as a remedy by those who are in danger of falling into this faith.*

If we wish to strengthen our conviction in reality and unselfishness, we should seek as much as possible to bring our own life into close contact *with what is genuine in our fellow-men.* We cannot help measuring the great world by the little world of our experience, and we have the choice of this so far in our company and our friendships. Whatever books may do for us,

our nature cannot be right and healthy without intercourse with living hearts, and the more intimate it is with what is best there, the safer we shall be from these degrading views. We shall always have means at hand by which to disprove them. There is little doubt that Rochefoucauld and Chesterfield took their view of life from what came under the courtier's eye, neither the true nor favorable way of understanding it. Had they been able to come close to a different class, to those who need the cup of cold water without importuning it, and to those who bestow it in the name of Christ, to the friendship and the affection which give proof of their genuineness in having no favor to ask and much love to render, it might have modified their opinion. We know of few things better for those who are ready to lose their perception of the real in the midst of the masks of conventionalism than to cultivate some acquaintance with the humble God-fearing poor, and to study the offices which want renders to want, together with the work which Christian mercy is carrying on there in its own quiet, unwearied way. In our friendships let us withdraw from those who love the false and artificial, and cleave to those who are striving to base their life on truth and principle, and, in our own conduct, let us beware of having a pretence and profession beyond what we really are. Many men, without being hypocrites at heart, surround themselves with an atmosphere of insincerity in the intercourse of life which destroys to that extent their faith in the reality of others. Let us not pretend to more than we have and are. Those who have homes should specially seek to keep them

free from every thing that is false. To accustom the young to the view of double dealing in those whom God has taught them first to revere is to sap the foundation of all faith. That God set the "solitary in families," that He made a world with a father and mother, with brothers and sisters in it, and caused such pure affection to well up from these fountains, is his way of helping us to believe in genuine love. And yet it may be remarked here that while a home and children were intended to make men believers in unselfishness, some men may use them so that selfishness may grow. They may be made a more subtle means for the exercise of vanity and egotism. They should not close the door of the heart to the outside world, but open it more widely. If so used and filled with truth and pure affection, the family may be made the best of human agencies for destroying the unhappy distrust in all reality. Happy is the man who, when the outer streams become turbid, "can drink waters out of his own cistern, and running waters out of his own well;" and happy next is he who, when transparency seems to meet him no more in his later course, has such a fountain of purity to look back upon in an early home.

Next to the cultivation of society and friendships among living men, we may mention *the choice of books*. These do not come so close as living men, but they open up a wider field. There is a literature of the day, to which we have already made reference, which spends its strength in reproducing the faults and foibles of human nature, and which boasts of being thorough when it lays bare sores and anatomizes gangrenes.

That these are found in man, and found too often, is true ; but to present them as the portraiture of humanity is not less defective in real art than false in morals. It vaunts itself to be a picture of the world pierced to the core, and, perhaps, as far as its knowledge goes, it is a picture of a certain world — the world of clubs and coteries and conventionalisms, which are as much the real world as the shallow eddies, which whirl straws and leaves, represent the deep current that sweeps beyond. If we glance at such views of human nature, since these too are part of man, let us not live in them. There are other and truer painters, whether it be in the strong outlines of fact or the colors of what is called fiction ; and fiction, if just, is no more than ideal fact. There are the pages of history which present the men who have thirsted for truth as for the water of immortality, who have labored for man's good with unpurchased and unpurchasable fervor, and died for God's cause with the triumph of heaven on their face. There are the true poets of life, who, while in their own genius they show the compass of humanity, reveal in their works the profound abysmal struggles of the soul and its sun-lit peaks of joy. Our literature from Spenser down to Wordsworth — we name only the mighty dead — has its full share of those with whom we may speak with profit regarding the deep heart of man. Nor can we surely forget that Book of books which knows more than any of them what is in man, and which has imparted to them all light and freshness. If we take the Bible into the range of literature merely as a human book, and forget for the moment that it comes from God, there is enough in it to lift up our

view of man to the verge of the infinite world. Though it made nothing known to us of God, yet it reveals man in the grandeur of his imagination and force of his soul, in the depth of his misery that he sees the sublimest moral ideal and feels himself cut off from it, that he has the loftiest aspirations after the infinite, and a never-ending pain because he cannot reach them. If a man will only deal more with these views of human nature given by the masters of human thought, he will not be so easily carried away by the pretensions of those who dissect it to find only superficiality ; and unless he has some previous theory which perverts him, or some unhappy temperament which warps his judgment, he will surely be led to infer that the being whose wants and wishes, whose inarticulate longings and conscious aims, are always rising, in some way, above the seen and limited, was made for a higher sphere, and had an original breath of the Divine within him.

Another counsel which may be connected with this is, that in judging of humanity *we must beware of taking a part for the whole*. It should be remembered that the unselfish theory is proved if we can show that there is any portion of human nature possessed of disinterested love, for the capacity is thereby proved in all. But the selfish theory can be maintained only by proving that all are selfish without exception. The most common way of doing this is to take a few as specimens, and assert that these represent the whole. We must consider, then, that it is quite possible for some to deceive and others to remain true, and that the discovery of occasional hypocrites does not make

all religion a pretence. If there were no reality, there could be no counterfeit. When hypocrites do startle us where we little expected them, our hearts must learn to fall back on the sincere who have fully approved themselves, the guileless and the good on whose foreheads the God of Truth has written his name in life and death — the beloved on earth and the blessed in heaven. Moreover, even where all seems frivolous, if we could only see the whole, we might discover that there was often more than met the eye, and that those who profess to be depicting human nature in the conventional world merely show us the surface and the smaller part. Beneath the inane features of fashion, and the petty hopes and fears and struggles of the hour, there are frequently deep questionings of the soul which rise for a moment, suppressed groans of the spirit at the felt emptiness around it, handwritings shooting out of the dark to make the heart fail in the midst of feasts ; and he who has not gone down to this, who has not ascertained that in every spirit below the hall where Herod sits in seeming ease and pleasure, there is in the dungeon a John whose thought rises up to tell of a time when it was better with the soul, and to pour bitter into every sweet at the recollection, — the man who has not realized this may profess to know and paint the world, but he has touched only the edge and surface — he knows not man's deepest misery, and cannot measure his real greatness. Let us, then, when we hear or read these cynical estimates of humanity, commune with our own souls, and ask if this is all that is in man ? and let us believe that there is in every one of our kind, while earth holds him, a heart which

has its own bitterness, and which in some way, however faint, responds to the true tone when it is struck. It may be a passing thrill, but it is there to prove that man is not all of clay.

The last means we shall mention for removing the view that man is incapable of rising above self is, *to apprehend the Divine cure for human nature*. We mention it last, not because this is the order in which it should be taken, but because it fitly concludes all other means as the most important, so indispensable that every other, without it, can be but a temporary palliative. Human nature, we have said, is deeply, fatally diseased, but not yet cut off from all connection with God, nor deprived of all traces of its original dignity. He bestowed on it this among the first, that it can give love without the thought of self. Now the cure which God has provided, while it reveals the depth of man's ruin, has in it also a token of the greatness of man's nature. It is God giving himself for man's deliverance, a free, unbought love, which devotes itself to suffering and death, that it may awaken a response in the sinful heart, and recall the sinner to the Father's arms, when he knows that all has been atoned for, and that the past of guilt is ready to be forgiven and forgotten forever. It reveals to us the nature of God, but does it not also reveal to us something of the nature of man? It does, for man's nature must be capable of appreciating free, unselfish love, if it is to return it; and, though the Holy Spirit is needed to carry home that appreciation, the Spirit works not against the law of man's original nature, but in conformity with it. The gospel, then, of free, unbought love is adapted to

the constitution of man, fitted to win his admiration and attract his spontaneous gratitude.

This, too, is to be marked, that the free, unbought love, so sublime in self-devotion, so magnanimous in overflowing gifts, enters the world through a human channel. It is in the humanity of Christ that the great God opens up this fountain of grace,—a humanity sinless and spotless, indeed, but still a humanity that is real, and all our own. This is, certainly, God's most royal seal set upon human nature, that He found it not unfit to be taken into the most intimate union with Himself, and that He chose to pour the infinite love of Divinity upon a dying world through the heart of man. The question, *Is man capable of unselfish love?* can now be answered by this other, *Was there unselfish love in Christ?* for in all things, sin excepted, He was made like unto his brethren, and in all things they can be made like Him. He who has studied the person of Christ, and laid his hand, however feebly, on the throbbings of that heart, will not be in danger of the view that self-love, utter and eternal, is part of the nature of man.

We are well aware that, with those who have adopted thoroughly this view of human nature, the argument from a Divine cure, such as the gospel reveals, will have little weight. But let us say that, for this part of it, we do not even care though the divinity of the gospel be denied, and the incarnation of God in Christ be declared a fiction, and the Person of the man of infinite love and infinite sorrow, be blotted out of the book of human life. The world might indeed wrap itself in a blacker pall than that

which ushered in his death, and the earth feel stranger pangs, and poor humanity, "beholding the things that were done, might smite its breast and return." But still, whence came this glorious vision of the God-man, and of free, atoning love unto the death, this vision which has ravished men's hearts in every age, and bowed down their souls in ecstasies of wonder and awe? How came it to establish its place in man's spirit, and to set up its throne in man's world? Christ himself may be denied, but the grand thought, the god-like vision of a Christ, this still remains, and a thought, whatever men may say, is a distinct reality. If it came not from God, it must have had its origin in the heart of humanity, and this heart must be capable of creating an ideal of infinite love and sympathy which our deepest nature pronounces to be worthy of God. It would still be a testimony to the unselfish nature of man that it could form such an ideal, and struggle on through many generations to realize it. That a being with such a nature should be left uncared for by God, or, even if there were no God, that he should be cast up by the constitution of the universe to perish and pass away forever, with infinite moral yearnings unappeased, and infinite spiritual hopes unrealized, would make that universe a falsehood and a mockery in its highest promise — "its root rottenness, and its blossom as the dust." And, therefore, from the greatness of man's nature, in the conception of a Christ, we can reason back to the reality of Christ's person and work, and feel assured that there must be a God of love, and such an interposition of mercy as the gospel reveals.

And now, to draw closer to this Son of God evermore, and to feel the tide of life that comes from Him, pouring with fuller flood around and through us, to have Him in our heart and eye, and to follow in his steps of free, unselfish love to God and man, to be true and transparent as He was, saying the thing that is, and doing the thing that should be, to struggle towards this mark where we do not reach it, and send after it, from every fall, more earnest aim and effort: this, with the help of God, will deliver us from the bitter scoff that all the world is hollow, and man, at his best, a vain and frivolous thing. The grovelling and the false will sink away beneath our feet, and we shall rise to that hold of God which gives his own unassailable peace within, and to that calm, though it may be sad, look on a fallen world and on poor tossing humanity, as still in his hand, and as destined to work out his purposes of free and everlasting grace.





IX.

Not far from the Kingdom of God.

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



IF these had not been the words of Jesus Christ, there would probably have been some Christians found strongly objecting to them. They would have said, “No one is nearer to the kingdom of God than another, for all men are alike dead in trespasses and sins. How can there be degrees of nearness when every one is at an infinite distance?” There is a side of truth in this. The difference between Christian and not-Christian is one not of degree but of kind. “Once ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.” And yet there are different degrees of approximation to the light. Our world is closer to the edge of dawn in one part of its course than another. The blind men who, whether through God’s providence or their own choice, took their seat by the wayside at Jericho, were nearer receiving their

sight than they had ever been in their lives before, and nearer still when their ear was caught by the tread of the multitude and they began to cry on Jesus of Nazareth as he passed by. And there are circumstances and associations in life that still bring some men closer to the gospel than others. There are dispositions of mind and attitudes in certain persons toward it which make us very anxious that they should take but one decided step, which cause us to wonder why, when they are so near, they go no further. They speak so discreetly about religious things, and have so amiable and reverent a spirit, that we feel as if Christ would still single them out, as He did this scribe, and say tenderly, regretfully, may we not add hopefully? — “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” We have to consider here some of those things which bring a man near the kingdom, and next what is needed to make him decidedly within it.

I. SOME OF THOSE THINGS WHICH BRING A MAN NEAR THE KINGDOM OF GOD. It would lead us away from the subject of discourse if we were to attempt any description of what is meant by this kingdom. Enough for our present purpose will come out in the course of illustration. It would also lead us into too wide a field if we took *all* the things that bring a man near it. We shall keep within limits by using the present incident as our guide.

It may be said that those are not far from it *whose life brings them into connection with some of its members and privileges*. The scribe here addressed had looked on the person of Christ, listened to his teaching, and

was in all likelihood acquainted with some of his disciples. He was one of those who will be able to say at last, "Thou hast taught in our streets." There was no reason apparent why he should not enter the gate of the kingdom as well as others. It was as near to him, he was as welcome, and men in no way different from himself were touching him and pressing on him as they passed by into the door. There is not one of us of whom similar things may not be said. We have had the fullest opportunity of becoming acquainted with all the truth of the gospel of God, with the life and death of the Saviour of men, and with their bearing on our own sin and death and eternal life. There it meets us whenever we open the Bible, and here it is echoed and re-echoed in the preaching of the Word. It may be said of every one of us that we have known numbers who have given the strongest evidence that they were the true disciples of Christ, in a holy and humble walk, in a happy and Christian death. Perhaps some of these may have been among our nearest and dearest friends. Does not this bring us near to the kingdom of God both on earth and in heaven? It may be we have been cognizant of the very change which gave the new and higher direction to their life. We have witnessed the deepening earnestness of their character, and seen it growing up into a purpose and consistency unknown before. Strange thoughts have come over us and a thrill has gone through our heart as we felt the difference, as if the very breeze of the Spirit's influence were stirring and soliciting us in passing by. It is a very solemn thing for a man to be placed in these circumstances, to be so close on the

verge of the kingdom of God as to feel the breath of its power moving round him. Others beside him, touching him by kindred and blood, are pressing past him, across the boundary line which is the beginning of a new and Divine domain, and he remains where he was. What prevents the step in him? Nothing that we can see — certainly nothing in God's willingness to receive or Christ's full invitation to him to come. The word is very nigh him, and he himself must feel that he is not far from the kingdom of God.

Leaving outward circumstances, we may come to natural dispositions, and here too we shall see that there are some things which bring a man nearer the reception of the gospel than others. If there seems to be inequality for the present in this, God will give it full weight in the day of judgment. Meanwhile, we have right to use it as a ground of appeal to cultivate the favorable state of mind and to press it to a decision.

A man is not far from the kingdom of God when he shows *a spirit of reverence and candor towards Christ*. The fair and respectful bearing of this scribe is very marked. He is impressed by our Lord's character and by the importance of the truth laid down by Him, and there is an entire absence of the frivolity and captiousness which belonged to so many of his class. Few things short of positive immorality make a man more incapable of appreciating spiritual truth than the confirmed habit of treating every thing lightly, and of looking at it only on its amusing side. It is not well to indulge this overmuch on any subject, and we should be very careful how we apply it to what concerns God

and the soul. It is an aptitude which is easily learned, for to scoff is in the power of any understanding however weak. When it is learned it makes the understanding weaker, for it destroys the ability to deal with the most momentous subjects in a truthful way. When there is a want of reverence there cannot well be candor. The spirit of mockery naturally turns not to the strong points of a subject, but to its weak ones, and is ready to exaggerate or to invent them. There is always therefore a hopeful token in a character when we find that, whatever light playfulness may flicker over the surface, there is a solid basis beneath, where some things in life are felt to be no matter of jest. Among these surely are those which deal with God and the eternal life. It may be that even the men who pass them by most lightly, to make a laugh or to escape one, have their earnest moments about them, but certainly he is the manlier who can stand out against this poorest of all hypocrisies, and who is not ashamed to show that there are some matters too sacred to be sported with. That man also, if not already Christian, is nearer to Christianity, and the presence of this reverent spirit is reason for hoping that he may reach it.

Another feature which brings a man closer to the gospel is *kindliness and amiability of nature*. We cannot think of the scribe here without being reminded of that young man spoken of in a preceding chapter of this Gospel (x. 17), who was so full of natural beauty of disposition that it is said, "Jesus, beholding him, loved him." We have all of us met with such, with persons who had a perfection of human grace and attractiveness about them, like the fragrance of a

flower that comes without consciousness or effort. It has frequently a more rounded fulness and ease than is to be found in the higher Christian life, where the struggle after the nobler ideal and the pain of repeated failure leave their scars and shadows. What are we to say of such kindness and grace? Are we to frown on them as evil, or turn from them with cold indifference? We cannot think so. The Lord Jesus Christ, who had an eye for all that is fair in God's creation, did not cast a chilling look on any thing that is beautiful in human nature. He acknowledged it as good so far as it went, and sought to gain it for the divine and eternal. It would be strange if that gospel which delights in those things that are pure and lovely and of good report, which has Him for its Head who had all meekness and gentleness, should feel itself less likely to be welcomed by what is naturally amiable. If hardness and moroseness are found in connection with the Christian name, they have no true connection with the Christian spirit, and we do feel that all the kindly and generous impulses of the heart move in the same direction with some of the finest graces of the kingdom of God. They are wild flowers of nature that with the enclosure of Christ's garden and the hand of Divine culture would put on a rare beauty. The sight of them makes us long to see them in the only safe soil, and they have an affinity for it which brings them near.

Another favorable feature in a man is *when he is desirous of conforming to God's law as far as he knows it*. This too seems to have existed in the character of the scribe, and he resembled in this also the young

ruler who had striven to observe the commandments of God from his youth up. To suppose as some do that they were false pretenders is to rob these cases of their deep spiritual import, and to make our Lord blinded by their hypocrisy. They were no doubt sincere in their profession, and this endeavor to lead a pure and moral life up to one's light is not to be scornfully denounced as is sometimes done. The gospel is bright enough without pouring equal blackness on all that lies outside it. It is indeed a blessed truth that the gospel comes to the chief of sinners, to the most profligate and debased, with the offer of free pardon and return to purity, and it is true also that there is a proud formal pharisaism which puts a man further from the kingdom than are the openly wicked. It was this hard self-righteousness which Christ so strongly condemned. But this also is truth, that if a man is going on in known sin he is searing his conscience, hardening his heart, and building up obstacles against his return to God. Be very sure of this, that all the way has to be travelled back, and that downward slopes of iniquity are hard to climb again. If conscience be at work in any man, if it is keeping him from doing what he believes to be sin, and leading him to aim at the true and right, he is to be commended. And if there be any measure of humility and charity with it, that man is certainly nearer the kingdom of God than he who is going on in trespasses. The general character of our Lord's own disciples was not that of men who had been wallowing in the depths of wickedness, and it is traducing the free grace of the gospel to speak as if vice were the most fitting qualification

for it. Wherever conscience is awake and earnestly endeavoring to do and be what is right up to its knowledge, it is coming nearer to God's kingdom, for that kingdom, like charity, rejoices not in iniquity, but in the truth.

The last hopeful feature we mention is *an interest in the spiritual side of things*. This scribe was a man who had felt the importance of the great questions that concern God and the human soul. He had listened with pleasure to our Lord's reasoning regarding immortality, and this reasoning was founded on a deep spiritual basis. He put questions on his own account, and added his personal experience to the answers in such a way as shows him to have been a thoughtful man who looked beyond religion as a thing of ceremonial, and who saw that it had to do with the heart and the inmost life. He had conceived an admiration for the person of Christ, and publicly owns it in a manner which impresses us with a sense of his transparency and courage. When we meet with such a man, though not avowedly Christian, there is something very hopeful in him. We meet with so much indifference and materialism that it is refreshing to light upon one who rises above such a chilling element, and who gives evidence that he believes there is a God, and a soul, and a spiritual law laid down for man's guidance — to see him not only listening but putting intelligent questions, and avowing with honest conviction how far he goes, though it may not be so far as we desire. The Saviour recognized it with satisfaction, and it is our part to do the same. We may not find all these features in the same person, but where we find even

one we should be thankful for and should encourage it. The gospel of Christ attaches itself to all that is best in human feeling and conscience, and makes its appeal to it. What is not against us here is with us, and if we meet it in a kindly, candid spirit, we may win it to the kingdom of Him whose heart yearns over the most distant wanderers, but who cherishes a peculiar interest in those whose souls are feeling their way, however faintly, to the eternally true and good.

II. We come now to consider WHAT IS NEEDED TO MAKE A MAN DECIDEDLY BELONG TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Our Lord's words imply that, with all that is favorable in this man, there is still something wanting. Christ had that divine insight which let Him see into the hearts of men, as well as into the heart of things, and which enabled Him to range them in their true place. We have neither the power nor the right thus to judge the inward nature of men. So far we may go in laying down the outward characteristics of those who are consistent members of his kingdom, but the more we refrain from unfavorable decisions on the eternal destiny of individuals the better. It is always right for us, however, to look as far as we can into the heart of *things*, and to use the principles we learn there for ascertaining our own true position, whether in God's kingdom or not.

We have employed the case of the scribe to illustrate the features that bring a man near the kingdom, and now we may seek to discover from him what is still lacking.

This strikes us, first of all, that in what he says

there is no apparent perception of the evil of sin, and no application for pardon and help. He perceives the claim of God's law, and admits it to be spiritual; but, so far as we can see, there is no conviction of that hopeless violation of it which can be met only by a Divine deliverer like Christ.

Then there is this, next, that, while he admires Christ's teaching, he speaks as one might to another on his own level: "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth;" but there is no appearance of his soul bowing before Him as a teacher sent from God, still less of his being ready to follow Him as his spiritual leader, and to cast in his lot with Him, to walk in his steps and do his will.

Now these two defects point out very clearly the two things that make a man a member of the kingdom of God. The first requisite, and one insisted on by Christ himself, is the *new birth* (John iii. 3): "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." When we look at this condition of entrance, as described in this chapter of John's Gospel, we perceive that its essence consists in a man being made to feel that the old natural life, however he may struggle in it, can never set him right with God. Whether he has been pursuing a course of sin and thoughtless folly, or has been striving to achieve, in all sincerity, a pure moral character, there comes a wakening up of conscience which shows him the gulf between what he should be and what he really is — a deep, hopeless gulf to all natural effort. When, under this conviction, he casts himself on the divine mercy as presented in Christ, the lifting up of the Son of Man by the

Father, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, the new birth begins, and he enters the kingdom of God. The change may be sudden or it may be slow, so slow as to be imperceptible at the time to himself or others; but such a change there must be, if any one is to pass this line. The great centre of determination is, the view a man takes of *sin*. When he is brought to see its evil in the sight of God, to feel his helpless position under it, and to put himself into the hand of God for cure, as God has made his own way of cure known, he has become a Christian. It is the passing from the natural and earthly life over into the supernatural and heavenly. This supernatural life is as truly in the world as when Christ was in it, although the outward miraculous signs which surrounded his personal presence are gone. Whenever a soul is brought into this new sense and view of things, it is by the direct power of the Spirit of God. Strong as the tempest, or soft as the breeze, shattering proud thoughts at a blow, or gently opening a new world, as in the breath of spring, day by day, it is the movement of that Spirit which comes and goes as it lists, and makes known its presence only in its work.

The other requisite is the *new life*. It is the natural and necessary outflow of the new birth. Wherever the birth is, the life will, more or less, follow, and wherever the new life shows itself the new birth must, in some way, have preceded it. If there be the view of sin we have spoken of, there comes with it what is termed a new nature — a higher principle of thought and feeling and action in the soul. Repentance is the look which such a man casts backward; contrition

is the turning of his eye within, and the setting of his life upon a new basis, or what is termed sanctification, is his aim as he looks forward. Humility and self-distrust, and dependence on God, and endeavor after an obedience not of the letter but of the spirit, and not of fear but gratitude, will be some of the features which mark this life.

In seeking to ascertain whether we belong to God's kingdom, we may observe that it is not so much the time and manner of the new birth that are a criterion as the evidences of the new life. In some a change takes place so suddenly and remarkably that they themselves and others cannot but be aware of the precise period. There is a quiet, sober-minded Christianity which is apt to shrink from such cases as if they had something unreal and unreliable in them, and which imagines that, however suitable they may have been at certain epochs of gospel history, they are out of place in our age. It would treat such converts very much as the disciples seem for a while to have treated Paul, with a certain suspicion of his sincerity, and almost an incredulity as to the power of God's grace. But some of the most remarkable men in the Church of Christ have been in all times the subjects of these decided transformations — Paul and Augustine and Luther and Bunyan, not to come nearer our own days. We should not only acknowledge such cases, but rejoice to see them, as proving the presence of the old Pentecostal power, and, if there be a tendency in such ardent natures to extremes, it is the part of the longer established Christians to take them by the hand and seek to guide them. Certainly revivals of spiritual life in sudden

freshness and extraordinary power are as much needed as ever they were, and if more unfrequent than formerly it is probably because we do not enough expect them.

On the other hand, some of those who have undergone this change suddenly are guilty of similar intolerance, and doubt the Christianity of all who have not had the same experience as themselves. They require the time and place of conversion, and a certain order of spiritual conviction, with an unhesitating assurance of faith, before they will admit a man's title to be a Christian. This is to forget, again, that many of those who have been the most eminent Christians have grown up slowly into the light and life of the gospel, and have confessed themselves unable to point to the period and way in which they crossed the boundary line. This seems to have been the case with a number of the first disciples who passed through the baptism of John, and it will probably always be so with the majority of those who have been trained under Christian influences, and have become wise unto salvation by knowing the Scriptures from their youth.

Meanwhile, the welfare of the Church of Christ may be promoted by the presence of both elements. The one gives ardor and fresh impulse, the other stability and edifying growth. What is wanted is that each should be willing to recognize the other when it offers the only real credential, the Christian character. Wherever we find the fruits we should admit that there is a tree of righteousness of God's planting. As long as there are such diverse dispositions and temperaments, and such varying circumstances in life, we may expect

that God's truth will find its entrance into the mind by different ways, that some will be operated on by one kind of evidence, some by another, some be taken by storm, others yield to slow influence, and that even the color and shape of the Christian life will vary, while yet there is a common likeness in all who possess it. We must seek to have the broad charity that will rejoice in this, even though there may be some things in the form of it with which we cannot personally sympathize. The thing common to all will be the prevailing likeness to Christ. Where the grand features of his character appear, the man belongs to the kingdom of God whether he can point out the time and place of his birth's register or not. Life carries with it its own signet.

Whether the scribe whom our Lord here addressed finally entered the kingdom we are not told. We may hope that, like Nicodemus, he was led on to a full decision, and that perhaps, "when a great company of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts vi. 7), he was of the number. It may be for a good reason that the result is concealed, to fill us with a salutary awe when symptoms are so favorable, and to urge us to bring them to an undoubted issue. If a case be sought which stands over against that of the scribe as an instance of true decision, it is found in Peter. Notwithstanding his sad fall, there are two words of his which show that his mind was fully made up. There is the feeling of spiritual unworthiness that comes out when he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" and yet there is that view of Christ which will not let him quit hold of Him, "Lord, to whom shall we

go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." The turning points of the new birth and the new life are both found here, and we should not rest till we reach them.

The subject would be incomplete if we did not, in the close, advert to some of the reasons which make it so desirable that a man who is near the kingdom of God should strive to enter it. If there are some so far away that they at times fall into a despair of ever reaching it, there are a greater number so near that they sink into an apathetic contentment with being almost Christians. Those that are far off may come to be nigh when the children of the kingdom are cast out.

Let this, then, be considered that though the distance may not seem great, there is momentous importance in it. It is thought by many that a character based on mere natural goodness is enough in the way of religion. If there be a proper regard to morality, and a kindly bearing to our fellow-men, it passes well in this world and may pass in the next. This, felt or expressed, is the opinion of a great multitude close to our Christianity, and if they have any misgiving, they put it down with the reflection that they *are* the multitude. It is good for us to leave this deceptive atmosphere, and put ourselves face to face with the Word of God. If there be any truth in it, it is clear that a great deal depends on being a Christian, and that to be a Christian needs something more than a decent arrangement of the natural life. "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." The man who trusts the mere natural good life must not only set aside such

a plain declaration, but the whole meaning of the gospel, the incarnation and death of the Son of God, the work of the Spirit, the solemnity of judgment and the very essence of religion as consisting in the friendship and fellowship of the soul with God. The natural life of man lies outside of these things, and he who confines himself to it takes the consequences of neglecting them. Apart even from the utterances of the Bible, let men only take conference with their own conscience when it speaks without the bias of worldly influence. It reveals often the flaws and failures of the natural life in such a way that, through the gaping chasms, the hollowness beneath is visible, and the man shrinks from himself. Nothing but a view of Christ as the source of pardon and of new life can enable a man to look such an awakened conscience calmly in the face; and if he cannot meet conscience, how can he encounter God? Or, even laying aside conscience, let a man consult the nature of his own soul, and ask if its end can be found in a life that does not regard God, and that has not learned to stand right with Him. This is to leave the highest part of the nature which should be the light and crown of all the rest, utterly neglected and ruined. It is to let a plant cling to the earth that was made to climb, and that can bring forth its best flowers and fruits only when it ascends; as if a palace were tenanted in its dungeons and lower rooms, while the higher apartments, which command the most glorious prospects over land and sea and to the broad sky, are left desolate; or, as if a city had its streets crowded with traffic and filled with the din of labor and busy life, but the temples, which tell of man's dignity by

pointing him to God, remain in untrodden silence, and become the homes only of the dead. Can a man who has a soul, feel that it is well with him in such a state? and yet thus he stands while he refuses to admit God to his rightful place.

Another reason why we feel anxious that those near the kingdom should enter it, is the effect their position has upon others. When there is a nature that has so much of the beautiful and attractive outside the proper Christian sphere, it is ready to impress those who do not think very deeply with the idea that the gospel is not so necessary as the Bible declares. Inconsistent Christians are an obstacle on one side; and the fair natural life may shine so much in contrast that we do not wonder at those who have not yet felt the power of a higher principle being stumbled. In this mixed and imperfect world it is impossible to exclude all harsh and cold things from the kingdom of God, but we may aim at having all naturally beautiful things included in it, and at having the graft of heaven inserted in the best of earth. This is certain, that when what is best in nature does enter in, it will be the first to confess that its own was poor and worthless compared with the new aim which God sets before it. Its seeming is made real, and its real rises to a height unthought of before. Its sense of rightness puts on a transparent purity, and its kindness a tenderness of sympathy, that make such a character become one of the most beautiful things our world can look upon. The young man whom Jesus loved, from whom he parted with such a regret, rises into the disciple who lay on his Master's bosom, the conception of whose face among

the chosen friends of Christ has been the ideal of the artist ever since, and whose mind more than any other received, and still reflects, the likeness of Him who was fairer than the children of men. When, even in a far humbler degree, such a union of nature and grace occurs, it specially adorns the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour; and to gain it for the gospel cause must be an object of peculiar interest.

This, moreover, should be pondered by all, that the only security for permanence in what is naturally attractive in human character consists in connecting it with God. Here, too, the grass withereth, and the flower of it falleth away. The brightest and most beautiful things of the heart lie all unshielded if God's shadow is not over them. The grace of God can keep the nature sweet in the midst of all bitterness, and bring out its sweetness most upon a cross, and under draughts of vinegar and gall. But the conflicts of life, the assaults of passion, the irritations of care and ill-success, and the resentments against man's injustice, will corrode and canker the finest heart if it is not constantly drawing the corrective from a Divine source. Even without these trials, whatever has not God in it is smitten with the inevitable law of decay. It can be nothing more than the seed sown in thin earth over the rock, which, because it has no root, withers away. Whatever of human kindnesses and amiabilities may be there, if there be an utter forgetfulness of the God of our life, and a cold indifference to the Father of spirits, there can be nothing permanent, and the bearing to man only stands out in sadder contrast with such an unaccountable and appalling neglect.

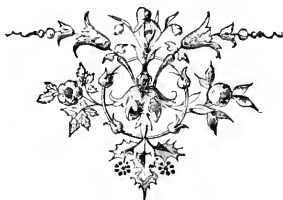
Outwardly, then, the human graces and virtues may bring a man at times close to the boundary of the kingdom, but there is still a limit between, which is of vast importance in the inner life, and which shows itself more openly as time advances. It is as if a man were standing on the shore, close to where a ship is moored. There is but a line between, and a step may cross it. But the one is fixed, the other moves, and all the future of existence depends on that step, — new lands, a new life, and God's great wide world. In the spiritual sphere to stand still is to fall away, to be left on that shore, doomed to decay and death. To pass into God's kingdom is to move with it, not only up to the grandeur of his universe, but into the heritage of Himself.

The great Italian poet, in speaking of those who lived in dead indifference, without either "infamy or praise," says that he saw in the other world the shade of him who "with ignoble spirit refused the great offer." It has been a disputed question who was, in the poet's eye enduring the eternal shame of declining to take one noble step. Those surely are in the right who find him in that young man who turned away sorrowful when the Lord said, "Come, follow Me," for, as has been observed, nothing that ever happened in the world could be so justly called, as Dante calls it, "the great refusal." If anything can fill the future world of sin and loss with tormenting regret, it must be that the kingdom of God was so near, the call to it so free, and that the opportunity was fatally and totally lost. How sadly does the wise man say, "for man knoweth not his time," and what a sorrow was in the heart of Christ

when He said, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace." Not far from the kingdom of God, and yet this *not far* may lose it all!

The old question may be coming from some, "But what must we do?" and the old answer still remains good, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." There is no other way, and never can be, of entering the kingdom but by coming to Him who is its Head and Lord; and our wisdom and our safety is not to wait for some more favoring circumstances, or for some great crisis of the soul, but to have the heart go, here and now, to that Saviour who is not far from every one of us. It was an earthquake shock which roused the jailer, but in that same city of Philippi, Lydia had her heart quietly opened. This hour, in the secret silent purpose of the soul, the question may be settled and the boundary line crossed. If any one feels that it is right to take this step, let him take it now, looking to Christ as the Healer of all the sinful past and the Helper of all the doubtful future. Let him put this look to Christ into his first act, whatever it may be, and then into every act that follows. This is the Christian's walk of faith, the life of God's kingdom, which becomes through God's grace ever stronger and more living as it is aimed at. The first step into the kingdom is in no way different from every other which succeeds; it is the doing before Christ and God what was heretofore done before man. It will cut off the sinful act and purify and elevate the base, but it will destroy nothing that is natural, nothing that is truly human. He who stands on the boundary line of his

kingdom freely inviting, ready to accept every resolve however feeble, will be near in all difficulty to strengthen with sufficient grace. If the purpose has been humbly but sincerely formed in any heart to take Christ at his word, let us thank God for it — if there be delay, the regret and the loss that may follow will be all your own, for, “be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”





X.

Work and Watching.

“The Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and . . . gave to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.” — MARK xiii. 34.



THE Christian Church is here compared to a great house or palace left for a time by its Lord and Master, the Son of Man. He left his church at his ascension, and He will return again to take account of it at the general judgment in the end of the world. He comes at the same time to every individual at his death. The Son of Man at his departure gave authority to his servants, that is, not merely, as some say, to the office-bearers of his church, but to all his servants, authority to transact in his room, to maintain due order in the house, and seek its good. There is meanwhile no other above them in the house, no earthly master, but only the Word of Christ, which under the teaching of his Spirit He has left for their guidance. Besides this authority to maintain order in the house, it is said “He gave to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.” This

is the most important portion of Christ's parting charge, since the rule and order of the house are there only for the sake of the work and watching in it. It is to these that we shall now turn attention, taking, *first*, the work of the servants; *second*, the watch of the porter; and *third*, the bearing of each of these upon the other.

I. *The work of the servants.* And here we observe that *work is the common duty of all in Christ's house.* It would be very strange if it were not so. The first thing we read of God doing for man when He made him was to assign him work. Before He gave him a right to eat of the fruit of the trees "He put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. ii. 15). When man is translated to the heavenly Eden it is not to idleness — "they serve Him day and night in his temple." The wise man when he looked abroad on the world made this deep reflection — "all things are full of labor." The calm stars are in ceaseless motion, and every leaf a world, with its busy inhabitants, and the sap coursing through its veins as the life-blood through our own. He who made all worlds has said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." It would be strange then if the Christian Church, which was intended to be the beating heart to all this world's activities, were exempted from a law so universal. It was for this end that Christ called its members into it — "why stand ye here all the day idle?" and then "gave to every man his work." Were it otherwise it would be against our best and highest nature. Work is not only a duty but a blessing. Every right deed is a step in

the upward scale of being by which we are raised to that rich reward — “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” That joy is itself larger and nobler employment near the throne of Him who has risen to heaven, not for idle repose, but grander action. If any one is ready to complain of the urgent voices that summon him to labor, of Christ’s command, “son, go work to-day in my vineyard,” of the pressing wants of the household that seem to grow in piercing earnestness, of fellow-servants who plead for aid, and fellow-sinners whose miseries cry for pity, let such an one remember that this is the ordinance of a wise Master who set us the example of unwearied labor, finishing one work to begin another, — that it is the law of the universe of that God who fainteth not neither is weary in deeds of kindness to his creatures, — and that it is in this way God and his Christ lift us up to the blessed dignity of being their fellow-workers. Instead of praying that God would grant us less work, our request should be that He would give us a greater heart and growing strength to meet all its claims.

We observe next that this work of Christ’s house *is varied to different individuals*. “The Son of Man gave to every one, that is, to each one, his work.” In one respect there is something common in the work of all, as there is a common salvation. “This is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent” — “this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” We have said this is common work for each one, and yet even here there may be a variety in the form. There is a different color of beauty in different stones that are all of them precious. One man may

be burnishing to the sparkle of the diamond, while another is deepening to the glow of the ruby. For this reason there are such different temperaments in Christian character, and varying circumstances in Christian life, that the foundation of the wall of the city may be garnished with all manner of precious stones. Each Christian has his own place and lustre in that temple, and therefore there is no ground to disparage our neighbor and none to despair of ourselves, if we are both in the hand of Christ. When we look from the individual life to the practical work, the variety is still more marked. There are different members, and all have not the same office. Some are there to teach—some to counsel and administer—some to tend the young—some to visit the sick-bed—some to conduct the temporal affairs of the Church—some to be liberal givers as God has prospered them, and some, without any formal mode of action, come under this description, which applies to them all, “sons of God, without rebuke, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of life.” It is very beautiful to see how the God, who has bound his world into a grand harmony by its very diversity, has arranged for this same end in his Church, by giving the members their different faculties of work,—how the pure light that comes from the sun breaks into its separate hues when it touches the palace-house of Christ with its varied cornices and turrets till every color lies in tranquil beauty beside its fellow. If it is not so it should be so, and as the Church grows it will be so. Use and ornament, the corner-stone and the keystone, shall both be felt to have their due place. To see how this

may be is to perceive that an end can be put to all jealousies and heart-burnings, and may help us even now to take our position calmly and unenviously, working in our department, assured that our labor shall be found to contribute to the full proportion of the whole.

Another remark is that *each individual has means for ascertaining his own work*. The Son of Man "gave to every man his work." The Master of the house let each servant know what he was expected to attend to, and it must be supposed that Christ will have some means by which He gives a man intimation of what He looks for from him. It is very vain to seek this as some have done in any personal revelation, or any irresistible impression made on the mind. Christ guides men into their sphere of work by the finger of his providence, and by the enlightenment of his Word in the hand of his Spirit. A man is to try to find his place of usefulness in the Church of Christ very much as he tries to find it in the world of men, and indeed these two generally go together. If it be sometimes difficult to ascertain this, it may be well to remember that this very difficulty is part of our training. It might be a much simpler and a more satisfactory thing meanwhile to have our place directly pointed out to us, but it would not make us so strong in the end.

It is of importance to have some rules to guide us in choosing Christian work, and the first we mention is to consider *for what we are most fitted*. There is scarcely any one who has not some specialty, both as a man and a Christian, which makes him suited for

some particular service, and it should be his aim to discover this. There is of course the danger of judging too favorably of ourselves, and running where we are not called, and the opposite danger of our diffidence or inertness that leads some to hide their talent in the earth; but in general, if a man will be true and honest, he may with God's help come to know what his power for usefulness is. An important guide in this respect is the opinion of our fellow-men when fairly expressed. If there be a strong appeal from them for our help in a good work, it should do much to counterbalance a sense of our own unfitness. This is one of the marked ways in which Christ speaks to us.

Another rule is to consider well *where God has placed us*, — our position in life, our opportunities for particular action or influence, the paths in which we move in society, the leisure that lies in our hand. To examine these carefully, and see how we can with all wisdom turn them to Christian profit is a great matter for every one of us. If there be an earnest desire to do good even with a sense of much unfitness, it is marvelous how fitness will grow. He who sends the opportunity and the desire will send the qualification, and I do not know of any nobler encomium from the lips of the Great Master than this, "She hath done what she could." The thought of having it from Him at last may strengthen our weak hands and make our hearts leap with joy. In general, I believe it will be found that the best Christian work is not far from our own door, and that those are mistaken who think they can do nothing till they find some great sphere, and who

run hither and thither in search of it. Church agencies have their high value, in some respects they are indispensable, but it would be sad indeed if they could measure in their records all the work of Christ's servants. It is often most effectually performed when it is done in no church connection, but noiselessly and informally, in hidden nooks of quiet homes, or walking by the wayside and yet scattering seed in the field. A master among his servants, a workman among his associates, a mother among her children, a sister among brothers, may be dropping words and radiating influences of which there shall be no report till the last great disclosure shall bring out the "Well done, good and faithful servant." The greatest work of the Christian Church should be this natural outgoing of its own life — a life which should obliterate the distinction between the religious and the secular, and make them both one, — all work, religion, — and all life, worship. Here there is room for each one, whether in the busy world or the calmest retreat; and if we only carefully seek to know *what* we are and *where* we are, and put the question prayerfully, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" we shall find that the Son of Man has given us our work, and that He will give us also strength and fitness for it.

II. We come now to consider, in the *second* place, *the watch of the porter*, — "and commanded the porter to watch." The porter is that one of the servants whose station is at the door to look out for those who approach, and open to them if they have right to enter. Are we to understand that the body of the servants

are exempted from watching while one takes the duty for them? This would be against the bearing of the whole Bible and of Christ's own teaching. In verse 37th of this chapter He guards us against such a misapprehension, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." The object of our Lord is, by telling us that the workmen are many and the watchman one, to impress this lesson, that, while the mode of labor in the house may vary, there is something common to all who are in it,—the duty of watchfulness. The porter must stand at the door of every heart while that heart pursues its work.

What are we to understand then by the watch of the porter? Some say it is prayer—to be constantly fulfilling that injunction, "Pray without ceasing." And certainly prayer is closely connected with watching. The two are frequently conjoined by Christ, "Watch and pray," "Watch unto prayer." But this combination of them shows that they differ, for Scripture uses no vain repetitions. The parable itself will disclose the meaning. The master of the house is absent and the period of his return is uncertain. The porter is stationed at the door to look out for the signs of his coming, and give timely notice of it. He is to have his eye turned also inward upon the arrangements of the house, that they may be in readiness for the Lord's return. This return of Christ is at the end of the world, to take account not only of his professed servants, but of all men, and there can be no doubt that from the moment of his departure He has charged his Church to expect his re-appearance, and to perform all her service in view of it. When the cloud received

Him, and his disciples looked up to it as to a door that closed on a departing friend, the angelic attendants assured them, "This same Jesus shall so come as ye have seen Him go into heaven," and when we gaze up into that broad sky in the glory of day or mystery of night, we should strive to realize the time when it shall part again and restore our unseen Lord. The Book of Revelation which concludes the canon of the Word shows the attitude of the Church, — her eye searching the future, her arms outstretched in longing as his were in blessing, and the sigh breathing from her heart, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

This great event is constantly represented in the New Testament as near, and the view is natural and true. Never does the meeting with a beloved friend come so close to us as when we have just parted from him. Love makes the tears of farewells sparkle into welcomes; and if we could only retain the same impression of Christ's loss, his return would be as nigh. It is moreover, in the New Testament, the great event that towers above every other. The heaven, that gives back Christ, gives back all we have loved and lost, solves all doubts, and ends all sorrows. His coming looks in upon the whole life of his Church, as a lofty mountain peak looks in upon every little valley and sequestered home around its base, and belongs to them all alike. Every generation lies under the shadow of it, for whatever is transcendently great is constantly near, and in moments of high conviction it absorbs petty interests and annihilates intervals. It may surely be for us to consider, whether our removal of Christ's coming further from us in feeling does not

arise from a less vivid impression of its reality and surpassing moment. Such views depend in no way upon peculiar opinions regarding his advent, for the longing expectancy of his appearance should be as common to all Christians as is their hope, and a thousand years are as a day to the grand event which opens everlasting life. What is the crust of a few centuries or millenniums, if the great ocean of eternity be felt heaving underneath, surging up through the chasms which death reveals, and admonishing us of the time when it shall sweep away all barriers, and leave nothing but its own infinite bosom?

