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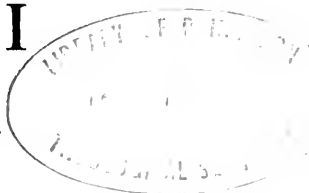
De profundis clamavi

DE PROFUNDIS CLAMAVI

And Other Sermons

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BY

JOHN HUNTER, D.D. (GLAS.)

TRINITY CHURCH, GLASGOW

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER AND MOTHER
I DEDICATE
THIS VOLUME OF SERMONS

PREFACE

THE following sermons, except for verbal corrections and the restoration of paragraphs omitted in delivery, are printed just as they were preached. I entirely agree with those who urge that the wide difference between the literary and the oral style makes sermons, generally speaking, unsuitable for publication. When preached they have usually done their work. I do not think that the sermons in this volume are any exception to the rule. I publish them because I have been often urged to do so by those who heard them. They make no pretension, at least, to finished literary form. The personal appeals which distinguish the sermon from the essay or lecture I have left untouched.

The sermons contained in this volume do not form an entirely consecutive course, but were both written and preached at different times ; hence the repetition here and there of thought and phrase. They are held together, however, by the conviction that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." The liberty I have sought for myself and others during a long ministry has been liberty for progress in Christ.

We are not straitened in Him. In His name we are committed to an undeparting inspiration and a progressive revelation.

This little volume is also meant to be of the nature of a testimony. I have always maintained that keeping the mind open and free, loyal to the broadest findings of modern Christian thought, does not necessarily involve the loss in one's self of a deep and tender piety, nor in one's preaching of the evangelical spirit and the power of direct, earnest, and practical appeal. With the theological liberalism which finds little space for the culture of the devout life, and with the dogmatism of inverted orthodoxy, which has lost "the passion for souls," I have no sympathy.

One or two discourses on Inspiration and related subjects, which have been crowded out of this volume, will appear in a second series which I contemplate publishing next year.

I desire to make acknowledgment to the editor of *The Christian World* for permission to make use of an article on the Atonement contributed by me to that journal a few years ago.

I am also indebted to an old friend, Mr William Whitwell of Dorridge, for revising proof-sheets.

JOHN HUNTER.

TRINITY CHURCH, GLASGOW,
May 25, 1908.

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DE PROFUNDIS CLAMAVI

“ Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice. O Israel, hope in the Lord ; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plenteous redemption.”—PSALM CXXX. 1, 2, 7.

I. THE DEPTHS OF LIFE

THE ancient maxim, “ Self-knowledge is the beginning of all knowledge,” has a nobler significance than that which it often bears. It is true, in the sense of St. Augustine’s memorable words, “ If thou sinkest deep enough into the human, thou wilt find the Divine.” Not only around us, but within us, there is all the mystery and wonder of the universe. Mind and heart and soul are deeper than we know. They draw their life from infinite sources.

Thomas Carlyle, whose “ gospel ” has been the inspiration of much of the best thinking and best striving of two generations, made a commonplace of the fact that every great man is a miracle. But one need not be “ great ” in order to be a miracle. There

is a Divine marvel in every common man. Our heroes and saints are not exceptional, but representative men. They reveal and interpret us to ourselves, disclose the depths of our being, the desires of our nature, and the possibilities of our life ; their greatness is a promise and a prophecy—the justification, not the condemnation, of our aspirations and hopes.

Our human nature and human life have their depths, and not in anything are they less understood than in the depths which belong to them. Their superficial aspects are for ever hiding from us their deeper realities. What calls itself knowledge of men—acquaintance with their ordinary thoughts, passions, motives, and ways, with their various humours, caprices, follies, and weaknesses—is not knowledge of man, of the inner and real man which the outer man as often conceals as reveals.