To be constantly realizing this, and living and laboring in the prospect of it, is, we believe, what is here enjoined in the admonition "to watch." It is to do all our work with the thought of his eye measuring it, as of a friend who is ever present to our soul, gone from us in outward form, sure to return, and meanwhile near in spirit, — to subject our plans and acts to his approval, asking ourselves at every step how this would please Him, shrinking from what would cloud his face, rejoicing with great joy in all that would meet his smile. If God has taken from us earthly friends, and if we continue to think of them with the warm love of earth mingling in the awe of the unseen, it is to help us to rise to the conception of that greatest Friend who will bring them back at his return and give us their approval in his own. At the same time there is included, in the view of Christ's coming, the thought of our own death, which brings each one of us close up to his second advent, whensoever it may be. Every life has an end, as momentous to it as the end

of the world, for it places it immediately before the judgment-seat, and subjects it to the omniscient eye. The peculiarity of the Christian view is that our own death and Christ's coming are seen in one line of perspective, and that all our work should be done looking for that blessed hope, "the glorious appearing of the great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ."

It is in most cases a much harder thing to preserve this watchful heart than to have our hands busy with the work of the house, and therefore, probably, the emphasis which our Lord puts on it — "He *gave* to every man his work" — "He *commanded* the porter to watch." But, if attended to, it will bring its proportionate benefit. It will keep all wakeful, for nothing is so fitted to rouse from the lethargy that falls on every spirit as the thought of the day of his coming. It will preserve purity if we have before us those eyes that are like a flame of fire, and so we shall "give all diligence to be found of Him without spot, and blameless." It will maintain the soul in calmness, for not those who are heedless feel the depth of security, but those who have set their watch and go their steadfast rounds. And it will rise increasingly to the fervor of prayer, — that prayer which is the strength of the soul and the life of all work. The thought of that grand presence, which shall break down through the skies to fill our world and test and renew all things, shall make our hearts burn up like a fire to meet Him — "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke xxi. 36).

III. We come now, in the *third* place, to show *the bearing of these two duties upon each other.*

On the one hand, work cannot be rightly performed without watching. If watching were absent, work would be *blind, and without a purpose.* It would be work without a proper crowning close, and without a master to sum up all its results. The foresight of the conclusion to which we are advancing makes us intelligent fellow-laborers with God, and helps us to concentrate our efforts on the one great issue. It is this which lifts Christianity above all the philosophies. They can only wish or guess what the future may bring, and can work vaguely in the house, but have no watchman at the door. They may have the hand and the foot, but they want the eye and the ear which can perceive already the signs and opening harmonies of a new world — which learn from the mind of Christ the preparations that are needed for the kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy.

If watching were absent, work would become *discouraging and tedious.* It would stretch away endlessly into a limitless future, where each man's effort would disappear in the general mass of human struggle, like rivers in a shadowy, shoreless sea. We could not long have heart for such work where we could neither perceive one grand consummation nor the share we were to have in helping it. But now the coming of Christ tells us there is a fixed and most blissful close, and every earnest man, and every earnest effort, shall be found to have a part in hastening it. There is no selfishness in being stimulated by this, for it is a divine desire to be made like God, channels of life and happiness, and

it is but a portion of the heart of Him who renounced self, and who, for such a joy, endured the cross and despised the shame. If we would see its results, we have only to compare the fitful efforts of any human system with the everlasting wells of benevolence that have sprung up for eighteen hundred years from the thought of a departed and returning Christ.

If watching were absent, work would become *formal and dead*. The labor of the hands, as we all feel, degenerates quickly into barren routine, if there be not a constant effort to keep the heart fresh. Duty can never live long separate from truth, Christian service from Christ. There must be oil in the lamp if it is to burn. It is watching unto prayer that brings in this Divine life, that quickens the powers, and makes them rise up for new and higher work. The special danger of our age is that we may lose perception of the real soul and end of all our labor in the multiplied machinery that carries it on. Our very Christian activities will lead to decline and death if spiritual life is not growing within, in proportion to them, — if we are not realizing more strongly our own individual spiritual wants, living more in the presence of eternity, and remembering that admonition which stands connected with Christ — “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.”

But if work cannot be performed without watching, on the other hand, watching will not suffice without work.

Without work, watching would be *solitary*. There do seem times when God shuts a heart up to this — when pining sickness or sore bereavement makes work

impossible or utterly distasteful, and one feels as if he could only hold himself above despair, and look out for that Christ who is to heal all. And yet we believe there is no one in this world irretrievably condemned to such a life. The loneliest sick-bed, the darkest chamber of sorrow, never loses the power of Christian influence, and He who trode the wine-press alone, and all the while was saving others — who made his cross a place to preach comfort from — surely teaches us how possible it is, and how noble, for a crushed and broken heart to forget itself. Then it is doing its greatest work for Christ, and drawing to it the hand that will bind its cruel wounds and give it all its desire. We may make the night solitary to ourselves if we banish the watchman from the sound of all service, and bury our soul in bitter musings ; but we should rather thank God that there is no spot on earth where some duty does not still remain, and, in the calm steadfast pursuance of it, we should beguile the hours of the night till “ the day break and the shadows flee away.”

Without work, watching is *subject to many temptations*. There are men who have placed the essence of the Christian life in solitude and contemplation, and imagined they were thereby fleeing from the world's dangers and their own passions. It is against the example of Christ and all his apostles, and we know how sadly in most cases it has failed. We know how empty speculation and vanity and pride have sprung up in such idle isolation, and how evil desires come more readily to the inactive watcher than to the busy worker. There is a rest and a heaven within, which souls weary of the world may find, but it is discovered best in the

world's midst, seeking its good and doing his will who lived and died to save it.

And then, last of all, watching without work is *unready for Christ*. The solitary watcher can have no works of faith nor labors of love to present, no saved souls to offer for the Redeemer's crown, and no crown of righteousness to receive from Him. He may be "looking for," but he is not "hasting unto," the coming of the day of God, standing with "his lamp burning," but not with "his loins girt." He is saved, but alone, as on a board or broken piece of the ship, not as they who have many voices of blessing around, and many welcomes before, and to whom an entrance is ministered abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Saviour.

Let us see then the fitness of this union. "The Son of Man gave to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch." What need of work! The world how dark — the soul how precious — time how short — life how irreparable — inquisition and judgment how stern! How much need of watching! How deceitful our hearts — how many our enemies — how insensibly slumber creeps on — how dreadful to be found sunk in carnal sleep on the breaking of the great day of God!

That man is happy who can combine them in perfect harmony — who has Stephen's life of labor and Stephen's vision in the end. In every soul there should be the sisters of Bethany, active effort and quiet thought, and both agreeing in mutual love and help. But Mary no longer sits at the feet of Christ and looks in his face; she stands at the door

and gazes out into the open sky to watch the tokens of his coming, while in this hope her sister in the house still works. In due time He will be here to crown every humble effort with overflowing grace, to satisfy the longing soul that looks for Him, and to raise all the dead for whom we weep.

But what of those who neither work nor watch, who serve their own pleasure and forget that there is a coming hour which must give account of all? If there be any purpose in God's world, or truth in his book, or meaning in conscience, such an hour must arrive. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" There is but one resource for any man — to grasp in faith the cross of Him who shall come on the throne. That cross disarms all the lightnings of his hand, for it finds an answer in his heart. To know it, live by it, serve under it, is true life now, and to look for its sign in the sky is the good hope, through grace, of life eternal.






XI.

Burial of Moses: its Lessons and Suggestions.

“And the Lord buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”—DEUT. xxxiv. 6.

HERE is something strange and altogether singular in this, that Moses, the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets, should find a resting-place in the earth and no man be able to point it out. The sepulchres of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are known among the groves of Hebron; the bones of Joseph, after many wanderings, rest in Shechem, in that parcel of ground which his father gave to him, the best beloved son. Rachel's tomb, watered by many a tear, stands on the way to “Ephrath which is Bethlehem,” for there her strength failed her, and she sank, as did all the ancient saints, on the way to that birthplace of hope. The sepulchre of David is by Jerusalem, the home of his heart. But the last abode of Moses, the servant of God and the lawgiver of Israel, is claimed by no city in the wide land.

It was certainly not neglect on the part of his people that left the spot unmarked. They murmured often against him, but, long before he died, discontent was hushed, and he had taken a place in their hearts never occupied by any other, for "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." It was not what a Jew would have wished or feigned. Had popular feeling constructed the history it would have framed this part otherwise, and assigned to Moses some well-known sepulchre, which would have drawn to it pilgrim feet, and made the land of promise to a Jewish heart still more dear. There is one of the little tokens in this that the Bible is not a human book. It meets the need of man deep down, where at first he himself does not recognize it, but it contradicts many of his superficial desires; and yet these very contradictions of desire may be found, when carefully considered, to have tokens of a Divine wisdom in them. It may be worth at least one discourse to inquire whether it is not so in the striking exception which God has made in regard to the burial of Moses.

Even though we knew nothing more, we might infer that this closing incident, in the history of the greatest man in the Old Testament Church, must have been often read and attentively pondered. The place and the manner of burial, in that ancient time, were subjects of deep interest, were often carefully prescribed by the dying man, and were sacredly cared for by the survivors. The way in which a man "was gathered to his fathers" has its record in the Word of God, and its meaning. No Jew therefore could pass this by

with indifference when he thought of Moses and his death. We know from their traditions that it was frequently discussed, and in one part of the New Testament (Jude ix.) the dispute about the body of Moses is distinctly referred to, whatever interpretation we may choose to attach to that peculiar passage.

This further may be said, that, the more carefully we study the Old Testament, the more we shall be convinced that it contains a development of truth, not merely by spoken revelations, but through events and incidents divinely arranged, and made the subjects of thought to those ancient believers, under the teaching of God's Spirit. These incidents are planted like seeds in the popular heart, and grow up slowly into leaf and flower in recognized doctrines. This was Christ's own method of instruction in his miracles and parables, and we may expect to find it in the Divine history throughout. No one can close the Old Testament and open the New without seeing that, during the interval, immense progress had been made in the unfolding of religious truth. The expectation of a Redeemer and a redemption had become clear and concentrated, and the belief in an eternal life, and in the resurrection, was held by many. There is, we believe, no satisfactory way of accounting for this but by the work of God's own Spirit, in the hearts of thoughtful men, using for his instrument the revelation which had been already given. We shall take the account of the death and burial of Moses, and seek to show how it was fitted to be such a source of fruitful reflection to the Old Testament Church.

I. *God will have no one, living or dead, to stand between his creatures and Himself.*

The first great lesson which the Jewish people were to be taught was the supremacy of the one true God. This was the indispensable basis of every other revelation, — the one God, alone, supreme, — and then his attributes, his law, his way to man. They were taken from among the nations and reclaimed from idolatry to carry this truth to the world; and then, when sovereignty was established, mercy could be fully proclaimed. It was the life-long work of Moses to fix this truth of God's sovereignty. The word given him to bear was, "Hear, O Israel! the LORD our God is one LORD." All his labors and his trials arose from the difficulty of impressing this on their deep and constant conviction, and his death would have had no regret to him had he felt assured his work was done. How solemn and pathetic his warnings to cleave to the true God and wander to no other, as if he felt already the misgivings of their defection.

And yet what he had done for them made it not unlikely that their reverence for him might prove their snare, and that they might be tempted to give him the place he desired to secure for God. Moses had been to them more than ever man was to a nation, — their deliverer from the most crushing bondage, their leader through the most terrible scenes, wielding in their behalf the highest powers of nature and gifts of the soul — their lawgiver, their prophet, their advocate with God. In every strait they had fled to Moses and found in him sympathy and relief. In all their waywardness and rebellion, his heart never turned from

them. Their murmurs against him were many ; but, long ere he died, his self-devotion and magnanimity had found fitting acknowledgment. The clear, calm grandeur of his soul had risen above the clouds of their discontent, and he had taken a place never approached by any other. He stood at the head separated from them all, — “ Moses and the prophets ; ” and “ A prophet like unto Moses ” was the name for that Messenger from God who was to complete every Divine mission.

The danger came, that death, which lifts every great man higher, might have raised Moses above the lesson of his life — the unapproachable supremacy of God himself. The deification of their heroes was the manner of the nations round them — it was the atmosphere of the age, and in this event we can surely see, first of all, a means taken to guard the Israelites from the temptation. Had Moses himself obtained his choice, it would have been that, in death, he might carry out the lesson of his life, and here he gains it. He dies apart, and is buried in secret, where his grave can be dishonored by no pilgrimage, and where no false veneration can rear altars to his memory. And this first lesson did not fail. The nation worshipped many strange deities, but it never gave the place of God to his prophets. If any life could have tempted them to such a course it would have been that of Moses, and when God removes him from their sight, and leaves no relic for sense or imagination to build its worship on, there is no successor of Moses who can assume the place.

II. *God wishes men to see something more left of his servants than the outward shrine.*

In the history of the greatest and the best, the tomb is often remembered and the life forgotten. It is an easier thing to revere the dust than to follow the example. There is an admonition in the Bible, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. xiii. 7); and here at the commencement of the lengthened roll, God inscribes it on an emphatic act. He takes away the grave of Moses, that they may have before them, in full and undisturbed relief, the man himself. His words living and dying, his walk with God till God took him, all that he was to God and to them, in self-devotion and affection, — these survive him and can never die. If they came to his grave, they approached the creature and its fleeting part; but in coming to his words and his life, they come to Moses himself and to God.

And may we not see a similar lesson in this, that the sepulchre of the greater Prophet than Moses is equally unknown, and may we not wonder that Christians, under a system of spirit and life, have been more slow than Jews to learn the lesson? Once, and once only, were men invited "to see the place where the Lord lay," that they might be assured it was empty, and refrain any more from seeking the living among the dead. If research the most patient has hitherto done aught, it has been to show that the spot has left no trace upon our earth. God has made the march of armies and the desolation of centuries do for the sep-

ulchre of Christ what his own hand did for the grave of Moses. He could scarcely have condemned more strikingly, in history, that idolatry of place and form which has usurped so long the worship of the spirit. The Christian Church, no less than the Jewish, is taught to look to the life and doctrine of its great Lawgiver with this distinction, that we know most surely where He is, to draw souls to Himself, and whence He shall come "to change these vile bodies, and fashion them like unto his own glorious body."

III. *God takes the honor of his servants into his own keeping.*

The people of Israel must be taught, in the beginning of their history, that the messengers of truth do not come from their midst, but from a Master above. Man's philosophy is the offspring of the soil of this earth. It appeals to man's reason, and finds there its reward. But God's law descends from God's throne, and, while it meets the requirements of man's nature, it is not responsible to them. Every true bearer of it has his errand from God, gives his account to Him, and finds his reward in God at last.

This lesson must be taught in the life and death of the first of that lengthened line of messengers who are to present Divine truth to the world. The object of the Bible is to send into the world men who may witness to their fellow-men for God, and of Him, and witness in fearless confidence, as feeling that, whether they live or die, it is to God they belong; who will speak to men, "whether they hear or whether they forbear," and say with Paul, "with me it is a very

small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment: he that judgeth me is the Lord!"

We need such an order of men still, not self-assuming or dominant, as "lords over God's heritage," but gentle among them, while loyal to truth and to its God, — men of kingly nature, because they serve a heavenly Master, and who are bold to utter his word without fear and without favor. Never since the world began were such men needed more. And let it be remembered that, while this duty falls with double weight on those who have been called to it by the rule of God's house, it does not belong to them alone. Wherever a man feels the force of Divine truth within him, he should be fearless in his place to speak it out, without shrinking, and to show that he is a witness for God. It was the noble wish of Moses, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets," and all that follow him, however humbly, to testify, in word or deed, to the truth of God, shall have a share in his reward. "This honor have all his saints."

How faithfully to men, and also how kindly, would all our work be done, if we had our account, not to them, but to God, ever in our eye! Moses ascends the mount to learn God's will, and, when he has finished his work, he goes to Him to die, and to find from Him his sepulchre. He, whose servant he is, takes him back into his keeping, in the spirit of that grand old psalm which comes down to us as "the prayer of Moses the man of God" (Psalm xc.), — "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

"The Lord buried him." There is a higher honor conferred on him than if all Israel had met to weep and lament, or the world assembled to his obsequies.

And when God buried him, this, too, was part of his care, to give him a fitting site for his tomb, not in Canaan, though his heart was there, and his people's home, but on the other side Jordan, and nigh to that desert where the labor of his life had been. Forty years' toil and travail, and then the long quiet sleep beside his work, looking to where Sinai throws its shadow, and Horeb piles its rocks, in advance to the land of promise but not within it, like a noble leader who sinks on the edge of battle and in the path of victory, and then reposes where he falls! That wilderness is his monument, which his faith and courage have made illustrious, shining all through it yet, as the fiery pillar lightened up its darkness, and making it, whenever we think of it, still glorious with Moses' name.

IV. *God would teach men that He has a relation to his servants which extends beyond their death.*

The great truths of life and immortality must surely have begun to stir in the hearts of thoughtful men when they knew this, that "the Lord buried him." Shall God, then, pay such regard to the perishable frame, and neglect the nobler part which dwelt in it? The outward shape and fashioning of clay, made of the dust and returning to it, was this then Moses, and not rather the living soul, breathed into it by God, as Moses himself records? and can the Maker put so disproportionate an estimate upon his own handiwork, as carefully to store up the casket and throw away the precious jewel which it held? Could we cherish the portrait of one beloved and leave himself to perish, when we might save him by stretching out the hand? Can this be the kindness of God to his friends? — for either He

must wish to preserve the souls of his servants and want the power, or He must possess the power but want the wish ; and where, in the one case, would be a God worthy of reverence, or where, in the other, a God who could attract our love ?

But when men become assured of his power, that He is the Father of spirits, and when He proves such regard to the frail and fading form, the burial of Moses might become God's way of leading reflective men out to hopeful thoughts of the spirit that had given such brightness to the now darkened face. When such questionings arose, " Wilt thou show wonders to the dead ? Shall the dead arise and praise thee ? (Ps. lxxxviii. 10) ; then a record like this might lead to the conviction, " Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints " (Ps. cxvi. 15). " Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth ; my flesh also shall rest in hope. Thou wilt show me the path of life " (Ps. xvi. 9).

Let it not be thought we ask too much reflection here from these ancient believers. That they pondered such questions anxiously all their writings show, and that they found deep truths in the law of God these psalms attest. We are left to infer many of the steps ; but we know that the plan chosen by God for some of his greatest revelations was to set before men events and incidents which arrested their thought, and guided them, by the teaching of his Spirit, to farther conclusions. A wise instructor employs not only his own mind, but a book which he sets before the scholar's eye, and God's book was the history of his dealings in these events of life and death.

And such a record as this must have led to thoughts not only of the soul of man but of the body also. It is a God-given instinct that leads man to reverence the frame in which the living spirit dwelt, and to see it laid aside with pious care. There is a dim groping in it after the hope that this part of our nature is also true, and will be made in some way perpetual. "Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands." "They that sleep in the dust shall awake." And when "the Lord buried him," He who made us identified Himself with this instinctive feeling of the heart. It is in a line with his own procedure, when He sent his Son in human nature and raised Him in it from the dead, and "set him at his own right hand in heavenly places." Whatever is good in the first creation is taken up into redemption to be ennobled and made immortal. The burial of Moses is a step towards the resurrection of Christ, taken after the manner of that ancient dispensation, dimly but tenderly. The seed is carefully laid in the earth, as by One who knows that it is precious, and who purposes to watch over it, and then the first-fruits rise as the pledge of the full harvest which is yet to come. All this to the mind of an Israelite must have been at first dark and doubtful; but there was enough in it to stimulate inquiry, and gradually quicken it into hope.

"The Lord buried him." It assures us Christians of things more clear, tells us that the dust of God's servants is dear in his sight, and that his hand keeps it safe against the day of the redemption of the body. They may sleep in desert sands or frozen wreaths, in the crowded city or the ocean's bed, "their ashes may

fly no marble tells us whither," but his eye watches over them as carefully as it did over this grave, which his own hand in some mysterious way formed and closed; and He will bring them forth every one when "He writeth up the people."

V. *God would teach men from the very first that his regard is not confined to any chosen soil.*

This was a danger into which these Israelites were ready henceforth to fall. They were to be inclosed in one land that they might preserve the truth of God from corruption, and they were tempted thereby to narrow their sympathies, and deny that the truth could ever extend beyond it. But here in the burial of their first and greatest prophet God leads them out to wider views, if they are willing to learn.

"The Lord buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor." It must have seemed strange when they entered the Land of Promise that they could not carry the founder of their nation with them. It would have been the glory of their soil, the pride and boast of the land of Israel, and when the Jew thought of it the earth would have seemed more sacred because the dust of Moses mingled with it. They may bear Joseph's bones across the Jordan, but a greater is left behind in Moab, in the land of the Gentiles, and all their power cannot change this purpose of God. This prerogative Gentiledom possesses over Judaism, from the very commencement, that it owns the sepulchre of Judah's lawgiver, and thus God would teach them that the desire to make their land the only land of God is vain. It could not but

extend the sympathies and views of the Jew to a wider range. When he came up to his yearly festival according to the law that Moses gave, and when, from the mountains which stand round about Jerusalem, he looked away to the hills of Moab, and thought that beneath their shadows his great prophet was slumbering, he must have felt more tenderly and hopefully towards the heathen soil. The dews must fall more gently there and the flowers spring more sweetly, and God's eye rest on it with some special favor. Thus within a system that was exclusive there was planted a seed that threw blossoms of charity beyond it, and as time went on those blossoms came to fruit. Men taught by God arose, who spoke of the period when all nations should serve the God of Israel, and the whole earth be filled with his glory. Then this burial of Moses would not seem so strange. The limits of the land of Israel shall be extended and embrace this grave, and the whole wide earth become a land of promise.

That time is now. The death of Christ has consecrated the soil of the world. Wherever men kneel with a pure heart they find God's mercy-seat, and wherever they are laid in the grave they are in holy ground. He has made it all. "*God's field*" — the garden where He sows his seed, in Moab as in Mount Zion — hallowed by the sepulchre of the greater Prophet and one Redeemer of the race, where the sleepers await the time when "their dew shall be as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isa. xxvi. 19).

VI. There is one concluding lesson which has been reserved for us in its fulness, and which could be seen only partially by the Jews, — that *the seeming failure in a true life may at last have a complete compensation.*

Perhaps the life of no man in the Bible has the same rounded fulness as the life of Moses. It had so little of any flaw in the character, and it accomplished so much for the cause of God and man. Take it from beginning to end, and it appears to contain all that a man could wish for in this world. But there was one part where the character broke down, and one at which the life fell short. On a great occasion his temper failed him, and human passion marred the tone of his mission. The penalty was that Moses did not enjoy what his heart was set upon — the view of the close of all his labors, and the entrance of his nation into the home God had chosen for them.

It seems very hard that so great a punishment should follow a single offence, and yet it is not uncommon in the life of a good man to see one false step or one pause in self-control bring with it irreparable loss. Moses prayed and pleaded in deep repentance that it might be reversed, but in vain. He gained perfect acquiescence in the will of God, and this was probably the best compensation which this life could give. The sin was blotted out, and he knew it, although the earthly effect of it remained. But if compensation is to be complete it must include the removal of the earthly penalty. The perfect idea of God's forgiveness is not merely that He should take away the inward pain of sin but the outward stigma of it, and that he should make all the life what it would have

been without that sin, or still richer and higher for the very fall and rising. The spiritual Physician should not only heal the wound but obliterate the scar, and, in the language of the prophet, give "beauty instead of burning."

In the case of Moses this does not at first appear. "The Lord buried him," but not in Canaan; and He showed him the land, but did not permit him to tread it. To an ancient Jew this must for a while have seemed strange almost to harshness, — to think that the meanest in all their tribes should enter and look on it, and eat of its plenty and drink of its sweet, and that he who had toiled and agonized for this life-long end, so faithful to God and so self-sacrificing, should be excluded! No Israelite could look round on that noble home, and the rejoicing family which dwelt in it, without thinking of the great leader who stumbled at the door and lay buried by the threshold. Is Canaan then all, and is the whole life of Moses shut up in wanderings through a wilderness? Slowly but irresistibly the thought of another land must have risen, must have dawned upon the mind's eye, — a land of which this earthly one was only the symbol, and which must have given Moses perfect compensation for all he lost in death. It could not be otherwise. They were attracted and compelled to it by all they knew of God and of his servant. It was God's very purpose in these events to educate them to a belief in another world, and to give them some faint conception of it — a world where the things and ties of earth are carried up to a heavenly temper and perfection. When a prophet came in after ages with the promise, "Thine eyes

shall see the king in his beauty ; they shall behold the land that is very far off" (Isa. xxxiii. 17), it must have been felt by many to be suitable to this death of Moses, and may have had its origin in his last look, which took in "the precious things of heaven" as well as "the precious things of earth and the fulness thereof."

To us who live under the gospel the view of entire compensation has been made clear. As God forgave the sin of Moses, we can see that long since He has made up the loss. When the prospect of the earthly Canaan faded from the eye, another opened with brighter skies and better soil, a fresher river, and more fragrant fruits. The Jerusalem for which those who entered the land had to fight many a hard battle came to him new and golden, like a bride adorned for her husband ; and for the tumult of the congregation of Israel he joined the calm of the general assembly and church of the first-born. The death of Moses, which seemed to cut off his life irrevocably from its grand object, realized it beyond his conception, and sealed it to him for ever.

The thought of this may be a comfort to many of us who feel at immeasurable distance from Moses, as if our nature were all broken by flaw and failure, and our life arrested before it had reached any true end. What unsatisfied yearnings, what shattered hopes rise before us, as we look in and back ! How little we have enjoyed, how much less we have done ! What fields of promise once gleamed before us, and we feel that they shall never be ours ! We have marched through deserts, and we are cut off by an irreversible

decree, from the green land which beckoned us on. There are weary aching hearts about these things, God knoweth ! But if there be a true purpose in the life it shall reach a perfect close one day, its shortcomings shall yet be completed, its errors rectified, its visions realized. There are no ruins nor half-finished structures in the city of God. One of the most blessed assurances of the Christian faith is, that not only can there be a compensation for failure now, in the lessons of humility, of trustfulness in God and of inward peace amid outward loss, but that there shall yet be a compensation in the perfectness of deed and of attainment. All the inward gains of the soul in its struggles, its defeats and disappointed hopes shall be represented, and more than represented, in the fulness of power and possession which shall be its heritage in the endless life. It is by privation, not unfrequently by disaster, that God qualifies souls for the highest ends, and the thought of this may make the most wearied heart among us bear up bravely, and “hope to the end for the grace that shall be brought to it at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

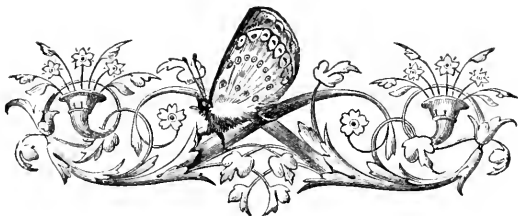
What is needed by all of us is that while we have our natural desire to see some result of life in this world — some “goodness of the Lord in the land of the living,” — as the great prophet of Israel had, we should not reckon life lost if this is not gained, but should rest assured that He who can give pardon of sin and peace of heart now, can grant all the crown and glory of a completed life in a world to come.

It is impossible to close this subject without remembering the remarkable way in which God set his seal

at last upon the full compensation which was given to Moses. He had prayed earnestly that he might enter the earthly Canaan, and, though death disappointed him, God in his own time and way heard his prayer. Ages after a grave had been made for him in the valley in the land of Moab, Moses stood within the limits of the Promised Land. When Christ's disciples saw Him transfigured, "behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 30). If the sacred soil had any crowning honor it was when the feet of the Son of God walked it, and Moses was detained at the gate that, after many generations, he might enter and look on the land in its most glorious prime. And in this final entrance God shows how long He can bear a prayer in memory, how He can seem at first to reject it, and yet answer it at last above all that a man can ask or think. He opens up in the highest way the mystery of Moses' grave, completes his history by the one golden link it wanted, and shows, that every life which has a true regard to God and to his will shall succeed at last most evidently where it seemed to fail.

And this is the lesson from One greater than Moses. He whose decease was accomplished at Jerusalem ended his life in what appeared to man an utter failure, with his followers scattered, his mission rejected, and Himself betrayed to a death of agony and shame. Yet it was then He uttered the words "It is finished;" then that He achieved success, and secured it for all who are willing to take up their cross and follow Him. Through such failures Christianity has been advancing

for centuries, through martyrdoms and defections, and great stones rolled to its sepulchre, and prophecies of extinction. But still it lives and moves forward to the throne its Author and Lord has already reached. The corn of wheat which dies and rises to the harvest is its symbol, and we must take it for that of our personal life. If we wish present success we may go seek it elsewhere, but if we desire the strength and peace which make a man independent of every thing but God, we must find these in God Himself, and in making heart and life submissive to his will. In such a life failure is impossible unless God Himself can fail and his moral universe prove itself a dream. Should He give us length of days in the world, as He did to Moses, and usefulness and honor, leaving but one break, as break there must be, at the close, let us take it thankfully ; but if, as He appointed to his Son, He send us defeat and disappointment, and forms of death, all through, let us take it hopefully. There is full compensation for failure, in every true life, and the highest where the struggle and the loss have been the deepest. Most comforting of all, there is reversal of the consequences of sin when, in humble contrition and faith, the heart has been put into the hand of the great Healer. The shadow on earth's dial-plate is turned back when eternal life is gained, and the sun shall go down no more. We shall be waked up from our grave, like Moses, to have our heart's desire, to look on the land and on Him who is the glory in the midst of it ; nay, better still, to share it with Him, and to know that "if we suffer with Christ it is that we may be also glorified together."



XII.

Moses & Stephen : the Old Testament & the New.

“And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone : and they were afraid to come nigh him.” — EXOD. xxxiv. 30.

“And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him (Stephen), saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” — ACTS vi. 15.

IN reading the account of Stephen's death and of the supernatural light that flushed over his face, one is led to think of a similar scene in the life of Moses, and we have put the two together here for the sake of comparison. To be servants of the same God, they could scarcely be more unlike in their history, and they show in what divers ways the Divine Workman may use his spiritual instruments. The life of Moses is probably the most complete of any man's, either in the Old Testament or the New,— a great, noble, growing life to the very end, and most clearly and graphically depicted in the Word of God. But not a single ray of light falls upon his death, and

no man attends his funeral. We only know that it was well cared for ; “ the Lord buried him.”

Of the life of Stephen we know almost as little as of the death of Moses. But his last hours stand before us distinct and bright, and no nobler funeral, among men, could be described than by those few words, “ And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”

So unlike in other things, they have this in common, that each of them, on a great occasion, had a transfiguration of the ordinary life, which was visible to all around, and these two events, in their resemblances and contrasts, invite our thought. We venture to call this visible change *transfiguration*, although that word may seem consecrated to a greater event. Each of them has the same character with that of Christ. It is the reflection by the earthly life of the vision of God when He comes very near, and we may believe that the Lord who shares the heavenly reality with his servants is not unwilling to divide with them the name.

In setting these transfigurations over against one another, we have no thought of comparing the two men. Stephen fills a small range in the book of God beside Moses. There is no grander character among all the great men of the Bible than the legislator of Israel. Such magnanimity, such power of faith and patience, such a work to do, second only to one other, and such a performance of it ! On the other hand, the most remarkable thing about Stephen's life is his manner of laying it down. He starts up suddenly from obscurity into the glory of a martyr's death, and is carried as visibly to heaven as if we saw the chariot of fire.

We shall seek to compare these men, not in their own lives, but in the periods to which they belong in God's revelation. It is the tendency of all history to be typical. We read it very inattentively if we do not see that it is constantly throwing itself up into representative men and events. This is the tendency, above all, of Divine history, for God's providence guides it in a special manner outwardly, and God's Spirit breathes through it all, with a grand unity of aspiration, to one central event. That there should be types in such a history is most natural. The more attentively we study these two incidents, the more we shall see that they have much in common, as both men belong to the same divine mould, and yet much in contrast, as they belong to ages and dispensations wide apart. We shall perceive, in this way, the marvellous progress that was made in unfolding God's truth from the opening of the law under Moses to the commencement of the gospel era in the time of Stephen. How much deeper and wider and nobler the latter view is, will appear if we look intelligently on the light which shines in the faces of these two men of God.

I. We may compare that *view of God which is reflected from the face of each of them.*

They had both of them a Divine vision before their eye which caused the transfiguration. In the case of Moses, it was what is termed (Exod. xxxiii. 18, 22) "God's glory,"—an appearance like that which was seen by him in the bush, and which hovered, as the Shechinah, over the mercy-seat—but brighter and fuller, as it was granted in more special favor. It

was without any definite form, for one fixed aim of that dispensation was to withdraw the minds of the worshippers from the tendency to shut up God in figures made with hands. We are told, indeed (Exod. xxxiii. 11), that "the Lord spake to Moses face to face;" but that this language is figurative appears from verse 20, "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see Me and live." It was the glancing skirts of the Divine raiment which Moses discerned, not an open countenance nor intelligent look. It was a great and significant vision, doubtless, raising the Mosaic system at once above all the religions of the nations, and proclaiming that there is one God, who is light, and who yet can visit man in love. For corresponding to this vision came the voice with it (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7), "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." There was much that was reassuring in it, but much also that was doubtful. It revealed the purity of God, but the image had no distinct features; and it promised mercy, but the way of pardon was not made plain.

We may turn now to the object presented to the eye of Stephen (Acts vii. 55): "Being full of the Holy Ghost, he looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." The glory, which Moses beheld like a bright cloud, has now opened its bosom, and, issuing from it, there is seen "God manifest in the flesh," "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." That Stephen recognized the true divinity of Christ is clear from verse 59. He died

“calling upon” (evidently Him whose name he takes into his lips—Christ himself) “and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” He addresses the very words to Christ which Christ himself in dying addressed to the Father. And now the purity which in the day of Moses had no distinct features has formed itself into the countenance of the Son of God, and the mysterious mercy descends from God’s throne by a new and living way, in the person of the God-man Mediator, Jesus Christ our Lord. The glory of God has outlined and fulfilled itself perfectly in the pure and spotless life of Christ, and brings us into the immediate presence of God with the words, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” And yet that life suffices not without the death as the door by which we are to reach it. It is a Saviour risen from the cross and grave whom Stephen sees; for “the God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,” “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed.”

These, then, were the views of God presented to Moses and Stephen. That the first was in the same line with the second cannot be doubted if we believe in the unity of the Bible and in the plan of God running through all the ages. It would be impossible to invert these views, for there was a fitness in their order. It was necessary that God should present Himself first in his supremacy, apart from the lords many and gods

many of Gentile worship, with an infinite majesty and purity before which the soul must bow down in deepest reverence. It was needful not less that through the cloud, dark with excess of brightness, softer rays should fall to tell of pardon in some wondrous way, else "the spirit would have failed before Him, and the souls that He has made." When Moses bowed before that revelation he bowed implicitly before Christ, for He was enshrined in it, like the mercy-seat in the most holy place, and it was his voice, though Moses knew it not, which declared the name of God.

But, thereafter, came the time when love could be fully disclosed ; first the earthquake and the thunder, and following them the still small voice, — for mercy can only grow when reverence has prepared the soil. In Stephen's vision this full revelation appears ; — God coming near in human form and in the fulness of compassion to human sin and suffering — taking our nature upon Him for sympathy and our sin upon Him for salvation. From the glory that shone upon the Mount there comes forth the Son of God, the Father's likeness ; — for the voice of the unseen there is the incarnate Word — and purity and pardon meet in harmony in the great God our Saviour Jesus Christ.

II. We may compare the *effect of the view on the immediate witnesses.*

In the case of Moses, the effect was mainly, if not entirely, an external brightness. So we may infer : "the skin of his face shone." Its beauty had something of terror with it. Those who were near could not bear its open look, and required to have it veiled.

Withal, it lay more on the surface than in the soul, and had more of outward brilliance than deep spiritual expression.

We are not from this to suppose that there was no religious fervor in the heart of Moses, or that his character wanted spiritual depth. All his life shows the reverse. But then he stood here, not as a person, but as the representative of a system, and, however some might rise above it, the general character of that system was not profound spirituality. It wrought more by outward reflection than inward development, or, at least, the development was latent and slow, and was far from appearing in the whole nature. In order to see this, we have but to think of what sad stains and inconsistencies mark the history of some of its best members, and how ready the great mass of its adherents were to cast aside its profession in the hour of trial. If their religion had been a deep, pervading thing, possessing all the soul, and rising from this into outward expression, it could never have been so fitful. In some few, it was a strong reality; but, in the majority, their religion was an illumination cast on them from without, — a separable and perishable surface thing.

The illumination on the face of Stephen is described as something entirely different. There may have been an external brightness, for the soul cannot merely speak through the face, — it can lighten it up. But, if so, it was a brightness that came from the action of the soul itself. It was the glow and grandeur of the spirit that rose up and looked out through the countenance, until “they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”

And here it may be observed, that the New Testament has changed even our idea of the angelic appearance. In the Old Testament, the conception is one simply of brightness ; but, to us, it is one of beauty. The radiance comes from the soul ; and the beginning of that ideal, which painters and poets have ever since sought to realize, — the spirit-expression shining out through the countenance, — may be found in such a description as is here given of the first Christian martyr.

That it was more of Divine expression in the face, than of supernatural brightness, is seen in the conduct of the beholders. It is said, “the children of Israel were afraid to come nigh Moses, his face so shone ;” but “all that sat in the council looked steadfastly at Stephen.” The appearance did not out-dazzle or overawe them. It merely attracted, and, for the moment, arrested them. It did not turn them from their purpose, — their passion was too fierce ; but it brought them to a pause, imprinted itself upon them, and — may we not suppose ? — came back in waking thoughts and nightly dreams, and deserted some of them never till they saw it again before the throne of God.

For there is this difference further between mere brightness of face and the beauty of the soul which beams through it, that the one is seen entire at first, and grows no more. It tends constantly to fade, and must fade to us, even though it remains in itself the same. But the soul's expression grows evermore as we gaze into it ; and it is in reminiscence, above all, that it rises to its perfect ideal. It was this angelic beauty which shone in the face of Stephen, and it was

there because of the object he looked upon. "His eyes were beautiful," if we may adapt to the case the expression of a poet, "because you saw that they saw Christ." There was a look passing beyond this world into another, so forgetful of all around, so absorbed in what he beheld, so full of reverence and love for the Saviour who met his gaze, of pity and forgiveness for his persecutors, that Christ himself can be read in that look, — the very Christ who suffered so meekly and magnanimously, and whose visible image is now reflected from the soul of his martyred servant, as he kneels down, and cries, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" and, having said this, falls asleep.

Now, these two forms of transfiguration belong each to its own period, as does the view of God from which they spring. The one is bright, but formless; the shadow of the Shechinah on him who sees it; and inspiring even its friends with awe, till they can look no longer. The other is the beauty of the soul that has beheld Christ, distinct and expressive, reflecting his divine purity and tenderness, so mild that even those who hate it cannot choose but look and wonder; and, when they would thrust it from the world, must stop their ears upon the voice of Stephen, and summon blind passion to do its work.

III. We may compare *the crisis of life in which each of these transfigurations occurred.*

In the history of Moses, it was in the fulness of his power and success as a Divine messenger. Great through his whole history, he had never been so great to the eye of man as at this moment. He had con-

fronted the proudest monarch of the ancient world, unarmed save with the strength of right and of confidence in God. He had scattered, as God's vicegerent, disaster upon all opposition, and had led through the Red Sea an oppressed and terror-stricken nation, to breathe into them a new life. He had been admitted amid scenes that, for outward grandeur, still stand unparalleled, into the closest intercourse with God, to hold converse with Him as a friend, and to receive from his lips those laws which were to fit his people for being the depository of spiritual truth to the world. Never was such honor set upon mortal man, and, in its highest hour, he bears the sign of it. He has looked on the brightness that betokens God's special presence, and, all unconscious, he has caught its radiance. It is there, like God's mark on his forehead, to tell where he has been, and with whom.

This hour of his success as a Divine agent is also in the very height of his natural and intellectual life. Many men gain their heart's desire, as God's servants, only to die ; and many seem taken away both in "the mid-time of their days," and the mid-time of their work. Before Moses, there lay stretched out years of usefulness and honor, which took their character, and bore their results, from this crowning period. If he had many and sore trials awaiting him, he had corresponding joys, with that sense of work achieved, which, to a right man, is both the fruit of life and its fragrance. We know not of any human life which has so resplendent a token of Divine favor set in its centre, and which extends back and forward into such noble performance.

The transfiguration of Stephen presents the most striking contrast. He is placed, as a criminal, before those who sat in Moses' seat, and is charged with breaking in pieces the law which Moses gave. He has done nothing to shake the earth with wonder, or fix on him the gaze of kings and nations. He professes only to be a humble follower of One who died on a cross, amid abandonment and reproach; and, to himself, scorn and hatred are being measured out in that same name. A cruel and ignominious death looks him full in the face, without an earthly friend to comfort him, or say, "Well done." There could not easily be a crisis more unlike the other; and it is this which, under the Gospel dawn, God has chosen for setting his illuminating seal upon the face of his servant.

"He heeded not reviling tones,
Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
Though scorned and mocked and bruised with stones.

"But, looking upward, full of grace,
He prayed, and from a happy place,
God's glory smote him on the face."

But the transfiguration of Stephen, to a discerning eye, is far grander than that of Moses. The one is impressed with the temporal and external magnificence of the Old Testament, — the other full of the spiritual glory of the New, which begins with a death as the salvation of the world, and shows us the shame of the cross on its way to become the brightest crown in the universe. It is more honoring to the power of God to see it not merely sustaining a man in such terrible extremity, but glorifying him, and bringing out from

his soul such a radiant joy into his face that men the most hostile are for the moment arrested.

It is, indeed, most significant, that while, in the Old Testament, the approving light of God falls upon his servant in the midst of life, in the New it descends in the presence of death. It crowns him conqueror after a course of labor very ardent but very brief. This is in accordance with that higher view of life which is now opened up, which prolongs itself into the eternal world, and makes us feel that, however short and narrow our sphere, if we are only faithful to God in that which is least, there is no failure and no break, but full time to carry on the work which is here interrupted and to reach all the results that now seem lost.

The contrast in the *crisis* of the illumination becomes thus as clear as in its *source* and *form*. It brings out the new view which the Gospel gives of man's life and of the part which suffering and death may have to perform in it. The worshippers of success can make their choice here between the triumphant persecutors and what has been termed the "irresistible might of weakness." The centuries of Christianity have pronounced their decision, and Christ long ago gave his when his approving smile was reflected from Stephen's face.

Among God's servants, those who fail in the outward life may rise to the highest rank in the spiritual, and the fore-glancing tokens of it can be granted here. There is a greater sight than Moses coming down from the burning mount with Divine brightness on his countenance, when the followers of Christ mount the scaffold and the fiery pile, sublimed by his grace till

they appear men no more, but angels of God. And, in our own time, when many speak of spiritual power as dead, God lets us see how He can lighten the dark valley with his presence, and make his most beautiful gems sparkle in the coronet of death. He reveals to us in our Christian friends oftentimes such a beauty and tenderness of soul in the hour of parting, that we can see they were directing their look clear into the heavenly world, and we walking with angels unaware.

IV. We may compare *the effects on the surrounding spectators.*

The impression made on the Israelites by the view of Moses was at first very great. They were filled with awe for him as God's messenger, and offered willingly of their treasure to God's cause. A growth of obedient homage took place that was rarely equalled in their history. But it had not much depth, and soon withered away. They had seen many more wonders in Egypt, and had equally forgotten them. They went on to murmur against God and against Moses, in a way that would make their history utterly unaccountable, if we did not see how, in every age, men can cast into easy forgetfulness the most striking demonstrations of the Divine justice and power.