We speak at times of “a shallow man.” But is there any such man anywhere ? There are only too many men everywhere who are living on the surface of their nature, keenly alive to their earth-born wants and to the capacities of human existence for work and pleasure, and whose days are largely the record of mean ambitions and strivings. But to judge by appearances is nearly always misleading. The acutest judges of character are often at fault, and none go more frequently and lamentably astray in their reckoning than those who boast most confidently of their knowledge of men. In the so-called shallow man we may perceive, if we look

intently and sympathetically enough, what is not shallow, and find, especially in those revealing hours when the tragic forces of existence sweep into his life, some suggestion of the latent power which needs the fiery storm to throw it up to the surface. We are often only passing judgment upon ourselves, upon our want of thought, imagination, and insight, when we proclaim our fellows to be lacking in those elements to which the great and deep things of life make their appeal. In the circle in which we live and move there would be many rich discoveries for anyone with fine imaginative power, skilled to see into

“The depths of human souls—
Souls that appear to have no depth at all
To careless eyes.”

There is a well-known poem by Matthew Arnold entitled “The Buried Life”—a poem full of haunting music and rare introspective power. It is a picture of many a soul, and it is not difficult to fill in from experience the outline which it supplies. We all have the power of living so completely upon the surface of our souls as to be ignorant of what is hidden in their depths. It is, indeed, a large part of the pathos and tragedy of life that we are so disobedient to the oracle which bids us know ourselves. We either do not care for self-knowledge, or imagine we have it in such abundance that we can swear by it at times—“as well as I

know myself !” But there are moments when we have glimpses of what we are and may be, of hitherto unknown capacities and powers, and from beneath our conscious life there rise the murmuring voices of a deeper—a buried life.

“ Yet still from time to time, vague and forlorn,
 From the soul’s subterranean depth upborne
 As from an infinitely distant land,
 Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
 A melancholy into all our day :

.
 A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
 And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again,
 The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain.”

It is, nevertheless, true that many people here and everywhere are living superficial and shallow lives. They have either not come to themselves, they are still crude undeveloped beings, to the great human powers and affections their vital progress has not yet advanced ; or they have fallen away from their true life after it had been once and well awake, and it is now deeply buried beneath passion and pride, concealed under the thick crust of a selfish and worldly nature. But in them all slumber the powers which make of the sons of men the sons of God, and the education of their being is the unforgetting care of Him from whom they come and to whom they go. In vain do they seek to escape from

His discipline, and in vain do they seek peace elsewhere than in His will. In the natural movement of their days, and quietly as the night dawns upon a sleeping world, or swiftly and sharply in one of those

“strong, rushing hours

That do the work of tempests in their might,”

they will be awakened out of their vulgar ways of living, be made aware of the depths of their souls, and pass into a new world of experience and knowledge.

St. Augustine complained of the people of his day : “No man cares to descend into himself.” It is a complaint which some of our wisest teachers are repeating in our day. Few there be who care to go down to the depths, to have their self-complacency disturbed, and be made to feel deeply and think deeply. Most men have no inwardness. They live altogether in the outward. The brooding, meditative gift is not in them. In past times men suffered from excess of introspective thought, but the disease which is brought on by too much self-reflection is not in our day a widespread epidemic. Too much looking within is not a temptation of the modern man. There is no country less known to him than his own soul. “After years of life together,” he might often confess, “my soul and I are strangers yet.” He is afraid of deeper experiences, and reluctant to be on terms of close intimacy with himself. He is quite at home in the visible and tem-

poral order of things, but he is a pilgrim and a stranger in what the Scottish seer called "the Eternities." From the message of the spiritual life he turns away as if it touched no secret spring in his heart. It is the voices without, not the voices within, to which he cares to listen. Even in religion, though interested, and perhaps keenly interested, in the problems of its external life, in its ecclesiastical and theological controversies, in its sectarian developments and in its social and philanthropic activities, he is unmoved by its inward and spiritual power.

It is often a sorrowful surprise to the earnest religious teacher to discover how slightly interested many professedly religious people are in religion, and what a trifling portion of their time they give to its serious study. Thorough, perhaps, in everything else, they are content to be superficial in all their knowledge of the verities upon which rest the world that now is and that which is to come. Hence their readiness to run after crazes and phantasies, and the little it costs them when brought into contact with aggressive unbelief to give up altogether their religious faith. They are carried away for the most part by scraps of knowledge which have come to them from newspapers, magazines, and popular novels. They have "outgrown" what they had never really grown into, and abandoned what they never truly possessed. There is a saying of Renan's which ought to be well pondered: "In reality,