In the case of Stephen, it may seem as if the impression were still less. Those who saw his face as it had been that of an angel, did not spare his life. They stopped their ears against his words, rushed on him and stoned him to death. But we know how a look lives years after the face is hidden in the grave, and how it rises in calm majesty to reprove and attract,

after all the storms of passion have passed away. We can scarcely doubt it was so here. We know of one who was consenting to his death, and who kept the clothes of them that stoned him. We know too of the wonderful transformation that entered into him, and how he sprung up, as if by creation, to preach the Gospel he formerly persecuted, and face the tortures and deaths he had once inflicted. Can we question that the look of Stephen burned its impression into the heart of Paul, and that from the martyr's death the living preacher rose with an angel's power and zeal? The meekness and courage of the dead did not die with him, for there is a "resurrection of witnesses" all through the history of the Church, and, in the labors and successes of Paul, Stephen will be acknowledged to have his share in the great day of God. It is no solitary instance of the ashes of the martyr becoming the seed of the Church, and how the shortest life can be made a long one, and the earliest death never untimely, if they be dedicated to a true and noble end.

Now, here again these results are entirely characteristic of the two systems. The Old Testament began with outward demonstrations of the most striking kind, and they were needful in their time and place. But, as mere outward demonstrations, their effects were transitory. They served a purpose only as they helped the introduction of spiritual principles, in some such way as thunder accompanies spring showers, where the power lies not in the peal or the tremor, but in influences more gentle and less marked. Even in that ancient dispensation a practised ear can hear the words all through — "Not by might nor by power, but

by my Spirit, saith the Lord." And, in the New Testament, this mode of working becomes fully apparent. It begins with the death of Christ as the grand means by which men are to be drawn to God, a death which has an infinite value as an atoning sacrifice, but also an exhaustless power as an attractive force. It manifests its real strength in the meekness and patience of its humblest followers — in their calmness in trial — their fortitude in danger — their forgiving spirit to their enemies — their unquenched hope in the presence of death. These are the moral miracles of the New Testament; as they abound the Gospel will progress, and were they but restored, as at the beginning, we could look back without a sigh to the time when God's immediate presence was proclaimed by all the powers of nature. Outward demonstrations have their use, but they are only the band of clay round the young graft to keep it safe till the current of inner life has established itself.

Besides the effect on the first spectators, we have to think of what these events are to us at this day. The transfiguration of Moses comes to us as a thing of testimony, and is separated from us by a gulf of more than thirty centuries. That of Stephen is always a thing of the present, filled with a fresh life which touches our deepest nature whenever we look on it. Material scenes of the highest grandeur live only in the pages of history; they need to appeal to us by an outward verification, and they become dimmer as distance intervenes. But spiritual greatness is everlastingly new, and we can be as closely in its presence as when it first appeared in the world. Nay, we may come closer to it

than the first spectators. As the prejudices of their position fall away, and as time tests it and brings out its reality, we see and feel more of its ever-during power. It is like a lofty mountain, which needs the interval of distance to let us measure its height. Of this kind are all the moral evidences of the truth of the Gospel, all the signs of the higher life which then entered the world, which never become old with years, but renew themselves in us as we open our souls to them. To this the form of the dying Stephen belongs; not the angelic face alone, but the angelic spirit of which it was the index, a thing which never appeared in the world till Christ was heard of, and which true Christianity alone can reproduce. The canvas of that picture never decays, the dust of time does not gather on the features. It is no picture, for we may come and feel the life in it while we look, and share it as we gaze on the great object of his view. So true is it that we are come even now "to spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant."

V. We may compare the *permanence of the transfigurations in the subjects of them.*

There are some who think that the brightness in the face of Moses lasted till he died, but for this supposition there is not the slightest ground. It faded away into the light of ordinary life as he receded from the great vision, and long ere his countenance was darkened in death it had become as the face of other men. It partook in this of the transitory character of the dispensation to which he belonged, and had its brightest light turned to our world.

In Stephen it was no passing glimmer of a setting sun, but that lustre in the morning clouds which shows him before he is above the horizon, and which is lost only in perfect day. Moses was descending the hill of God with a brightness which was continually dying: Stephen was ascending the higher mount with a glory growing to all eternity. The death of Stephen is the New Testament translation, and he is to be set as the third with Enoch and Elijah, only higher, inasmuch as each manifestation of God rises while time moves on. It is a greater thing to overcome death than to be carried past it, and here it is no fire-chariot which lifts to heaven, but the outstretched hand of Christ, according to his own word, "I will come and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also."

In the death of Stephen it is intended that we should see how thin the veil is between the two worlds, — how the Lord stands on the very confine, sending across his look and arm and voice, so that ere his servant left the earth he saw his heavenly Master, heard his words, and returned his smile.

Nor, we may well believe, is that vision of the Saviour in the dying hour so unusual. When Christ and heaven are disclosed in the Bible, it is only the curtain cast back from what is all around us at this present time, and even yet, when a saint passes through, the folds may be relaxed a little, and some rays permitted to shine forth that we may guess at the brightness beyond. The calmness and tender sweetness of the dying hour, the faith and patience and hope, are most evident tokens of the presence of Christ's Spirit; but may not the smile of more than human joy, the glow

which sometimes suffuses the countenance till it is seen like the face of an angel, be the reflection of the look of Christ Himself, and the first faint ripple of the waves of unutterable glory that are beginning to touch the feet and sparkle in the eyes of the awakening soul? Most sure, to those who have witnessed it, is the conviction that there must be light beyond, that this gleam is not from death's darkness but God's own day, and may well be encouragement to us "to hope in his word, and to wait for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; yea, more than they that watch for the morning."






XIII.

Faith's Approach to Christ

(ADDRESS BEFORE COMMUNION).

“For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.” — MATT. IX. 21.

NE always loves to think of the surrounding circumstances of this miracle — Christ called to the ruler's house filled with mourning and death, with his heart absorbed in the great work which lay before Him, the first of the glancing proofs that He is to give that He is the resurrection and the life. The thronging press of the people is around Him, curious and expectant. But nothing far off or near, future or present, can shut out from Him the appeal of misery. He is, always and everywhere, alive to a suppliant's touch. His very garment, to its hem, is instinct with his own spirit and sensitive to the most trembling hand.

It is not less so now far up in heaven. The place which increases the sympathy of all hearts that enter there, has not diminished his. His garment, wide-

spread and dropping low, is near our hand, and He feels a sinner's and a sufferer's touch upon his throne, with circle on circle of glory gathering round Him, and saints and angels thronging in. He came down that, in his nearness to our misery, we might learn to know his heart, and He rose that we might be assured of his power to help and heal. So let us seek to read this incident and consider what it teaches.

FAITH COMES WITH A DEEP DESPAIR OF ALL OTHER HELP BUT CHRIST'S.

This woman had tried many means for many years. All that she possessed she had given, all that man will do for health she had done. She is not the better, but rather the worse. Hope had departed, which the poor sufferer surrenders last of all, and she is left to drag about a weary burden, and to feel that death only can unbind it.

But all this weakening of nature's hopes is that faith may rise to a hope above nature,—to its Lord and God. Had these past years of disappointment not brought her to the verge of despair, the great Physician would have been unsought.

Thus God will let the sinner or the sufferer wander on and try all other ways of cure, not to tantalize him with shadows, but to lead him through them to the great reality. He lets the prodigal go far away and deep down among the swine and the husks, and make experience of all man's friendships, such as they are in his poor circle, and find them all hollow and heartless, that his Father's house and face may rise glowing before him, in the depth of his darkness, and he be

driven to know them as never before. So he has suffered thee perhaps to wander and exhaust all thy strength and hope, sometimes on the world's pleasures, sometimes its moralities, sometimes on its business, sometimes its philosophy, and still to find the burden and the sore and the void, till, wearied in the greatness of thy way, toil-worn and travel-sick, thou sayest, "There is no hope," that out of thy despair this hope may rise like the morning-star out of black night. All other physicians have been tried, and thou liest in thy blood, that this question may be stirred,—"Is there not balm in Gilead, is there not a physician there?" Bless God for all failures if this vision at last rises,—for despair itself, if such a hope is its child,—for be sure that in God's world there are never shadows but there is a reality from which they fall, and never failures in the soul's highest longings, but that they are steps to God if the soul struggles on. Let thy sin and sickness and sore lead to this name, "I am the Lord that healeth thee."

FAITH HAS A DIVINE POWER TO DISCOVER CHRIST.

We cannot tell what brought the woman to Him. It was in the beginning of his work, and we hear of no cure like hers before, none of any disease so deep and long seated. Her ignorance and weakness, too, were great, and profound reasoning was not in her sphere of things. There was something in his look, his words, his whole personality, that drew her to Him, she could not tell why. But she goes. "If I may but touch, I shall be whole,"—"I feel it, I know it."

And faith often goes so to Christ, straight to the mark like a driven arrow,—with grounds for going that it cannot tell well to others, or tell even to itself. There is an intuition that has reasons in its heart, and that will be able to bring them out full and clear one day—a groping half-blind, which will yet find enlightened eyes,—a sense of misery, of sin, urged to Him by a divine necessity: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”

Can you tell why the needle trembles to the pole? the buds feel their way to the spring? the flowers to sunlight? They are made for it, and souls are so made for Christ. He created them, loved them, died for them, and, when He comes near, they feel his presence and cannot live without Him. Would you know, deeper down, the ground of this? It is his whisper in the heart which has reached them: “My sheep hear my voice.” — “Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master.” Our appeal is only a response. The cure began with this woman before she touched. His arm guided hers. His strength sustained her weakness. His lips whisper to the soul, “Let us arise and go unto our Father;” and when we awake from our earthly sleep and see all things clear, we shall perceive that He was with us in all our best purposes, in our choosing and chosen hours; “God was in this place, and I knew it not.” — “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?” It gives the assurance of final success in all who long for the healing of the soul, for where that soul feels its need and seeks a Christ, it is Christ who is there, leading it to Himself.

FAITH COMES WITH AN IMPLICIT TRUST IN CHRIST.

There were many things wanting and wrong in this woman's knowledge, but her faith was very full and absolute. Up to the measure of what she needed, her confidence was entire. Her faith is implicit in a *perfect cure*: "I shall be, not better, but whole." It is implicit in his *ability*: "If I may but touch his garment." — "The least contact with Him gives me all I need." How great the physician who could pour so complete a remedy through communication so slight!

Such implicit faith be ours! that up to the felt measure of our necessity we should trust Christ with it all, and, when we discover more, trust Him with the increase, that, with the growing sense of our sickness, we should believe there is power in Him to heal guilt and sorrow, and disappointment and doubt, and death itself—that we shall yet be made *whole*. This requires faith, and seems to require it more the longer that we live. Yet He will bestow this also. The faith is the promised gift of Him from whom it looks for the cure. "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

And that our faith should be implicit in the ease with which He can accomplish it! A touch, a word, a thought from Him can do it. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." — "Speak the word only, and thy servant shall be made whole." For cures come from Christ as water from a fountain, light from the sun, life from the great God. They are the natural emanations that radiate from Him, hindered only by the obstructions which we interpose. If we could but realize this, in its full certainty, that the God who made us wills not our death, and that the Son of God

is in our world to be the assurance and channel of this blessed will, delighting to do it, with what confidence might we draw near and receive out of his fulness grace for grace! If all hope for the soul were dead elsewhere, only that it might live in Him as all our salvation — “Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on thee” — then would come the experience of those words, “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

FAITH SEEKS, FOR ITS COMFORT, CLOSE CONTACT WITH CHRIST.

“If I may but *touch*.” There is a trait of nature in this which gives us a sense of kinship. The heart seeks to press close to the Healer, as a sick child to its mother's breast. It is the instinct of suffering which Christ himself has sanctioned. He took by the hand her who was sick of the fever; He touched the blind man's eyes, and put his fingers in the deaf man's ears. The sufferer and the Saviour must be felt to be in contact, as necessary to our power to lay hold, if not to his ability to help.

It is in accordance with this that God weaves his attributes, the tokens of his presence, into all the works of his hands. He spreads his vesture abroad in creation, and brings it close to our touch, instinct with his being, that we may feel and grasp the God in whom we live and move, and know him to be, not a mere abstraction, but a God near and ever present. The incorporation of God in external nature is a step to his incarnation in human nature. It leads to that mysteriously intimate approach to us, when as “the

children are partakers of flesh and blood," the eternal Son also "took part of the same." He put on the garment of humanity, and drew near in person, that we might clasp Him as a kinsman in our arms, and feel the infinite One to be our own. Our fallen nature made it needful that He should come closer still. He became the partaker of suffering and shame that we might touch Him in the sympathy of our hearts, and feel that, in like manner, He can touch us and be afflicted in all our afflictions. Nay more, He became sin for us, and bore it in our stead, that his healing touch might reach our conscience, and that we may have the assurance that He can be present to help in the deepest guilt and darkness of the soul.

The history of all God's dealings with man is the record of an approach nearer still, and nearer, until, in the incarnate Son, He shares all our sorrows, and carries our sins, till faith puts its fingers into the print of the nails, its hand into the wounded side, and constrains us to cry, "My Lord, and my God."

So does He approach man, for man's heart thus yearns to draw near to Him — to a living God, to a personal Saviour. We need this. We can believe a truth, but we can trust only a person, — we can admire a truth, we can love only a person, — we can meditate on a truth, we can commune only with a person, and faith stretches out a wistful hand to touch his garment that it may come at last to embrace Himself.

FAITH, WITH ALL ITS IMPERFECTIONS, IS ACCEPTED BY CHRIST.

How imperfect this woman's faith was you can see.

She thought she could be cured, and He not know. She imagined He healed by a sort of nature, not by a conscious act of will. In many, faith may be weak and ignorant, but touching Christ it is forgiven much. Like Samson, it is so full of faults and failure in itself, but when it turns to God, a divine power comes to it in its hour of need; and is not this the lesson of that strange Old Testament history?

What an encouragement to come to Christ truly, though it may be feebly, though conscious of many defects in our knowledge, creeping where we cannot walk, touching where we cannot lay hold! "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." And this gives us the hope that if a man really trusts God for one thing, he will be led on to more, from body to soul, from time to eternity. If we read rightly the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we shall see that the Apostle teaches this. Those believers of the ancient Church cast themselves on God in some one crisis of their life, and this established the connection for ever. And if a man really and truly accepts of Christ, in one part of his saving character, he will be led on, by the grace of God, to accept him in all. For Christ is one, and instinct in every part of his nature with the life that heals. Let us thank God if we feel in ourselves, or see in any man, a thorough faith in some one side of the helping and healing power of the Son of God. It is no reason why we should rest in what is partial, but abundant reason why we should be encouraged to maintain our hold. If we grasp the garment-hem we shall bring Him to turn the face, and to say, "Be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole."

FAITH FEELS A CHANGE FROM THE TOUCH OF CHRIST.

“And she felt in her body that she was healed” (Mark v. 29). There was an inward sense, which could not be mistaken, of return to wholeness — the stanching of a wound through which life, for long years, had been slowly ebbing, and the rising of a tide of new existence which made her feel she could yet be, and do something, in God’s world. It is almost worth years of weary wasting to have one hour of the blessed consciousness. The dew of youth comes back, the world seems to put on sunshine and spring-time in sympathy, as if God were making it all anew, and the man, who was lying like a crushed and helpless worm, rejoices in the thought of the hard duties and heavy burdens which come to try his fresh-created strength.

When faith, under a sense of its need, touches Christ, the virtue that comes from Him gives some such feeling to the soul. When that great transference of sin and spiritual sickness is made to the Saviour the soul is safe, entirely and eternally safe, through the grace of Him who will keep that soul which we commit to his trust, and who will never suffer any one to pluck it out of his hand. There is a crisis of this kind in every spiritual history, if the new life is to begin, — some turning-point in the disease where it sets in to hope and health! We do not say that, in the spiritual frame, there is always the same full and immediate sense of it. In most cases not, for the soul’s recovery is very gradual and fitful, even though it is sure, and, in some cases, the struggle of doubt is part of the process through which it gains at last its highest power. But this will prevail in the

midst of all, — a feeling of change, — of something new and hopeful, when Christ is looked to and leaned upon — a sense of contact with a power out of, and above, the world, which can give life and courage for the soul's sorest battles, and which whispers to it, often with sure conviction, that it shall prevail.

There are men in whose presence you feel strength and comfort, whose look and words are like a reinforcement to turn the battle from the gate. Have you this feeling, above all, when your heart rises to the thought of that august and godlike Presence, when it seeks that "blessed and gracious face?" Then take courage. The pressing throng of doubts and fears, of worldly cares and temptations, may thrust aside, at times, the hand that touches, but do not turn away. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved!" The thrill of life which comes from Him tells of far more yet to be gained, — "He is come that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly." He will bring not only into contact with his garment but with his heart, and then the peace that fills it, and the joy that overflows it, shall be the portion of those who lay hold of Him. They shall know "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that they may be filled with all the fulness of God!"

For this end Christ has entered the world, that He may make man the heir of God and God the heritage of man. He stands before us more clearly now, that He may assure us of it. He has borne the penalty of sin, has passed through death in our nature, and has risen above it, bearing those marks of his suffering which prove his continued share in our humanity and

his everlasting sympathy with us. "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see." And He shows us his hands and his feet.

At a communion-table it would seem as if the Saviour were bringing his garment-hem nearer to our hand, that touch may aid faith, and his person stand before us through visible memorials. Our eyes are made to see, our hands to handle, and our lips to taste, the Word of life, that He, whose we are, may enter our soul by every gate-way, and take our nature into full possession.

Christ is now, as He was then, passing through the midst of men, if they would but see Him. Still, they throng and press and draw nothing from Him, because they bring no eye to discern, and do not feel that need which opens the eyesight. We can take from Him only what we perceive in Him, and must urge the prayer that "God would reveal his Son in us!"

For this, too, He has provided. Though the Head be far away, by his Spirit He comes near. "He shall take of mine and show it unto you." It is the holy oil, poured on the head, which descends even to the skirts of his garments, to his border's utmost hem, to every symbol and to every suppliant, to put healing power into the fainting heart, and to "fill the house with the odor of the ointment."

It is our hope and joy to think, as we touch Him here, with the hands of dying men, that He is still, as once before, passing on through the world to perform his greatest work — to raise the dead. Many a home like that of Jairus looks for his appearing. Himself the Risen One, He is advancing to awake his friends

who have fallen asleep, and to comfort those who mourn over them, and who wait for his coming. He spreads his garment, meanwhile, as He moves, to the touch of misery and sin, and if He lingers in his progress to the homes of the dead, it is but to gather in his train the fuller fruits of his redeeming toil. His mercy and our need cause the seeming delay. His work on the way must be finished ere the close can come—that close so longed for by all fainting spirits and bereaved hearts. Sinner, sufferer, while thou art in the way with Him, touch Him and follow. Ere long He will enter that highest house, and thou possess the privilege of the best-beloved, to enter the innermost chamber with Him, where sorrow shall be turned into joy and death into life, where faith which touches the hem shall rise to vision that beholds the face, and friends who part and weep at nightfall shall meet at day-dawn, in a world where the voice of crying shall not be heard any more, nor the shadow of death fall upon the heart for ever.






XIV

Christ not Pleasing Himself.

CHRISTIAN AND SOCIAL TOLERANCE.

*“Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me.”—*ROMANS XV. 2, 3.

HE occasion of this very practical advice is to be found in the previous chapter. Some of the Roman Christians considered the meat that had been offered to idols unfit for Christian use, while others of them could partake of it without scruple. But, not contented with enjoying their own liberty, they set themselves to indulge in mutual re- crimination. The one class considered the other un- conscientious, while these retorted on them as weak- minded.

It is a quarrel that, in some shape, has turned up ever since. The apostle Paul belongs unmistakably to the one side, that which saw no conscience in the matter, but he is not devoured by a zeal to bring all to his own mind. He sees that there are things infi-

nately more important than uniformity. Charity is greater, and liberty. Those who cannot eat must believe in the good faith of those who can, and they who have no scruples must refrain from taunting those who have. Then from the whole controversy he rises to this great principle, which lifts the thing out of the local and temporary, and gives it a world-wide and permanent interest. In our intercourse with our fellow-Christians or fellow-men, we are not to make our own pleasure, but the pleasure of our neighbor, our chief end. This is the example set by Christ, our great Master: "He pleased not himself." The violation of this principle has produced more unhappiness and sin than many other things that seem at first sight more deadly, has broken up the communion of the Church, and the comfort of the social and family circle, and deserves, therefore, special consideration. The *first* thing is to state the rule of forbearance as laid down by the apostle; *next*, to show that it is illustrated by Christ's example; and *then* to present some of the advantages that would result from acting on it.

I. *We shall state the rule of forbearance as laid down by the apostle.*

We are guided in this by the circumstances that led to the statement of this principle. There were two classes in the Roman Church who refused liberty to others. There were the men of despotic *conscience* and the men of despotic *intellect*; and, that we may cover the whole ground of character, we may add to them a third class as needing this lesson,—the men of despotic *will*. To one or other of these classes belongs

almost every case of undue interference with Christian and social liberty.

There are the men in whom *conscience* is strongly implanted without a corresponding breadth of view, who place duty and sin in things indifferent, and make the way of God's commandments, which is very broad, exceedingly narrow through restrictions that are not his. One evil result of this is, that, by magnifying these, by "taking tithe of mint and anise and cumin," the weightier matters of the law come to be neglected. Men cannot habitually exaggerate the little, without losing sight of the great. But the danger to which the apostle here adverts is not to truth but freedom. Such men can seldom be contented with prescribing to themselves. They dictate to others, make the rule of their conscience the universal rule, and hold that there is neither sin nor duty to any man but what they see to be such.

There is another class, who may be called men of despotic *intellect*. They have discernment enough to see that there is really nothing in many of these questions so much disputed, but they have a want of tenderness to feel for those who have not reached their level. They have arrived at the breadth that knowledge gives, but not at the greater breadth that comes from wisdom and charity. There are few things more intolerant than superior intellect, or, still more, the fancy of superior intellect, when it is dissevered from love and humility. There is an impatience of the slowness of what they consider inferior natures, an undisguised contempt for scruples, and a reckless pleasure in thrusting their breadth offensively forward

where it is not attacked, proving themselves to be as narrow in another way as those whom they wish to liberalize.

We have to add to these a third class, the men of despotic *will*. The despotic will may ally itself with conscience and intellect, or it may not, and may be founded merely on taste and temperament. It is a disposition in some men of strong character to insist on seeing nothing but their own domain wherever they turn, and to think of their way not only as best for themselves, but for every other with whom they come into contact. Natures of this kind reverse the constitution of the chameleon, and claim to give their own color wherever they lay themselves down. Imperiously or gently, they seek to dictate not merely the pursuits, but the enjoyments, of all around, and they make life in their circle either quiet unquestioning submission, or a constant struggle for freedom.

In all these cases, there may be much that is good, a true homage to God in the conscience, right reason in the intellect, a sincere desire to promote the happiness of those around them, in imposing their own will, but, withal, there is a subtle form of self-gratification at the root of it, a mistaken self-assertion, which does not leave room for other natures to develop themselves in freedom.

It may be asked if, in no case, we are warranted to interfere with our fellow-men in such matters as these. Most certainly we cannot remain indifferent to what they do and are, if we have any regard for God's truth and their welfare. Humanity, as well as Christianity, makes a man his brother's keeper. But we should be

very sure that it is regard to God's truth and another's welfare that actuates us, and not the mere wilfulness that seeks its own way. There are few things in which a man needs to pray more for clear-sightedness than to be kept from confounding God's will with his own strength of caprice, and from fancying he is seeking another's good when he is merely anxious to see the reflection of his own peculiarities. Even when we have every reason to believe our cause to be just, and our motives pure, we must deal with men as having independent rights of their own, and we must learn to respect these, whatever be the relationship, if we are to gain the end we seek. If there be sin, above all, sin that is dangerous and soul-destroying, we must "reprove, rebuke," though even then, "with all long-suffering;" but we should seek to feel that there is a very broad field within this, where there is room for a variety of temperament and action which is almost infinite, and where each one has the same right to choose for himself what is best. We have to learn that, within the limits of what is not positively wrong, every one has the right *to be himself*, to develop his own nature in his own way, and that he cannot be forced into the mould of another without losing his capacity of highest enjoyment, and his power of greatest usefulness to his fellow-men. Our duty under God is to be true to our own nature, but to grant this privilege also to every other, and, where we seek to influence them, to do it in accordance with the laws of their nature.

It is frequently very hard to allow this, especially when there are close relationships of friendship and

family. Husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, find it most difficult of all to make allowance for each other's variety of nature, and to remain side by side without undue interference with one another's peculiarities. The affection they bear each other becomes a snare to them in urging assimilation, and the necessity of close intercourse seems to require that there should be common tastes and pursuits.

It is here that the further principle of this passage comes in, that we are not merely to refrain from constraining others into our way, but, as far as we can, we are to meet them in theirs. If there be a separation of taste, instead of compelling them to surrender, we are to forbear, and, if the thing be harmless for us, and it will gratify them, we are to take part in their pursuits. If we constrain *them*, we violate the law of freedom and narrow their nature, whereas if *we* give way, we exercise the truest freedom — that of self-control, and benefit our own nature in the highest way. Constraint would become mutual repulsion and dislike; while freedom makes the attraction equal on both sides, and we gain more than we surrender. To give and not to exact, to throw out feelers and tendrils from our own stem, not to wrench the branches of every other tree in our direction, is the true law of united growth.

The question may arise here again — Is there no *limit* to this surrender? and it is pointed out. We are to please our neighbor "*for his good to edification.*" This is the end, and the end prescribes the limit. Our great object must not be to please our neighbor, any

more than to please ourselves, but to do him the highest good, and gain an influence that may lead up to truth and duty and God. Such a principle saves Christian compliance from sycophancy or characterlessness. It is implied in it that we can yield in nothing which would lead him to sin or impair the strength of his spiritual nature. It is implied, moreover, that we cannot surrender any part of our own proper nature in doing this. We must *be ourselves* if we are to be useful in any way, and it can never be our duty to sacrifice our own mental constitution, still less our moral nature, to build up that of another. But within these two limits, — the indulgence of our fellow-men in sin, and the compromise of our own true nature, — there is ample scope for the exercise of endless charity and compliance with each other's tastes and temperaments. The tree that has its firm-fixed root and upright stem has also its spreading branches and thousand waving twigs, which yield to the breeze and salute the gentlest movement of the surrounding air. How beautiful strength is, when it thus melts away at its extremities into kindliness and courtesy; and how attractive would be firm Christian principle, when it was seen that it could clothe itself with softness and tenderness, and that it rises so powerful and lofty to bear up and spread out all genial affections, like leaves and blossoms, and to have all innocent enjoyments come fluttering like birds to sing among its branches! "Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary."

II. *We have to show that this forbearance is illustrated by Christ's example.* "For even Christ pleased not

himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me.”

The quotation is from the sixty-ninth psalm, in which the speaker is David; but the apostle takes the words as completed in Christ. “It is written in the psalms concerning Him.” This manner of dealing with the psalms gives us a light to read them in. Wherever a man is uttering a breathing of the Divine life, it is not merely Christ that he is implicitly looking forward to, but it is Christ that is breathing and speaking in him. Christ’s Spirit is advancing all through that Old Testament world, in outward symbol and inward aspiration, ever more distinctly to his own personal appearance, as God manifest in the flesh. What God is in nature, Christ is in that entire history,—its final end and sustaining life. It is moved beneath by his coming, and is cast upward into events and persons that reflect Him, and into utterances of soul that spring from Him and seek after Him. Therefore, when David expresses this spirit of self-sacrifice, it is Christ already in him, uttering what is true so far of David, but true in the highest sense only of Himself. It is not by accommodation, then, but deep insight, that the apostle quotes.

To prove the disinterested forbearance of Christ, he cites a passage that shows his self-devotion to God. He offered Himself to bear the reproach cast on that great name, and thought nothing of self if the honor of God was maintained. There is a broad principle taught us also here, viz., that right action toward man flows naturally from right feeling toward God. If self-pleasing has been sacrificed on the Divine altar, it has

received its death-blow in every other form. He who has truly, deeply, entirely given up his will to God, is not the man to force it, harshly and capriciously, on his fellow-men. This is what the apostle would have us infer regarding Christ in his human bearings.

We have to show then, as briefly as may be, that this was a characteristic of Christ in his intercourse with men, — forbearance and freedom. He presented the Divine will, and pressed it on men as the rule of all life, but He refrained carefully from crushing their nature in its free development; and for this very reason, that the Divine will was to Him the one only law, and all human natures were to be made free from bondage in serving it.

An illustration of the forbearance of Christ lies, at the very first, *in the variety of character which his earthly life drew around it.* He was pre-eminently broad and many-sided, touching and attracting human nature in all its aspects. His disciples represent the extremes of temperament, from the sanguine outspoken Peter to the quiet reflective John, and within these all the rest move and act in their own likeness. He is never careful to stamp on them a hard uniformity, but leaves them to their own natural development, and aids them in it. Then, outside this circle, we have groups of all possible colors, — the Pharisee and the Publican, Nicodemus and Zaccheus, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene, the woman by the well and the women at the sepulchre, the centurion beside the cross and the thief upon it. He draws all men unto Him, and while there is a change in the depth of their nature, — while a higher life is infused into them, —

it unfolds itself in every direction without constraint, as the earth in spring-time is drawn forth into every form and color of leaf and flower by the all-sympathetic attraction of the sun. We do not admire enough this generosity of mind in our great Master, so different from that which prevails among the founders of human systems, who cannot be satisfied unless their formulas are repeated, and their minutest features reflected, by all their scholars. His word "came with power," not to stamp with the uniformity of death, but to create the manifoldness of life. How far other the society which gathered round Jesus of Nazareth from that harsh spiritual despotism which Loyola sought to create under his name!

This farther may be remarked, in the human life of Christ, that He not merely refrained from interfering with free growth Himself, but *He interposed to defend others when they were interfered with*. His most marked action is in behalf of liberty, and He is strongest in rebuke when he checks the attempt of any one to thrust his own character on another, to the destruction of its genuineness. What a lesson there is to contending, narrow-minded religionists, who can see nothing good beyond their own circle, in his answer: "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us" (Luke ix. 49). "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." "We must not narrow," as if he had said, "the cause of God to our own party, but rejoice in goodness wherever it appears. If we are right, it is all coming our way." What an admonition to those who would impose their own way of work upon every other when

Martha's complaint is so gently but firmly met! What a resolve to allow the heart its own manner of manifestation when He defends, against the murmurs of his disciples, her who poured the box of ointment on his head! It was her way of proving affection, and this made it good and right, and brought forth that touching justification which is not an ingenious excuse, but a deep, true reason: "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (John xii. 7). The inspiration of a loving heart has the gift of prophecy. Its insight is foresight, because it is taught of God. And what a rebuke to those who would bring down every thing that is lovely and of good report to the hard utilitarian measurement, and, in the pretended interest of fruit, would strike off all the spontaneous blossoms of Christian affection!

In the whole earthly life of Christ, this feature can be discerned, — the refusal to constrain a natural temperament, or to seek to make any one be other than he really was, sin only excepted. In this sense, too, "the Son makes them free, and they are free indeed." Shall we say that He, the normal Man, had all the features of sinless human nature within Himself, and could therefore rejoice in them all, or that He had, with his own distinct nature, that most sensitive sympathy, which enabled Him to understand them every one, and that broadest wisdom which gave Him to know that there can be nothing highly good which is not perfectly true, and nothing strong which is not natural? This, at least, is striking, that the most intense and concentrated of all natures, burning with consuming fervor for God's honor and truth, was yet the most expansive,

and so considerate and gentle as not to crush the softest susceptibility of those about Him, like the sea which is so mighty to shake the earth, and which holds the most delicate flowers with all their filaments unbroken in its bosom. It is another evidence of the Divinity of His character, that such power and freedom were combined in one.

There is another way of looking at the forbearance of Christ with variety of disposition, when we turn from his earthly life to *the work He carries on by his Spirit*. His withdrawal from earth in His visible person is in favor of free Christian development, since the very presence of a visible Lord and Lawgiver, however wise and tolerant, must tend to uniformity in the character of his subjects. The principle of working by his Spirit is to enter into each nature by itself, and unfold it from its own germ and centre. It is the lifting up and widening of the first overshadowing canopy of his personal guidance, which was needful in its time, into the grand arch of the heavens, beneath which all can grow up more freely and expansively. It is for wise reasons, in regard to Christian growth, that a visible Head is removed from the Christian Church, and that the liberal unconstrained movements of faith are substituted, meanwhile, for the limitation and fixity of sight. We can perceive how the disciples started up into stronger, broader men, under this new influence, and how their characters struck out on all sides into more marked individuality. There was a presence of Christ to implant the first seeds, and foster them; then a departure, that they might grow up more freely in his absence, till through His Spirit they

reach a full stature and firm character. When these are gained, and individuality fully formed, there can be a safe return to that closest proximity to Him, which is their highest happiness, and where, too, they shall feel that the law of love is perfect liberty.

These fruits of the Spirit of Christ in humanity are of the most varied kind. How different are not merely the apostles Peter, Paul, John, James, each with his own view of truth, but how different the epistles of the same apostle, caused by the variety of development in the churches to which they were addressed! There is no book on earth that has such perfect harmony in it, rising from such a variety of color and character, as the New Testament, where all the features of human nature and all the graces of the Christian life gather round one centre, — the one Lord and one faith. And though the Church of Christ has failed to learn this, and though, by an attempt at forced uniformity, it has rent its own unity, we can see what may be called the breadth of view of the Great Head, in that He does not identify Himself with their narrowness, nor confine his reviving influences to any one portion where his truth remains. The showers of his grace come from too high a source to be limited by the walls they build against each other. He is repeating down through all time the rebuke He gave to the uncharitableness of John, and the one-sidedness of Martha, and the murmurs of his disciples, — is teaching us to look with an approving eye on every honest effort to do good and to take pleasure in the wide variety of human character and Christian grace.

Christ in his earthly life, and by his heavenly Spirit,

thus carries out into a higher domain the working of God himself in the world of nature. There is the same freedom and the same variety, as if the Being who has the mightiest power and most controlling will would prove his strength by establishing, not despotism but liberty, and by allowing all his rational creatures to feel that, while He holds them in his hand, they belong in the fullest sense also to themselves.

III. We have now, in the last place, *to present some of the advantages that would result from acting on this principle.*

It may seem as if in this view of the work of God in nature, and of Christ in the Christian Church, we were far enough from any practical connection with our own daily life. And yet it is not so. The world is all made on the same plan, and the laws that regulate its moral and social state are as universal as the laws of light and gravitation, which govern suns and stars, and yet preside over the color and fall of a leaf. The grandeur of the Bible consists in making us feel this. It lets us see light in God's light. It asks us to be children of our Father in heaven, followers of his Son, and to study the manner in which supreme wisdom and love act, that we may govern our conduct to others by the same laws. If we only do so, the great forces of the moral world are all in our favor. As God gains his ends we shall gain ours, or, rather, we shall aid in gaining his, and find that we have a share in them. His forbearance toward the nature He has given us, the law of freedom he has placed us under, the many-sided development He permits, both in nature and

grace ; above all, the example of Christ, so free from capricious dictation, so full of reason addressed to our reason, and love touching our hearts, and liberty withal, — these become our guiding lights to teach us how to deal with all around us, and give us the hope that we shall have his help in gaining the happiest issue.

If, in Christian or social intercourse, we wish to deliver any man from what we think error, we must do so by putting him in the way of convincing himself. To beat him down by unreasoning opposition, or even by an irresistible argument, may please us, but is not likely to gain him. There is a great chasm between achieving a victory and making a conquest, and the completeness of the first often prevents the last. To respect a man's freedom, never to press him so hard as to humiliate him, to give him the clew that may help him to guide himself to the right, is according to the Divine model, and would aid us in serving at the same time both our fellow-men and the truth. How much this is needed in the Christian Church every one can perceive who looks around.

Again, in the family circle, it is often painful to see minds that, from their strength of character, are fitted to influence all around them for good, losing the power through the over-assertion of self. Authority must exist, but it is there only that influence may have opportunity to do its work, and when authority makes itself felt at every turn, and pushes itself into every little act, freedom is gone, and influence vanishes with it. This is one cause, as much as over-remissness, why the families of earnest men so frequently take a course which disappoints their expectation, and why, after

sullen submission, there comes sudden outbreak. Constitutional government here, as elsewhere, is the great thing to be aimed at, — that is, firm law on certain great essentials, but freedom within this to grow up according to taste and temperament. If strong natures with deep convictions, anxious to have them adopted, could only be made to see this, and could learn to control themselves, their end would be sooner gained. Power of character and steadfast example have a silent, assimilating influence, which seldom fail, unless they are thwarted by irritating interference with natural freedom.

It should be considered, further, that if we wish those we are influencing to become valuable for any thing, it must be by permitting them to be themselves. They will do very little if they turn out dead transcripts of us. If any man is to have power either in the world or the church, he must have independent life; and for independent life, liberty is indispensable. We can never sanction liberty in the way of sin, but there are a thousand little daily acts where it will demand to be left to itself, and where we should take pleasure in recognizing it. These are the very signs and safeguards of the personality God has bestowed upon his creatures, and it is only by seeking to enter into it as He does, freely and kindly, respecting it, and conforming to it, that we can guide it to a right end, and make it a real power for good.

This is the only way, too, in which we can hope to make our fellow-creatures truly our own. We cannot give ourselves away to another, except as we feel that we belong to ourselves. God, who is the lord and pro-

prietor of us all, has acted on this principle. He has put us in a manner into our own keeping, that He may receive us back again as more his own. If we act so, and if our friendships and family ties are constructed on this principle, we shall have our reward in finding them grow constantly closer and more inward. Let us seek to have them consist, not so much in exacting as in rendering duties, not in demanding interest but in extending it, turning our eye outward rather than inward, "looking not on our own things, but the things of others," and then the little differences of taste and opinion, instead of being barriers to union, will become the instruments of it. After all, in every age and in every class of life, sympathy is the great craving of the human heart, and if we can be so unselfish as to forget ourselves and show it with the peculiarities of others, we shall be astonished at the rich return,—how cold natures open out to a kindly presence, as flowers in spring when the hard frost lifts its repressive hand.

This additional inducement may be mentioned, that in pursuing such a course we shall best succeed in elevating and broadening our own nature. If we could bring all around us into our own mould, we should only have narrowed ourselves in the process of constraining others. But, if we enter into sympathy with their pursuits, we not merely grow in unselfishness, but add something to our intellectual nature which was not there before. We have so much more of humanity within us. There can be no finer instance of the way in which we gain by yielding, and make conquests of men and things when we seem to be led captive.

In all these considerations we have been able to advert only incidentally to what should be the great end of all this action. It is not to please ourselves, but neither is it ultimately to please our neighbor. It is to secure an influence with him for his highest good, — to bring him into the path of life and God. To deal with this would require a separate discourse, and we can therefore do no more than remark that friendship and family affection, most precious as they are among earthly things, are, in the Divine view, only channels for something nobler and more enduring, — for infusing the love that survives earth, and forming the ties that death cannot break. In this, too, Christ is our great example, who illustrated this world with self-denial, that his words and life might be strong to point to and plead for another.


In all this work, there are needed two great qualities, *love* and *wisdom*. Neither will suffice alone. Love in its earnestness is often too narrow, and wisdom in its breadth may be too cold. They are the light and heat of the moral world, which must go together. We shall find them also in the example of Christ — that nature, so ardent and so large, seeking one thing, — the likeness of God in man, — but knowing that this likeness can be reflected in many ways, that each child of the family may have the Father's image, with its own individuality, as every stone of the New Jerusalem will have its own color, while the light of God is reflected in them all.



XV.

The Changes of Life, and their Comforts in God.

“ Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.” — PSALM xlii. 8.

 PSALMS xlii. and xliii. have so close a connection that they must be regarded as one. The same struggle and victory pass through them, and they are necessary to complete each other. From external and internal evidence, they belong to David, and to that part of his life when he was fleeing from the face of Absalom his son.

All must recollect the touching scene when he left his palace, crossed the brook Kidron, and “ went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered ; and he went barefoot : and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went ” (2 Sam. xv. 30). He was not so great in his youth, crowned with Goliath’s trophies, nor in manhood, when God delivered him from the hand of Saul and set him on the throne of Israel, as in that hour of desertion.

It is then that the character comes forth, that faith flames high, and the feet find their rock in God. When we can look back on our own life, as we now do on David's, we shall perceive that such times have been, not the depths, but the heights, of the soul.

It is here that we can look into the heart of David, and know how, in some measure, he was according to the heart of God. When the priests would have borne the ark with him into exile, the noble magnanimity, the deep submission, of his spirit is seen. "Carry back the ark of God," he said, "into the city; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation. But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him!" By one of those strange circles of events, which have surely in them a Divine plan, he was treading the very soil of Gethsemane, and up through his heart there was throbbing the spiritual life of his Son and Lord. "Not my will, but thine be done."

It was not indifference to the ark of God that prompted the words of David. Banished beyond Jordan, among the forests and cataracts of the mountain land of Gilead, where "deep calling to deep," in the torrents around him, seemed emblems of his trials, his heart turns to the hallowed spot,—"true as the dial to the sun, although not shone upon." It breaks out in every part of this song. The first verse is a longing wish after it, the last a joyful conviction that he shall reach it. Three times his soul is cast down in him, and three times he rises stronger for his fall, the onset of his faith ending like the apostle Paul's,

“for this I prayed the Lord thrice,” and, like that of a greater still, who “prayed thrice, using the same words.”

The verse we have selected is from one of the seasons of comfort. In the third verse he had said, “My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?” Day and night God’s hand was heavy upon him, so that “his moisture was turned into the drought of summer,” and now he feels that day and night God’s comforts can be with him. It is wonderful when we open these ancient books to find the identity of human life. As men speak, we can feel the beatings of the same heart, and see the tears upon their face, which make us children of one family. We can see, not less, the identity of the life that is divine, — for God’s light is shining down into their souls, and making them strong with the strength of the Eternal. It is to make us feel this that we have such a Bible, and it is thus we must seek to use it.

The *first* thought we would draw from this verse is, that THERE MUST BE CHANGES IN EVERY TRUE LIFE.

These changes give to life the *most opposed conditions* — light and darkness. There is day, and there is night. That these are in the first place to be taken literally is admitted, and that we are taught to look to an unchanging God through all the changes of natural time. But that day and night look farther than this, is seen from the whole tenor of the psalm, and from the usage of Scripture language. They represent the shiftings of color which pass across our history, from

the broad bright sunshine of prosperity to the darkest and heaviest of our trials. If our life is to be of any value, these must come in some form, outwardly or inwardly. "Because they have no changes," says the Psalmist, "therefore they fear not God" (Psalm lv. 19). To be convinced of this, we have only to look at the lives of those who have come forth as strong true men on God's side, at the vicissitudes in the course of Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, at the conflicts of the followers of Christ, above all at the life of the Great Head himself.

What a breadth of experience there was in Him! First, the day of brightness which He left, then what may be called his night season in this world, and now again his exceeding gladness in the light of God. His earthly life, set like a night between these two great days, had also its changes. He had his time for the transfiguration robes, and his cry up through the darkness of the cross; his moments when He rejoiced in spirit, "I thank Thee, O Father," and his hours of sorrow even unto death. A broad experience like this runs, more or less, through the history of all who belong to Him. The more we study their lives, and seek to enter into sympathy with them, the more we shall feel that our life cannot be uniform, and that, above all, we must be made partakers of the suffering. Shall we repine when God puts us among the children, and makes us conformable to Christ? If we have the sharp and sudden fall, as over a precipice, we hear some of them saying, "Thou hast lifted me up and cast me down;" and if we have weary, wistful looks, on through a life where all seems darkened, and the

sweet of existence crushed out for ever, another says, "I shall go softly all my years, in the bitterness of my soul." There is no place so gloomy where we cannot see the trace of some foot, now "standing in God's even place," nor so lonely, where Christ has not been, and (shall we not say?) where Christ is not now. Let us settle it with ourselves that such changes must come to us, and let this give us, I do not say submission, but acquiescence. It is the lot of the family, — it is more, it is the life of Christ, and it must be spread throughout the members.

These changes, let it be observed, are *according to a fixed law*. Day and night are the ordinances of heaven upon earth for the growth of earth's life, and, if we could trace the sunshine and the dark in every follower of God, we should see them arranged with equal wisdom. It is a more complex work, but, be sure of this, there is order in it all, and the hand that rules the world in its orbit, and that makes it fulfil its course through light and shade, is governing our lives for a higher than earthly end.

One feature of the law is presented so far for our guidance. *It is a law of alternation*. These changes give place to each other in succession. It is day and night, and, let us thank God, it is also in due time night and day. Each has its time and use.

In the general, *God sends to us a portion of the day before the night*. There are in the natural life happy homes of childhood, loving hearts so close to us that they shut out all evil beyond, fond fancies and bright hopes which make an Eden begin our memory, as it does the world's. The Christian life is even so. It is

usually, at first, a simple, humble, apprehension of God's mercy which gives the love of youth, and knows not the pains of backsliding, nor the chillness of decline. It is in kindness that God begins our life with such a daytime. It strengthens for the trial, and creates a memory within, which can be nourished into a hope. It helps us all to reason with the ancient patriarch, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" If we have had our day, it is our duty and our strength not to forget it. The great poet who said that "nothing can be more wretched than to remember happiness in misery," was surely wrong. To remember what is truly good is to possess it for ever.

But after day it is God's manner sooner or later to send night. It is night that lets us measure the day. The daylight cannot be estimated when we are in it. It needs night to look back on it, to see what is true and false, what solid and empty. At night we can tell our work, and count our gains, and resolve, if another day be granted, that to-morrow shall not be as this day, but much more abundant. It is night that lets us measure ourselves. We cannot know self by day. We are mixed with the busy distracting world, dispersed and confused in action and enjoyment. The night comes to let the thoughts concentrate and fall back on their real strength, to make them feel what basis they have within: "Thou hast proved my heart, Thou hast visited me in the night" (Psalm xvii. 3). It is night that lets us measure the real universe. By day it is shut. We see only this earth and earthly sun. By night God withdraws the veil, reveals eternity with

its far-off shores of sparkling worlds, and fills the soul with infinite longings, which make it conscious it has a universe within, greater than the universe without, and which can be satisfied only with God. It learns to stretch its arms up to that world where there shall be no more night, and to Him who fills it: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to his seat."

For these, and many other ends, does God let night fall upon the soul. If day has its light and its gladness, and its walk and its work, night has its sense of void, better than earth's fulness, and its deep thoughts, and humble waiting, and sighing aspirations for the dawn — its refreshing dew below, its far beacon lights of stars above, which are nearer eternity than the sun's brightness.

And yet we cannot wish that God should close our view of this life with night. It is a true feeling which is expressed by the ancient mourner, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." We long to have the night break up before we die, to have some horizon-streak of the coming day, which may make the word true, "it shall come to pass that at evening-time it shall be light" — a glimpse of dawn like Simeon's view, or Stephen's, or the calm that fell on Christ's own struggle ere He died. There is a light indeed that vanishes from our life, which we feel can never come back, — never here; "the tender grace of a day that is dead," is fled to the eternal shore, and our hearts would break to think that any thing in this world's future could make us forget it, or fill the blank. But there is another kind of day

which can come to the bitterness of utter bereavement. The Sun of Righteousness rises with healing. Our dead are given back to us in our souls, with more than the tenderness of life, and without the cruel pang of death. When we can hold them in our hearts, without pain, we have recovered them. They ascend, as the Lord did, and sit in our thoughts in heavenly places with Him, calm and bright, and the tender grace of a bygone day puts on also the glory of a day to come. That such a day-spring even here can visit the darkest gloom of trial, let not any mourner doubt who believes that Christ has left his own grave empty and that He will come to open ours. He can raise our friends from the bitterness of death, and give them back to our spirits in this world, to speak, and live, and even rejoice with them, that He may thus assure us He himself is risen, and that they too shall yet be ours in full possession.

And, when such a day comes, it is to console the night,—to make us feel that Christ's word, "Weep not," has power with the living before He touches the bier where the dead lie. Were He to suffer the cloud to hang for ever as heavy and as dark, it would overwhelm us and misrepresent Him,—"The spirit would fail before him, and the souls that He has made!" Such a day comes also to test the night, to try its thoughts and its resolves, if they are steadfast to their end, and, after testing, to mature them. In the hours of darkness the roots strike down, the dew lies all night long on the branches, but the blossoms and the fruit demand the sun; and hope, and love, and higher fellowship with God, and deeper sympathy for suffering

humanity, come forth afterward as the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

The *second* thought contained in this passage is, that TO SUIT THESE CHANGES IN LIFE THERE ARE DIVINE PROVISIONS.

For the day God commands "his loving-kindness," for the night He gives "his song." There must be something suitable in each of these provisions to the circumstances, the more so, that similar expressions are found in other passages of Scripture. The "songs of the night" is as favorite a word of the Old Testament as "glory in tribulation" is of the New, and it is one of those which prove that both Testaments have the self-same root and spirit.

The loving-kindness of God is a movement, —not so much from us to God as from God to us, — of which a believing man is not insensible, but toward which his position is more that of a passive recipient. It is God's goodness, like the daylight's gladness, thrown on and around him to lighten up his life. It is a promise which, to a thoughtful man, is very precious. Prosperity without God's favor in it is less than nothing; but if God's loving-kindness be there, it is better than life. It brings with it the assurance that all things shall work together for good to the man.

It secures this, in the beginning, that he shall have strength for every day's duty. There will be light to guide him in all his walk, and grace to help him in all his work. It secures next, that prosperity shall not injure him, — "the sun shall not smite him by day." If it be God's gentleness which has made him

great, that gentleness shall dwell also within, and make him able to say, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty," and that times may come when a man must take up such language in the sight of God against accusers, no one who reads the words of Job or David or Paul, not to speak of Christ himself, can doubt. This loving-kindness secures, still further, that prosperity shall have its true enjoyment. God's love gives to a man the very life of life, and bestows on the day that light of which the poet speaks, — "a brighter light than ever shone on sea or shore." Every blessing, every happy affection, every tender touch of kindred souls, is a drop from the river of life, and a foretaste of the fountain-head. If we possess it let us be glad, and, if we have lost it, let us still be glad, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. These, too, like our friends, are not lost, but gone before. There are some who tremble when they look back on past hours of joy, and bear contrition for their too great happiness, as Job sacrificed for his sons when they feasted, but if God's loving-kindness was there, the daylight was good and pure, and it has done its part. It has strengthened the heart for trial, filled it with happy memories, and given it power to cherish happier hopes. If we are children of the light and of the day, we need retain no fear, because we have had our hearts made joyful by the Father of lights.

It might seem as if there were nothing better than this, a day in which "God commands his loving-kindness;" and yet the order in which this stands, and the whole spirit of the Bible, teach us to look for something higher in night, when "He gives his song." The

loving-kindness is God's goodness *on*, and *around* us, the song his goodness *in*, and passing *through* us. The song is the realizing of the loving-kindness, — the light that shines around, entering into the soul as night deepens, and giving day in its centre. It is the pillar of cloud kindling up into the pillar of fire.

Those to whom God draws near in an agony of grief understand this. If there are hours in our life when we know that there is a living God and an eternal world, it is in such a crisis, when we are compelled to cling to Him in the dark, and feel, as we cling, a strength beneath that lifts us up. This could never be if there were not a God, and, I can suppose, that Christ may permit death to enter a home, and delay his deliverance, that He may bring us to this issue. Who knows whether at Bethany a greater work was not done in the house of mourning, than outside at the grave? It is then that God enters and heaven opens, and that we know what it is to have strength in weakness, and peace in trouble, and to bear a crushing load, and feel One bearing us. This is God's way of help, so good for us, so glorifying to Himself, and whenever it comes, in whatever degree, it is "his song in the night."

The song in the night is not only this conscious feeling, it is the expression of it, to ourselves and others. It may not be loud, — not even whispered in words, — but it is a resignation to the will of God, that is calm and sweet, that speaks often loudest when the lips are dumb, and lets itself be known by its perfume, like a flower in the dark.

Where there is song there is the token of freedom

from terror. God's own voice has hushed the soul, "Fear not, for I am with thee," till it replies, "I will fear none evil, for Thou art with me." The song tells of a coming end to darkness, for there is prophecy in it, and wherever there is this deepest harmony — the heart at one with God in sorrow — the highest hope is never far away. It comes like those faithful women to the sepulchre, in the morning while it is yet dark, and finds to its wonder a risen Lord.

If you search the history of God's dealings you will find that it has been his manner to give these songs in the deepest night to those who look to Him. In the time of Job, He was known as "God our maker, who giveth songs in the night." Asaph remembered his "song in the night, when he communed with his heart;" and what are David's psalms in trouble, but songs when God made "the very night to be light about him"? Paul and Silas found it in prison, when "they prayed and sang praises at midnight, and the prisoners heard them," for He in whom they trusted made his comforts come gliding like his own angels, through the prison bars, till strange sounds of song, such as dungeons had not known before, came floating to the wondering listeners. In privation, in bereavement, in desertion, in death, these utterances of confidence in God are written down for us. In the night of trial He has filled the history of his church as full of songs beneath as of stars of promise above. They console the hearts of the singers and they rise to join the songs of the morning stars, — to announce that a ransomed company is marching through the gloom, anticipating the time when they too "shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

The *third* and last thought is, that THERE IS A CONSTANT DUTY ON OUR PART AMID ALL.

“And my prayer unto the God of my life!” If we are to be safe in these changes, and to share these Divine provisions, here are the means. “Life” — some one has said — “is a constant want, therefore it should be a constant prayer.” It is not that we are to sublimate this duty into one unvaried feeling, and to withdraw it from every act of time and place, — for those who do so must be more than common men, if prayer, as a feeling, does not soon droop and die. The day and the night call upon us to sanctify each, by its own form to God, and some days and nights in their temptations and sorrows demand those wrestlings that have power with God to prevail. Let us never forget that the Saviour of the world found it needful so to cry to his Father, and that the world’s redemption passed through its crisis in an act of special prayer. If our hours of sorrow lead to such outpourings of heart, we are on our way to the songs of the night. To pray truly, is to praise. Therefore in such supreme moments of our being, let us “stir ourselves up to take hold of God.”

But neither are we to confine the prayer within such limits. Those who are most earnest and deep at central points will spread most widely the feeling of prayer all through time. The throb of the heart will pulsate to the extremity, and prayer will be like the movement of life which beats so constantly, because it is a dying and reviving in every pulse-stroke. The essence of this feeling is dependence upon God. It is a dependence that is reverent and yet loving, reasonable and yet childlike, that is not inconsistent with action, nay,

that is impious and vain, unless it is breathing its life into every fitting duty. It will put the question, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" and be ready to work by day, or watch by night, as He may give the word. "Lord, teach us so to pray?"

It is to the "God of our life." The God is it not of *all* our life, of every day and night, — who orders them, and bids them come and go as He orders light and darkness to flicker over the face of the earth? To Him we pray, for "all our times are in his hand." It is to the God of the *great movements* of our life. When all the joy, or, still more, all the agony, is gathered into one cup, and we are bidden drink, and He is seen to hold it in his hand, what can we do but pray to Him then? "God of my life, to Thee I call." It is to the God of our *eternal* life, and bitter without any sweet that cup would be, and cruel the hand that pressed it to our lips, if we could not add this — *God of our eternal life!* It is this that more than accounts for the agony, and this that summons to unflinching prayer. For, apart from the promises of his own Word, and the revelation of Jesus Christ, we may argue that the God who sends such agony on human hearts, must have a great purpose beyond, which will justify Him before his universe, and that the God who admits a creature to speak to Him, and gives comfort and joy in the thought of his own fellowship, cannot remand that creature to everlasting forgetfulness. Here, suffering and prayer meet and clasp hands around eternal life, and Him who is the God of it.

We can never but think that these men of old, who so wrestled with sorrow, in the power of prayer, had that faith which made them feel that death is not an

eternal farewell to God. It is surely the first instinct of any life to cling to its own preservation, and shall this not be true of the life which is Divine? And we, who have a clearer light, or rather life brought to light, shall we not feel it more? *My prayer to the God of my eternal life!* In such times our prayer should be that He, who is proving Himself a Father to our spirits, may make this highest life his care and ours, that the rending of our dearest earthly affections may bind us closer to Him who can heal them again, and that, over the graves of our lost and longed for, we may have a firmer hold of that God who is "the God not of the dead, but of the living."

If happiness be the end of life, as some would tell us, life in this world is a great and manifest failure. But, if it be something more — if it be to train the soul in reverence, and faith, and obedience to God — then, with much that is dark we have some light on our way through the terrible mysteries which surround us. Let us pursue our way with this guide, — "My prayer to the God of my life," humbly trusting in, and following Him who struggled in the deepest darkness for us. Be sure that they who follow Him must come to the light of life. If we have meanwhile day, we shall have that loving-kindness which makes it doubly bright, and in the deepest night we shall not be hopeless, but cherish that "song in the night" which comes as "when a holy solemnity is kept" (Isa. xxx. 29) — a deep resignation to the supreme will that waits for the morning, which must come as sure as there is a God — and for melodies, which shall not be low in the heart, but loud and joyful on the tongue, for "those that dwell in the dust shall awake and sing."



XVI.

The Gospel, and the Magnitude of Creation.

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” — PSALM viii. 3, 4.



HERE is an objection raised by some against Scripture, that the language in which it speaks of the earth and its relation to the heavenly bodies, of the sun and his rising and setting, is inconsistent with the theory of the world as established by modern astronomy. This objection is so superficial that it scarcely needs to be adverted to. The Bible, while it professes to be Divine in its origin, professes as distinctly to be human in its mode of address. It comes, like its great subject, in the likeness of men, and uses their ordinary speech. It could not do otherwise without antedating all science, and making itself a revelation of material as well as of spiritual truth. This is not its object, for although, as we believe, it does not come into collision with the true deductions of science, it has the one ever-present aim of bringing

the soul of man into connection with God and the eternal world, and of delivering him from that sin which is at once his crime and his punishment. To do this in a way suited to every country and every stage of human progress, is the grand mission of the Word of God, and those men betray not their breadth but their narrowness, and the vain conceit of a little knowledge, who would have had the Bible adopt the nomenclature of schools instead of the common language of humanity.

But there is another objection much deeper than this, and deserving of a more careful consideration. In some form it must have presented itself to every thoughtful mind, and excited the various feelings that rise from doubt up to wonder and adoring gratitude. The language of the Psalmist here shows us, that some of those questions which still perplex us in seeking to bring God's truth into one consistent whole, have been raised long ago, and are as old as the soul of man. The Psalmist could have had but a small conception of the magnitude of creation as compared with that which dawns on us through the power of the telescope and the calculations of astronomy, but the insignificance of man as the subject of Divine interposition and care, filled him with wonder and awe. Amid the amazing extension of our knowledge of the universe through the discoveries of modern science, this wonder has taken the form of an objection against the gospel, openly expressed by some, and felt in different degrees by many more. It is that the gospel revelation is out of proportion to the magnitude of creation, as now certainly known. Before attempting in any way to

meet it, it may be necessary to set forth the difficulty more in detail.

Modern astronomy has taught us that our earth, which was once reckoned the centre of the universe, is no more than one of a sisterhood of planets revolving round a common sun, and one which is very small, compared with other globes of the same system. There are some of those planets that surpass it in size many hundred times, and the sun round which we revolve, and which, for aught we know, may be the scene of life, exceeds it beyond all comparison. Outside our solar system, there are those constellations where every luminous point may be, and probably is, the centre of a system of its own, filled with vast and varied being. Beyond these visible stars, which seem like the first mile-stones in trackless space, there is the faint light called the Milky Way, which, by the aid of the telescope, can be resolved into masses of stars, so distant from us, that a ray of light from them would require thousands of years to reach us. The Milky Way is, with good reason, supposed to be the outer bound of that great stellary congregation to which all the visible stars belong, including our own sun. But in the depths of space, immeasurably beyond the Milky Way, there are systems and groups of systems as large as, or larger than, the whole field of creation already noticed. Our own galaxy is but a unit among many more. Beyond it, there are others so distant that, as a celebrated astronomer (Sir John Herschel) states, "the rays of light from some remoter *nebulae* must have been two millions of years on their way." In the presence of such conceptions, thought is powerless.

If we can realize all this as the product of one mind, how does it magnify our idea of it! How great the Being who not only comprehends all these worlds at a glance, but who made them, sustains them, and more than fills them! "Behold the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee."

Over against this view of the universe, we may set, in few words, the gospel revelation. It tells us that in one of these worlds, insignificant in magnitude compared with many, God has interposed in behalf of a race of sinful beings, in a manner which, in some respects, must stand unparalleled and alone. He first opened a communication with them as fallen, and then entered into a union mysteriously intimate. That He may gain great spiritual ends, He sustains at once the relation of Sovereign and subject, Judge and sufferer. He not only touches, but takes upon Him the fallen nature — vindicates the eternal law of justice — condemns the sin, and makes provision for the restoration to pardon, purity, and Divine life, of myriads of the rebellious race. The revolt is destined to be put down, and the world which seemed lost to its allegiance is to be finally reconquered to the Divine kingdom, and made the seat of holiness and happiness. It may be put briefly in the words of Scripture, "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." "And the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."

It cannot be denied that the two views of God presented here, of his greatness in the material, and of

his love in the spiritual, world, stand wide apart, and that the attempt to hold them together in thought may well overpower us. But though we could not offer a single consideration fitted to reconcile them, it should be remembered that it is of God that we are speaking, and that an infinite nature must present aspects which diverge far apart from each other, — which become, if we may so say, utterly unlike. The Bible is not taken by surprise in this, for though its writers had not that knowledge of God's creation which we have, they had that inspired conception of his grandeur which is worthy of it, and they felt how marvellous this makes his interposition in behalf of man. It filled them not, indeed, with unbelief, but with wonder and awe.

It should be remembered, moreover, that both of these views of God come before us on their own distinct evidence, and must be tested by it. Different sciences, which seem at first discordant, advance at last to join hands in reconciliation, and religion, which springs from the basis of the spiritual, may appear for a while in strange contrast, or even conflict, with the discoveries of the material universe, and yet be found in the end to be in full harmony with them.

One more remark may be made as a preliminary, that science, as far as it has gone, and we may confidently say as far as it can go, is unable to take the place of religion. It cannot supply religion's consolations, and it can offer no substitute for its hopes. Till it can do this, or till these consolations and hopes are no more needed, science can never supplant it. Religion may have its forms of expression touched and modified

here and there, but it cannot have its life impaired until man ceases to feel that he has a soul. If science could destroy the lights which religion holds up in the history of man, it would be found not only to have inflicted the greatest wrong on humanity, but to have assailed the very spring, and quenched the attractions, of its own progress — for the highest thought connected with science is that in its paths we are following the footsteps of a universal mind, and beginning a course of inquiry which is eternal as it is infinite. Science would then be the blind giant tearing down the pillars of the temple, and crushing with itself in the ruins, not its enemies, but its friends.

We come now more directly to the objection that has been taken to the gospel from the vastness of creation as displayed in astronomy. So far as we can see, that objection takes one of two shapes, — either *that man, looked at in the light of such a universe, is too insignificant for this interposition; or, that God is too far above us to expect such an interposition from Him.* We shall consider these two forms of objection in order.

I. As regards *man*, the professed aim of the gospel is his deliverance from spiritual error and sin, and his introduction to that which alone can satisfy the wants of his nature, the favor and fellowship of the God who made him. This is a sphere of action entirely different from astronomy, and, at its very first step, as much higher as mind is above matter. It is the presence of life, above all, of intelligent life, which gives significance to creation, and which stands, like the positive

digit in arithmetic, before all its blank ciphers. The most beautiful landscape wants its chief charm till we see, or fancy in it, the home of man.

This may be charged as egotism, but it is the law of our being by which we must judge the world. We must look out on God's universe with the eyes and heart that its Maker has bestowed upon us, and we must believe that they were meant to guide us truly. The eras of geology receive their interest as they become instinct with animation, and as they foreshadow the entrance of the intelligent mind, which was at last to appear among them to be their interpreter. It is the reason of man which has reconstructed them out of their dead ashes. It is that same reason which gives to the present living world all that it has of meaning and of unity. The forms of beauty and grandeur which matter puts on are only the clothing furnished by mind. The Alps and Andes are but millions of atoms till thought combines them, and stamps on them the conception of the everlasting hills. Niagara is a gush of water-drops till the soul puts into it that sweep of resistless power which the beholder feels. The ocean, wave behind wave, is only great when the spirit has breathed into it the idea of immensity. If we analyze our own feelings, we shall find that thought meets us wherever we turn. The real grandeur of the world is in the soul which looks on it, which sees some conception of its own reflected from the mirror around it,—for mind is not only living but life-giving, and has received from its Maker a portion of his own creative power. It breathes into dead matter the breath of life, and “it becomes a living soul.”

It is not merely the great masters of thought who possess this power, but the capacity is in every mind which makes it kindred to the greatest, and which separates it by an infinite gulf from matter. "Man," Pascal says, "is a feeble reed, trembling in the midst of creation ; but then he is endowed with thought. It does not need the universe to arm for his destruction. A breath of wind, a drop of water will suffice to kill him. But, though the universe were to fall on man and crush him, he would be greater in his death, than the universe in its victory ; for he would be conscious of his defeat, and it would not be conscious of its triumph" (*Pensées* xviii. 11).

The very discoveries of astronomy which disclose the vastness of the material creation, are, in another form, testimonies to the greatness of man's mind. In every step of progress, the discoverer is above the discovery. It is mind which travels from star to star, which measures them in mass and distance, and which, when it has traversed them, can comprise them all, and more than them all, in a single thought. It can rise above them, and pass beyond them, into infinity and eternity. So far, then, from these discoveries leading us to believe that God will do less for man, they may incline us to the hope that He will do more.

The mind of man receives a further dignity when we turn from its power over the material to its capacity in the *moral* world. It is able to conceive and to reason from those distinctions of truth and falsehood, right and wrong, good and evil, which underlie and govern the spiritual world, as the laws of mathematics do the material. It feels that there is something here which

is as universal as mind, and more enduring, not only than the forms of matter, but than its substance. We can *think* the material universe out of being, and we *believe* there was a time when it did not exist, but the true, the right, the good, must be conceived in thought, and held in faith, to be unchangeable and eternal. Here, if anywhere, mind grasps the absolute and infinite, and, because it is able to do this, it holds rank above the highest things that eye can see, or heart conceive, in the physical creation.

To this dignity of mind derived from its power of thought, we have to add its value in the light of *immortality*. Though the material universe as a whole will never cease to exist, it is yet subject in every part to change and decay, — while the soul lives on, unaltered in conscious identity, binding the present to the past, and the future to the present, in a continuous chain for ever. If there be in matter, as we look up through the worlds, what seems an infinite of *space*, there is in mind a real infinite of *time*, and a power of growth in thought and feeling and enjoyment, which consists not, like the growth of matter, in alternate birth and death, but in an evermore living life, welling upward, and swelling outward, in approach to the infinite and ever-blessed God. We may agree with Augustine, who says, “There is but one object greater than the soul, and that one its Creator;” and we may reason very fitly, that if it was worthy of God to create such a being at first, it is worthy of Him to care for it afterwards, and to seek its progress and happiness with all the means at his disposal, that is, with a power and wisdom and goodness which are unlimited.

We may reason, farther, that it cannot be considered unworthy of God to interpose *supernaturally* for such an end. The first origin of created being, and of man, must be thought of as supernatural — as a step on the part of Divine power beyond what was previously existent. Why should there not be another such interposition to create man anew, and raise him to true spiritual life? The denial of this would consistently lead to the denial of a Divine act of creation, and, indeed, to the denial of God's personality, with which consequences we do not here deal. But if we believe in a God who created the world and made man in it, it is surely reasonable to believe also that He will guide his work to its proper end, and that the highest part of man's nature will not be left to neglect. A dignified idea of either God or man will not incline us to believe that things are abandoned to chance-hazard here. If we see God exerting his power and wisdom in multiplying and adorning forms of dead matter — if we behold Him piling them in heaven-soaring mountains, brightening them into resplendent suns, and scattering them through space in infinitely varied combinations, — it is not too much to expect that He will exert these same attributes in retrieving from loss and in raising to fresh spiritual power that immortal mind which is the true image of Himself — which alone of all his works can comprehend Him, and can return the expressions of his intelligence and love.

So far from what God has done for the world of matter, in the fields of astronomy, being any reason for discrediting what the gospel declares He has done for the world of mind in man, it should be a reason for

believing it. If He has lavished so much of pains and skill upon a universe of death, what may we not anticipate for one of life? If He has expended so much upon the mere pedestal and platform of being, what upon the thinking immortal spirit, on whose account alone the basement and outer furniture of the world are there? Belief in the gospel will become an easier thing to us in proportion as we realize the greatness of the soul, and breathe the air of eternity.

Still, we can imagine an objection rising to all this in the minds of some. It may be urged that it is not a fair statement of the case to compare mind in this world with matter in the worlds of astronomy, for it is rational to suppose that mind exists there as well as here. The difficulty, it may be said, lies in this, that God should have done so much for mind in our globe as compared with what has been done for it in other regions of his universe.

A very sufficient answer to this is, that ours is the only world with the inhabitants and circumstances of which we are acquainted, and therefore the only one regarding which we can form any judgment. The nearest of the heavenly bodies to our own (the moon) is to all appearance uninhabited, and what stage other worlds may have reached, in the great march of being, it is impossible for us even to conjecture. We learn from our earth's history that long eras roll on before the highest state is reached, if indeed we have reached it, and whether these other worlds are behind or before us in the scale must remain for ever unknown in our present condition. Granted that they are the spheres of intelligent and responsible mind, it is equally impos-

sible to say whether, and under what form, Divine interpositions may be needed by them. God doubtless has his manifestations there as well as here, and in the manner suited to the nature and wants of his creatures. Everywhere "his works praise Him, and his saints bless Him;" and instead of reasoning from the wide extent of his universe that He will neglect any part, it is more consonant to infer that He will care for all. The tokens of his presence among us, seen and felt to the lowest verge of being, lead to the same conclusion.

If there be a peculiar manifestation of God to us, we know that there is a peculiar necessity to which it is adapted. The revelation of the great Father of spirits in this world is one suited to a lapsed and sinful state, and marked, therefore, by that view of his character which re-assures the heart by its infinite condescension; but as He never repeats Himself in this world, it may be expected that in others He reveals Himself in infinitely varied modes. Every star must give up its secret before we have the complete manifestation of God, and even then we would see but "parts of his ways." To compare and to study these may be, must be, the work of eternity; and, as we wonder sometimes how a soul, growing on for ever, can find fresh exercise for all its thoughts and activities, we may reach the answer when we look up through the countless hosts of the firmament, and feel that every point of light shall yet open out into a sun, and each one cast its own special illumination on the nature of Him who, with all our searching, cannot be found out unto perfection.

II. We come now to the second form which the objection may take — that as the gospel revelation sets man in a rank that is too high, *so does it bring God too low*. Is it credible, it may be asked, that the all-extending infinite Power, which these worlds on worlds disclose, can enter into union with human nature, and take that place on our earth which the cross and the grave of Jesus Christ reveal ?

Perhaps there may be over-boldness on both sides in the argument as to what we may expect from God, but, provided we do not degrade his moral attributes, the presumption is likely to be not in anticipating too much, but too little. All that we know of God may lead us not to set limits to any side of his character, and certainly it is not the discoveries of astronomy which should teach us so to circumscribe Him. We see in the sky the hand of a Being infinite in power and wisdom, and is it rational, because of this, to restrict Him in his display of goodness and mercy ? He is so great in the heights of heaven, therefore he cannot be so great in stooping to misery and sin ! This may apply very well as a standard to some kinds of men, but it is not the standard for the noblest, and, least of all, can we take it as a measuring-line for God. There is more philosophy in the feeling of the Psalmist that God's greatness is the measure, not of his distance from, but of his nearness to us. "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy to them that fear Him" (Ps. ciii. 11).

In the character of a really great man, we require a *balance* of qualities to satisfy us. Pascal has finely said, "I do not admire in a man the extreme of one

virtue, as of valor, if I do not see at the same time the extreme of the opposite virtue, as in Epaminondas, who had the extreme of valor and the extreme of gentleness. For otherwise this character would not rise, but fall, by the excess of the one side. A man shows true greatness, not by touching one extreme, but by touching both at once, and filling up the interval" (*Pensées* xxv. 9).

This is a principle which we are justly warranted in applying to God. In astronomy we see Him touching the extremity of *omnipotence*, and, if his character is not to be one-sided, we may expect to see Him touching, in some other work, the extremity of *love*. We shall seek it vainly all through creation, if we do not meet with it in the gospel. There we believe it is to be discovered, and a depth of sympathizing tenderness is revealed, which is a full and fitting counterpoise, and which can be set over against that height of awful majesty. By how much then the mind of man extends the scale and weights the balance on the side of power, by so much is a sphere of action needed which can show us corresponding mercy; and the gospel of Christ becomes then a suitable, we may almost say an indispensable, complement in any perfect manifestation of the nature of God.

Thus it would be, even if we were to place the material and the moral on the same level of importance, but the argument becomes stronger, when we consider how much the moral rises above the material. We may expect that God's revelation of Himself will be in a similar proportion. Every man who can think will acknowledge that intellect is superior to physical

strength, and that purity and goodness are superior to mere intellect. As society progresses, and the world grows wiser, this standard of judgment is more and more adopted. Nimrod and Achilles had the place of honor in the earliest ages, but as time rolled on mind became pre-eminent, and men read Homer to admire, not the hero, but the poet. If Napoleon is the object of admiration yet, it is as the embodiment of intellectual energy; and his hard selfishness, his want of truthfulness and justice, are constantly reducing him to a lower place as a man of heroic mould. There is an attempt being made in our day to bring back the worship of force, and to make men fall down in adoration of its brief success, even when it is devoted to the most selfish ends. But it only shows how miserably blind intellect becomes, when it loses sight of a guiding moral principle in the universe, and how, when the higher lights that are in God are forgotten, men stumble in the practical rule of life. Weak as human nature is, and fascinated by false glitter, it is gradually and surely advancing to estimate men by the unselfishness of purpose which they display. Genius directed to evil, or squandered on vanity, loses its power to charm, and the involuntary tribute is given to fortitude in adversity, to self-sacrificing labor for the good of others, and to the life which forgets itself in the presence of danger or death, for the service of humanity. Our deepest and truest instincts tell us that these things make the real hero, and that power and genius are never so great as when, with noble unconsciousness, they stoop to lift the fallen and lost. Whatever aberrations the spirit of a man or an

age may show, we must come back to this rule of judgment.

But if we have such a standard in the profoundest instincts of our nature, and if the world is ever more advancing to the perception of it, from whom did we receive it, if not from God, and is it not reasonable to suppose that the view he gives us of his own character will be formed upon it? Can we imagine that the human reason will ever rise so high as to be in advance of Him who is its original, and turn round and discover a God inferior to itself—one who was anxious to impress his creatures more with a sense of his material power than of the features of his moral and spiritual character? And yet take away the gospel, and, so far as we can see, we should have a deity whose highest display was that of physical omnipotence. Could we reverence in God that which we cannot respect in man? It is the gospel which restores the harmony between the view of God's power and that inner dictate of our nature which sets the highest crown upon goodness. Then it is that awe at his power and love of his condescension can aid each other, and both concentrate on Himself.

We can suppose a reply made that this standard of judgment is the result of the reception of the gospel among us, and that we are trying the case by the maxims of our own side.

It would be to the highest praise of the gospel if it had created such a standard, and it is, indeed, to the gospel that we chiefly owe its development. But he takes a very superficial view of human nature who does not believe that there are essential moral intuitions

in it, weakened, it is true, and perverted by sin, but ready to be awakened and to give their response to the Divine Spirit when it breathes upon them. Deepest among these is the conviction that the pure, and merciful, and tender, are beautiful, not only in the human, but in the Divine — and it is because the gospel meets this feeling that we are borne to it on the tide of all our spiritual sympathies. The more profoundly and reverently we study our inner nature and the standard of moral judgment which has been there set up, the more we shall feel the need of the revelation of Jesus Christ to give us this full-orbed view of God. It alone discloses depths of compassion transcending even those heights of power, and points us to a Being who crowns his own nature, as He crowns ours “with loving-kindness and tender mercy.”

When we take this view we see that man has been placed in this world in the midst of concentric circles of Divine attributes, which become charged with deeper interest as they press in closer towards him. The most distant is power, girdling the universe with its rings of stars and constellations. Within it, comes the sphere of harmonious wisdom in the orbits of the planets and the revolutions of sun and moon, with signs and seasons. When we touch our own world, we can discern goodness in the varied tribes of being in earth, and air, and sea. Justice enters in the field of human history, inspiring confidence, and yet exciting awe when it shows us the rise or the ruin of nations, as they abide by, or depart from, the principles of rectitude.

But the inmost circle of fatherly love and forgiving

mercy remains in the approach of God to the individual soul. Such a circle there must be, and when we feel its clasp on our hearts, we learn, in the language of the poet, "that the world is made for each of us." The universe gathers round each single eye like a broad rainbow arch, to let us see, not the world alone, but God, power the outmost color, — mercy the nearest, — that every one may be able to look up to Him without dismay. Take away the inmost and deepest radiance, and then that which is most consoling to us, and most glorious in Him, disappears. One of the most beautiful pictures in the whole range of ancient poetry is when the hero of Troy stretches out his arms to embrace his infant son before he moves to the field of battle. The child shrinks from him in fear, "scared by the dazzling helm and nodding crest," and the tenderness of the father's heart comes out with a touch of nature that makes us feel it beating across three thousand years: —

"He hastened to relieve the child,
The glittering terrors from his brows unbound,
And placed the gleaming helmet on the ground —
Then kissed the child."

And shall we not feel it reasonable that the God who placed paternal pity in the heart of man feels it, and will take his own way of making us feel it, also? When we are ready to be crushed by the overwhelming greatness of that starry diadem, there must be some assurance given of God's compassion that shall open for us the door of filial confidence to his heart. Were it not for this, how cold and stern would every night come, with its awful lights looking down distant

and silent on a world of sin and graves ! Its thousand eyes would glitter pitilessly on our misery, and its fixed cycles would be coiled round us, like chains of despair. The arms of omnipotence would be dreadful if there were no throb of mercy in the breast.

“ Thou art the mighty God !
This gleaming wilderness of suns and worlds
Is an eternal and triumphant hymn
Chanted by Thee unto Thine own great self !
Wrapt in Thy skies what were my prayers to Thee ! ”

The gospel is the answer to this, and the only sufficient answer. When we fall as dead at the feet of Him who has “ in his right hand the seven stars,” and whose countenance is “ as the sun shining in his strength,” He lays his hand on us and says, “ Fear not,” and when we look up we meet the face of Jesus Christ. He discloses a second universe in the soul, with its depths of infinite yearning and heights of capability, and shows the greatness that is in man, by touching human nature with the Divine which is in Himself. The man who, with unsealed eyes and humble heart, enters this new world, perceives a growing grandeur worthy of all that God has done or can do for it — a world that goes forward not to death but life, and that even now floods all the stars with a purer, tenderer light than the astronomer’s tube can reveal. The character of God rises more conspicuously Divine, — love softening greatness, and greatness commending love. “ The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, and that dwells in the high and holy place, dwelleth with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the revelation of this God, and it carries the tokens of its divinity with it in the purity and grandeur of the prospects it presents, and the glorious freeness with which it offers them to a fallen world — in the depths of Divine mercy disclosed by it, which are no dream, for they attest themselves by their fruits in the transformation of souls into a heavenly image, and in the patience and hope and peace which the humblest of us may share, according to our measure, through the grace of the Son of God. It is a noble thing to study God's universe. It is a nobler thing to be acquainted with Himself. It is the noblest of all to unite these two — to feel the mercy of God's heart, and see the majesty of his handiwork, and to accept them both as Godlike, and both as ours — “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds; He telleth the number of the stars, He calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite” (Psalm xlvi. 3).

The conclusion of the whole matter is, that he who feels that he has a soul will find his way into a spiritual world, and he who feels that he has sin will find a Divine fitness in the gospel of Christ. And, when he embraces it, he will come to see that “the stars in all their courses” fight for that gospel. Both revelations are worthy of God, and each, rightly considered, contributes to the fulness of the other. But of the two, the gospel is more needful to us. The “bright and morning star” is more to our soul's firmament than all the constellations of the sky. It is needed even the more for that vastness of creation which,

without its guiding light, would bewilder and blind us, for, truly viewed, the gospel, instead of requiring a defence against astronomy, stands justified by it as a grand moral and spiritual necessity.





XVII.

Man's Hope of Immortality Uncontradicted by God.

"If it were not so, I would have told you." — JOHN xiv. 2.

THESE words are a parenthesis in the midst of one of our Lord's greatest promises. His disciples already cherished high hopes of a glorious future through Him, and now what He says is above all they could ask or think, — eternal mansions in heaven, where they shall see and share the glory which the Father bestows on the only begotten and well-beloved Son. There might be some misgivings in their minds, as if such hopes were beyond hope, and these words are thrown in to quiet them — "If it were not so, I would have told you." "I know," as if He had said, "what you are expecting, and you need cherish no apprehension lest you come short of it. Though I had given no promise in words, my silence would have been your guarantee and pledge. Had you been deceiving yourselves with a falsehood, I would have felt bound to undeceive you."

There is a familiarity of friendship in the words

which breathes the spirit of his own saying (John xv. 15) — “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends.” There is an appeal to the innate truthfulness of his own nature, which we feel to be deserved by Him. He is so faithful that He will not merely refrain from uttering a falsehood, He will not connive at it by silence. He cannot be near error without unmasking it, and showing that He is the *Truth*. The looks, the words, the conduct of his disciples, were making a constant appeal to Him, and telling of their hope of eternal life through Him. Had He been conscious of its emptiness and refused to speak out, had He accepted their homage and service, with such a misapprehension in their hearts, what should we think of Him? It would cloud all the character of Christ in its foundation-element of truthfulness, and destroy the ideal we have formed to ourselves of One in whose mouth there was no guile. The basis of all his teaching is truth first; truth above all things; truth, however hard and painful — let us know the truth; and were He to act in contradiction to it here, and connive at a falsehood which runs through the whole life of his disciples, and which affects their close relation to Himself, we should cease to love or reverence such a character any more. The brightest ideal which ever rose on the world would be felt to be hollow and deceptive.

Now, this conception of what Christ should have done, and would have done, in these circumstances, whence comes it? Whence this conviction of what truth requires of One who appears with the claim to

be the Son of God? It is certainly of God's own implanting. The deep unalterable feeling that truth has a supreme claim over all things else, and that nothing can justify, not merely the utterance of falsehood, but silent connivance with it, — this feeling is engraven in man's soul by Him who is the Father of lights. If we did not believe in the unchangeable nature and claims of truth, we could not believe in Him.

We feel that if God has implanted in us this conviction of the homage due to truth, He Himself will act in accordance with it. His conduct, as far as we can trace it, will correspond with the moral and spiritual principles which lie at the root of the nature He has given us.

We purpose, then, taking this principle announced by Christ, which we feel to be so worthy of Him, so just and right, and we shall try to apply it to what we may expect from God. In doing this we must, *first*, show that we stand to the Maker of the universe in a position similar to that in which these disciples stood to their Master, — that is, we are looking to Him for the fulfilment of hopes which go beyond this world into another; *next*, we must show that the same considerations which would have led Christ to undeceive his disciples, had they been in error, apply to God in his position to us; and *then* will follow the conclusion, that, as the silence of Christ would have been, as He tells us, an assurance to his disciples that they were right in their hopes, so the silence of God, if He had been silent, would be an encouragement to us to believe that the immortality we expect from Him is not a dream. We look for that blessed hope, and expect

an eternal home for the soul. "If it were not so, He would have told us."

I. The *first* thing we have to do is to show that OUR POSITION TO GOD IS SIMILAR TO THAT IN WHICH THE DISCIPLES STOOD TO CHRIST,—we are looking to Him for the fulfilment of hopes which reach beyond our present life.

It cannot be questioned that there is a deep and wide testimony in man's nature to the existence of a God and of a future life. It may be pronounced either true or false, but it must be admitted to exist. We find it appearing in all countries and in all ages, and the seeming exceptions to it no more vitiate the fact than the absence of reason in some individuals, or its degradation in some races, would lead us to deny that man is rational. Those who believe in the effect of sin can account for the distortion and the darkening of this testimony of man's nature, though sin with all its power has not been able to eradicate it. We may glance at it more in detail.

There is a dim token of a nature which seeks more than earth, in the manner in which earthly things are often pursued. When we see man grasping at wealth and fame, at power and pleasure, casting them all into the void of the soul, and still unsatisfied, we perceive something of the truth that he is made for the infinite and the divine. The world cannot fill his soul, because it is greater than the world. Man himself is conducting an exhaustive argument to prove the true end of his being. The magnet in his heart can never rest till it points to its pole-star.

We can see it when the mind of man intermeddles with all knowledge, pursues the broken rays of truth, and seeks to trace them to a higher and still a higher fountain, — when he strives to resolve facts into laws, particular laws into general, general into universal, and so upward to one supreme centre. In his thirst for truth, solely because it is truth, in his faith in it, in his search after it as single and sovereign, there is a token of man's origin and destiny.

It comes to light in the way in which man pursues an object beyond the range of self-interest, and the term of his own life. Instances of it occur not only in a few men of lofty enthusiasm, who embrace a nation or a world in their thought, but every day and in every walk of life. We all know men who have aims, more or less exalted, for which they are ready to give time and labor and endless anxiety, without any prospect of reward or fame, without even any hope that they themselves shall see the result. In this stretch of man's soul beyond self there is a look of his nature beyond earthly limits.

We can perceive the same in the conception men have of an ideal of perfection, in the delight with which they dwell upon it, in their struggle to realize it, and in the deep lamentation that comes from the heart over the imperfect and impure around them. The only sphere in which this yearning can be realized is immortality. Without this it would have no proper meaning, no sufficient and worthy close.

It is discerned in all the religions which man has made for himself. He cannot remain permanently without a religion, and that religion must as certainly have

a future. Individuals may have so far reasoned themselves out of their sense of an immortality, and particular nations and ages, through the influence of a prevailing materialism, may have sunk low in the appreciation of it, but it is still there in the heart of humanity, ready to spring up when rightly appealed to. However arid the soil, pierce deep enough and there is some vein where this water of life may be touched.

We can see also, that, in proportion as religions rise in their perception of moral excellence, in that degree do they become clear on the question of immortality. We may appeal here to the Bible, and to the various forms of religious faith which are connected with it. We are not quoting it for its authority, but simply as a matter of fact. Let a man, if he will, say that the book and all that has sprung from it is merely a product of human nature, it is still an evidence that human nature is looking for an eternal life. The hundreds of millions who hold by it profess this at least, and we have a right to say that Christianity, in its rise and diffusion, is a testimony to man's hope of an immortality.

It may be said that the vast mass of those who profess it think very little of the eternal life which it proclaims, and this must be mournfully admitted. If they all held it as a constant firm-fixed conviction, there would be no need to argue for it. We refer to it here only to show that a religion, which is the most widely spread through the most intelligent part of mankind, — where human nature, on its intellectual and spiritual side, is most fully developed, — has the hope

of immortality for one of its central and pervading ideas.

We have a right to say further, that this hope is one of its greatest living forces. It rose with this, burning in its breast; it lives with this indestructible fire within it, kindling and intensifying itself with the powers of the world to come. No one can read these parting words of Christ or the utterances of such men as Paul and John, without seeing that, wherever their religion goes, the conviction of an immortality goes with it as an all-pervading thought. Its martyrdoms and its missionary efforts are everywhere based upon it. Its preachers are inflamed with the love of saving souls that are immortal; and its witnesses have calmly met death for the truth's sake, because they believed that they were not losing life, but gaining it.

In the midst of all the materialism of our day, the missions of Christian churches abroad and at home, the sacrifices and self-denying labors for the spread of the gospel, prove how strong among many millions is the conviction of the value of the soul in its immortal nature. It remains yet to be shown that any view of man, as possessed of a mere earthly life, will lead to the suffering and labor which the gospel has called forth in the cause of humanity; and it is a remarkable fact that a philanthropy which professes to be able to act without the gospel hope, has never appeared except where the gospel has warmed the air and enlightened the sky.

I know that it is the fashion of some to speak of the hope of immortality as selfish, and to object to Christianity because it puts eternal life in the front rank of its

truths. We should be able, they say, to follow the true, the right, the good, whether there be an immortality or not. But the question is, whether in following the true, the right, and the good, and in connecting these with the thought of God, it be selfish to desire to follow them out to their fullest issue, and to follow them for ever. There is a selfish way of looking at the doctrine of immortality, as of every thing else ; but there is also an unselfish way, and it is the most Christian, — a view of immortality which thirsts for it and claims it as the heritage of man, and which can forget itself in the thought of God, and an eternal universe of truth and purity with which He shall at last surround Himself. It is surely worthy of consideration, in this question of unselfishness, that the religion which of all others is most disinterested in its morality, which founds its motives, not on hope of reward, but on love, is that one also which looks most clearly and steadily into an eternal life, and that its central act is a sacrifice unto death, which becomes the spring and birth of numberless immortalities. That the gospel infuses into the soul the ardor for an eternal life is a truth we not only admit, — it is one in which we glory ; but the desire, as the gospel puts it, is not for the mere existence, or any outward accompaniments of it, — it is for the true, the pure, and divine, which have become to the soul the life of life. To ask us to be willing to give up looking on, and living for, such a world, is to demand, not unselfishness, but apathy.

We appeal, then, to the Bible, and the forms of religion that have sprung from it, not in the way of authority, but merely as proof of this fact, that vast numbers

of men are looking to God with the hope of an immortality. In all ages they have labored and suffered and died in this hope. Many of the purest, noblest natures, that make us reverence humanity as a Divine work, have gone through the world with their face turned to God and eternity, and the unalterable conviction in their heart that it was no evanescent look. They have been appealing to the Father of spirits as really and truly for the fulfilment of their expectation, as his disciples did to Christ, when they followed Him and looked into his face with the hope of eternal life in their souls.

And this conviction, represented in the Bible, has, lying behind it, the deep instinct spoken of in the religious, and even in the earthly, struggles of man universal, — the instinct that he is the citizen of a greater sphere than time. It is an instinct that may be maltreated, and that, left to itself, will grow up into sad perversions, but the Bible does not create it, it finds it, and makes it its work to purify and point it to its true end. Even in its lowest form, it makes its dumb appeal to God, and is part of the dim groping after Him who is the desire of all nations. If it were utterly false, we would expect that, in some way, it would be shown to be so. The principle laid down by Christ for his own conduct would apply equally to God. If in these hopes and aspirations men were deceived, and were appealing to the Author of their being, so widely and so constantly for the fulfilment of what He never intends to bestow, then, in some distinct way or other, by some voice from heaven, or some prevailing voice of reason in their own hearts, we might justly conclude that He would act

on this principle—“If it were not so, I would have told you.”

II. Having sought to show that there is a parallel position, we have next to prove that THE SAME CONSIDERATIONS WHICH WOULD HAVE LED CHRIST TO UNDECEIVE HIS DISCIPLES, HAD THEY BEEN IN ERROR, APPLY TO GOD IN HIS POSITION TO US.

The reasons fall under a twofold division,—those which lie in *God's own character*, and those which lie in *the relation between Him and us*. Whatever could press on Christ as a moral obligation to speak out to his disciples, would lead us to expect that, if we were deceiving ourselves, God would speak out to us.

In thinking of character we must take *truthfulness* as a first element. Christ's faithfulness to truth would have prevented Him from suffering his friends to live and die self-deceived in so momentous a question. A genuine nature will shun, not merely active falsehood, but silent connivance with it. The most beautiful ideal of moral purity which ever appeared on the world's horizon, would be all darkened if we could conceive of Christ as a tacit party to deception, living all his life amid hollow hopes, and never uttering a word to correct them. “He would have told them.”

And shall we think less or worse of God, from whom every conviction of faithfulness and purity which glances through our bosom must come? The standard of clear candor which demands no suppression of the truth, when we are appealed to, has been implanted in us by Him. Shall He not act upon it? If we believe in Him at all, we must believe in a “God

of truth, and without iniquity." Yet here would be men, through successive generations, cherishing a baseless expectation, looking to Him for its fulfilment, and going down in ceaseless procession to the grave, with a lie in their right hand. The living labors of men, their dying hopes, their feeble hands raised in supplication, their closing eyes, all turning to Him and his heaven, yearning for a final home, — friends following them there in thought, and enduring life only in the hope to meet them again, — and it is all a deception, and God, the God of truth, can look silently on, nor utter one word, nor give a warning sign! "That be far from thee, Lord, that shall not be unto thee!"

Another fundamental element in character is *justice*. It would have impelled Christ to undeceive his disciples, had He known their hopes to be vain. For these hopes they were exposing themselves to hardship and scorn, stripes and prison, and were ready to suffer a cruel and untimely death. They counted these sufferings "not worthy to be compared with the glory that was to be revealed." Even had they been willing to encounter them all the same, without thought of a future, they should have known it. It was right that the terms should be before them, and that Christ should not accept their services and sufferings on a false presumption. "He would have told them."

And shall there not be the same equity in God? Here is a conscience implanted in man which urges him to surrender all things, even life itself, that he may meet the final Judge with a smile. Here are men who have faced the most terrible deaths in obedience

to the call of truth, and have entered the fire and mounted the scaffold joyfully because they saw the God of truth beckoning them on. And was the vision a phantasm, flickering in the flames, permitted, if not formed, by God to delude them, and were the ashes scattered by the winds all that remained of those hearts of faith? They might have been unselfish enough to have served Him all the same, since love to Himself, and not any selfish hope of his heaven, was their motive, but surely they should have known it. If Divine equity can have the law of the universe move on amid a perpetual delusion, and be subserved by it, then God's justice is something else than the image of it which He has formed within us.

There is still another element of character which would have led Christ to undeceive his disciples, had He known their hopes to be false, — his *goodness*. At first sight it might seem as if it were kinder to suffer them to dream on, since all their regrets would be quenched in extinction. But, apart from truth and justice, a heart of genuine pity could not bear to see the highest hopes perpetually bursting into nothingness, as if human souls were only air-bells, flushing into rainbow colors, to vanish out of existence. Let us imagine for a moment that Christ was walking beside them, listening to their happy converse of the vision of God and the communion of saints in an eternal home above the skies, while all the time He was aware of the dreadful secret that a few steps before them was the fathomless grave into which they were stumbling, with no consciousness and no awakening any more. And could that large and loving heart

have borne the sight without tears of anguish, which would have told the terrible loss, if words had failed Him? Though their sleep might be too deep to be broken by a dream of all the God-like aspirations they had cherished and lost for ever, He could not have endured the sight, and if there were beings besides in the universe of God, who beheld such extinction of hope, we feel as if it would poison their celestial joy to behold spirits, panting for God's immortality, and the cup of life constantly dashed down as it touched their lips.

And, if we carry such a thought still upward, what shall we reckon of the heart of a God of mercy who could look on such a scene with silent composure? If there be compassion in Him, like that which we attribute to a Christ, or even like the poor spark of it which is kindled in us, could He preside with, dumb indifference over a world where He is saved from the bitter cry of deception only because his creatures cannot wake to tell Him of their cruel and eternal disappointment?

To raise such dreadful thoughts is surely to answer them. We could not bear the scene, and how should He? If this life were indeed all, would not the goodness of God bring man's wishes within the circle of his brief existence, and not suffer him to tantalize himself with the lights and shadows, the hopes and fears, of an eternity which shall never dawn? If this life were all, why should man be made to mourn for the dead, with a grief that has no likeness upon earth? why the deep undying memory, the tomb, the cherished dust, the treasured image in the heart, till the heart beats no

more? If there be life beyond, then the most agonizing grief and bitter tears may belong to a scheme of mercy, for they endure only for a night, and can lead to infinite compensation. But if death be all, the kindness of this world's Maker would surely have caused parting to leave a less deep and lengthened sting. Otherwise, the hardened and heartless would be the fittest for such a world, and the tenderest and most loving would be made most wretched by that which, in them, is the likeliest to God. Could God permit such dishonor to his dearest attribute of love?

Besides the character of God from which we have been here arguing, there is *the relation which exists between Him and his human creatures*. It also is fitted to excite hopes corresponding to those cherished by the disciples from their Master's relation to them, and it, too, would claim something like this promised contradiction, — "If it were not so, I would have told you."

One of the first of these relations is that of a *Teacher*. Christ had led his disciples to look to Him for instruction in all the great interests of life. He had spoken to them of God's character, of his works and will, had taught them to recognize his hand in bird and flower, in the world of men and in their own hearts. He made them feel the depth of sin, and showed them how they were to be delivered from it, and these things had been to them bread and water of life. Had He spoken of no future world, the cry of their hearts would still have been, "Evermore, Lord, give us this bread." And had Christ known that this cry was vain, it would have been unworthy of Him to stimu-

late it. He would have convinced them that the desire was unreasonable, or He would have carefully guarded against exciting it.

Now God has taken up a relation like this to his intelligent creature, man. He has spread around him manifold fields of knowledge, traversed by open paths of inquiry. He has allured him to the study of his wide universe, by glimpses of truth which fill his soul with a thrill as he looks, and with a passion to pursue the search. He has sent out gleams of his own infinite nature, of his majesty and wisdom and goodness, which make man feel how sweet are the beams which come from that fountain, how pleasant it must be for ever to behold that sun. Such truths satisfy a desire in man, but they also excite it. And when God has thus become our Teacher, and begun to fill our minds with wonderful thoughts of his universe and Himself, can we believe that, in that day, He will suffer all our thoughts to perish? To have such lessons commenced, cannot but raise the hope that they will end in something definite and complete. He would have told us were it otherwise, or, having command of both the scholar and the books, He would have prevented the birth of such a fruitless expectation.

A relation higher than instruction is the *drawing out of the heart's affections*. Although Christ had never required the love of his disciples, they could not have helped rendering it. His words and his conduct bound them to Him irrevocably, and when they were asked if they would abandon Him for any other, they could only say, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Fear overcame them for a moment, but, though they fled

from his cross, they gathered to his grave, and followed Him on to their own, through tortures and martyrdoms, in the hope that they would meet Him at last with joy.

Now, let us suppose for an instant, that, by some strange arrangement, immortality was for Him but not for them. The supposition, however unnatural, contains the illustration we need. Let us suppose that when He ascended, the love which He had kindled in them followed Him up into the depths of heaven, never to be followed by themselves, and that He sat down upon his throne to forget those who remembered Him till death. Then the love had failed, not on the part of earth but heaven,—not the mortal friend but the immortal Master would have been guilty of cold forgetfulness. He would surely never have drawn out affection if He had intended such a close to it, nor taught it to cluster round Himself with twining arms and fragrant blossoms if it was to wither in a night.

And yet, if we are never to awake from our graves, this is the manner of the God that made us. He has attracted our love to Himself by his works and ways, by the beauties of his world and the bounties of his hand, and, if his countenance be sometimes stern and clouded, He has prompted our hearts to press in toward his heart through the dark, and to believe that all the cloud is but the hiding of a Father's face. The Book, which we say comes from Him, may have its origin denied, but it has sprung up in his world from hearts which He has made, and it contains the record, and becomes the source, of affections which hold fast to Him in the midst of all changes. He has permitted,

if He has not arranged, that there should be an outflow of constant and undying love to Him, such as is seen above all in the Bible and its results, — a love which cannot be satisfied with one passing look, but which longs for an eternal gaze. And, if He meant never to meet its desire, would He not be allowing a love to spring up in the human heart, stronger and truer than his own; for man's would be perpetually struggling to overpass death, while God's would coldly yield to it?

This relation of affection rises into the higher one of *fellowship*. It is affection entering on the exchange of thought and feeling. The bond between Christ and his disciples, of mutual converse and appeal, finds its counterpart in the bond between God and many souls of men in this world. Not only has God put his works in such a way before men that his mode of thinking, the links of reasoning, the checks and counter-checks in his operations, come before them as from a fellow-man; not only has He spread before them the delicacies of his taste, in his exquisite forms and colors, and shut up tender thoughts, "too deep for tears," in every flower, but he has impelled them to put their thoughts and feelings before Him. There are times when such a pressure is laid upon us that we are forced to send our wishes out to God. It is as strong, it is a stronger, necessity for some men to speak to God, than it is for others to speak to their fellow-creatures. This instinct of prayer is acknowledged in all religions; it is expressed, almost unconsciously, in the broken cry, "O God!" that is wrung from a man's lips in suffering. Whence has come this spontaneous recourse to prayer, which withstands all arguments?

Let it be granted that it is the Bible which has given to this feeling clearness and consciousness, and let us suppose, meanwhile, that it is no more than a human book. It must in any case meet a human want, and express a human desire. If it is not God's heart meeting man, it is man's heart meeting God, and seeking a fellowship with his Maker, which cannot but be of his Maker's prompting. If not direct and supernatural, as Christians hold, yet indirect and natural, from the constitution which God has given to man, and to the world in which he has placed him. In any case, there is interchange of thought arranged between God and the soul of man.

And when, in the trust and joy of this fellowship, the soul looks forward to its continuance, can we believe that God would permit it, in this, to be for ever deceived? — that He would neither save it from death, nor seek to bring its desires within the compass of its inevitable doom? Can this be the kindness of God to his friends? If Christ could not have buried such a secret in his heart from those who trusted Him, we feel that it would be unworthy of God to act on any other principle, that he must be true and transparent in his friendship, and either fulfil the desire of those who fear Him, or convince them that the desire is unattainable: "If it were not so, I would have told you."

The more we dwell on the line of thought we have sought to present, the more, we believe, will its truth appear, — that the desire of immortality in man, and the hope of it, may be cherished all the more strongly by us, because there are reasons for God contradicting it, if the hope were false. He has contradicted it in

the lower creatures ; that is, He has not suffered it to spring up. He has bestowed no such constitution on them, and entered into no such ties, as could lead them to indulge the expectation. Their eyes wait upon Him for no gift like this, and those who dream of a second life for them can only do it of arbitrary fancy, not because the rudiments of it are there already in their relation to God.

He has contradicted prevalent falsities in human nature in various ways. Apart from supernatural utterance, which we do not here appeal to, there is the progress of reason, the growth of conscience, the rise of the soul's highest life, which make superstitions and immoralities that have covered whole ages and nations to pine and die. In these ways, He tells man what is false, but here it is in proportion as the soul grows, and sin dies, that this hope increases, and it is strongest when we find our highest intuitions answered in the light and life of God.

We can account for this hope being so dim and uncertain among vast masses of our fellow-creatures, and for the highest form of it reaching its certainty and clearness only through painful struggles. Reason and conscience and the love of true freedom, which have all of them their roots in human nature, are checked and perverted by the tyranny of material interests, and much more may it be expected that the hope of immortality, which is still more of the spiritual, should be slow to grow to strength. God has made his best gifts in this world only to be reached through toil, and the steadfast view of the future is to be gained as the eye is purged from impurity. There must be also a pro-

portion observed in the opening up of a future life, that it may not overbalance the present, and unfit men for needful work, and this equilibrium is preserved by letting it in slowly through the spiritual vision. At the basis of all these, lies the great cause of every darkness, sin, which has overclouded man's view of Divine things, and which gives way gradually as God's plan of education for his world progresses.

Some such reasons will account for the hope of immortality being to many so dim, but that its germs should be found so wide and so constant in human nature, that it should come to its highest perfection when it approaches most into conscious nearness to God, and that, after all, it should be utterly futile, this would be entirely and for ever unaccountable. That God should permit hesitation and struggle before man reaches a glorious certainty, is in keeping with that law of our world which sets lions to guard the access to the gates of the palace of truth everywhere ; but that, in answer to the highest struggle of the human soul, there should only be a blank and ghastly negative — that man should be formed by nature or destiny, or whatever we may call it, to struggle on hopelessly till he stumbles into the yawning gulf, — is against every analogy around us — and, if we choose to call the Being who ordains it, God, and to believe Him to be faithful and benevolent, it is against every law of truth and kindness with which we are acquainted, — against the deepest principles of them which have been planted by Him in ourselves. We may apply to it with full conviction the principle here announced by Christ — If it were not so, He would have told us.

In the midst of this reasoning we can suppose the objection frequently offered, Wherefore grope in twilight, when life and immortality have been brought to light in Christ? Do we not set aside his revelation as valueless when we have recourse to such arguments? But let it be considered, that we have also those to deal with who deny the authority of Christ, while they admit a God. It is surely something to show that immortality is closely linked with any true faith in a Divine Being, nay, with the proper view of a moral order in the history of the world. If this life be all, not only is the Bible false, but our highest nature is that which deceives us most, and the noblest aspirations and struggles of the best of men have a falsehood at their heart.

Neither let us be afraid of disparaging the Bible by leading men to spiritual convictions through any path that is true. He who is brought, in any way, to a thorough belief in immortality is not further from Christ, but nearer to Him. When he comes to learn what a precious pearl he has in his bosom, he may see that it can be trusted only with One, and that all that the Bible says Christ has done for it, is eminently reasonable, and worthy both of the soul and of Him.

Moreover, if we lay aside the Bible for a while as a book of authority, and appeal to it merely as a book of fact and experience,—as a history of the human spirit feeling after God,—we may reach its Divine origin in another way. If it presents to us the highest view both of God and man, it may be presumed that what conducts the human race to the one great truth, could not have its origin in a system of impos-

ture. The well that springs to everlasting life must have had its fountain as high as its final flow. And so by reasoning from Christianity, as a mere record of human thought about God, forward to the faith in an eternal life, we may find our way back to Christ Himself as the root of all right thinking, and to the full truth about his life and person.

Even for Christians, who admit God's Word as an ultimate authority, it is very good at times to view the great articles of their faith on all sides. One, and not the least, proof of the divinity of the Bible is, that it meets the truest and highest intuitions of the spirit of man. But these intuitions must be questioned if we are to see how they find their answer. This subject of an eternal life is so vast and momentous that it will bear to be looked at in every aspect, and under every incidence of light. It is whether God is building out of the materials of his universe a gigantic tomb, or a glorious temple for living worshippers, — whether we are inscribing empty epitaphs over everlasting graves, or erecting votive tablets to Him who liveth for ever and ever, and whose life insures that of all who look upon his face. This very saying of Christ, — his reasoning with the Sadducees about immortality, in which He founds it on the relation of our spiritual nature to God, — the twilight questionings and gropings of the Psalms and Prophets, — all encourage us to move round this mighty subject and study it in every point of view. It is to be like the sculptured image of some beloved friend, which we gaze upon in light and shadow, remote and near, and make our own at each angle of contemplation and in every mood of thought, till it

becomes instinct with life, and we feel as if the lips could speak and the features break into a smile.

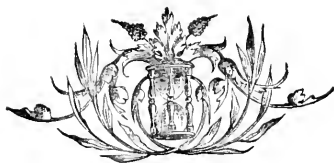
Still, it is certain that if we would realize the full truth and blessedness of an eternal life, we must study it, not in the silence of God, but in his utterances, and, above all, in the light of Jesus Christ our Lord. Behind and before this saying of his, which we have been considering, there are words that tell us infinitely more of a future world than the human mind has been able to reach with all its reasonings. Nor is it by his word alone, or even chiefly, that He reveals, but much more by his person and life, opening the unseen, as the sun opens the world, by shining, and giving the conviction of its reality, by the new life which he infuses into the soul.

It is not by *declaring* the resurrection, but by *being it within us*, that Christ makes us sure and blessed. Immortality without Him would be vague and formless, and, when the shadows of an awakened conscience are cast upon it, gloomy and fearful. To deliver us from this, more was required than silence. That prayer was rising from the need and darkness of sinful humanity: "O Lord! my rock, be not silent unto me; lest if thou be silent unto me I become like them that go down to the pit." And in answer, the silence of God has broken forth into his WORD, and from the bosom of the Father, Christ has uttered his voice, "O death, I will be thy plague! O grave, I will be thy destruction!" His cross before the gate of death, his throne behind it, insures the whole. They tell not only of the certainty, but exceeding glory, of the soul's salvation; of its infinite value as seen by Him who could

not over-date its duration, nor over-estimate its worth, and who has set his seal upon both, when, to make it heir of his own life, He gave Himself.

And now, from all the dark suggestions of utter loss and annihilation, we shall struggle to this fountain of light, as from funeral vaults into the sun's brightness, and every view of Him, like every sunbeam, shall be its own witness, — and opening graves, and rising saints, putting on their immortal robes, and teeming mansions of the saved, and crowded courts of them who study God's eternal ways, and, ever as they study, sing, shall tell us that God has an end for his universe higher than our highest thoughts, and worthy of Himself — while, over all, a voice mingled with the music of harpers playing on their harps, shall proclaim — “But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create, for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy.”





XVIII.

Christ's Delay to Interpose Against Death.

"Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."—JOHN xi. 32.

THE words of Mary are very touching and natural. There is a mingled gush of feeling in them, which she herself would have found it difficult to refer to its different sources. All her grief for her dead brother bursts out afresh, at the sight of one who had been so dear a friend to him, and to her. Veneration and affection for the Great Master, never so drawn out as in the hour of sorrow, fill her soul. "*Mary fell down at his feet.*" Formerly she was willing to *sit* at them. The soul is never so attracted to Christ as amid such desolation, — constrained to cling to "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

There is continued confidence in Him, seen in her address, *Lord* — still *Lord*, notwithstanding all that had happened, — seen in the conviction that an earlier arrival would have brought deliverance, — "*If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died,*" — and

leading to a hope that He was able to help even in this extremity, she could not tell how.

It will be observed that Mary uses the very same words which Martha had already employed, ver. 21. The reason may be, that they had often used the words to one another. "If Jesus only *would* come, — if Jesus only *had* come, all might be well." But it seems remarkable that Mary does not go on to finish her appeal as Martha did, ver. 22, — "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." Was Mary's faith less strong than Martha's? We think not. Mary's sentence was finished in her own heart. She had a more intense and impetuous nature. With its stillness, there was more depth in it, and she cannot give vent to her feelings in words. Tears break in upon and check her utterance, for it is immediately added, ver. 33, "When Jesus therefore saw her *weeping*." She had fallen at his feet, and her bursting emotion would not allow her to say more, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died, but —" and all the faith expressed by Martha, though unuttered by Mary's lips, is deep within her soul.

Yet with this faith, there is wonder at the absence of Christ which verges almost on reproach. "Surely there must have been reasons for my Lord's delay, while we wept and prayed for his coming, while every morning, and through the long day, our eyes sought the hills where his steps might be first descried. Why so late when this dead brother of mine, and friend of thine, was sinking to his grave?" "Oh, the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land?"

Such thoughts as these have since passed through many a heart, and will do so till the world's close. What sore strokes befall us, in this matter of death, from which the Son of God could easily save us, if his power and his pity be as we are told! They are very natural thoughts, natural above all, when we watch by the death-bed and weep over the dead. They were felt by Mary in Christ's presence, and may be felt by us during his long absence. He has now been away so many long days, and our dead lie buried, and yet He comes not. We shall seek to look at the question in the light which this narrative gives. *First*, there is the strangeness of Christ's delay to interpose against death; and *second*, some reasons that may account for it, suggested by this history. The *first* may give expression to our doubts; the *second*, help our faith.

I. THE STRANGENESS OF CHRIST'S DELAY TO INTERPOSE AGAINST DEATH.

Let us turn our thoughts to the circumstances around us, as Mary and Martha might to the state of their home in the absence of Christ.

Consider *what death is to the sufferer!* It is no natural change, no happy translation bearing the sign of blessedness on its face, as the departure of unfallen man might have done. It is the end of all earthly sufferings, but, in general, more dreaded than them all. The token of God's displeasure against sin is on it, and the abiding shadow of his first threatening. Man's heart recoils from its accompaniments, — the wasting decay or the convulsive agony, — the farewell to the only world we have known, — the rending asunder of

the dearest ties of affection, and of those closest friends, body and soul,—the dismissal of our nature to the corruption of the grave and to a mysterious eternity.

When we see a friend moving forward to this doom, what means do we not exhaust to save him? When Thomas heard that Lazarus was dead, he said, "Let us also go that we may die with him." So did the death of a dear friend touch his sympathetic heart. Yet Christ suffered Lazarus to die. And how many have been struck down by death since, of the most lovely and loving? What warm hearts and noble souls have passed through that great gloom, and drunk of that bitter cup,—beautiful exceedingly with the beauty of nature and with the grace of the regenerated spirit! What sad thoughts we have sometimes about the bright jewels that lie hidden in death's darkness! We were stricken and stunned when death did not spare them, at the cruel untimeliness, as it seemed, at the fierce remorselessness with which the great enemy seized his prey. And yet when we speak of death, it had no power without Christ's permission: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Consider *what a bereavement death is to the survivors!* In a Christian death it is not the dead who are to be mourned, it is those whom they leave. What anxious days and nights were those after the message had been sent, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick!" Their brother is sinking to his grave, as each sun sinks over the western hills, and there is no token of help. Their look seeks the wasting frame, and then seeks the path by which Jesus so often drew near. Has He forgotten his friends, or does He distrust his power?

Those, who have passed through it, know what ages of agony are lived, while the wavering balance is watched and slowly seen to sink against all our struggles and prayers.

And then the anguish of the parting, — the dumb despair that cannot find a tear, — the hard apathy, like a stone on a grave's mouth, that will not let us feel our way to our loss to weep over it! The slow groping which follows to realize it, — the struggle, as if emerging from the stupor of death, to find out what a different world it is to which we have come back, — the look behind to years of love which seem so short, cut off from us already by an earthquake's gulf, and strange as if they had never been ours, — the look forward to a lonely road through a bleak world from which one blast of desolation has swept the greenness and the blossom! "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." How often has the old wailing cry burst from human hearts, how often the death-scene of Bethany been renewed in the homes of men! The childless mother and the orphan, the wife and sister, lover and friend, have wrestled in agony over the dying and moaned over the dead, and none seemed to listen. They felt there should be power of help somewhere, and writhed towards it. And the appeals remained unanswered. Does it not seem strange? "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Consider *what a ground of reproach death has furnished to the enemies of Christ!* There was no want of unbelieving Jews in Bethany to take advantage of Christ's absence in this crisis. Some of them said,

“ Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died ? ” But, beyond this more friendly question, there must have been hard thoughts of unbelief — the resolve to read all Christ's past by this delay. Whisperings and shakings of the head there were, no doubt, in plenty, breaking out into open speech, as still He came not. “ These wonderful histories and great promises have been brought to a decisive test, and Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, must die and be buried like all of us. Let Him deliver him, seeing He delighted in him.” It must have added vinegar to the gall of those sisters' grief to hear the taunt. Their faith was assailed from without, when it was questioned by their hearts within. Something like the feeling of the Psalmist must have been theirs, — “ My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God ? ”

A longer interval of death has allowed time for a louder concert of reproach. As we look into the grave after each new occupant, all is hushed. There is “ no motion in the dead,” no breath in the sky to whisper of a coming dawn. And men of carnal sense gather round and set their seal upon the grave — “ Where is the promise of his coming ? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Even the Christian heart feels as if there were something strange in the way in which Christ abides out of sight, and moves not a step for all the scorn. It wearies for some interposition to vindicate his claim. “ Arise, O God, plead thine own cause ; remember how the foolish man reproacheth

thee daily ; the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.”

There is still another way in which the strangeness of the delay may strike us — when we turn our thoughts from our own circumstances to Christ, as the sisters of Bethany did, and when we consider the just expectations we have of interposition from Him.

We believe that *Christ is fully aware of our need*. When a friend fails us through innocent ignorance, we do not blame him. What pains us is his persistent absence when he knows our extremity. So soon as these sisters apprehended danger, they sent the message to Jesus, “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick!” They appear to have added no request to it. “It is enough if Jesus knows — this will bring Him to our side.” And when He did not come, and day after day passed on, we can imagine the messenger questioned and re-questioned how he gave his message, and how the Master seemed to apprehend it. “Could He but see this wasting frame and our fears He would not fail us.”

Whatever Martha and Mary thought of the knowledge of Christ, it is our faith that He understands all our need. When we send up the prayer, “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick,” it is only because He will be inquired of by us. With the omniscience of the Son of God, He sees the dwellers upon earth, and, with the experience of the Son of Man, He comprehends their sorrows. “If you only knew what I suffer,” we say to a friend, as if his conception of it would call out a sympathy that would bear us up in its hands. Yet Christ knows it all. He can draw nearer than the

nearest, feel the palpitating heart, read the anguish we cannot utter — and his foot does not step forward to the rescue. Is it not strange?

We believe, further, that *Christ has full power to interpose*. The mourners of Bethany express their conviction of it, ver. 22 — “I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.” And Christ expresses it in his prayer to his Father, ver. 42 — “I know that thou hearest me always.” For it is our faith that He has not only the omnipotence of Divinity, but the moral right and power from having paid the ransom price. When He said upon his cross, “It is finished,” God raised Him from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand in heavenly places, as the sign that the way is clear to abolish death — to destroy it for ever in regard to all who look to Him as the Resurrection and the Life. Who, in this, could resist his will? The keys of the unseen world and of death hang at his girdle. That He should be so slow to put his authority into exercise, when such tides of suffering would be rolled back, and such a flood of overwhelming joy set in, must occasion to many Christians strange thoughts.

For, last of all, on this part of the subject, *we cannot doubt the desire of Christ to interpose*. The evangelist is careful to remind us of this feature of it, ver. 5 — “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard therefore that he was sick He abode two days still in the same place where He was.” It is a strange *therefore* which conjoins such love and seeming indifference. Then follows that account of the conduct of Christ which is filled with such everlast-

ing consolation to a dying world, and which yet suggests so many wondering questions, ver. 33 — “ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him ? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see. *Jesus wept.*”

But, if He felt so deeply for his friends, why did He not come sooner to comfort them and interpose in their behalf ? And, if He meant now to interpose, and knew what He was about to do at the grave of Lazarus, why should He weep ? However we may answer such questions, we must never doubt that the tears of Christ were not seeming, but deeply real, and that the groans of his spirit came from true sympathy with human sorrow. He wept as those mourners did, although he might weep with “ larger, other eyes than theirs ” — weeping, not with *them* only, but with mourners without number, as He looked abroad over the world, and down through all time — with every bereaved heart, and with each solitary soul which thinks that its way is hid from the Lord, and its judgment passed over by its God. Yet here our perplexity still rises. If so He feels, and if He has power and right to interpose, why does He delay so long ? “ He abides still in the same place,” and leaves us pining in sickness, agonizing in pain, bowed down in sorrow, and going forward to mix our tears and our dust in a common grave. We cry like the disciples in the storm to their sleeping Master, “ Lord, carest thou not that we perish ? ” and to *us* he does not awake so soon. “ O the Hope of Israel, why shouldest thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man

that cannot save? Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name" (Jer. xiv. 8).

Our very confidence in Christ's ability and willingness to help us, thus becomes the occasion of bewildering doubts, and our faith passes through that painful struggle, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." We consider, then,

II. SOME OF THE REASONS FOR CHRIST'S DELAY WHICH MAY BE FOUND IN THIS HISTORY.

We say "*in this history.*" Other reasons might be found in the whole Divine plan, as it is revealed in the Bible, and others probably there are outside the Bible and our present life, in the unknown counsels and universe of God. Yet even from this history much may be drawn, if we examine it with attention. The works of Christ are all of them mirrors for the history of the world, bringing into a small compass what is permanently and universally true, and, if the Spirit takes of the things that are Christ's and shows them unto us, we may have light on some of the difficult questions that concern our own life and death. We shall try to follow these reasons in the order suggested by the narrative itself.

One reason why Christ delays to interpose against death is, *that his friends may learn confidence in Him when dying, and have an opportunity of showing it.* We have no account of the manner of Lazarus's death, and we shall not seek to imagine it. It may have been a joyful one in its expression, — or simply peaceful, — or silent, as many a good man dies and gives no sign. But the truth remains in all, that death is a great sea-

son of instruction to the friends of Christ. Sometimes we can see the process; at other times it is between Him and the soul alone — sometimes it may be slow, or, again, as rapid as in the lesson He gave on his cross to him who hung beside Him; but we must believe that the period of death has its peculiar use in every spiritual history.

The great end of Christ's dealing with any soul is to convince it that *in* Him it has an all-sufficient life, and that *with* Him it can pass safely through every emergency. We have to learn that we are "*complete in Him.*" We can never learn this in words or by thinking. It must be taught us in the reality of life itself. He takes away from us one thing after another — the friends, the affections, the aims of youth, — while He becomes to us a deeper and truer possession. But this course of teaching would want its crown if it did not end in death. Death is the withdrawal of all human supports from around the soul, of its closest affections, of its earth-born vesture and home, of the very body which is its second self — that it may be alone with Christ, and feel Him to be enough for it — more to it than every created thing. He invites the soul, and constrains it, to put all its confidence into that last act of surrender — to cast itself, bare of every aid, but his, into the mysterious infinite, — knowing Him in whom it believes, and feeling that underneath it are his everlasting arms. For a soul to learn this perfect confidence in Christ, it must die.

On the part of Christ, again, it is the last touch of that purifying fire which He employs to melt the fallen nature, — free it from its dross, — and fuse it into his

own likeness for access to Himself in the heaven of heavens. It is not by any mechanical process that He thus purifies the soul. It can only be by a close spiritual approach to it. But we know something of this manner of dealing with us, even in life. There are supreme moments of experience when we seem to live ages, and when all our past history ripens into God's one great lesson for us. Such a moment is that of death, in which Christ matures the soul for the life to come — draws it aside to Himself — presses it, in solitude and secrecy, for a while to his own heart and fulfils his words, — “If I go and prepare a place for you, *I* will come again, and receive you unto *myself*; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

And yet, sometimes, it is not done so secretly but that the sparkles which fall from the jewel reveal what He is doing for it, and where He means to set it. The looks and words of a Christian, when dying, are part of the end for which Christ permits death. It is that dying, as well as living, he may show himself to be the Lord's. To accomplish all this *for* the soul, and *through* it, Christ delays his interposition, and the difficulty in the case of Lazarus is not so much that he died, as that he was brought back from the grave to fight life's battle a second time.

Another reason why Christ permits death is, *that the sorrowing friends may learn entire reliance on Him*. It is a subject for study in this chapter how Christ leads on these sisters from a dead brother to the Resurrection and the Life, and teaches them through their loss to gain what they never could lose any more. Had He snatched Lazarus from the brink of death, they would

have trembled again at his every sickness, but, when they learn to find their brother in Christ, they are secure of him for ever, and they discover in Christ himself more than their heart conceived, —

“ One deep love doth supersede
All other, when her ardent gaze
Roves from the living brother's face,
And rests upon the Life indeed.”

Christ separates our friends from us for a while that we may learn to find our all in Himself. He makes their grave the seed-bed of immortal hopes, which shall give us back every thing that is good in the past, and a joy with it like the joy of harvest. The expression of our resignation in bereavement is as much a triumph of his grace as the calmness He gives to our dying friends. When Martha and Mary can still call Him “*Lord*,” and when their “hope can smile on all other hopes gone from them,” — when they can clasp Christ as their portion amid desolation around and within, — Christ Himself is justified in the permission of death.

Another reason which follows this in the order both of the narrative and of nature is, that, in the midst of death, *the union of sympathy between Christ and his friends is perfected*. Jesus had given many convincing proofs of his love to the household of Bethany while Lazarus lived, but none with that touching tenderness in it which came forth at his grave. The fellowship of suffering brings hearts and lives together more than all the fellowship of joy. There must have been a Divine compassion in the Redeemer's look which melted Mary's soul as she fell at his feet and felt that her grief was also his. And when his grief broke out into

that trouble of spirit at the grave, when his heart was overpowered by it and *Jesus wept*, — the mourners knew that He was one with them. Gethsemane shows us the agony of Christ's soul for man's *sin* — the grave of Bethany his agony of heart at man's *suffering*. All that sad, sorrowful walk to the sepulchre where He mingled his tears with theirs, was as necessary to make them feel the sympathy of his soul, as was the great deliverance when He said "Lazarus, come forth." Nor need we be at all stumbled by the objection that He could not feel so deeply since He knew what he was about to do. A man may pity the breaking heart of a child although he can see away beyond its short sorrow, and God pities us in the midst of our life's troubles though He perceives the speedy end of them. Be very sure of this, that Christ's grief was as genuine as theirs, — and that the compassion of God and of his Son is as true at every step of the road to the grave as it is when it rises up at last into full redemption and the gate of the grave is thrown wide open. To form this fellowship of suffering on the way to death is one reason why Christ permits it. He says, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee," and we are brought to reply, "We did pass through the flood on foot, there did we rejoice in Him."

Consider this further, that it is by delaying to interpose against death *that God makes this a world of spiritual probation*. When He abode in the same place and lingered on his way to Bethany, Christ tried the character, not only of the sisters, but of all who knew the case. Superficiality fell away, — secret unbelief broke out into scorn, — and those alone stood the test

whose souls had sought and found in Him what the soul needs. Christ's delays are the touchstones of spiritual life.

You who would have Him never suffer the tears of his people to fall, — who would wish Him to heal his friends so soon as they are sick, — or raise them to life the instant that they die, reflect on what you ask. You would lead men to seek Him, not from the love they bear Himself, but from their desire for his outward benefits, and would create, in your impatience, a world of formalism and hypocrisy, — the very world which God disproved in the face of Satan when he said, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" But God defers the time for interposition — makes all things outwardly come alike to all, — and causes calamity and death to visit with an impartial step the homes of his friends, — in order that he may sift men's characters and prepare them for the day of judgment. Those who would have Christ interpose immediately against death mistake entirely the structure of the world we are placed in. To be consistent, they should go back and remonstrate against the creation of responsible agents, and the possibility of sin which flows from it. Death is the consequence of these things, and it is at the same time a veil let down over the face of God's throne, to hide spiritual things from the eye of sense, and to make faith the instrument of the soul's recovery and training. Death cannot be abolished until the history of this world is completed.

We mention, as a last reason for Christ's delay to interpose against death, *that he brings in thereby a grander final issue.* Had He come and arrested this

sickness midway, or raised Lazarus to life so soon as he died, the gladness of the friends would not have been so great, nor would his own triumph over death have been so illustrious. But He patiently waits his hour, while the mourners weep and the scoffers scorn. Men must interpose when they can, but the Son of God interposes when He wills. The wisdom with which He chooses his time makes his delay not callous nor cruel, but considerate of our best interests in withholding for a while that he may bless us at last with an overflowing hand. Could the mourners see it as He does, they would willingly acquiesce, and would go forth, patiently sowing in tears that they might have a more abundant reaping-time of joy.

It is in this interval of delay that our life is cast. The world is represented by this home of Bethany before Christ reached the grave, and all the phases of character, and all the stages of Christ's progressive advance, may be seen in the hearts of men around us. But at whatever step of his journey man's faith may discern Him, He is surely on his way. The tide of eternal life is setting in toward the world of graves, and its swell and its murmur can be already perceived by all who have a soul to feel the heaving of Christ's heart. Amid the tears and sobs of the bereaved friends whose sorrows still touch Him, He is moving to the sepulchre. His presence, though unseen, can be heard and felt in whispered consolations,—in the faith and hope which his Spirit infuses into the soul. Those, who know Him for what He is, recognize a Friend who weeps in sympathy with them, and who walks by their side to the tomb which his voice shall

yet open. The delay seems long, but He counts the hours as we do; and not for a single one shall He linger beyond what infinite wisdom sees fit. One result of this delay shall be a grander final issue. He permits his friends to descend with broken ranks into the swellings of Jordan, but He shall lead them forth on the other side in one fully marshalled and bannered host. He puts the jewels one by one into his crown within the secret of his palace, that He may bring them out at last resplendent and complete as a royal diadem from the hand of his God. Patient waiting shall have its full compensation on that day, and Divine delay justify itself before the universe in glorious and everlasting results. Could we see to the end, it would reconcile us even now. He discerns it for us, and withholds his hand from premature and imperfect interference. After their burst of weeping, He hushes the separate voices for a season in the silence of death, till they can awake and sing in full harmony, that their united praise may still the enemy and the avenger, and be his glory and their own joy for ever.

One thing connected with all these reasons, and impressed upon us by the present narrative, cannot be omitted, that *there is a fitness in Christ being absent from the world while death reigns*. Mary felt this, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Christ could not be present and see death strike down his friends without interposing. We never read that this enemy of man was permitted to exercise his power before the open face of the Son of God. It would be inconsistent with the honor of Him who is the Lord of life. And therefore Christ

must be absent from the world while death and the grave maintain their sway. This is befitting his dignity, and it furnishes one reason more why we should desire the appearing of that blessed and gracious face before which death and every shadow shall flee away. Meantime He gathers the fold of his cloud over his countenance, that we may not think He looks with cold indifference on our anguish, until He shall withdraw the veil fully and for ever. Happy those to whose eye of faith the cloud is already pierced, and who feel in the heart that sunshine of his face which shall give life and light at last to all the dead in Christ.

What a miserable earth would it be without this hope, without this possession!—the desolate home of Bethany without the great Friend—men dying, mourners weeping, graves filling up, and death reigning for ever! Why then should a world exist to pass through ceaseless anguish to such a close,—to be a wide eternal burying-ground, where tears are only dried on the cheek by death, but never wiped away by the hand of God? How should our hearts leap up with exulting joy to think that there is a Christ, and how should we thank Him, as we alone can, by accepting Him as God's unspeakable gift! There is a way of being certain of this blessed hope, by having Him now in the soul as its life. If we are quickened from the death of trespasses and sins, and raised up to sit with Him even now in heavenly places, we know that He can and will redeem us from the power of the grave. There must be a world in reserve for such a divine life. It will no more be an incredible thing with us

that God should raise the dead. And now, on the way, the great Lord and Giver of life is pressing on you his gracious offer, without which immortality has no ray of clearness or of joy. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die! Believest thou this?" See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh, and rest not till with all your heart you can reply, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."





XIX.

Judas and the Priests. End of Evil Association.

“Saying, *I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that.*” —
MATT. xxvii. 4.



CERTAIN gloss of interpretation has come in of late upon the character of Judas, which tries to present it in a milder light than that in which it was formerly regarded.

It is said, that, after all, he may not have intended to betray his master to the death of the cross. He was one of those Jews who believed very strongly in an earthly kingdom, and in the mission of Jesus of Nazareth to establish it, — an error which he shared with his fellow-disciples. He was more impatient than the rest to bring Jesus to declare for it, and took a very rash step to gain his end. His hope was that when Christ was in the hands of the high priest and the Roman governor, He would throw away all reserve, and come forth as a conqueror and king. It was, in short, not the *money* Judas looked to, but the *idea*. He was not, in the proper sense, guilty of treachery, but of a mistake, and merely sought to thrust Christ

from the temple pinnacle, in the belief that he would rise to a loftier position.

However this particular comment may have been intended, it is one of a class which begins by effacing what it reckons dark spots in the Bible, and ends by darkening the bright. There are depths and heights in the mystery of sin and salvation which go together, and whatever takes away from the possibility of the soul's fall, weakens its capacity for ascent. If all sin could be shown to be only a mistake of judgment, there would be no need of Christ and redemption through his blood, and with the ineffable sorrows would depart the infinite joys.

The attempt may seem ingenious, but in some things ingenuity is the worst token of truth. The Bible has no doubt still much to be found out by diligent search, but in an estimate of character, in the very centre of New-Testament history, the immense probability is that the judgment of centuries and of the Church universal is right.

It is a gloss that is entirely out of keeping with the drift of the Gospel narrative. The character of Judas is streaked long before with the sin which led to his final crime. He murmured at the token of affection which was given to Christ, because he wished to turn it to his own covetous advantage. He was a thief, and he had the bag, and hypocritically put forward the poor as a pretext to gain his own selfish ends. When he went out on his treacherous errand it is said, "Satan entered into him," and though this has been compared with our Lord's word to Peter (Matt. xvi. 23), "Get thee behind me, Satan," the expression of fact

in a calm narrative is surely very different from the indignant rejection which our Lord applied, not to the apostle, but to his suggestion. When Judas went out on his errand he went alone, as feeling that he had no sympathy in the hearts of the rest. He chose night and secrecy for his bargain. He covenanted to take money, *and did take it*, and if the amount was paltry for so great a crime, it proves not that there was any higher motive, but that covetousness can bring down the soul to the most miserable price.

Much has been founded on the expression (Matt. xxvii. 3), "Judas, which had betrayed him, when He saw that he was condemned," — as if he had expected that Christ would free Himself before it came so far; but the remorse of Judas at this moment can be perfectly explained by the full consequences of his act now looking him in the face. It is the murderer's horror when the deed is committed and *cannot be undone* — that awful revulsion which, among all calculations, is never reckoned on.

Moreover, if he had expected Christ to free Himself, as this theory of Judas affirms, his despair should not have commenced so early. Judas should not have ceased to hope till the crucifixion was complete. Many of Christ's past interpositions had taken place in extremity, and why not now? It is clear that it was not a mistake but a crime that was revealed by the lightning-flash thrown in upon his soul. His words prove this: "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." To tone them down to the discovery of a misapprehension, is to rob them of all their meaning, and of that lesson, so deep and far-

reaching, which the Church of Christ has always read in this event, — the greatest sin lying like a black shadow beneath the world's brightest light.

The chief purpose for which we wish to use this passage is to show the end to which association in sin conducts. Men join hand in hand for a wicked object, out of which they hope for common profit. For a while the alliance lasts, and evil seems to have its laws and power of coherence as well as good. But conflicting interests rise, and then the nature of the union is apparent. Sin began by severing the bond between man and his Maker, and what other bond can henceforth have any permanence? If left to do its will it would disintegrate God's universe into atoms of selfishness. While the Cross of Christ was being raised as the centre of spiritual attraction — Divine self-sacrifice, — here, around its base, and in wonderful connection with it, sin was permitted to exhibit its character of repulsion in the darkest colors. There are two instructive sides in the separation which takes place, and we shall consider them in order, — Judas and his state of mind; the chief priests and their conduct toward him.

I. The *first* thing is, JUDAS, AND THE STATE OF MIND TO WHICH HE IS BROUGHT.

The most striking way, perhaps, in which we can consider this, is to attempt to trace in Judas that feature of sin to which we have made reference, — its tendency to isolate the man who perseveres in it, till he is left all alone. He begins in the *guilt* of selfishness and ends in its utter *solitude*.

The first effect of his sin *is separation from human companionship*. Up to this time, he had lived in the outward fellowship of Christ and the other chosen eleven. It may seem strange to us that Christ should ever have admitted Judas to that number. The only reasonable account of it which we can form is this, that our Lord acted by Judas as He did by all the rest. He accepted him on the ground of a profession which was consistent as far as human eye could see. Christ himself received members into his church as He intended that we should receive them,—for, had He used his Divine omniscience in his judgments, the whole structure of his life would have been out of our reach as an example. Judas accordingly entered among the apostles, because, in all outward things, and even in some inward convictions, he was like them. He came under the same influences,—listened to the same invitations and warnings,—and they were meant as truly for Judas as for the rest. It would have gladdened the heart of Christ had Judas yielded to the voice of mercy. It is not any question for us how then the Saviour could have suffered for the sins of men, any more than it is a question how the history of the world would proceed without the sinful deeds which are permitted by God and gathered by Him into the final result. The plan of the universe, in its lowest or its highest part, does not rest on the doom of any man to be a sinner. God forbid! There are manifold doors in the Divine purpose which God may open or shut as He pleases, but there is one always shut,—that God should tempt any man to evil,—and there is one for ever open,—that He wills

not the death of the sinner, but that he should turn and live. Whatever difficulties may be in these questions of freedom and decree, we can never permit the speck of one to touch the Divine purity and mercy. If Judas had come, he would have been welcomed as any other.

But he did not come, and gradually the gulf in his secret soul must have widened between him and those with whom he outwardly walked. He was with them, but not of them, and slowly this must have become apparent to his own consciousness. Next in grievousness to the havoc which a hidden sin works in a man's nature, is the separation of his heart from the fellowship of the good around him,—the sense of shame and degradation with which he must compare their estimate of him with what he really is. He is held to them by custom and repute,—sometimes by a feeling of the needed check which their society exercises over him,—and yet he is more and more repelled by the want of sympathy and by the necessity for hypocrisy which becomes every day more irksome.

Yet so long as the great overt act was not committed, Judas could continue in the circle of his former friends. Happy influences were still breathing round him; he felt that a change of course was yet open, and he soothed his conscience perhaps with the thought of one day taking it. If any man is in this position, let him not delay. It is something to hold on to the society of the true and good; but it is always dishonorable to do it falsely, and the connection may be broken at any moment if we do not join them in our inmost soul.

The sin of Judas, long cherished and slowly growing, broke out at last with terrible and open power, and changed his whole position. It is a great mistake to say that sin in the heart is the very same as sin thrown into a deliberate and daring act. They are in the same line, as our Lord has taught us, but the external act gives evil a power which it had not before, and which may prove fatally destructive. It is like a combustible material, which, if once exploded, may leave the man's nature a shattered and hopeless wreck. To repress sin from the actual life is something, — only let it not stop there, else it is a constant deception and danger.

When Judas let the character which he had slowly formed go out into his terrible treachery, he felt as if a bridge were broken behind him. In that bewildering night in the garden, he was swept from the side of Christ, and only then did he begin to realize what he had done and what he had lost. He could no more look upon the face of the Master he had sold. The trustful happy circle of the twelve was broken, and he, of them all, was left utterly alone. However they might meet in secret, and fearfully, to speak of their past and their future, — of the death of their love and hope, — he felt that he had no more part nor lot among them. There is not any distance in space or time, — not any change in circumstances, — which will so cut a man off from his fellow-men as one sin will do. But it will generally be found that this sin is the outcome of a secret life which stands disclosed by it. It is God's way of letting us see, even now, what final judgment will disclose, — the revelation of an utter

incompatibility, which makes a man seek no more a fellowship where he never had a true share.

In his terrible solitude, Judas turned to his employers and accomplices. It could scarcely be in the hope of forming any new ties. Friendships were not at present in his thoughts, and not to be looked for in that circle. There was the pressure of despair on him, — the sting that sometimes drives the criminal to proclaim his sin that others may know the worst of him. The secret burden of a crime may prove so intolerable that publicity will feel almost like pardon.

There may have been, too, the prompting which sometimes leads a man to seek any human presence as a relief from the terror of his own thoughts. He could not expect that the priests would relax their hold on Christ for any confession of his, but he may have faintly looked for some word which could help him against his own bitter accusations. But here the gulf of separation opens again. The chilling question, “What is that to us?” and the look which must have accompanied it, told him that, as he had cut himself off from the good, he was cast off by the wicked. He had served their purpose, and is thrown away like a broken tool.

Men have been able to dig for each other deep dark dungeons, far from man’s face and God’s pleasant sunlight, but there is no fearful pit of solitude like that which a soul can sink for itself. It may be more rare that it takes the form of a crime, like that of Judas, which sets him separate, like a wonder and a terror; but all sin has this quality in its nature. It divides from those whose friendship can be trusted, and it can form no other tie which will endure.

The next thing to be remarked of the sin of Judas is, that it brought him to a state *where he was deserted by himself*. We may call a man self-deserted, when he cannot be alone with his own thoughts. We have each of us a personality which we feel to be our real self, and which lives on amid all change and circumstance. But, with this, there is a circle of thoughts and feelings different from this self, and yet inseparably connected with it. They are the inner home which every soul is engaged in fashioning for itself, and which is destined to be its eternal dwelling-place. As long as we can keep company with its memories and hopes, we are never in utter solitude. When we have to turn away from it, we are alone indeed.

Let us say here, that there are some who do turn away from it without being in the worst case. A calamity may have crazed the brain, or a morbid spectre looked in on the heart and jarred the sweet strings of their nature, and alienated them from life and self, as Job seems to have been. We all know where the wrong lies, not in the book of the soul, but in the man's disordered reading of it; and how sure we may be that, if not here, yet hereafter, he will be made to see light in God's light. The jarred strings which have sent forth this temporary discord will give out sweeter music at last for the strain put upon them.

The terrible self-desertion is when conscience is roused, and makes the thoughts intolerable because of the presence of a sin which cannot be got rid of. Backward, forward, upward, this meets the man wherever he turns his look, and his feeling is that which the poet has given to the apostate angel, "Me miserable, which way shall I fly!"

It may be seldom in this world that one is brought to such blackness of darkness, but it is certain that every sin he consciously commits is making him less able to keep company with himself. He may not take note of it at the time, but his conscience is doing the work of the hand on Belshazzar's wall. It is writing down terrible words, and such a force can be put into them, that when they are set in order before his eyes, his knees shall smite together, and he will seek to escape anywhere from his own thoughts.

Further, it is to be observed that Judas *was deserted by the tempter and the bribe*, — deserted, at least, so far as the false strength is concerned which had hitherto sustained him. It is the distinct teaching of the gospels that, besides the chief priests, there was another influence at work outside Judas — the enemy who seduced man to sin at first, and who still is engaged in the work of temptation.

The kingdom of evil, as well as that of good, has a personal head. That he should have the power of tempting is no more strange than that human spirits should possess it. He can no more compel than they, and he gains in influence only as we yield him place. The experience of many temptations points to such a power in operation. There is a halo cast round worldly objects and a glow of passionate attractiveness breathed into them, which are not in themselves, and which can scarcely come from the mind that looks on them. Crimes are committed and souls bartered for such miserable bribes that to the rational spectator it is utterly unnatural, and the man himself wonders at it when the delirium is past. Our great dramatic poet has

seized this feature of sin, — this strange *residuum* in temptation, which indicates an extra-human agency, — and has set it down to those unseen powers of evil which “palter with us in a double sense.” It does not diminish any man’s responsibility, but it should increase his vigilance. Not only are these powers unable to constrain the will, they have no influence of seduction, no delusive atmosphere at command, where the heart has not prepared itself for it, by cherishing the sin long and deeply.

Judas had made ready his own nature for the tempter. He, and none but he, could have rendered himself capable of yielding. And now that he has yielded, the power at work becomes apparent in the disenchantment which follows. The seducer, in this form at least, leaves him, and withdraws the allurements of his promise. There is something wonderful, if it were not so common, in the sight of this fortitude of the transgressor failing in the very moment of success, in the sudden change in value of what he had coveted an hour before, till the silver, which was so dear, eats his flesh as it were fire, and he casts it from him like a viper that has stung his hand. It is the act of a treacherous ally, who has lured his sinful victim to his selected place, and then deserts him in the instant of his ruin.

Whether men will admit the agency of an unseen tempter or not, they must grant that a sinful object has a very different look before and after possession, — that in the hour of promised enjoyment it shrinks and shrivels, or becomes hideous and loathsome. Whatever we deduct from the influence of Satan we must attribute

in a corresponding measure to that of sin, for the fact remains that the powers of evil, soon or late, abandon the man who has sold himself to them. They promise what they never pay, and buoy up with a false courage, which fails at the moment it is wanted. After sin has made a man so that he cannot look steadily into his own soul, it ends by destroying his enjoyment in that fictitious world of pleasure for which it has induced him to sell all that is Divine and real. It cheats him of the substance for a shadow, and of that shadow it robs him, or changes it into a frightful phantom, from which he would escape if he could — as Judas from the hire of his treachery.

We have seen how sin separates a man from the friendship of the good, from the sympathy even of the wicked, from fellowship with his own thoughts, from pleasure in the thing he coveted; and now we come to the last feature, *the separation it effects between the soul and God*. The first step in sin is such a separation begun; but there seems to be a stage which a man may reach in this world when nothing will induce him to turn his face to Him whom he has abandoned. If a man under the overwhelming conviction of guilt can still look to God, it makes his sin seem more sinful, but it makes the thought of it more supportable, for it gives him the view of mercy and reparation. There are no straits in guilt where there is not help in God, if the man will only hope. But if sin has gained such power over him, that, though he feels its bitter fruit, it is less painful to him than the presence and the thought of God, what is to be done? That which is reviving light to others is to such a man consuming

fire, and flight from God's face is sought by him as a relief and escape.

While the man maintains this position, the nature within him cannot be changed, and in that nature lies his misery. The terrible hardness which makes remorse different from repentance arises from the view of sin without the true view of God. It is a fearful truth that there may be the most bitter and tormenting sense of guilt without any real godly repentance for it. The heart of stone may be crushed and remain stone in its every fragment; it can only be melted when the love of God is suffered to shine on it. And if the man has so depraved his nature that God with all his love has become a distaste and repulsion to him, and evil with all its misery less intolerable, what are we to think of it? It might seem utterly impossible that any being in God's universe could ever reach such a state if we had not instances of it, nay, if we had not the proof of it in our own nature. Whenever any one of us, in the presence of a sinful object, or after a sin has been committed, strives to put away the thought of God, — when we do not like to retain Him in our knowledge, — we are touching the edge of this terrible darkness, and we may have some idea how men may come at last to love that darkness rather than the light.

These are subjects very painful, but very needful, and they are forced upon our consideration in such a case as this. It is of all things most certain that a soul living consciously in sin is living without God, and to be without God is to be without hope. This, too, is certain, that the longer a man thus lives the more does absence from God deepen the sense of dis-

like, and the more difficult and improbable will be his return. The thought of this may not trouble some very much at present, because they feel as if they can live without God in a very pleasurable way, and they do not see why they should ever have a greater necessity for Him. They can put friendships and occupations in his room, and contrive to forget Him. But when these pass, as pass they must, and perish like flowers on the edge of a gulf, the awful depth of the chasm will be seen. When fold after fold which now closes the eye of the soul is torn off, and it is compelled to look on eternal realities, how will it stand the gaze? This loss of God must then be felt to be that loss of the soul of which the Saviour speaks, when he asks, What shall a man give in exchange for it? And when He who made the soul, and loved it so much, puts the issue before us so solemnly, should it not bring us seriously to question ourselves, and to resolve to give place to nothing that will cloud our clear view of God, and never to betray Christ and the homage we owe Him for the whole world?

II. We come now to the *second* part of this subject — THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THEIR CONDUCT.

In the case of Judas we see sin when it has reached its close; here we can perceive some of its features when still in the strength of its course.

The first thing that strikes us on their part is *their disregard for their instrument when their purpose is gained*. Judas had served their end in putting Christ into their power quietly and securely, so as to avoid the hazard of public insurrection. And now for the

traitor himself they have no further concern. They could not but see his agony in his face and bearing, an agony which was haunting him without respite, and fast making life intolerable. But for all this they have no regard. They could relieve his anguish only by releasing Christ, and this would be to surrender the object for which they had made use of Judas. If they had let Christ go free from any such motive, they would have been different men from what they were. Even Judas himself could not complain. He had tried to make his use of them as they of him, and there was no pretence of principle or affection on either side. They had kept their share of the contract, and he must abide by his. This is the remorseless logic which belongs to these cases, and among such men it is all-powerful. It raises a feeling of commiseration for the poor outcast wretch to see him so repulsed. Had he gone so to Christ he would have been otherwise received.

That this is the natural end of all these associations there can be little doubt — of all alliances that are made for mutual aid in the pursuit of revenge or unhallowed ambition, of unjust gain or sinful pleasure. Let us admit that there will appear sometimes in the worst of men a remnant of human feeling which casts back a fragment of pity to a fallen accomplice, yet it is given only when it does not interfere with the purpose for which they sought his help. They love that purpose better than him, and when it is selfish, and wickedly selfish, we can easily calculate how far their sympathy will go, how little sacrifice it will make, and how soon it will weary of that little. We know well

enough, too, how seldom any glimmerings of commiseration rise in such alliances, and how the contract is that of the wolves of the forest, which devour their fallen companions and continue the chase.

“*And the chief priests took the silver pieces.*” It was like stripping a dead comrade. They had not the natural feeling to let the wretched hire lie, but they must lift it for a use of their own. Let this be learned, that if any friendship is to be formed that will stand us in stead in time of trial, it need not be sought among bad men consorting for unprincipled ends. Under the courtesies which have been established by conventionalism, or among the excitements of social pleasure, this may be forgotten, but the first stress will lay bare the hollowness of such friendships, and show what bitter enemies confront one another when wicked men are separated by selfish purposes.

The next thing in the conduct of the chief priests is their attempt *to shake off the responsibility of the common act*. Judas confesses in his agony the entire innocence of his Master. Christ was guiltless of any such design as they charged him with, — of self-seeking or earthly ambition, — and they knew it as well as Judas. It was because He refused to yield to this that He was both betrayed and condemned. It was because Judas had given up any hope of worldly gain, through his kingdom, that he had sold Him to them. And now, not only Christ’s guiltlessness of the charge, but his spotless and loving character, — the good he had received at his hands, and never evil, — the gentle considerateness, — the unwearied patience, — the pitying tenderness he had shown him and his fellow-disciples, — rose up

before the soul of his betrayer, and smote him with unutterable remorse. No one word, no one act, could he call up that would help his own thoughts to justify his treachery. And when the consciousness of his guilt is crushing him, his associates refuse all share in it. "What is that to us?" If Christ is innocent it is not their concern. The traitor who knew Him so well should have thought of this when he surrendered Him. And in this, they touch the very point which stung Judas to the quick, the one thing which made his guilt blacker than theirs. He knew Christ better, and sinned more against the purity and love of his nature. There is no more deplorable fall than in the case of those who have been most in Christ's company, and no sorer blow than when a hard worldling strikes an apostate Christian professor.

This attempt to shake off responsibility is a very common feature in all evil associations. There comes an ultimate and dreadful condition of mind, when, as in the case of Judas, all refuges of lies are swept away, when nothing but guilt, guilt without contrition, stares the man in the face. But there is a state of things on the way to this, through which Judas, too, may have passed, — the effort to shake off all share in the guilt, and to cast it on others. The first compact of evil in the world manifests it — "the woman that Thou gavest to be with me" — "the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Sometimes it is an attempt to put down an upbraiding conscience, sometimes to outface an accusing accomplice. But this is certain, that one of the punishments in concerted sin is mutual recrimination, and that the weakest are denied, not only pity, but ordinary justice.

The last feature we mention in their conduct is *that they end their sinful compact with a taunt*. "What is that to us? see thou to that." It is a sneer at his being too late in coming to the knowledge of Christ's innocence. This view of the matter should have suggested itself sooner. It is undisguised contempt for his helplessness. They despised him all along, and now they can show it. And there is probably an intended derision of his remorse. There are some men who, whether from a harder physical nature, or from the application of mental opiates, can drug their conscience till the stings of it in others are regarded as signs of feebleness. They look on the man who suffers from them as a deserter and a coward. It is difficult to say whether the meanness of sin is most revealed in Judas or in them — in his degradation, or their spurning of him. A generous man can use sarcasm — it is the scorn felt by a true nature for what is base, but a sneer has always a vein of the ignoble in it, and a sneer at a fallen accomplice belongs to natures of the lowest grade. Some find it hard to face the serpent's hiss of hatred, but here is something worse to endure — its hiss of scorn. Better by infinite meet the ridicule of sinners for not joining them while we have a good conscience, than end by being subjected to their taunts when we feel they are deserved.

Yet before leaving these men, let us be sure of this, that though they might disown responsibility they could not destroy it. A man may stop his chronometer in the night, but he cannot arrest the sunrise. The time shall come when *they too must see to it*, and the innocent blood find another voice than in the remorse of Judas.

The two sides of sinful companionship we have been contemplating show us two stages in sin, the one its full career, the other its close. As long as men are in the pursuit of an object, they may be able, with the aid of passion, to stifle conscience, but when the object is reached, and the value deliberately counted, — the thirty pieces of silver for which a Saviour has been sold, — conscience can begin to strike the balance. The heat and halo of the chase are over, and the net result can be reckoned, at least on one side; the miserable gain, if not the infinite loss. So it is with the betrayer, and so it must be, by and by, with those who hired him. They may meanwhile outbrave Judas, but they have to meet God. And, let us think of it, — the poisoned arrow a man uses may wound himself. The sneer is always on the way to the remorse. They have both the same hard bitterness in them — the same want of God's love. Nay more, as their taunts now pierce him he may turn round and reach them. Mutual reproach is one of the miseries of confederate sin when it closes. On one side the burden of sin has a dreadful solitude about it. "Every man must bear his own burden" — "See thou to that." And yet, on the other side, there is a fearful companionship, for one sinner takes up this taunt against another. May not this be the meaning of that solemn sentence — "Gather ye the tares, and *bind them in bundles* to burn them" ?

In what we have said, we have been looking chiefly at the end of sin and sinful association in this world. If we had no other view of it, there is enough to fill us with fear and awe, — that sin cherished in the soul should so ruin human nature and leave it a wreck of

guilt and agony. While the other disciples stumbled to rise, because truth and love to the Son of God were in their hearts, and while they grew up to that self-sacrifice and nobility of soul which make their names mingle in our thoughts with that Name which is above every name, the traitor's has gone out and down among men, as a thing of loathing and horror, and is the perpetual warning of the awful catastrophe to which sin, cherished in the soul, at last may lead. There is surely no prayer which better befits us in such a review than the Psalmist's: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."

It is scarcely possible, when we have such a case before us, to avoid thinking also of the future world. This matter is no subject for passion or threat, but for serious thought each one with himself. The New Testament has an expression concerning Judas (Acts i. 25), which is as practical as profoundly solemn, — "*He went to his own place.*" In the eternal world every man has *his place*, and it is *his own*. No other can make it, and no other can occupy it, for him. Whatever may be in it outwardly, its essence lies in his own soul and in the condition to which he has brought it. Here, in the last issue consists his misery or joy, for only through his soul can his share be measured in the universe of God and in God himself.

And God has made the man's own soul witness and judge over itself. This difference only shall exist between the present and the future, that then, — con-

fronted with the eternal laws of truth and justice, — the witness shall have no power of false testimony, and the judge be unable to use favor or sophistry. We may say, that, by thus lodging the decision in every man's conscience, God has put it out of his own power to act with partiality, and put it out of our power to charge Him with it. If the conscience could truly charge the Supreme Lawgiver with injustice, it may be affirmed with all reverence, that this would sustain it against the wrong. Men shall take their own place in the spiritual universe as bodies take their place in the natural, — by the power of gravitation which is in them — nearer God or further from Him, as they have impressed the character upon themselves, and in nearness will lie life and peace, — in distance, death and misery.

It may be a congratulation with some that such cases as that of Judas are exceptional, and that, without having decidedly chosen for God, they have nothing of the blackness of the betrayer nor the malignity of his accomplices. Let this be meanwhile granted, and let it be admitted that in the future world there must be infinite gradations on either side. To deny this, and to make only two unrelieved colors, would be untruthful to God's justice and to the plainest lessons of the Bible. But let any one ask himself if he could think it well to remain on the same side with Judas, only not so deep in degradation? If it were possible, could he be contented with some border-land between God and sin? The history of the Cross of Christ, which is so wonderful a touchstone of human nature, shows us, in the person of Pilate, one who attempted it. If any man

could have escaped taking a part between Christ and his enemies, it might have been Pontius Pilate. He was a heathen, who might excuse himself from Jewish questions, and he was reared among the conflicting scepticisms of his day in such a way, that his question "What is truth?" appeared hopeless of an answer. But with all his struggles he was forced to take a side. He might wash his hands before the multitude and say "See ye to it," but the stain of Christ's blood is on them yet, and he stands a miserable example of that weak and fancied neutrality which can never be sustained. If God had no claims, and sin were not already master of our nature, neutrality might be spoken of, but he who chooses it as things are, elects to remain a rebel. If the Son of God had not entered the world with his summons to return to allegiance, the case might have been, at least, more doubtful, but now we must either be among those who gather to the side of Divine Truth when it rises on the cross into the form of Love, or take our part with the chief priests and Judases who buy and sell Him, and the Pilates, who think they can stand by and harmlessly hold the scales.

What a deep ground of thankfulness should it be to all of us, that the standard which calls us to take a side, holds out a free and full pardon to the worst of rebels, — to the betrayers of the Son of God, and to his murderers, if they will but turn to Him! The death of Christ, which is such a revelation of human character, is a revelation still more of God's mercy. The death rises into a sacrifice, the crime discloses an atonement, and if those who joined in the treason

would have but looked on Him whom they pierced, all would have been forgiven, and the abundance of sin swallowed up in the abundance of grace.

From whatever is doubtful and mysterious, let us turn to this — the light which shines in darkness. Let us be afraid not so much of the punishment of sin as of sin itself, feeling that it bears its sting in its own bosom, and that, if there be in any child of man the desire to be freed from it, he is welcomed by the full heart of God drawing near to us in that Redeemer who is able to save to the uttermost all those that come unto God through Him.






XX.

Christ's Reticence in Teaching Truth.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." — JOHN xvi. 12.

UR Lord Jesus Christ had been engaged for years in instructing his disciples. There never was so constant and skilful a teacher, using every opportunity and every incident. The record of his lessons preserved to us in the four Gospels is a very small part of what He spoke, and yet what a store of truth, new to the world, and divine and everlasting in its reach, is contained in it! What a light is cast upon human duty, in its breadth and depth, in the sermon on the mount, how varied the relations of man's life to his fellow-man and to God as presented in his parables, and what revelations of the love of the Father, and all he intends here and hereafter by the gift of his Son, in this same discourse!

But after all these revelations, and when now at the close of his ministry, much remains untold. One feels as if there were an expression of regret from the heart of the Great Teacher that He cannot unbosom Himself further. He has so many things to communicate, but

his lips are sealed. It is not so much time that is wanting to Him, though that too presses, as fitness on the part of his scholars. The Teacher is all-wise, but the learners are weak and full of prejudice. The Teacher is *so* wise that He will not give them more than they can well receive.

This is a view of the wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ which we do not so frequently consider. We dwell much upon what He openly reveals, but we do not reflect as we ought to do on all that was in his thought, and which He kept back out of consideration for us, or rather, we should say, left room for, and indicated in such a way as to convince us He intended us to know it one day. It is this view of Christ's character which is here presented to us, — *Christ's reticence in teaching truth*; and we shall *first* give some illustrations of it, and *next* some conclusions in regard to Christ and human nature to which it may help us.

I. SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF THIS FEATURE OF CHRIST'S TEACHING.

1. *We shall take some of the truths to which we may suppose our Lord made immediate reference.* One of these was the long separation which was about to take place between Him and his disciples. They were on the verge of parting from Him, never more to meet till their death should bring them to his presence in another world. This would have been a terrible, an almost intolerable prospect, to them, with the sense they then had of entire dependence on his outward presence. They could not conceive of such a farewell, and when He hinted at separation they thought of it

as spoken of in figure, or as to last for a brief time. There was but one thing that could enable them to bear the prospect of his long absence, — the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and the felt presence of Christ with them in their hearts. Till then it is not made clear to them.

Another thing that He did not reveal to them plainly was the fall of the Mosaic dispensation, accompanied with the destruction of the Jewish State, and scattering of the nation over the world for so many centuries. This was the breaking up of all that they clung to as patriots and Jewish believers. The whole foundation of their faith would be convulsed by the thought of it. It was only the unfolding of Christianity in its spiritual power, the fulfilment of types and sacrifices in more glorious realities, the transference of their affections to a higher fatherland, and the view of the heavenly beauty of the Jerusalem above, that could enable them to bear the loss of their gorgeous ritual, and the dispersion of their race.

Another thing of the future not fully revealed was, the admission of men of all nations upon equal terms to the privileges of the children of God. It was only the spirit of universal charity, — the perception of Christ's relationship to man as man, the burning love to human souls kindled at the great sacrifice of the cross, that could lead them to count nothing that God has cleansed common or unclean, and to cast wide the gospel-door to every sinner of mankind.

We may mention, further, the gradual way in which He made the true view of his own person dawn on them. Had they known, as they came afterwards to

know, the full truth of his Divinity, they could not have borne it. To walk, side by side, consciously with the Son of God, in all their human sin and frailty, to exchange common converse, to reason and remonstrate with Him, would have been impossible. It needed that they should look back on it, that they should have the tenderness and condescension of his character, as well as its purity and grandeur, brought out by the Spirit taking of the things that were Christ's and showing them unto them, before they could realize that God incarnate had entered our world and linked human nature in the closest ties to Himself. So great a truth could not have flashed on the eye at once without overpowering it.

All these things of which we have spoken are rooted and imbedded in the Gospels; we can see them there in our Lord's words and actions from the beginning; it was from these very words and actions that his disciples came to learn them under his Spirit's teaching, but they are presented in such a way as to meet the state of their minds at every stage. The Gospels and Epistles are not opposite views of Christ and Christianity, — they are not even different, — but two steps of one development, the course of which can be seen passing on through the Gospels themselves. The principle on which Christ conducts it is, that the full greatness of a truth is not unveiled until the spiritual eye has been strengthened, and a hope is not shattered until its true compensation has been provided. It is because He is the same Educator who in nature lets the blossoms fall only when the fruit forms, and suffers the leaves of last autumn to remain on trees whose young buds need such shelter.

2. To illustrate further this feature of Christ's teaching, we may consider *the manner of his revelation of truth to the world in general*. His methods are of a kind peculiarly fitted to reveal truth as men are able to bear it. The parable is his favorite method in speech, and the miracle in action, which, as He performs it, is a parable put into a living shape. In both of these a man sees little or much, according to the spirit he brings, and what he sees is always growing into something deeper and higher, as he ponders it. Our Lord desired that truth should not be thrust upon a man from without, but grow up within, as from a seed, night and day, he knows not how. "Seeing, he sees and does not perceive; hearing, he hears and does not understand;" but, if he will only be patient and thoughtful, a new world grows up in him as plants and leaves grow in spring. It is this manner of Christ's teaching, by parable and miracle, which makes it suited to all the years of human life, as it is suited to every age of the world. The youngest child can understand something of it, and the most mature Christian feels that he has not reached the end of it. There is no other method of instruction we can think of that would have gained this result.

Then if we go back to the Old Testament, we shall find that the teaching was conducted in the same way. The symbols and the sacrifices were divine parables, where the learners had to take part with their hands, and were made their own instructors. Their daily acts were impressing upon them the great lessons of sin, atonement, and purity, and, step by step, they saw a deeper meaning as their minds were ready for it.

There is nothing more beautiful than to trace how their views of these three things, guilt, pardon, and holiness, kept equal pace, growing in clearness till Christ came and satisfied all their longings when they were prepared for Him. It is He Himself who is the great Teacher,—the Prophet as well as the Priest of the one unbroken Church,—and his plan is the same as in his earthly life, revealing truth as men are able to bear it.

When we come down to the ages that have followed his appearance upon earth, there is the same gradual unfolding of the principles of his kingdom. It is true that they are all to be found in the divine record. The more closely we study it, the more shall we be surprised to see the clearness with which they come out. But it is not at once that men are brought to discern them. The great Reformers of the Christian Church were led on to their final views by slow degrees. The beginning of a chain was put into their hands, and they had to grope it out, link by link, under the compulsion of Providence and the constraint of conscience. They were made to see each new truth when they were prepared for it, and they were kept in harmony with those whom they had to lead. It seems at first sight to be consummate calculation on their part that they never hastened too far before their followers; but the wisdom is in the Spirit and Providence of Christ, the teacher of the Church. If Luther had seen the whole course that lay before him when he opened the Epistle to the Romans, and learnt the great truth of justification by faith alone, he might have shrunk back in fear. But darkness was made light before him as he ad-

vanced, till a new dawn rose upon the Christian world. And all those who have been honored to do much for the cause of God and man ever since have been led in the same way. When churches and nations are brought out of Egypt, they do not see the long years and wanderings that are before them ere they arrive at their inheritance of freedom and peace. The wells of Marah and waters of Meribah would terrify them ; and yet these have all their lessons of faith and fortitude, which qualify God's people for conquering the land of their birthright. From the time Christ took men in hand to instruct them, He has been acting on this principle, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

3. There is another illustration of this manner of Christ's teaching — *in the individual life*. Take, for example, the way in which the view of human life alters as men advance in years. Were the young to discover how unsatisfactory the present world is at the core, — how little of real happiness, as they expect it, it can bring — what blanks and what bitters there are in its most promised sweetness, — they could not bear it: —

"If nature put not forth her power,
About the opening of the flower,
Who is it that could live an hour?"

The young need this bright view of the world to develop their energies, — to nurse their affections and imagination, — that when the veterans droop they may come in, like a fresh reinforcement, into the failing battle of life. And this brightness is also true, though in a different sense from their vision of it. It comes

from a source above and beyond their present horizon. The *illusion* is not a *delusion*. "The glory and the dream" are really there in a true life with God, though the youthful view takes in no more than the broken shimmer of it on the sea over which they sail. For to this indeed it comes, that the early vision of life is never realized. The golden islands which lay in the sunrise pass into clouds, and the gorgeous sparkle into a stern reality of struggle and storm. But ere this arrives, God has given opportunity for building up a firmer character on the principles of duty, and on the far-seeing vision of another world, which will not disappoint the hope. It is well if the man has learned this. The world's dream can take its own flight, and he can bear it.

There is a similar experience in the Christian life. Those who enter on it have the confident feeling which would gain triumphs without thinking of trials — the spirit of Peter, that hopes to have the heavenly vision without the hard work, — "Master, it is good for us to be here," — or the fancied strength which prompted his boast, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." They have the "love of their youth, the zeal of their espousals," and they cannot conceive that it should ever be otherwise. But then comes "the check and change," chillness of feeling, temptation, the bitter cross, and long prospects of march and battle before the close. Ere this, however, they have learned to add to their faith virtue and temperance and patience, — to put on the whole armor of God, and having done all to stand.

The afflictive events of God's providence are meas-

ured in the same way. The days of darkness come, and they are many, but our eye takes in only the first. One wave hides another, and the effort to encounter the foremost withdraws our thought from evils which are pressing on. If we could see them all at once we might lie down, like Elijah, under the juniper-tree, and say, "It is enough — let me not live!" But patience attains her perfect work while trials unfold. As the eye learns to see in darkness, the mind, by a merciful arrangement, grows accustomed to look calmly on the deepest afflictions, and to appreciate angel-like consolations in them, which came as to the prophet in the desert, that in the strength of them we may travel on many days to the Mount of God.

The great doctrines of the gospel are presented to the mind in a like manner. There are many who cannot bear at first the full view of the sovereignty of God, — of One who does all things according to the counsel of his own will, — and they draw back with something like shrinking from it, and dwell only on the perfect grace and absolute freeness of the way of life. But grace and unconditioned freeness go forward, and with joined hands embrace at last the lofty doctrine of God's sovereignty, while they say, "Not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake!" The man has now learned humility and self-renunciation, unreserved trust in the good and perfect will of God, and he can bear it. In Christ's personal teaching, — in the revelation of truth to the world, — and in the guidance of our individual life, — we may thus trace the same principle of unfolding his lessons as men are fitted to bear them.

II. We come now to SOME OF THE CONCLUSIONS TAUGHT US REGARDING CHRIST AND HUMAN NATURE.

In regard to Christ, we have reason to admire his *control alike over Himself and his message*. He is so absorbed by it that He can say, "The zeal of Thine house hath devoured me," and yet He is not possessed by it like a frenzied instrument. There is calmness with all his depth, — may we not say, calmness *because* of his depth? A little knowledge makes men eager to tell all they have. We read of God that it is "his glory to conceal a thing," and spread his cloud upon it. He can "hold back the face of his throne," and Christ has this same token of divinity in the way He discloses truth. He is neither its slave nor its organ, but its Owner and Lord. It was the saying of a philosopher, "If I had all truth in my hand, I would let forth only a ray at a time, lest I should blind the world."

With this self-control there is united Christ's *tenderness* in teaching. The rays of the Sun of Righteousness do not injure the most delicate tissue of the eye on which they fall. It needs the most loving heart to have such pity on ignorance as to feel that premature knowledge may hurt it, and to refrain from acting the tyrant in the possession of superior intellect, — "to have a giant's strength, but not to use it like a giant."

This is the great problem which revelation solves when it brings the infinite mind of God into contact with our finite minds, without overwhelming them. The secret of it is its wonderful humanness, coming to us *where* we are, and *as* we are, while it never lays

aside its own truth and purity ; and its central power is found in Christ. He had it not only from the Divine nature which He possessed, but because He was truly and intensely human. He had learned sympathy with finite minds from passing through the school of experience. "He grew in wisdom." "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." There is a meaning in such words beyond what we commonly give them. There was a dawning of knowledge in the human nature of Christ, gradual as in us, and a progress of it through pain and struggle. And this gives not only skill, but tenderness, to all the dealings of the Heavenly Master with his slow and weak scholars. He has his full summer-tide of glorious revelations for the dwellers in a higher world, — for those who can look with undazzled eye on the brightness of his noontide, — but for us who are emerging from the winter darkness of this earth, He has the gentler radiance of his spring-time, and the alternations of his sunshine and his shadow. He does not let out his full flood of light to scorch the young plant with unmitigated splendor ; but interposes his clouds for a covering and refreshment. There are in the teaching of Christ, both in the Bible and in Providence, reticences and pauses which temper the truth to feeble minds, as clouds chasten light. If we so read them, they are not mere blanks, but tokens, of a true and real tenderness. "His doctrine will yet drop from them as the rain, his speech distil as the dew." "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, till He bring forth judgment unto truth."

We may see in this method of teaching, not less, the

wisdom of Christ. Wisdom is displayed not so much in doing the right thing, as in doing it at the right time. The right thing, properly speaking, springs not from wisdom at all, but from an inherent principle of justice. The time for doing it is the great distinction between wisdom and folly. It may be said that as *space* is the sphere in which Divine power is displayed, *time* is the sphere for displaying Divine wisdom. And as power demands vast depths of space, — immense fields where suns and stars may be spread out in their mighty masses and movements, — so wisdom demands lengthened eras of time to unfold its plans in all their gradual developments and wonderful combinations. Over all these developments the mind of Christ presides. He is the God of history, and his wisdom is especially seen in the way in which the truths of his Word open out with a light suited to the requirements of every period. We do not speak here of prophecies which meet their fulfilment, but of principles which spring forth to guide men, as the star came kindling out of the sky to point the way to those whose hearts were feeling after the world's Redeemer.

No crisis has ever yet appeared when Christ's Word was not ready to take the van of human movement. The truths in their particular application may have lain unmarked, — or revealed themselves only to a few sentinels watching for the dawn, — till some great turn in the life of humanity comes, and then the principles of freedom and right and universal charity shine out so clear and undoubted, that men wonder at their past blindness. They were there centred in the life and death of the Son of God, and his wisdom is seen both

in having deposited them ages ago, and in bringing them out to view at the fitting season. When so it is, we need not fear any want of harmony between the Word of Christ and the progress of science. It is a subject that troubles not a few, but, if they would only wait in calmness, the wisdom of Christ will appear in this also, and God's revelation will be seen to step across the burning shares in its path, without the seeming consciousness of an ordeal. It was never Christ's intention to reveal scientific truth in his Word; but He has left ample verge and scope for it. The indentations of the two revolving wheels will be found to fit, whenever they really come into contact; and the only thing broken will be the premature human harmonizings which are thrust in between them.

Last of all, in regard to Christ, we may learn His *patience* as a Teacher. He is not in restless commotion to have his work done on the instant; nor does He abandon it in discontent when men prove inapt and slow. He has often to say in sorrow, more than in anger, "How is it that ye do not understand?" but He patiently begins his labor again, and is long-suffering to our ignorance, as to our sins. Short-lived men must speak out all their mind before they die, but the centuries belong to Christ, and He can calmly wait. He knows that he has time to teach what He intends. He knows also the final and triumphant issue, and without haste, and without rest, He is advancing towards it. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged till He have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." Our impatience often rises in the meanwhile, and the question with it, "Wherefore this

waste?" We wonder with a pain, which grows sometimes to tormenting doubt, why weary ages roll on, and darkness reigns, and souls pass away into the eternal future without comfort and hope of the truth. It is a right feeling, in as far as it urges us to pray and labor with all our energy for the enlightenment of poor darkened spirits, and for the diffusion of God's saving gospel; but, beyond this, we must be calm at heart, as believing that the issues are ordered by an infinite mind and sovereign will, and that Christ will prove that the delay on the road in no degree detracts from the wisdom and kindness which shall shine forth in the end.

The subject we have been considering may teach us some conclusions also concerning *our common human nature*.

We may surely learn to take *large and tolerant views of it*. When we see how slowly the best of men have apprehended the clearest of all truths, we must not be provoked at what we call the stupidity and prejudice of our contemporaries; nor fret unreasonably because antiquated opinions, as they seem to us, obstinately hold their ground. If the great Teacher had to wait, we may be content to do so. There are errors which give way only when God takes them into his own hand by the events of his Providence. They do not yield to reasoning, but to a change in the point of view which reveals an entire side of things previously hidden. It is marvellous how a turn in the road opens whole landscapes of truth to men, and lets them see what no logic could convince them of. Such changes make us say with the ancient patriarch, "Behold God

exalteth his power; who teacheth like him?" And yet reasoning has its value, as it prepares for them, and we must not weary in the use of it in all charity and candor. It may be slowly sowing the seed which God will quicken in a day.

Next, we may cherish *very hopeful views of human nature*. There are many grounds for this, but here is one, — that there must be noble things in store for that race with which the Son of God is contented to have such patience. If the great Husbandman waits so long for the feeble, springing blade, how precious must the full harvest be! There will be plentiful stores of pure wisdom for the world, and boundless treasures for each immortal soul that covets truth. There are ages for the world to learn in, and an eternity for the individual; and when the soul is able to bear full light, how many things will the great Teacher have to disclose! What secrets in providence and grace shall be uncovered — what blank deserts on the map of knowledge filled up with rich discoveries — what pauses and silences in the speech of Christ, replaced by matter of adoring wonder and praise! We shall find out why we can get no answer to many questions now. Where we are compelled to stand in awe before mysteries which stretch away like trackless wastes, we shall advance and see proofs of larger wisdom and deeper love than it entered our hearts to conceive. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."

It is a token of the immortality of the soul, that God has implanted in man a boundless desire of knowledge, and given him so limited a time to satisfy it, — and it is ground for expecting all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge from Jesus Christ, that He came into this world, possessed of them, and yet kept silence on so much we long to know. When our inability to receive is removed, — when we can take no harm from premature lessons, — we shall not have to complain of his silence. “In that day we shall ask Him nothing.” We shall drink at the fountain-head of illumination, see light in God’s light, and find it all the sweeter that it comes from Him into whose lips grace is poured. “The Lamb in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters ;” and the increase of knowledge shall not be increase of sorrow — “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

In regard to the things which Christ does not tell us, let us be thankful to Him for his silence. The cloud that veils full knowledge “is a cloud of love.” Many things about our great future, and almost every thing about our earthly future, are concealed from us. If we look back with a thoughtful heart, we cannot but feel how wisely and kindly He has unrolled the volume of life, and stood by us and strengthened us when we had hard things to read in it. Events that would have seemed intolerable have happened, and lie behind us with a softened light shed over them. We may be grateful that they were not foretold, — and grateful still more if we have been carried through them, not by having our hearts made hard, but our souls

made strong. It may help us to be less distrustful about what things lie still before us. When we can bear them, He will let us know them, — or, when He lets us know them, He will enable us to bear them.

Finally, let us be chiefly concerned about knowing the *one great thing* which Christ has to say to us. There is a message which stands out in his Word distinct from the beginning to the close: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Whatever disputes men may raise about it, the way is very plain and very near to any man who will open the Book and read with a willing mind. The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. The repose of the heart on God as made known in Christ, is all that is required, and the surrender of the life will follow. This is the one only thing that can extract from the life all other things hard to be borne. The hardest parts of life, — the most bitter things in it, — are written by our own hands, — the upbraidings of conscience, the stings of memory, the reproach of wasted opportunities, and the falsity and folly which make our life often seem so mean to ourselves. We cannot bear these things now, and how shall we when a clearer light of truth is poured on them? But Christ has words for them where all reticence is cast away, — words of full pardon for the past, and a strength for the future that will help us to a real and noble life. "As God is true, his word toward you is not yea and nay. For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God."

There are times in the future for learning other

truths, but for this our time is always ready. It is a word which is ever nigh us, and ever needed. It is that Gospel which makes Christ the salvation and desire of every soul that has learned to know itself and Him, and that brings it to say, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way." When this view of God is gained, all other things will come in due time and in wise order, and all "his words shall stand fast to you for ever and ever and be done in truth and uprightness!"





XXI.

The Last Passover. Christ's Desire for it.

(BEFORE COMMUNION.)

“And He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” — LUKE xxii. 15.

THESE words were spoken on a remarkable occasion — on the night before our Lord and Saviour suffered on the cross. It was on this night that the Passover feast was kept by the Jewish nation, to celebrate the most wonderful event in their history, — what may be called both the commencement and the key-stone of it, — the deliverance from the land of Egypt.

Our Saviour had often joined in the Passover before, but never had He looked forward to it with such feeling as now. “With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you,” — with intense and ardent desire — and He gives the reason, “before I suffer.”

“*Before I suffer!*” They seem strange words from such lips, — from Him who had already earned his title to be “the man of sorrows,” — who had passed through privation and reproach and grief, and who

seems to count all these as nothing to that which lay before Him. It is because He is standing on the verge of Gethsemane, and beneath the shadow of his cross, and such words, "before I suffer," tell us that there was an agony of endurance in view which was to cast into the shade all that lay behind Him. It is this suffering that makes the death of Christ the centre of Gospel truth, and that brings us together here to remember Him who was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.

"*This passover before I suffer!*" It tells us, surely, that there was some connection between the Passover and the suffering of Christ, and a special connection in this Passover at which He and his disciples were now sitting down. It may be suitable for us, when seated at the Lord's table, to think of some of the reasons why the Saviour desired so earnestly to join in this last Passover before He suffered.

1. One reason was, that *the Passover had now reached its end, and found its full meaning.*

That the Passover was a real emblem of Christ and his redemption, no one of us can doubt. It is no more unreasonable to expect typical forms in history than in nature; above all, in that Divine history which the hand of God specially constructed to be a spring of blessing to the family of man. The roots of a tree, with all its fibres and feelers, repeat themselves in the air in shoots and branches, till they are crowned with blossom and fruit. The lower life of the creation has a dim resemblance to the higher life in man, toward which it is struggling, — for God forms his world on one great plan, and makes the first prophetic of the

last. Even so all the spiritual history of the Old Testament is advancing to the second and greater Man, the Lord from heaven. It casts itself into foreshadowing shapes and types of Him, because his hand is on it, and his life is in it. It is struggling toward Him, taught and led by his Spirit, and it cannot but resemble Him. He is its root and its offspring.

Among all these types the Passover holds the foremost place, — floating down through the old dispensation to tell of its greatest deliverance, — as this communion has come down to us to tell of the great redemption of the New. It was now about to resign its charge, for it had served its purpose. It had stirred, year by year, the ashes of memory in the Jewish heart, and kindled them up into the flame of hope, — had taught men to look for a greater prophet than Moses, and to long for a higher salvation than the freedom from Egypt. And now, with this last Passover, it has come. It has come, with many of its forms like that first deliverance, but with a spiritual depth and grandeur in it beyond what the best of those ancient saints could ask or think.

There is thralldom more miserable than that of Egypt, and yielding as little recompense to those who toil under it. There is a tyrant stronger and more inveterate to keep his hold. The iron has entered deeper into the soul; for the slave is in love with his chains even when they gall and fret him. Herein lies the deepest misery of the bondage, that it is self-maintained, — and herein it entails not only misery, but guilt. The slave is also a rebel, and the work of sin has for its wages death. It is the condition of man, —

of all of us,— by nature, whether conscious of it or not, whether clasping our misery, as the maniac his fetters, or wakened to cry, “ O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ”

But here, too, is our deliverer. “ If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” The Captain of our salvation has appeared with the words, “ The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek ; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” He offers a free pardon to the rebels, and full freedom to the slaves. “ Ye have sold yourselves for nought ; and ye shall be redeemed without money.”

“ Ye who have sold for nought
The heritage above,
Receive it back unbought
The gift of Jesus’ love.”

The heritage begins now in the deliverance of the conscience from guilt, and of the soul from the love of sin,— and ends in being “ delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God,” in a heavenly country, of which the earthly Canaan was the dim and distant figure. The ancient covenant, which changed the slaves of Egypt into God’s servants, gives place to the new, which changes his servants into his sons, and commences that golden chain, “ If children, then heirs : heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.”

And here, too, are the means of the redemption. The Passover, which sprinkled with the blood of the covenant the door-posts in the land of Egypt, descends until its last victim dies beneath the shadow of the cross of Christ. Its efficacy is gone, for He has appeared who is to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness. At best it was a shadow, but now the great reality has come, — “Christ our passover, sacrificed for us.” It is no unconscious victim, but one who freely gives Himself, the just for the unjust, that He may bring us to God. It is no corruptible thing that is the ransom price, but the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. In this was seen the height of Divine love and the depth of human sin and loss, that the highest in the universe devoted Himself for the lowest, and died the death for them, which was the ransom of the soul. He who made the world came into the world to save it, and bore for it the burden of shame and guilt. It is the love of Christ, and it passeth knowledge.

And now He advances to close the old and open the new, to disperse all the shadows with the one light, and fulfil all the promises with the one blessing — even Himself — “for of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” The foreshadowed sufferings of that ancient covenant all meet in his cross, and its promised blessings all flow from it. He is the victim and the offerer, the passover and the Moses; He endures and does, suffers and saves. He passed through a deeper than Egypt's darkness, — was baptized with the

baptism of blood,—was the slain lamb, and stricken first-born for our sins. He led his chosen to the sea which barred the way, and stretched over it his delivering cross, and it opened, and a way was made through the deep for the ransomed of the Lord to pass over. He is the heavenly manna — the water and the smitten rock, — the pillar of defence and light, — the ark of the covenant that dries up Jordan's stream, — the tree of life that scatters its healing leaves and sheds its fruit through all the goodly land. The Divine history of the past now completes its cycle, and this last Passover begins to speak the word of the cross, — “It is finished.” The cloud of the LORD has found the true tabernacle, — the star rests over the home of redemption, — and all the sacrifices take up the message of the forerunner, “Behold the Lamb of God !”

And when at last the fountain of grace hidden in the law is about to break forth into the broad rivers and streams of the gospel, should not He, from whose death the water of life is to flow, be present and be moved at the token of this great time? His footsteps re-echo through all the paths of the ancient church as He advances “to repair the long desolations;” and His voice is heard, — “Lo I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God.” Through his earthly life He had looked forward with ardor, mixed with fear, to the conflict of the cross, as a warrior to the victory, which can be reached only through battle, and garments rolled in blood, — “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?” — and now that He stands on the verge of it and grasps the sign of his

death and his triumph, should He not pour out his heart in such longing words, "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" ?

2. Another reason why Christ desired to be present at this Passover was, *for the support of his own soul in the approaching struggle.*

"Before I suffer!" He had a terrible conflict to meet, for which He longed, and at which He trembled. There is something wonderful in the way in which the Gospels let us look into the soul of Christ, into its very faintings and misgivings, — as He reasons with Himself, — "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto this hour."

It is that we may feel how human He is in the weakness of humanity, and how real the suffering was which He had to endure. We are ready to think of Christ as if, by his Divine nature, He stood above all the sense of human infirmity. But He felt it as we feel it, and fell back on the same sources of support. His hunger, and thirst, and weariness, and sweat of blood, were no mere semblance, — nor any more were his fears and heart-sinkings, his wounded spirit and terrible sense of abandonment. His tears were real, and his look on Peter, which came from the heart and went to it, and his cry, — "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, O my Father!" We might doubt the true Divinity of Christ as soon as his real humanity, for He must touch both, and touch them entirely, if He is to bring them together. And as his hunger was relieved by bread, and his thirst by water, so was his soul by God's appointed means. The utterances of Scripture which had com-

forted hearts before Him, — the supplies of God's table, — and the aids of prayer, were also his means of refreshment. It is an everlasting consolation to think of this. The seats which the Lord of the way has made for poor pilgrims to rest upon, and the stores treasured up for weary hearts, have been tried and tested by the Lord himself, and He knows by experience how to guide their feet to each fitting place, — “He can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that He himself also was compassed with infirmity.”

But there is still more in his longing wish to eat of this Passover. It is not merely to think through it of all that God has done, and hold communion with the Father of spirits; but to do all this in fellowship with human hearts, — “to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” We may feel startled at the thought that the Son of God should be dependent on such aid at such a moment. And yet it is in keeping with all his history — with the whole plan of redemption. The Divine and human are inseparably interwoven in the life and work of Christ. When He is giving proof of his Divinity, He applies to men for the relief of his hunger and thirst, — and when He is accomplishing their salvation He leans on them for the help of his sorrows, and has his fainting hands held up, as those of the great prophet of Israel were by Aaron and Hur.

There is surely nothing more touching in all the life of the Saviour of men than that request in the garden, “Tarry ye here, and watch with me.” It shows so much his weakness and his strength, — the wonderful sympathy, which made the suffering of his soul so full

of anguish, and which yet made Him so strong to bear it. In Gethsemane, as afterwards upon the cross, He had an agony which none could measure but Himself. He entered a cloud from the bosom of which we hear only the broken cries of the struggle. But as near as men can come, He entreats them to approach, — “Closer, closer, brethren of humanity, to the Brother who suffers for you, and suffers as none other can !” There are moments when in our anguish we can do no more than clasp the hand of a fellow-man in the darkness, and feel upheld by the touch. Though utterly silent, it mingles with our soul and breaks the frightful solitude. With such a feeling, the Saviour sought the nearness of his poor fainting friends in the garden, — the strongest human spirit leaning upon human weakness for help, and showing in this his power, for it was this sympathy which nerved Him to endure the agony for them.

“He encircled Him with love, made it
Impossible for Him to fail, so watched.”

So God assures us that those can help suffering best who can come nearest to its weakness, and that Christ is our Saviour by taking on Himself every thing that is ours, except that which would have unfitted Him to be our Saviour, — a personal share in our sin.

With this same feeling He desired with desire to eat this Passover with them before He suffered. To have them full in view was to see the front rank of that innumerable army of his redeemed, — “the joy set before Him, for which He endured the cross and despised the shame.” It recalled the aim of all his life and death, — the end for which he left his throne

and walked the thorny path to his cross, till now He stood beneath its thickest shadow. It made that end rise clear above the clouds of his own depressing thoughts, and gave Him an object to which his whole soul went forth, as a mother to her helpless child, when in some dreadful moment she forgets danger and casts self away, and will do and dare what makes strong men tremble. It is the figure of his own Word which makes the tenderest human love a drop of the Divine to lead us to the fountain: "Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee on the palms of my hands."

And when we see Christ moving to his cross,—girdling and strengthening Himself with bonds of sympathy,—it is to make us feel the outgoing of God's own nature to the children of men. We could be satisfied with no gifts from Him, however great and godlike, unless his love were in them,—for in his love we have *Himself*. We feel that God, who has given a heart to man, must have a heart to meet it, else amid all his gifts we are orphans. Were He to cast down his redemption from an inaccessible throne, with a pride that cares not for thanks, or an indifference that despises affection, it would not be the redemption which our souls desire. But neither does He. His salvation does not coldly drop from his hand, it enters with his heart; and that heart is opened in the sympathy and sacrifice of the Son of God. The Sovereign of the universe wishes to be our friend and father, to satisfy the thirst of the soul, which longs to be pressed to an infinite heart—which cannot feel it up among all the throbbing stars, and finds it only when He

comes down through them to speak the words, — “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. And I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

3. We are led naturally to this further reason — that Christ desired to be present at the last Passover *because his friends needed special comfort*. “To eat this passover *with you* before I suffer.” These words must have told them what they were beginning to fear. They had been long dimly conscious of the chilling breath of the coming tempest, and now the tone of his speech, — the deepening solemnity and tenderness, — made them feel it was close upon them. “Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts.” Their cherished expectations were to be crushed, — their Master taken from their head by a cruel death, — and they scattered as sheep without a shepherd.

It is a dreadful thing when the heart's dearest affections are torn in pieces, and the faith broken which should bind them up. We can scarcely realize the trial through which the disciples had to pass, when He whom they loved and revered above all on earth was crucified before their eyes, and their hope in God buried in his grave. They had to walk through a darkness almost inconceivable by us, until their confidence was established in the risen Redeemer. But He himself understood it all, for it was the shadowy edge of his own deep darkness, and He wished to prepare them for it. He desired to make his converse with them at this Passover in the upper chamber, a strength and consolation to them against the sore temptations

they were to encounter; and He opens his heart to them, and to his Father, in that heavenly discourse and prayer which have been the treasure of his Church in every age,—more to it than the parting song of Moses was to the Israelites in all their conflicts,—and sounding to us like the silver bells on the high priest's garment, which told the people without that he was still living, and interceding for them within the veil. When we would have our hearts warmed to this memorial of the death of Christ, let us think of the thoughts that then glowed around it, and that breathe of the very incense which He offers for us now in the golden censer before the throne.

Who can tell how these words of Christ, and the tones of them, lingered upon the ears and hearts of the disciples, to preserve them from utter despair? those warnings of coming tribulation, and the promise of the Divine peace which was to keep them amid all—the foreshadowings of bereavement and death; but the open door, not far distant, of the Father's house of many mansions, with the assurance of meeting there, and of having every shadow chased away, and every tear wiped off for ever! “Ye now have sorrow, but I shall see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”

And certainly it was not for them alone that Christ desired to be present and bequeath these comforts. It was for those also “who should believe on Him through their word”—for us, here and now, and for all in every part of the world who are “broken in their hearts and grieved in their minds.” The tenderest words are in keeping only with the tenderest moments.

There are hours which unlock the lips to speak and the heart to hear, and He longs for this hour to unburden his soul's emotion, and gather all its deepest utterances round this memorial which has come down from age to age to tell of the love of Him who poured out his soul unto the death for us.

And may we not believe that Christ still prepares his people for what may be lying before them, and that He employs his comforts "to prevent" them — to go before them — in the day of their calamity? If we wisely observe our own life and that of our Christian friends, we may frequently see that trials and death have not only their forecast shadows, but their fore-glancing illuminations of soul and resting-places in providence, which are sent as a support against the day of battle and of war. When darkness is about to fall, God has lamps to put into the hand by anticipation. He who made his ark go before his ancient people in all their wanderings, causes the consolations of his Word to smooth the way of them that look to Him. He knows what painful steps are before us in the journey of life, what privations, what bereavements, — it may be that the most solemn step of all must ere long be taken, — and He desires to eat this Passover with us "before *we* suffer." May the sign help us so to clasp our hand on Him, that we may feel we grasp the rod and staff of the promise, and that when "our flesh and our heart faileth, He may be the strength of our heart and our portion for ever."

4. The last reason we give for Christ's desire to be present at this Passover is, that *it looked forward to all the future of his Church and people.*

At the close of the last Passover, Christ instituted that communion of the Supper which has come down through many generations, and goes forth into all the world as the remembrance of his death, and the pledge of the blessings it has purchased for us. How frail this little ark which his hand has sent out on those stormy waters, but how safely it has carried its precious freight! Empires have risen and fallen, society been tossed in wild convulsion, and yet it holds on its way, and will do, for Christ himself is in it with that heart of love which shall yet bless a whole sinful world.

If Christ was ever to sit down at his own table on earth it must be now, and was it not fitting that He should greatly desire it?

It was an engagement to be present at every other communion where his friends meet to remember Him — a promise to be present with them, not in the corporal and carnal way some dream of, but with a true spiritual nearness which makes good his own words, “Yet a little while and the world seeth Me no more, but ye see Me;” “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” When we look back through time to that first night, we see Him blessing the bread and breaking it, and giving to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude, till it reaches the far-off ranks in which we gather round Him. This makes of all communions a single fellowship, and brings the scattered companies of Christians into one Church, of which He is the Head unseen, — but the felt and ever-living life.

And this presence of his, at the first communion,

looks still farther — on to the period when, instead of his Spirit, we shall have Himself. He desired to take his place in person at the first communion in our world, and when the great communion opens in heaven, He shall be seen in his place once more. It was his ardent wish in leaving, to impress upon the hearts of his friends the confident expectation of meeting Him again, and of finding Him the same in affection as when He parted from them. This was to be their star of hope, rising over every wave, re-appearing from every cloud. In his farewell communion address in John's Gospel, we find Him constantly recurring to it: — "I shall see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." This is the express meaning breathed into the ordinance by his own words, — "I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom;" and it is the point of the apostle's declaration, — "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death *till He come.*"

One object of Christ's presence, then, at this communion, was to make it the promise and the pledge of his great return, when He shall change earth to heaven, — faith to sight, — and these emblems into his own glorious Person. The Passover came down through long ages, pointing back to the deliverance of Egypt, and forward to the coming of Christ; and Christ himself changed it into this memorial, which looks back to his death, and forward to his second coming. It is the grand New Testament type, which has a hand of faith to point to Christ's cross, and an-

other of hope to point us to his throne — the pillar which accompanies the Church's march, with its side of cloud and sorrow, but also its side of light and joy.

Dear as this memorial is to the Christian heart, it is but the substitute for something dearer far — the personal presence of our Saviour and Lord. In due time it likewise shall surrender its place and its use. The cup of communion which we now hold has come down to us from his own hand ; and we send it forward until it shall reach the hand that gave it to us. He will resume that cup to cast it into the river of his pleasures, to disappear there for ever. It shall be needed no more, for it brings but a feeble draught to parched lips in the wilderness, and thenceforth we shall eternally drink at the fountain-head.

Yet, while we hold it with the hands of dying men, let us realize through it our faith and hope. Let us look back to that first night, when with desire He desired to eat the Passover with his friends, and forward to the time when his Church shall possess Him again, — the same, and yet how different ! He, as human in every sympathy, but manifestly and gloriously Divine ! she, risen from the little company into “ the general assembly and church of the first-born — the New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ! ”

Blessed are they who are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb ! With desire may we desire it, and have some foretaste of it, in souls that are open to the life of that world into which Christ is gone. And may He, whose desire was so set on the first communion,

deign to visit ours, and make Himself known to us in the breaking of bread, giving to us the wedding-garment, and the wine of the heart, and causing us to feel that, even now, "He can satisfy the longing soul, and fill the hungry soul with goodness."

Here we would gladly close these thoughts, and yet we must add one more. He who had a desire to them that truly owned his name, had a desire also that went out wider. Never, in our most sacred service, let us gather all our sympathies within the circle of Christian fellowship; or forget that we have a Saviour whose compassion looks on a whole world. His call is as wide as the race; his arms as outspread as his invitation; his heart as large, and his sacrifice almighty to save. If there be one thing to which we would cling with the entire soul's conviction, it is that He has thrown open the door of forgiving mercy to any and every sinner of the fallen family, and that He stands at the gateway, with the sincerity of unchanging truth on his lips, and the pity of quenchless love in his heart, — "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out." Be assured that the grief which wept over Jerusalem has its tears for thee also; and that the heart which yearned after the young man who refused his great offer, follows thee tenderly, and asks thee to turn and live. With you — every one — He desires to eat the passover. He wishes you to acknowledge your friendship openly and unreservedly, but whether you make the avowal or not, He approaches you with the invitation, — "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any

man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." There may be such an answer of the heart as shall secure your share now in the hidden manna, — and a sense of fellowship with Him, outside this table, — which He will bring to view here on earth, or hereafter in heaven. May He find many welcomes of the soul beyond what we openly express, and "the LORD shall count them all when He writeth up the people." Do but invite him now from the door of your heart in such words, and He will at last return your invitation from the door of his heaven, — "Come in, thou blessed; wherefore standest thou without?" Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.






XXII.

Christ's Prayer for His Disciples.

(AFTER COMMUNION.)

"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." — JOHN xvii. 15.

HE prayer of our Lord in this chapter is one of the most sacred spots in the Bible. Here, if anywhere, sublimity and tenderness,—the Divinity and humanity of Christ,—shine out united.

The circumstances make it deeply interesting. It was offered up after He had kept his first communion with his disciples ; and it shows the wish of his heart concerning those who have joined in it, that they may be preserved from whatever would dishonor his name or their own profession. It was presented in the near prospect of his death ; and it is a solemn and touching consignment of them into the hands of his Father, that they may be guided and guarded through all difficult and dangerous ways, till they meet Him again in the glory of the eternal life. He uttered it immediately before He departed to take his seat at the right hand

of God as their intercessor ; and it shows us the spirit and the model of his mediation there. Already He seems to have risen in thought to the higher sanctuary, and his prayer has the fervor and nearness of one who looks upon the open face of God. "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee."

If there be any thing that can commend it to us further, it is this, — that we who have entered the world ages after the words were spoken have still our share in them. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe in me through their word ; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." And so, if we have come to his cross and table with sincere faith, we have our interest in his never-dying advocacy, and we abide all our days under the shadow of those arms that were outstretched upon the cross to suffer, and that are now lifted up on the throne to plead for us.

There is a petition in this prayer well adapted to our present circumstances, — "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil ;" and we shall seek to show, *first*, *What* our Lord asks for his followers ; and, *second*, *Why* He asks it.

I. WHAT OUR LORD ASKS FOR US.

You will observe that his petition has two sides, — a negative and a positive. He tells what He does not ask, and what He does. He does not ask that God "should take us out of the world." His meaning is

not that He presents such a request absolutely, for before this prayer closes He says, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am." He means only that we should not be taken out of the world *immediately*. He might have asked that the gate of faith should at once become the gate of heaven, and that the prayer, "Lord, remember me," should be answered in every case, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." It is our Lord's wish, however, that after men become Christians they should remain a longer or shorter time in the world. His next desire is that while in the world they may be kept from the evil,—from the great, the only real evil,—sin; the same prayer which He has taught them to present for themselves, "Deliver us from evil."

To be kept in the world implies three things,—to be engaged in its business, to suffer under its trials, to be exposed to its temptations and sins. These are the things we have to face when we go forth into the world; and in quitting a communion-table let us try to realize what it is to be kept from evil in the midst of them all.

1. To be kept from evil in the world means *to be engaged in the world's business, and have it rightly directed*. There are some who have thought that we would be more pure and Christian if we were to withdraw from the activity of life to the solitude of the cell or desert. Such a withdrawal must always be impossible for the mass of men, and it is in direct opposition to the example of Christ, and to the spirit of his gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ mingled with men all through his own life, and touched them in every relation of theirs.

The world is his world, and it is open in its entire breadth to those who belong to Him. When men were converted by the preaching of his apostles, they were not required to give up any honest occupation. If they were found idle they were set to work, and commanded "to be quiet, and mind their own business," — to be "diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." If the apostles were called from their first employment, it was not because it was derogatory to their character as Christians, but that they might give undivided labor in another sphere. The great apostle of the Gentiles did not think his office suffered when he wrought at his trade of tent-maker, and — what shall we say? — was not labor consecrated by the Son of God himself? It is written not only, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" but, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" He who is our Divine Master was in this also among us "as one that serveth," and put his hand to the world's work that He might ennoble all true labor.

The gospel, then, does not withdraw men from the world, with any affectation of refinement or superhuman purity. It belongs to man, and reckons nothing that is man's alien to it. Whatever is open to men, that is just and right in business, is open to Christians. And they are to give themselves to it, not in any half-hearted way. They are not to be spectators or dreamers, but workers. Whatever their hands find to do, they are to do it with their might. So far the boasted *gospel of labor* preached in our day is only a fragment broken from Christianity. Christ preached it to his followers, but added this prayer, "that they should be kept from the evil."

The gospel asks this of its friends, that all their business should be directed to a true *end*. Other men may turn their work to ends that are merely personal. They labor for the meat that perishes. Every Christian, whatever he is doing, should be laboring for that which endures to everlasting life. His toil should not have self for its end, but God and Christ, and, in them, the good of suffering sinful humanity. When others, with every fresh gain, put only the question, What more can I do for myself? he is to ask, What more can I do for Christ and his cause? What more for man? The Christian will not have less security for his own maintenance, but all the more. He will have his daily bread by his Lord's prayer, but then he works for it, not as an absolute owner of himself, or of his labor, but as a steward; and all his business, in the dullest cities where he toils, has spires pointing Godward and heavenward. Men may call this ideal and impracticable, but it has been largely realized by some, — it is, in a degree, by many, — and it is the only thing that can redeem human business from being dreary, degrading toil, and man himself from feeling that he is a mere beast of burden. It will carry comfort and dignity into every day of our life, and every hour of the day, if we bear this precept with us: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

In addition to this end of his work, a Christian must remember the *manner* in which it should be carried on. The law of truth and justice should regulate every part of it. Some think they can separate their religion from their business, but it is the vain old endeavor to

serve God and mammon, — an utter ignorance of the nature of Christianity which must touch every thing in life, if it touches it at all. I know it is hard, some say it is impossible, to carry out such a principle in the midst of the complications and competitions of life. But, if the gospel is not to make Christians truthful and upright, I do not see any great purpose it can serve on this side time or beyond it. And I do not see how we can be Christians at all, if we merely meet at certain times, and indulge some pious sentiments, and then go away and live our life without regard to God and his will. If the world and its business are ever to be put right, and cleared of the frightful frauds and robberies that threaten the very ruin of society, where is the stand to be made, if not by those who have lifted up their hands to God and said, — “We are his witnesses”? Where should we resolve to shake our hands free from these things, but at the table of Him who “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”? The appeal to Christian men is, “What do ye more than others?” What serves a gospel which sets no example to a world that needs it, and leaves no mark upon work which is vain and worthless, or worse, if it is not regulated and sanctified by the will of God?

2. To be kept in the world and kept from its evil, means, *to suffer under its trials and to be preserved from impatience*. If a man would escape trial, he must needs go out of the world, and when Christ prayed that his disciples should be kept in it, He knew that they were to suffer affliction. “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” Moral distinctions are not observed

in the providential allotment of calamity. Famine, pestilence, shipwreck, and death in every shape, light upon those who are God's servants, when they are hastening on his errands. This stumbles many. But only consider. If God were to adopt another plan, and exempt his friends from trial, He would antedate the day of judgment. He would take away from Christians one of the most effective means of their training, and one of the most striking ways in which they can prove their likeness to Christ. The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor, but it is not seen in his being saved from suffering; it is in the way in which he meets it. A merely worldly spirit is ready in severe affliction to fall into one of two extremes,—either to cast the trial aside in levity, and to dissipate thought by some engrossing pre-occupation; or to sink into despondency, and consider all as lost. The spirit of the Christian, which is also that of the true man, is described by the apostle: “not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor to faint when we are rebuked of Him.”

A spirit of hopeful patience is that which most of all marks a Christian man in trial, as of one who knows that there is a purpose in God's providence, if he could discover it, and that, where he cannot, it will come out some day, filled with wisdom and kindness. Few things do more to raise the tone of our own Christian life, and to prove to men that there is a hidden property in religion which can turn the bitterest things in this world into sweetness. If there are some who have to exemplify the truth and justice of the gospel in the active business of life, there may be others appointed

to prove its patience and calm fortitude in hours of bereavement and sickness and calamity. We may learn this lesson also at the table of Christ, and in fellowship with his sufferings. It is here we are taught the un murmuring acquiescence in God's will, which says, — "The cup that my heavenly Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?" Here we may learn to avoid being absorbed in self, when we are suffering, and to forget it in seeking to help and comfort others. It was in the midst of his own heaviest of all sorrows, that Christ offered up this prayer for us, and sent forth the memorial of that death of self-sacrifice which brings to our lips the cup of consolation.

Here, too, we find the strongest appeal not to turn our own trials into murmurs against God, or discontentment with things around us, or wrath against those whom we may blame as the authors of our suffering. It was at this hour that He prayed, "Father, forgive them," and included us among the number. What a gentle, soothing influence might not all our trials draw from such a source; how tender-hearted and forgiving might we not learn to become through the thought of Christ's forgiveness; and what sweetness would not the tree of the cross infuse into every well of Marah in our hearts, if we would but strive more earnestly to cast it in at such a time as this, when the Lord is showing it to us!

3. To be kept in the world, and kept from its evil, means, *to be exposed to its temptations, and preserved from falling into sin.* As long as we remain in the world, temptation and sin beset us. They are all around in objects of allurements: "the lust of the eyes,

the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life." And they are within, in the remaining corruption of an imperfectly renewed nature. It is Christians who are addressed, "Be watchful, be vigilant. Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." And the sad backslidings of many who gave evidence of being followers of Christ prove that the warnings are not unneeded. God has not seen fit to deprive sinful things of their attractiveness, nor to disarm the great enemy of his fiery darts, nor to quench at once and altogether the inflammable material in our heart. This would be fighting the battle and gaining the victory without us, and there could then be no perfected purity, no established character, no conqueror's crown. Therefore God sends forth his children into the battle to face all these enemies, and Christ makes no request that they may be spared — only that they should be kept from the evil.

This should mark a Christian man in the world, that he should have a deeper view of what is to be aimed at in character, of what is meant by being *kept from evil*. It is not to be preserved from misfortune, or sickness, or reproach, or bereavement, but from *sin*. While others may fix their view on the streams, and seek to filter a portion of the current here and there, we must begin at the fountain-head, and press this prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Other men may have their own motives for avoiding wrong-doing — regard to character, or health, or advantage. We must strive to reach reasons higher and more powerful, — "How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?"

“The love of Christ constraineth us to live not unto ourselves, but to Him who died for us.”

At a communion-table these motives should be felt in their power. “He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” If this means, first, that we might be covered with his perfect atonement, and accepted in the Beloved, it means also that this should lead to our being filled with his Spirit, and that we should seek to purify ourselves, as He is pure. To make the death of Christ a mere refuge-house for pardons is to degrade it to the most selfish end, and to receive the grace of God in vain. The Lord whom we acknowledge laid down his life to blot out all the sinful past; but He rose again that, in his Spirit of purity and love, He might be our leader in the war with sin in every form and degree. He consecrates us as his soldiers, — clothes us with the whole armor of God, — and sends us out to do battle with evil, first of all in the heart which is its stronghold. If the death and life of Christ are to have any practical meaning in our daily walk, it must be this — the death of the false and impure in us, and the springing up of a new and Divine life in their room.

Principle in the business of the world, and patience under its trials, thus rise up into the view of an end still nobler, — the putting on the likeness of Christ, who is the image of Him who is invisible, — the clothing of the soul in that purity which is the garment of the Father of lights, and which bestows on those who possess it the power of seeing God. It is true that the best of us aim only feebly and far off at such an

end as this ; but even to feel that it is a worthy end, and to aim at it in any way, is to have the earnest already of an eternal life begun. Let us stir ourselves up to lay hold of this afresh. To some men it is unintelligible, and even to Christians there are seasons when, surrounded by the world's business and pleasure, it seems dream-like and unnatural. But all the deepest longings of man's soul, and all his truest thoughts about God, bear him to it. It is the essence of the Bible, and the object of the entrance of the Son of God into our world. It is the inmost heart of his prayer for us, and it is the sober reality which comes before us at every communion-table. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

II. We come now to give some reasons WHY OUR LORD ASKS FOR HIS FRIENDS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN OUT OF THE WORLD.

He asks it *for the benefit of the world*. If Christ were to remove men to his immediate presence so soon as they become his followers, He would be taking away from the world those who were meant to be its greatest blessings. True Christians are the salt of the earth. Distributed over its surface, they help to preserve it from the utter corruption to which it would otherwise sink. They are more, — they are its light. If ever the world is brought to the knowledge of God, it must be through their instrumentality. If they were removed there would be no church on earth to witness

for God. It would be the darkness of Egypt without light in any dwelling, the corruption of Sodom without a Lot to be grieved for it; and if the earth were still preserved, it would only be for the sake of those who, in time coming, might be drawn from it to God. This world would then be a quarry from which stones were taken, as from heathen Tyre, and transported, so soon as cut, to form the house of God in another land. But it would not be a site on which a temple shall rise to God's glory, growing from age to age, until it fill the extent of the wide earth, and have the "headstone brought forth with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it!" But this is God's purpose, — to make that earth which has witnessed the sufferings and death of his Son, illustrious also as the scene of his final triumph. The victory is complete when the Conqueror remains in undisputed possession of the field.

He asks it for *the honor of his own name*. There is glory that accrues to the name of Christ, and there is joy among the angels when a sinner drops the weapons of rebellion, and becomes, through Him, the child of God. There is glory also that comes to Him, when his redeemed are brought home, and when, arrayed in the beauties of holiness, they cast their crowns before the throne with the ascription, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" But it is for his honor also that there should be an interval between, — a pathway of struggle, where the power of his grace may be seen in preserving his friends in every extremity. The more threatening the rocks and eddies, the fiercer the winds and waves, so much the more honor to Him, who sometimes asleep in the ship (as men deem it),

sometimes absent, can keep it from wreck, and carry it in safety to the desired haven. What an emphatic challenge there is to every enemy in his own words, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand"! We see their emblem there, — a feeble wandered lamb in the midst of the wilderness waste and howling, and around it the ravening wolf and roaring lion, the treacherous pitfall and poisonous wind. But when his hand has fed and tended, and guarded and guided it on to the green pastures and still waters of the heavenly land, the lengthened hazards of the way shall commend the power and kindness of the Great Shepherd more than if He had snatched it at once from the midst of peril, and set it in the bosom of perpetual peace. It was a glorious thing for the Head himself to enter the lists of battle, and after a conflict that bent Him to the depth of agony, to depart a victor, triumphing through endurance to the death. But it multiplies his triumph, or, we should rather say, it brings out in its true and manifold form all that was hidden in it, when we see it repeated in the victory of the meanest and weakest of his followers. It is like the sun reflecting his image from every dew-drop, folding out his treasures in the green of leaves and colors of all the flowers, and flashing his light along the beaded moisture of gossamer threads, — for we believe that not a blessing or a comfort, not a grace or virtue, rises out of the night of our sin and suffering, — not the slightest filament of feeling sparkles into hope, — but it will be found that it owes its source to the

fountain of light and life which God has opened for his world in Jesus Christ.

The last reason for this petition of our Lord is, *for the good of Christians themselves*. "Master, it is good for us to be here," Peter said, when a ray of heaven's light shone upon him on the Holy Mount, "let us build here three tabernacles." As if he had said, "Why go down again into the dark world of opposition and trial, when we can enjoy here at once the heavenly vision?" But "he wist not what he said," and he was compelled to descend, and travel many a weary footstep, before he reached that higher mount where he now stands with his Lord in glory. We, too, may sometimes feel that it would be better for us to be carried past these temptations and struggles, and to enter at once into rest. There are times when that rest seems so much to be desired, and this world so little, that our soul, like that of the ancient Israelites, "is much discouraged because of the way." But He who undertakes for us knows what is best, and as it was expedient for us that He should depart, so must it also be that we should for a season remain behind.

Not that this is indispensable for our sanctification, as some say; for the Saviour who could carry the dying thief at once to paradise, could do the same for all of us, and the advance which the best of Christians make in this world is so small, compared with the mighty transformation needed at death, that it cannot enter much into the account. The reason seems rather to be that there are lessons which we have to learn on this earth which can be taught us in no other part of our history.

One of these is the evil of sin. And, therefore, we are detained in a world where its effects are so terrible, where we have to struggle with its consequences in our personal life, and its temptations in our soul. The angels of God may learn to hate sin when they have seen it lay waste a fair world, over whose birth they sang together with the morning stars. The infant that has tasted the cup of life, and turned away its lips from the draught, may learn to hate it still more, for it has felt, at least, one of its fruits. But most of all must he loathe it who has wrestled with it in mortal agony till he has cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" — and, above all others, his song shall rise triumphant, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." There must be some who pass through this experience, to give the key-note of it to all God's holy universe.

Another part of God's desire may be that we should enjoy more fully the blessedness of heaven. Our bitter bereavements will intensify the joy of its meetings; its rest will be sweeter for the hard toil; and its perfect light and purity fill the soul with a far more exceeding glory for the doubts and temptations which oppress us here. How gladly shall the weary dove of hope, which flutters in every human breast, alight at last on the eternal ark of God's safety, when it has found no resting-place for the sole of its foot over all the wide world, and how joyfully shall it feel the hand of the great Deliverer outstretched to take it in, when it comes, weary and worn with the stormy wind and swelling billow! Many a painful footstep the pilgrim must tread before he reaches the Father's house which

shines forth its welcome above, but this promise may cheer him, "There remaineth a rest to the people of God," and when it is attained the pain and peril of the way shall enhance the peace and safety of the eternal home. The path itself shall be seen to be a right way; the deepest valleys of death shall be lighted up; and with Him, who rose from the lowest depth of suffering to be the centre of heaven's joy, thou shalt say, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God."

And now when we pass from the communion of Christ's house into the active world, let this petition of his point out our *duty*. What He asked for us we must aim at. He did not request wealth or fame or comfort. He chose them not for Himself, and He did not reckon them so needful for us as to put them into his parting prayer. On one thing his heart was set, — that we should be "kept from the world's evil." Let us fear nothing so much as sin; and feel that our life can aim at a true and noble end, only when it breathes the air of this prayer of Christ.

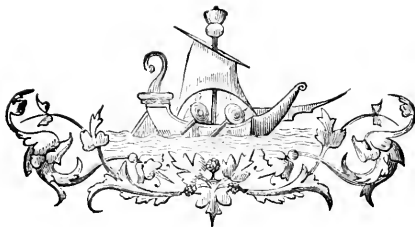
And in this aim his prayer will make us feel our *security*. The life of a Christian man is in no common keeping. It is suspended on the intercession of Christ — upon the will of the Highest in the universe when He is engaged in his holiest act — when He is pleading before the throne of God. We continue in this world while He asks that we should remain, and

we cannot die till He lifts his hand and utters his "Father, I will that they be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory" (John xvii. 24). "Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." How strong may we not feel in all our conflicts on the plain, while such a Prophet is praying for us on the mount! how comforted in all our sorrows, when such refreshments are ready to be wafted down from the overshadowing wings of the mercy-seat! "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day — He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

Are there hearts and lives that have not been surrendered into this keeping, — that are being wasted on vanity or ruined in sin? Your body's life cannot exist against the laws of his natural world. If it enters into conflict with them it must perish. Can your soul's life prosper in defiance of the laws of his very nature, and of the prayers of the Son of God? When He pleads against sin, and in behalf of truth and righteousness, where can your hope be for safety? It is a terrible thing to have arrayed against us the requests of Him whom the Father heareth always — to know that the triumph of the petition for right insures our doom. There is one resource — an open and a plain one. He is willing, most willing, to take your soul and life into his keeping, and to write your name upon his priestly breastplate. He is willing to do it at once "with the pen of a ready writer." He does not decline to pray for you till your life has given

you some title to hope for it, but whatever your life may have been, if it is only surrendered now in contrite submission to his will, his prayer ascends already for you, to raise its feeble spark into a flame. It was for this He died, for this that He lives, and if there be any meaning in the intercession of Christ, it is that the humblest look upward to the pure and true, — the feeblest cry for aid in the battle against sin, — finds a face to represent it, and a voice to speak for it before the throne of God. Only let your look and cry be true, however weak, and you can claim all the aid that the prayer of Christ insures, and rejoice in the thought that such aid is almighty. “Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Save, Lord; let the King hear us when we call.”






XXIII.

Hope and Patience.

“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” — LAMENT. iii. 26.

 HERE are few parts of the Bible where, in so short a compass as this chapter, there is shown such a bitterness of sorrow and such a strength of consolation. The grief and comfort pursue each other, like the shadows and sunshine of a day in spring. A mighty wave breaks over the man's head, and all seems lost, but we see him again standing on firm ground, and his voice comes out, not in cries for help, but in expressions of confidence. He is afflicted in body and depressed in soul, assailed by enemies, and grieved by the state of God's cause, but one thing constantly re-appears to sustain him — the view of God himself. And if the sky overhead will clear in this way, though at intervals, we can hold on when all the earth is wrapped in gloom. It is from heaven, and not from earth, that a believing man expects the outcome of the sun. You find, therefore, that his eye

looks upward; and, when it cannot see God, it seeks the place where He is hidden, as a flower bends its head toward the cloud which veils the light.

God and his salvation are the object of his desire. Gladly would he possess them, but, if he cannot, he will make them the object of his hope, and, if hope fails, he will quietly wait. There is no case so desperate,—no weary disappointment so prolonged,—in which there does not remain some duty towards God. This is what we have to consider. In the 24th verse this sufferer speaks of his hope in God: “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I *hope* in Him.” In the 25th verse he speaks of “waiting for God.” “The Lord is good unto them that *wait* for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.” And here, in the 26th verse, he combines the two. “It is good that a man should both *hope* and *quietly wait* for the salvation of the Lord.”

We shall, *first*, consider what is meant by the “salvation of the Lord;” *next*, the separate exercises of the soul toward it; and *lastly*, the benefit of conjoining these — “both to hope and quietly to wait.”

I. The **FIRST** thing is to understand what is meant by the “*salvation of the Lord.*”

Now, God’s salvation is used very frequently in the Bible for his interposition to save the soul of man from sin—that great salvation which is the sum and substance of the Bible; and a man becomes possessed of it when, in humble trust, he commits his soul to God’s mercy, as it is made known. We do not think, however, that it is this salvation which is here spoken of,

for though a man may be encouraged "to hope," he cannot be urged "quietly to wait for it." He is to strive — to ask and seek and knock until he finds ; but there is not a spot in the search after God where he is entitled to sit down and rest. If we look, moreover, into the language of the chapter we shall see that it is not that of a man who is ignorant of God. He is acquainted with his gracious character, and has learned to rely on it.

The "salvation of the Lord" here is something else than the first view which a sinful man obtains of pardon and peace, through "the great God our Saviour." It is the salvation which a man needs in any crisis of life, where he suffers under trial or is threatened with it. And, in these trials, hope and quiet waiting do not come at once into their fullest exercise. As long as human means can avail, it is a man's duty, trusting to Divine help, to employ them. To sit and wait, where effort can avail, is to insult God's providence. The "salvation of the Lord" is when all conceivable means have been employed, and have failed. The hand can do, the heart can devise, nothing more. When the Israelites had reached the Red Sea with the mountains on either side and the Egyptians behind, the words of Moses were, "Stand still, and see *the salvation of God.*"

Such positions are frequently arrived at in life. We feel that we are at the end of all endeavor, and the object has not been gained. Our strength and resources, — all possible expedients, — have been brought into exercise. The last reserve has been thrown into the battle, and yet it goes against us. We may strug-

gle on with a blind despair, and, as long as strength remains, we must struggle on ; but this power, too, seems to be failing. It is then that the case rises distinctly into "*the salvation of the Lord.*" Nothing can save us but his marked interposition, and the heart must put itself in the attitude of "hope and quiet waiting" for it.

The trials of this kind are innumerable, as varied as the lives of men, and when we instance one or two, we know that we touch only the surface of human experience.

There may be some who are using every endeavor to secure subsistence and an honorable position for themselves and those dependent on them ; and yet all their efforts are unsuccessful. Slowly the tide of comfort, and even of the means of existence, is ebbing ; and the dark reefs, which threaten utter shipwreck, lift their head. If some change does not quickly come they feel that temporal ruin is on them. It is a time not to relax effort, but to look out more intently for deliverance from God, and to have the heart resting on it.

Or there may be some one who has the presence of a constant difficulty in the spiritual life — perhaps the want of that sense of religious comfort which is felt to be so desirable, or the obtrusion of some painful doubt about doctrine or duty, through which no present light can be seen. To cast the thing aside and become indifferent to it, would be against the promptings of the whole spiritual nature ; and yet to reconcile it with other convictions is meanwhile impossible. There are many such cases of painful want of harmony in our time. A period occurs in every genuine life when the

simple faith of childhood has to pass over into the intelligent faith of manhood, and such periods occur also in the history of the world. Many things then seem shaken when they are only about to be established on new and higher ground. If there are some who are involved in such a struggle, and if all thought has failed to open a path through it, it is a time also for this more entire reliance upon God. No exertion to reach light is to be neglected, but there may be a more implicit confidence in Him who is the Father of lights, — holding steadfastly to what is felt to be true, and waiting for illumination on what is doubtful — “casting out the anchor and wishing for the day.”

Perhaps there are some who are deeply interested in the spiritual welfare of a soul dear to them as their own. Their prayer has been rising, like that of Abraham for Ishmael, “O that he might live before God!” But all means have appeared to fail. If there is not positive disregard of religion, there is, at least, want of that thorough decision which is so longed for by those who know the full value of God’s friendship, and who yearn to see all that their heart loves most included in it. There is a certain length we can go in such endeavors, and we feel that to go further might injure the end we seek. Then this remains to us — to take all our endeavor, and leave it with God, in whose hand are the hearts of all men, who can follow the wanderer wherever his feet or his thoughts may carry him, and can bring him again to himself, and to his Father’s house.

Or, it may be, there is some life which has lost all the relish it once possessed, — where wasting sickness

has undermined the strength, — or friends who were the hue and perfume of it have been taken away, — or hopes that hung on its horizon like a coming glory have melted into thin air, — and existence seems to have no more an object, and duty sinks into a dull mechanical round, and the night comes down dark and starless, and the morning rises cold and colorless. It is hard to say what can restore to such a life its vigor and freshness, for the mind comes oftentimes to have a morbid love of the gloom which is its misery, and to reckon it treason to its past hopes to turn its eye from their sepulchre. God only knows the remedy, and it is a special time to call up higher duty to our aid — the duty of turning to Him, and striving to feel that He has it in His power, though we may not see how, to save us over the grave of our most cherished hopes, without causing us to forget them, and to shine in with a reviving light upon the dullest and bleakest of earthly walks.

There is, probably, not one of us but has some such trial as these, — some object on which our heart has been set, not yet attained, or taken away from us beyond the prospect of recovery. We stand at the end of all our exertion, and our desire is far out of our reach. A man who has faith only in worldly resources is powerless here. He must give up in despair, or cast himself on a blind chance. But, for a believing man, there is still a duty and a stay. When he cannot take a step farther in human effort, there is a pathway to the sky, and his heart can travel it. There is a salvation of the Lord which lies beyond and above every deliverance in the power, or even the conception of

man, "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding." Then comes the time to realize this — that if the object of our desire be right and good, He can give it to us in a way we dream not of, and that, if it be denied, it is because there is something better in store, "above what we can ask or think." Some hidden treasure of the soul is to be opened up, or some future gain of the immortal life is being prepared by this delay. The blessing we long for can come in this world, sudden and wonderful, written all over with the manifest tokens of God's hand; or, if it may never be ours here, it carries the standard of hope beyond the gulf to plant it on the shores of the eternal. We may quietly wait with the assurance that every blessing will be found complete when those who trust in Him are saved in the Lord, with an everlasting salvation.

II. The SECOND thing is to consider what is meant by these exercises of the soul towards God's salvation, — "*to hope, and quietly to wait.*"

Every one of us knows, without any labored definition, what it is *to hope*. But if we are to set ourselves to practise it in a Christian way, it may be useful to look at some of its elements.

The foundation of hope may be said to lie in *desire*. It differs from desire in this, that desire pursues many things that can never be objects of hope to us. We can only hope for such desires as are possible and reasonable. This then is the first thing for us to do,

if we would strengthen hope, to see that its objects are right and good,—that is, accordant with the Divine will, and beneficial for us. We may learn this by consulting God's Word, and our own thoughtful experience. We are sure never to err when we begin with the blessings that concern our spiritual and immortal nature. We may wish, without fear and without limit, for whatever brings us nearer to God's friendship and fellowship—for whatever forms in us the mind and likeness of Christ. After this we are perfectly free to desire those things which meet the wants of our entire nature, as far as these are sinless. That nature is of God's making, and all its necessities and affections have true and proper objects. But, on this human side, we should never wish with the same absolute strength, for we live in a world where the lower comes often into conflict with the higher; and we should seek to desire things in their due proportion—first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then all the other things that may be fitly added to it. If we have been taught thus to govern our desires, we have laid the foundation of well-grounded hope.

The next element in Christian hope is *faith*. Hope differs from faith in this, that we believe in many things in regard to which we do not hope. Hope is faith with desire pointing out the objects. If we have sought to make these desires Christian and reasonable, then we may consistently call in the aid of faith. "The Lord shall give that which is good." We have the assurance in the knowledge of Him, as the "Father of spirits," that He will care for the souls He has made. If we give up to His keeping that precious and immor-

tal part of our nature, we may have the most perfect conviction that He will satisfy all the longings He has infused into it, and will fill it with all the happiness of which it is capable. And as He is the "God of the spirits of all flesh," — of spirits which dwell in fleshly tabernacles, — and which are open, therefore, to joys and sorrows dependent on them, we may be sure that He will not overlook this part of our nature. Only His care of it will be proportioned to that same importance which we have been taught to observe in our desires. So we may reason from the general spirit of the Bible; and when we go to its particular promises, we find them every one bearing out this view. They tell us that the spiritual, as it is to be unfolded and perfected in the eternal, is the great concernment of God's dealings with us; but that, in subordination to this, all that belongs to our happiness is the object of His care, and may be the subject of our hope. The greater end does not finally exclude the less; it only modifies and regulates it; and makes it, in its last issue, more certain and complete. The hope of the Bible is, first of all, divine, like its great subject, but it is also, like Him, truly and tenderly human. For a time they are in outward conflict, the human crying out in suffering and struggle, but, all the while, sustained by the divine, and destined at last to enter into a visible and glorious harmony with it.

When we have sought to purify our desires and to make them the subject of faith, as far as they are right and good, there is still a third element to be added to make our hope strong — that of *imagination*. I know that this word is misjudged by many, and associated,

if not with the sinful, at least with the visionary. But it is a true, God-given, part of human nature, and ready to be turned to the noblest use. While sin has made it a charnel-house of corruption, or a storehouse of vanities, purity can fill its treasury with divine aspirations which are as grand as they are transcendently real. It is that power of the soul which gives to hope its wings. Let it but rise from the desire of what is true and good, and be chastened by the faith of what God has promised, and it can lift up the soul above the most terrible trials, and put it already in possession of the unseen and heavenly. No one can read the Bible without seeing that it has everywhere its Pisgahs and Tabors, and exceeding high mountains, whence the beauty and glory of the future are to be discerned,—and God's Spirit carries men to their summit, and bids them open their eyes. It is true that all cannot rise to the same height, nor look with the same vision, but in every nature the faculty of the ideal lies hidden, and religion was intended, above all things else, to call it forth. Every true Christian has the soul of the poet latent in his nature, and, if many are kept depressed and earth-attracted, it is because they do not strive enough to free this power from sinful and worldly encumbrances, and to give it wings to soar to its native home.

Let us dwell more on those scenes of the invisible and future which are depicted in God's Word, and of which the renewed heart has the presentiment in itself, and while the imagination gives vividness to these pictures, faith will give reality to them; for it tells us that, in the degree in which they are good for us, they

must be ours. Even in regard to the deliverances and blessings which we may desire from God in our present life, we are not required to forecast the issue in colorless vagueness. As we may wish and pray for definite things, so we may imagine them, and try to think how God may and can bestow them. The imagination which is permitted to others, is not forbidden to a Christian, only with him it will not be so positive as to dictate God's way of realizing it. He will seek to feel, in all his forecastings, that God can do to him above what he can think, and that even in this world it does not enter into man's heart to conceive what God prepares for them that love Him. What he hopes for, whether of the heavenly or earthly, will still be the *salvation of the Lord*.

The next exercise of soul which we are to cherish toward God's interpositions is "*quiet waiting*."

There come times in life when, as labor seems vain and resultless, so also hope droops and is ready to die. The strong emotions of our nature do not continue long with equal freshness. The laws of action and reaction, as in material things, come into operation, and, in proportion to excitement which has strained nature, there is depression. It would save some Christians much grief and vain self-reproach if they would remember this. We are often no more accountable for our moods than for our temperament. After seasons of excessive emotion, there will come times of lassitude sinking to torpor. Both have their *use*. The shadow is as necessary for growth as the sunshine, and these alternations give the Christian graces their full proportion in the character. Both have their *duties*. Though

we may not be responsible for moods, we are for the way in which we act under them. When all our endeavor fails, we are to fall back on hope, and when hope begins to faint, there is still left to us "quiet waiting." So full of resources is the grace of God, that, as each lower deep of trouble opens, a new power in the Christian life can be created to meet it.

"Quiet waiting" is that which, in other parts of the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, is termed *patience*. It is the part of hope to seek the future; it is the duty of patience to rest calmly in the present, and not to fret — to be satisfied to be where God appoints, and to suffer what God sends. It is fitly placed after hope, because it follows it in the natural course of an educated Christian life. Hope belongs to youth; patience is the lesson of maturity. Hope enters with a man into his first battle, perhaps in some forms it is never brighter than then — the helmet-hope of salvation, has been dimmed and dinted by no blow; but patience is the hard acquirement of the veteran, gained in many a march and campaign. So it was unfolded for our example in the Captain of our salvation, who endured God's will after He had done it, and took the cup of trial patiently into his hand when He had finished his active work.

As there are means for stimulating hope, so there are also for strengthening patience, and there is, in some measure, a correspondence in them.

One means is common to both — the employment of *faith*. It will enable us more quietly to wait if we have confidence in the all-wise and all-merciful arrangements of God. The failures, — the seeming blanks

and dull monotonies of life,— which try our patience most, are equally at his disposal with its highest activities and enjoyments, and the very wildernesses and solitary places of it may be those which shall yet rejoice and blossom like the rose. He can make all its wastes to be as Eden, and bring out the best spiritual results from what seem to us the most barren spots.

In other respects, the means for growing in patience are very different from those that help hope. If hope is nursed by desire of what we have not, patience is maintained by *contentment with what we have*. Our duty may be, when desire of something lost or longed for is consuming us, to bend our look more intently on the present, and try to discover how many things, and how precious, God has left to us. There are situations in life which, to the outside spectator, appear the most dark and cheerless, that are far from being so to those who are in the centre of them. Bright spots come out, and sources of interest open up, which common eyes disregard ; and we learn that life may be like the homes of some Eastern lands, which have their dull, dead walls to the crowd, but their fountains and flowers and singing birds in the courts within. There are many joys with which a stranger cannot intermeddle, which he cannot even discern, and, if we are to wait quietly, we must cultivate an eye for these. One purpose of our detention may be that we may discover them, for, both in the natural and Christian life, men lose what is near, in their haste to reach the distant. Nay, more, if they reached the future it would disappoint them, for it is only to those who have learned to draw from the present its hidden stores that the future can yield

its true and rich treasures. It is not necessary that we should shut out hope as one of these sources of present interest, but we must admit it as the handmaid of patience, not as its mistress, and we must treat it so that we can feel thankful there are many other things besides hope which still abide.

Then, instead of that imagination which nourishes hope, we must cultivate patience by *a calm attention to duties*. Quiet waiting is not inaction. We may be waiting for one object, while we are steadily working for another. If some aim that engrossed our life is withdrawn, and some way of usefulness that had all our affection is closed, we shall find there are other roads to walk in, and other works to perform, provided the heart will accept them. Even though the heart shrinks, if the hand will only give itself to what it finds to do, and will do it with its might, the heart will follow. It is a kind law of our nature, that labor expended on any object gives an interest in it; and it is a still kinder law of the kingdom of God, that the tamest and most insignificant of daily duties may be made noble and divine, when the thought of God and the will of Christ are carried into them. One soul may rise to heroism in the narrowest circle of routine, when another dwindles upon the grandest fields of action.

Thus the means are at our disposal for building up these virtues of hope and patience in our character. When we give our souls up in trust to God, He gives them back to us again with his hand on them, that we may labor to fill them with all that can make them happy in the future and strong in the present.

III. We come now, in the THIRD place, to consider the benefit of uniting these — “It is good *both* to hope and quietly to wait.”

But is it possible to unite them? It would seem as if hope and patience were at open war. Hope carries us to the future; patience binds us to the present. Hope has a restless fire and energy; the strength of patience is in calm and often in unresisting endurance. We can see, as we look around, how ready men are to run into one or other of the extremes — how some natures are over-sanguine and unsteadfast, others submissive to all that comes, with a dull despondency. Yet it is for this very reason that the two are conjoined, and that we are urged to aim at the true balance. If we feel that our nature tends to either side, we must strive, with God’s help, to correct it by its opposite.

We know how, in material laws, forces which counteract each other can combine in harmony. The attraction that holds our world to the sun is met by the impulse which propels it straight into space, and the movement which gives us day and night, summer and winter, is the result of both. Every Christian heart feels how it can be going forward in thought to some blessing God has promised, and yet resting, while it is withheld, in submission to the Divine will, — as John, in Patmos, walked the streets of the heavenly city, and listened to its songs, and yet abode in his solitary exile, and was satisfied to be there as long as God required.

That we may be led to aim at both of these, consider this, that *the one is needful to save the other from sinking into sin*. If hope possessed the Christian heart alone,

it would be ready to flutter itself into impatience. The brighter the future rose upon the vision, the more the man would fret against the delay. Hope left to itself would be an ill-disciplined child, that cries for what its heart is set upon, and will hear of no denial. It would soon cease to be hope,—its clear eye would be dim with tears of discontent, and its heart would sink for the distance from its goal.

On the other hand, if we had quiet waiting without hope, it would be in danger of settling into stagnancy. The object of its waiting would disappear, and trials without any end in view would benumb and paralyze it. Hope without patience would be life kindling into over-intensity, and burning itself out in fruitless longings. Patience without hope would be the decay of life's flame for want of nourishment, till it would sink into the quietude of death. Whenever hope rises into impatience, it is the will of God that quiet waiting should lay its hand upon it, and bid it "rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, and not fret," for there is purpose in his delay, and occupation meanwhile for us. When patient waiting, on its side, becomes indifferent or torpid, it is not less the will of God that hope should come and wake it up, as the cry did the slumbering virgins, "Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet Him." On either side we may fall into sin, and the fully approved state is to have the eye looking forward, while the heart is at rest,—to combine these two, as they are found so often in the Bible: by the Psalmist (cxxx. 5), "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope,"—by the Apostle (1 Thess. i. 3), "the patience

of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ," — and by the speaker here, "both to hope and quietly to wait for the salvation of the Lord."

Consider this also, that *the one is needful to raise the other to its full strength*. Christian patience rises to its proper power not through any force of insensibility. It is thoughtful and reasonable, and must know where it is and what it waits for. It is the part of hope to tell it this, — to throw into it the light of intelligence, and make it strong with the promises and the power of God. The Saviour still leaves us, as He left his first disciples in the garden, with the words, "Tarry ye here and watch," and promises to come again. If hope can lay hold of this promise, and keep it fast, patience will maintain its post like a sentinel who is sure of relief at the appointed hour, and if the hour seems long, will beguile it with those words, which have passed like a "song in the night" through many a weary heart, — "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

Then, as hope strengthens patience, patience in return will strengthen hope. Such allies are all the Christian graces, children in one family, who, if there be love among them, supplement each other by their opposites. If a man is enabled to "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him," it is a reason to him for hoping that there is a divine work going on in his life, which the God of patience and consolation will complete. If I can feel that there is a strength which bears me up under heavy burdens and lonely hours, I can trust it for more than this. I *must* trust it for more, since my inmost heart feels that patience is only the

means of my life's walk, and not its end, and God does not intend to deceive us, either by our human or our Christian instincts. Patience brooding over its own quiet spirit, which yet it feels is not its own, has the presentiment and angury of an end beyond itself. In the deep well of a tranquil heart, the star of hope is lying, — ever clearer as the calm is deepening, — reflected down into it from God's own heaven.

This is God's manner, first, to give the inward peace of soul, and afterwards the final deliverance. He came into the ship and calmed the disciples' fears, and then He spoke and calmed the storm: "I will be with thee in trouble: and then it follows, "I will deliver thee." Peter's prison was opened by the prayers of friends without, but that of Paul and Silas was burst by the song within, and this is something nobler and better. When God gives to us this patience which can rise even to triumph, we may begin to rejoice in hope, and be sure that He will proclaim liberty to the captives. It is the order of that golden chain (Rom. v. 3), "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."

And now, if it be possible to unite these two, and if it be so needful, it should be the lesson of our life daily to aim at it, — to hope without impatience, and to wait without despondency, — to fold the wing in captivity, like a caged bird, and be ready to use the pinion when He breaks our prison. Let us address ourselves with a cheerful endurance to our duties, whether they weary

us by their weight or by their trivial monotony, — and to trials, whether they come in great afflictions or in fretting and ever-recurring vexations. We may attain to that hopeful patience which comes not from stoicism but Christianity, which feels all the good of life, and yet can be strong and satisfied in the want of it, — the finest acquirement of that higher school which the gospel has introduced, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.”

We shall find increasingly “how good it is.” It is good now *in the depth of the soul*, — in the conscious assurance that it is better to rest in the hardest of God’s ways than to wander at will in our own. “Behold, we count them happy who endure.” We shall find it good in the growth of all the Christian graces, under the shadow of patience. Were we to gain every blessing so soon as sought, the blessing itself would be small, and we should gain nothing more. But now, while we patiently wait, faith becomes stronger, resignation sinks into a deeper attitude of reverence, gentleness and meekness are clothed with softer beauty, and courage and fortitude, and all the stronger powers of the soul, arouse themselves and put on armor “to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”

We shall find how good it is *in the enhancement of every blessing for which we have to wait*. God’s plan of providing blessings for us is to educate the capacity which is to receive them. We are straitened in ourselves, and must be kept waiting till our minds and hearts enlarge. “Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” Between your use of all the means and

the result which you desire there is still a gulf of separation, on the brink of which patience must sit and look across, waiting God's time and way to pass it. And when patience has her perfect work "ye shall be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James i. 4). Then the result will come, — the full blessing you desire, or something better. And, at the close of all, the pilgrims are kept resting on the river's bank, in view of the celestial city, till the Lord send his message for them to cross the stream. If they have a right heart it will be growing larger while they wait, and the provisions of the home will enlarge to meet it, for while they are waiting Christ is working to prepare the place. "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord."

Of all the motives to hopeful endurance, surely this last is not the smallest, that He who lays the duty upon us has Himself given the example of it. He asks nothing *from* us that he has not done *for* us, and done by a harder road, and with a heavier burden. If there are some of us who have not begun to think of the "salvation of the Lord" in any way, let us turn the eye to Him who did so much to bring it within our view and reach. The only recompense we can make Him is to seek to be part of his joy and crown. And if we have begun the course which, with all its struggles, is a happy and a hopeful one, let us keep the eye fixed on Him who is our Surety, our Forerunner, and our Prize, and "let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."



XXIV.

The Eternal Future Clear only in Christ.

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He (Christ) shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” — I JOHN iii. 2.

THE apostle admits that there is obscurity hanging over much of our eternal future. He glances at this part slightly, but it is the background of that one *light-scene* to which He afterwards points. “It doth not appear,” — that is, it is not *clear*, — “what we shall be.” This is about the height to which Gentile wisdom could reach. It might say in a hesitating tone, “We shall be,” but it had to add, as the sum of its knowledge, “it is not clear *what*.” The gospel, though it can say much more, suffers these words to remain, and, if you consider for a moment, you will see of how many things God’s revelation still leaves us ignorant.

The first step of the soul into another state of being is a mystery. No doubt it continues conscious, and its conscious existence, in the case of God’s children, is most blessed: “To depart and to be with Christ is far better.” But the existence of the soul separate from

the body, and from all material organs, is incomprehensible.

The *place* of our future life is obscure. How there can be relation to place without a body we do not know, and even when the body is restored, we cannot tell the locality of the resurrection-world. Nothing in reason and nothing certain in revelation, connects it with any one spot in God's universe. It may be away from earth, in some central kingdom, the glittering confines of which we can perceive in thick-sown stars, that are the pavement of the land which has its dust of gold. It may be, as our hearts would rather suggest, in this world, renewed and glorified — a world sacred as the scene of Christ's sufferings, and endeared to us as the cradle of our immortal life. Or, that great world, *Heaven* — the heaven of heavens — may gather many worlds around this one as the centre of God's most godlike work — may enclose the new and old, the near and far, in its wide embrace. "It doth not yet appear."

The *outward manner* of our final existence is also uncertain. That it will be blessed and glorious, freed from all that can hurt or annoy, we may well believe. That it will be proportioned to the future material frame, we may reasonably infer. We may calculate that, in the degree in which the incorruptible and immortal body shall excel the body of sin and death, our final home, with its scenes of beauty and grandeur, its landscapes and skies, shall surpass our dwelling-place on this earth. There is a *measure* in the works of God on which we can reckon, both in the patterns of things in the heavens, and in the heavenly things themselves.

But then we want the first step for our calculation, in the ignorance of the nature and properties of the resurrection-frame. Whether we may possess merely our present faculties, enlarged and strengthened, as a child's mind expands into a man's, or whether new faculties of perception may not be made to spring forth, as if sight were given to a blind man, we find it impossible to affirm. Conjecture on some of these points may be lawful, — for a certain class of minds it may be unavoidable, but it should be touched always lightly, ready to be surrendered for the better things in store, and with this saying of the apostle written over it, "It doth not yet appear."

Many of the *modes of thought and feeling*, in that life to come, perplex us. The great laws of mind and spirit must remain the same, because in them we are formed after the image of God. In these we are his offspring, and draw not simply from his *will*, but from his *nature*. Truth must for ever continue truth, and goodness eternally commend itself to the soul, else our training for the future life would be valueless, and our confidence in the reality of things shaken. We can never admit that the perceptions of the spiritual world will be reversed or essentially altered. But there may be large modifications, through the extension and elevation of our thoughts. We shall see the same spiritual objects, but from other positions, and with higher powers of judging. How far this may affect our views we cannot say. Can we think of any solution to the questions which sometimes torment our minds, — of foreordination and free-will, of the entrance of moral evil into God's world, and its terrible effects; and, if we

are never to gain a solution of these things, can we understand how our thoughts will attain repose? We cannot comprehend how the heart will remain tenderly human, and yet not be pained about things the very fear of which now tears it in sunder — how it will be able to carry in it some of our earthly memories, without a burning blush and an ineradicable sting. Every one of us is beset with his own particular doubts and fears, when we try to take the survey, but we all have them in some form, and they belong of necessity to our present position. We feel the temptation irresistible, at times, to venture within the veil, and penetrate into the conditions of our future being. But we are soon compelled to return. The atmosphere is too subtle, the azure is deep even to darkness, and from every endeavor we must come back to realize the lesson of our present state, that while Christians are now the sons of God, the heir is but a child.

It would be unsatisfactory enough if this were all that could be said and done. But the apostle puts this dark background upon the canvas, that he may set in relief a central scene and figure — Christ and our relation to Him. “When Christ shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” It matters little, the apostle says, what may be our ignorance about other things, what doubts may agitate us, what darkness lie on the edge of our horizon, if we can abide in the centre with this great Enlightener. He casts his illumination upon our future destiny as well as upon our present duty. There are three things promised us which are all connected with each other: — *Christ's manifestation* — “He shall appear.” *A full*

vision on our part—“We shall see Him as He is.” And *complete assimilation as the result*—“We shall be like Him.” We shall take these in their order.

I. The first thing promised is THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST—“Christ shall appear.” It is not merely that Christ shall be seen, but seen as never before. The word used is the same as that already employed. “It is not *manifest* what we shall be, but Christ shall be *made manifest*.” The simplest, and, at the same time, the most comprehensive way of thinking of this manifestation of Christ is to take as our guide the two-fold nature which makes Him a revelation to us in this world—his *humanity* and his *divinity*—and we shall attempt to keep these in view throughout the entire subject.

The first thought of the apostle was no doubt the *human nature* of Christ as appearing again to the eyes of his friends. He left with that nature, and promised so to return. “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.” The angels who appeared at his ascension comforted his disciples with the words, “Ye men of Galilee, this same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” It may be a subject of endless and most consoling thought to us to go over the whole history of his earthly life, and feel that it is not an eternally vanished thing. His first disciples are not to be the only favored men who ever saw Christ after the flesh. They will regain the view they lost, and we, if we are of them who love his appearing, shall share it with them. All the personal life which

He lived with them in friendship, so close and tender, — in the house and by the way, — beside the lake and among the hills of Galilee, — amid the shades of Bethany and in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, — shall be renewed again. “They shall walk with Him in white; they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.” It is true that there will be a great difference in many things. The Jerusalem above, golden and glorious, with the temple where they serve Him day and night, shall be something else than that where He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. The home of Bethany, where, if anywhere on earth, the love of the family which gathers round Christ was felt, is a very distant figure of the Father’s house of many mansions; and the goodly land of Canaan flowing with milk and honey, could have no glory, at its best, compared with the better country when that promise is fulfilled, — “Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.”

But this difference of circumstance and scene shall not make any difference in the true human nature of Christ. The disciple whom Jesus loved, who lay on his breast, did not expect to find it so. That nature will be changed no doubt, but not in being made less human. The likeness of sinful flesh will be removed — the marred visage and form of suffering, — but the look that turned on Peter — the face that rejoiced in that hour when He said, “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth” — the hands that blessed the children, — these shall remain, with all the soul of pity that was in them, and the beating heart which went

forth through them. The only difference will be that they shall *appear*. In this world they were hidden, seen only by the few, seen obscurely, realized feebly ; but, when He is made *manifest*, they shall be the centre and the sunlight of a ransomed world, the heritage of an innumerable company, and yet each one, as if by himself, shall have his view of, and portion in, the true human fellowship of the Son of God.

In the manifestation of Christ, the apostle must have thought also of his *Divine nature*. The evangelist John, beyond all the other sacred writers, delights to dwell on the conception that our human nature became the tabernacle of God, that He might dwell with men, and make them his people, and be their God. It was an incarnation in which the heart of God reached the most distant part of his spiritual creation, — a descent in which infinite greatness takes the deepest form of condescension, and infinite goodness the tenderest form of compassion. When a man's spirit has been opened to it, it reveals to him a universe of love, at the summit and base of which are Divine majesty and human misery, and the incarnate Son of God is seen touching both and bringing them together. This universe is its own witness to the man who has begun to live in it, and he who has not is still stumbling among graves, on which all the stars of the sky do not cast a ray of hope. "God is the LORD, who hath showed us light."

His first appearance in this nature was dim and overcast, both for the sake of the weak vision of fallen humanity ; and because suffering and sacrifice were necessary for the work He had to perform. Before He

could raise, He needed to redeem. When He became man "He emptied Himself" of his Divinity, as far as this was possible, — gathered the attributes of the Infinite within the limits of the finite, and shut up the rays of his uncreated glory in the likeness of sinful flesh. This very hiding, indeed, was a manifestation, but it was a manifestation to faith. The world did not recognize Him, and even his own had but a presentiment of the fulness of the Godhead which dwelt in Him bodily. The glimpses to the eye of sense were partial and momentary. They were given to the few, at rare and broken intervals, as in his miraculous interpositions — in his transfiguration — his appearance to dying Stephen, and to John in Patmos.

When He shall *appear* there may be expected a clear manifestation of the Divine nature through the human. It will not be necessary for him to "hold back the face of his throne, and spread his cloud upon it." The glory that He had with the Father before the world was shall be resumed, and, if we may venture to say it, *raised*, — for the glory of the Divine shall have added to it the grace of the human. The majesty, the power and wisdom which belong to Him as the Son of God, shall go forth unrestrained, in union with the tenderness and sympathy which fill his heart as the Son of Man. Every one who sees Him in that appearance will be able to take up the words in a higher sense than at first: "He dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

II. The second thing promised at the appearance of

Christ is a FULL VISION ON OUR PART: "We shall see Him as He is."

This implies a necessary and very great change on us, before we can bear and embrace, even in the smallest measure, the perfect manifestation of Christ. We may know something of the change by thinking of that twofold view of Christ of which we have spoken. The bodily frame of man must be fitted for the vision of Christ's glorified human nature, and man's soul fitted to understand more of the Godhead in Him.

There must certainly be a change in our *material frame* before we can sustain the view of Christ's exalted humanity. Some degree of affinity is necessary before there can be any fellowship. When Christ dwelt on earth in his body of weakness, his human friends could hold intercourse with Him. But so soon as He assumed his glorified form, He left them, and carried on his communication by his Spirit in their souls. When, on rare occasions, He withdrew the curtain and showed his glory, or (shall we not say?) a part of his glory, to one or two of his friends, we can perceive why it is that meanwhile He remains out of view. Stephen could look on Him only in death, and had his soul absorbed by the vision; Paul knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body, and John fell at his feet as dead. When men are brought to see Him as He is, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory would crush them to the dust, without that change which will make their bodies incorruptible and glorious as his own.

With this change on the body, there must be a corresponding one upon the *soul*, before there can

be the full vision of Christ. If we were allowed to conjecture, we might suppose that this education is part of the history of souls in the separate state. The body can rise at once to its highest perfection, but the law of spirit is that of advance by slow degrees. Freed from sin at its first entrance into Christ's presence, it may be gradually growing under his instruction, in the knowledge and experience which shall qualify it for union with the glorified body, and for those scenes of surpassing splendor and awe which await it in the resurrection-world. There may be a training going forward which shall make the great day of the Lord only the natural close in a long advance. If we think of such movements now within the veil, it may help us to account for what we reckon premature departure from this life. There is another world, of vaster thoughts and activities, which is making ready for the final coming of Christ. There are employments in that world for those whom we deplore. It is consolatory, also, to think that the great day shall not startle the blessed dead, if we may so speak of them, with affright. It shall dawn to them as the summer sun dawns. But however the preparation takes place, we may be confident that the soul's vision will be at last perfectly fitted to its object — "Christ as He is."

It will be a vision free from all *sin* in the soul. This will make it free from error, and from the doubt which has pain with it. It will be free from *partiality* — from that fruitful source of misconception and division, taking a portion of Christ and his truth for the whole. It will be a vision *intense and vivid*, not coldly outlined by the understanding, but veined and colored

by the heart — a sight in which the soul goes out to rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. And it will be a vision *close and intimate*. They shall gain their knowledge of God and Christ by quicker processes and shorter paths than here we do. Our views of Christ in this world are often cold and unimpressive, because we have to reason them out and justify them to our judgment before we can take the comfort of them to our heart. We think so much before we feel, that we are chilled even when we are convinced. We hold Christ questioning at the door till his locks are wet with the dews of the night ; and when we do admit Him, we scarcely feel warmth from his presence. Yet even here, there are times when his gospel will start up with sudden self-illumination, — when his Divine life makes itself so felt within that it gives the key to many a mystery, overpowers many a doubt, and makes us know something of the meaning of the eagle-eyed evangelist, — “In Him is life, and the life is the light of men.” These occasions, rare and brief, are premonitions of the opening of an inward eye which shall see truth more closely, when faith shall pass over into sight, and reason deepen into insight. It is not that we shall receive all truth by intuition, or by ecstatic vision, as some suppose, for if reason be a true part of our nature, it must have endless room for exercise. But close and instant vision of the truth — the eyesight of the spirit — shall belong more to our nature than it does here, and it will prevail above all when we look on Christ. The divine realities which lie behind the material face of things, and of which we have now only glimmerings, shall be seen steadfastly

and perfectly when we see the Divine in Him. How clear and close the vision must be when his promise is fulfilled, — “In that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in Me, and I in you. I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one.”

III. The third thing promised is, COMPLETE ASSIMILATION TO CHRIST: “We shall be like Him.”

The way in which it is to be accomplished is told us, — “*for* we shall see Him as He is.” It is the perfect view of Christ which gives perfect likeness to Him. To look on one we love brings a measure of similitude, and looking on Christ, even here, however dimly we may see Him, produces a degree of likeness. “Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” It advances in the world of spirits, in the growth of knowledge and love. But it is when Christ *appears* that the last great step is taken. However pure and happy may be the state of separate spirits, the Scripture teaches us that it is incomplete, and that they, as well as the whole creation, “wait for the manifestation of the sons of God.” When Christ appears in his complete nature, He becomes the model to whom they are conformed, body as well as soul. It is by letting our thoughts dwell on this that the future of our eternal history becomes less obscure to us.

Taking the order we have hitherto observed, we may think first of our *material frame*. It will be made like to Christ’s glorious body. This assures us that we shall have eternal relations to God’s material universe. It fixes a central home for our nature — we shall be

where Christ is. It makes us feel that there will be a fitness in our frame for our future dwelling-place. All that world forms itself into a harmony with Christ, and when we are like Him we shall be in harmony with it. It is not merely that Christ arranges for this by his omnipotent power put forth *on* us, but by a Divine life working *in* us. There is a view of the resurrection-world which sees it all as fashioned from without, as called into shape by Christ's voice,—even as a new world is called into being by the voice and look of spring summoning the dead seeds into life through its breezes and its sunshine. This is a true view, but there is still another way of looking at the resurrection-world — as taking its shape from within, from the Spirit of Christ rising up through it,— even as there is a consentaneous wakening of the dead seed to meet the voice of spring heard overhead. There is a voice from beneath to respond to the voice above — “Thou shalt call and I will answer.” It is the great law of God's world that where there is life there will in due time be a full and a fitting form for it, and when Christ has breathed into a soul his own divine life, it cannot rest until it has gained its perfect shape. It is to this that such a passage seems to point, “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies *by his Spirit that dwelleth in you*” (Rom. viii. 11).

In this world already we can see a dim foreshadowing of it. Man's material frame is adapted to his inward nature. His upward look and speaking eye are the outlet of his soul. As the soul grows nobler it

lets itself be seen more distinctly, even through features that have sprung from the dust of the ground. It thins and makes transparent evermore its walls of clay. There is a struggle of the inner life to assimilate the outer form to itself, which is prophetic of something coming. Above all, spiritual life will have its shape befitting it. Stephen's face, "like an angel's," was the natural blossom of his soul's life coming out in him before the common spring-time. He saw Christ sooner — that was all — and though death nipped the bloom for the moment, it shows us what shall be. The seeds of the earth struggle up every year, and represent in form and color the separate thoughts of divine beauty and kindness with which they are charged, and there is such a time coming for higher and more divine germs. Every soul shall take its own special image according to the grace that is in it. And yet, varied as they are, they shall have a common likeness, for they shall all be conformed to the one great Exemplar and Model, as the flowers that look up to the sun round themselves into the image of his orb, while each one borrows out of his beams some distinguishing hue of its own.

When the material frame is made like Christ's it indicates to us something not only of the forms of the future life, but of its active employments. The body in this present world serves two great purposes. It lets in God's external creation, with all its lessons of knowledge, upon the soul ; and it gives the soul power to go forth and imprint upon God's creation its own thoughts and volitions. When the Bible assures us that a body shall still be associated with man's soul, it

leads us to infer that God's material universe will be open to him in all its teachings; and that he will be able to impress it in some way with the marks of his own mind and will. Only it will be after a higher manner. The lordship of man over creation, which was granted him at first, will be heightened when it is restored through Christ (Heb. ii. 7). His redeemed shall be employed in studying God's works and ways, and in carrying out God's purposes in them. Through Him that loved them they shall be made kings and priests unto God, even his Father — kings and priests, living a life of royal dominion, that shall be one also of pure and blessed service, where power shall seek only the fulfilment of God's will and the welfare of his universe.

Besides the assimilation of the material frame, we cannot forget that there will be a likeness of *the spiritual nature*. This thought has been underlying all that we have said. The source of heaven's blessedness and power is the likeness of the soul to Christ. He is the image of the unseen Father, who has taken the copy from the Divine side, and transferred it to the human for our example. He has removed by his life and death all the guilt which barred our way to God, and He has secured all the Spirit's power to make that image ours. Slowly we are drawn to his image here by the cords of love, as they strengthen their hold on us; but the image at best remains incomplete and dim. When He shall appear "we shall see his face, and his name shall be on our foreheads." It shall be deeper — *in our souls*; and all of God's truth and grace that can be communicated to a creature shall enter into the

depth of the spiritual nature through Christ. If the active soul finds scope for work in God's material universe, the Mary-like spirit which delights to sit at the feet of Christ and hear his word, shall have unrebuked leisure in the heavenly home. We may trust that in some way the sisters, *Service* and *Meditation*, will interchange gifts, and be perfectly at one when they reach his higher presence.

Access to the person of Christ shall then give the most direct access to God Himself. Christ's heart shall be in the world of the soul what his glorified nature is in the material creation—a resting-place for thought,—a central home where we touch and embrace the *personality* of Him who is infinite. It is the hold of Christ now by faith that is to save man from that terrible spectre which broods over some, an infinite force without an infinite Father; and it is in the presence of Christ that throughout eternity God's fatherhood will be seen and felt as in its inmost shrine. The soul will feel here that God *is*, and is *its own*, and rise evermore to understand a higher sense in the words, "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." In this progress into a fuller knowledge and possession of God, Christ shall be the guide. They have set the Lord ever before them, and they shall follow Him whithersoever He goeth. He came from the infinite into the finite, not only that He might save his lost heritage, but that He might conduct God's children up through the finite into the infinite for ever. He is the "first-born of every creature" (Col. i. 15),—the "Prince of the whole creation,"—who has placed Himself at its head, and is leading it up to God, in

whom alone it can find its end and its joy. Yet let us never forget the view of Him which belongs to our world, and which must send its strengthening and reviving look through all the holy universe of God. He leads up God's creation with the voice of mercy on his lips, with the memory of suffering in his heart; and the front ranks of his innumerable army raise their song, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory for ever." We thank God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it is his purpose that his restored and unfallen children should not only rise into the brighter light of his face, but enter into the deeper love of his heart. Grace no less than truth comes to us through Jesus Christ. The Lamb in the midst of the throne shall lead them not only to the "great and high mountain" whence the glory of God can be discerned, but to "the fountains of living waters," — to the everlasting springs in the valleys which run among the hills. Here is the heart of his revelation for us. Let our heart repose on it. As our view of God and his universe widens, this shall grow with it to dissipate every doubt and soothe every fear. Here we see but a little bay of the great ocean, and tremble when the throb of its tide strikes our shore; but when we are on its full bosom we shall be upborne by it, nay, rather, be upborne by Christ himself, and possess in Him "the perfect love which casts out fear." It is the glorious LORD who will be unto us a "place of broad rivers and streams;" and, with the infinite "depth of the riches both of his wisdom and knowledge," we shall feel that "neither height nor depth shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Augustine concludes an address to God in these words, — “And what can any one say when he speaks of Thee? Yet woe to those who are silent, since even the most eloquent are dumb.” The words are not less fitted to express our feeling when we think of that *eternity* which has been called the *lifetime* of God, and which, when shared with us, becomes our *immortality*. Every single mind can but throw out its own ray, which is so poor a guide for others, since it is felt to be so scanty for ourselves. And scanty as it is, it is also so shifting, — varying as the atmosphere of the soul changes, and as the angle alters from which we take our little view. Yet here we feel that we stand in the true centre, — striving to look at it through Christ. It is Christ the human and Divine who is to lead man’s soul to God, — and man’s thoughts out of time into eternity. The true knowledge of Him now contains the germ of all we need to satisfy our nature. It requires no change save expansion and perfection to fit it for the eternal life.

We have pursued the order of presenting first the human side of Christ, and then the Divine; but we trust it has been made clear that the knowledge of Christ comes to us through the *soul-side* in ourselves. We must begin by knowing Him spiritually as the source of pardon and purity, — commencing a new life within, which goes forward, strengthening and rising, — a life of which heaven is not the reward, but the natural and necessary continuation. We cannot close so great a subject without seeking to point out briefly why God has chosen such a way for leading us on to a future world.

First of all, God has used it as a *means of spiritual test and training*. When man constructs a religion for himself, the material side of the future is made the prominent or the exclusive one. In the Divine religion, the material side is not overlooked — for it also is true, — but it is made the fitting attendant and shadow of the spiritual, as the outward creation is the shadow of God himself. Every thing about our future lies in having our soul right. The gospel bears on it the mark and sign-manual of *the Father of spirits*.

There is a test here which tries every man, whether he will seek God for what He *is*, and not merely for what He can *give*. God *gives* to the body, — He *is* to the soul. He will not bribe us back to allegiance by the promise of material benefits. This would be unworthy of Him, and hurtful to us, for it would only strengthen that love of self which is the root of all sin. That soul finds heaven which seeks God in it — to which it would be no heaven if God were absent, — which would search its many mansions as Mary sought Christ's grave, and when it found not Him, would stand without the door weeping, — “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.” “Whom have I in heaven but thee?”

The training for this is gradual, and can only come through spiritual means. Do not be discouraged if you have not the full feeling of it, but seek to have the conviction that it is right you should have it, and struggle evermore to rise to it. There is a balance of forces in the works of God. Man's body is attached to this earth by the power of gravitation, in such a way that he can walk securely on the surface and yet look

upward. He is not dragged to the ground by its dead power, nor is he ready to be driven from it by every gust of wind. God has similarly proportioned the forces of the world to come. They are not so strong as to detach us from this world and its duties, and yet, if we are open to their influences, they are strong enough to prevent us cleaving to the dust. Here, too, we may walk the world's surface while we have heaven in view. There is this difference only, that into our spiritual position our own choice enters; and as our choice strengthens, our upward look is more decided, and the higher world becomes more and more the one to which we feel we finally belong.

In this way we become certain that there is a heaven, and that we are on the road to it. The grand method for being sure of the immortality of the soul is to be sure that *we have* a soul, and this assurance is gained by having a share of God's life in it. It is no wonder that some doubt the soul's immortality when they make so little of their soul, and neglect its true life, till not a pulse-stroke of it can be felt. Let us not be tormented so much seeking proofs and repelling objections outside of us. Men need not say — "Lo here, or lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you." All arguments will never prove the future life to a man in whom its hidden life is not stirring already; but let a man have this, and his soul may come to such a state that he shall feel there can be no place for it but the bosom of God, and that he is as sure of reaching heaven as if he were already within the gate.

The next thing in this way of revealing the future is, that *it is a means of quieting our thoughts*. There are

some minds which trouble themselves with the fear lest their present life and its natural affections should be irrecoverably lost in the future world. The place and circumstances seem so indefinite, and must be so different from the present, that they are tossed in uncertainty. Shall they meet their friends again so as to know them, or shall they not be separated from them by the vast expanses of that world, and by the varied courses they may have to pursue? We may have our thoughts about these things tranquillized, if we bring them into connection with Christ. Our eternal life begins in union with Him, and it must for ever so continue. If we are gathered round Him in heaven, and know Him, and are known of Him, this will insure acquaintance with one another. It is strange that it could ever be made matter of doubt. And when we think that He gave us human hearts and took one into his own breast, — that He bestowed on us human homes and affections, and solaced Himself with them, — we need not fear that He will deny us our heart's wish, where it is natural and good. Variety of pursuit and temperament need no more separate us there than it does here, and his own name for heaven, — the Father's house of many mansions, — speaks of unity as well as diversity, of one home, one roof, one paternal presence.

There are others to whom the thought of infinite progress in an eternal life becomes an almost overpowering burden. Though fired by the conception, they feel giddy when they think of the heights to which the soul may climb. The far-off goal stretches for ever on, and our present position disappears in an

endless advance. It is then that the thought of Christ may enter to give us repose, in eternity as now. The farthest progress can never take us from his presence, nor weaken the sense of his sympathy. When the soul is wearied with thought, it is in sympathy that it finds rest. There are times when this is the yearning cry of our nature, — *rest, only rest,* — and as John on his Master's bosom, so every one shall find repose of spirit there, the mystery being that it shall be for *every one*, as God even now is an entire God to us all. This presence of Christ through all the expanse of the future will be like the ark of the covenant which accompanied God's people through the wilderness, and made it everywhere a safe and pleasant home. Possessed of this companionship, the centre of the soul's repose will be perpetually near. "And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto Him, If thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence" (Exod. xxxiii. 14).

The last thing in this revelation of the future is, that *it makes Christ the centre of the soul's affections and aims*. Darkness is left brooding, or shadows sent flitting over the great eternity, that Christ may stand forth in the centre distinct and clear. God's heaven is made to grow out of Christ, that Christians may not have a single thought about it in which He is not present. And it is presented thus, not only to Christians, but to all men, that when they are drawn or compelled to think of the future, Christ may rise to view with his words, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me," and "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise

cast out." It is to assure them that the gate of heaven is as wide as the outspread arms of Christ upon his cross, which are his welcome to a whole guilty world. Its unbarred and unlimited door is yearning for the wandering and lost, as his heart did when He wept over them, and sorrowfully reproached their own impenitent will as the only obstacle, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life."

There must come times when men think of these things. The common eddies of life may wheel round their own trifles, but the deep currents of the soul all bear it to its deepest interests — to death and judgment, to God and life eternal. And when the powers of the world come to lay their arrest on a man, when time dwindles, when the soul whispers clear of its nature and destiny, when eternity opens in its awful proportions, it is God's purpose that there should be no place left for a man to flee to but Christ. He darkens all the sky save where He appears, — spreads a vast trackless void around, and leaves the soul with Christ alone. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

And when at last a man is forced to quit his hold of all the known, and venture forth into that void, who can give the soul a footing in the empty place, and bring it safe to the shore of a new world? There is but One. The ship is tossed until the morning watch, but there can be no calm around, nor peace within, till He appear. God has willed that morning should break only at His coming, and calm fall in the track of his footsteps. He who "made the seven stars and Orion, who treadeth the waves of the sea" — who has

his throne in the upper calm, and his feet on the lower storms,—is still walking the waters of death for the help of them who love his appearing. However dark the sky, let us sweep it with earnest gaze till He is seen. Nor shall we search in vain. The sky is obscured that He may come out in saving and more bright relief.

The waters may rise even to the soul, the gloom of death-shade gather over it, and the heart may so fail as to cry out for fear in presence of the Deliverer. But the ear that has learned to recognize his voice will hear the words of the Son of Man, “It is I, be not afraid,” — words that assure us of a kindred nature, and a gracious purpose. Then shall we receive Him gladly, and be immediately at that land whither we are going,—“We shall behold his face in righteousness, and shall be satisfied when we awake with his likeness.”



✓ a testimony to the role of
immortality - b. 2-2-2

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