few persons have a right to be unbelievers." There can be little doubt that much of the fading interest in spiritual and eternal things which has marked the days that are passing over us, and much also of our scepticism and unbelief, are due to the want of inwardness, to the slight knowledge men in general have of the depths of their life, and to atrophy of the spiritual senses through neglect. There can be little doubt, also, that this neglect of the inner life is the explanation of the falling back of many in recent years upon traditional ecclesiasticism—the reverting to a lower type of religion which we once supposed had been left behind. Men want a certain amount of assured religious belief, but they want it without any high and prolonged spiritual effort on their part. But as long as they remain strangers to their own souls and are content to let others feel, think, and believe for them, they must be more or less ignorant of the reality of religion. We are so made that we cannot believe with a real believing anything which does not answer in some measure to our consciousness and experience. The ultimate appeal of religion is to the soul. Outside of the soul, the surest and most convincing evidence of the realities of faith can never be found. The divinity within us must be awake to discern the divinity that descends out of heaven and is revealed in the world and life. Without the personal assurance which is the result of the actual satisfaction of our spiritual needs and yearnings, we are not able to

appreciate the great testimony to God and to the things of God borne by the religious experience of mankind—the collective experience which is named “authority”—a natural and genuine authority by which our spiritual life is enriched and we are freed from the limitation and narrowness of the mere individual standpoint. Also, we can never outside of the soul find the true and permanent ground and bond of religious sympathy and fellowship. On the surface we are divided, often to all appearance hopelessly divided, but in the depths we are one. Debate and argument, views and opinions, drive and keep us apart, but in the depths we find not only ourselves but our brethren—brethren breathing out the same aspirations and prayers, having the same passion for God, the same need of God, and the same joy in God. It is true of religion even in its intellectual aspect and expression, that those who are able to go beneath the surface and have the power of insight discover unities underlying apparently serious differences, but this is still more true of religion as an experience. Spiritual experience—the experience of the life of God in the soul—is the highest liberalising influence, and the most effective and satisfying. It gives one the power to understand and interpret many religious dialects, and to discern here and now beneath diversities of temperament and training, cult and creed, the communion of saints, the universal Church of God—the Church of the Spirit.

It seems to me what we most need to bestir ourselves about in these passing days is not so much the broadening as the deepening of religion, its deepening in our own souls and in the souls of our fellows. In its thoughts of God and His ways with man, religion has expanded wonderfully everywhere since the middle of the last century ; but religion must have depth as well as breadth. The breadth that does not proceed from depth is hardly worth having—it is certainly not worth crossing the Atlantic to recognise and honour. The intensive movement is more vital to progressive religion than any expansive or forward movement. The course of true religion is, indeed, most outward and onward when it is most inward. Great religious reformations ever date from the quickening and deepening of faith in the souls of men. Their inspiration and energy are drawn from deeper depths than the merely argumentative and systematising powers of the mind. It is perhaps the most serious defect of the liberal movement in religion that it is so much more an intellectual than a spiritual movement. It is the constant approach to the things of God primarily through the intellect which sterilises much of liberal religion everywhere, makes of the churches lecture halls rather than temples of the Spirit, and their pulpit a rabbinised pulpit for the exposition of philosophical ideas and doctrines rather than a place for the delivery of a message from God to man. We must go deeper.

Out of and to the depths of life we must speak. Mere affinity of opinion and belief is far too outward and contracted to satisfy men who care much for universal religion, and hope and pray and work for the Universal Church. Our great facts, the things which in our hearts we all most regard, are in the depths, not on the surface. We are religious, not because the credentials of this or that form of religion bears the strain of critical inquiry and satisfies our critical reason, but because we have great moral and spiritual needs and experiences to which we believe our religion is a full and perfect counterpart, corresponding in a deep and manifold way with what we know of ourselves and of life.

To the soul, then, we must return. Out of it have come religions, bibles, prayers, liturgies, psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and it is still full of the elements of revelation. It is an unexhausted and inexhaustible world. The outward universe, the star-sown abysses of space, have none of those mysterious and unsearchable depths which we find in our spiritual being. When we gaze on

“The splendour of the morning sky,
And all the stars in company,
And think, How beautiful it is!
Our soul says, There is more than this.”

And there *is* more than this. God is, indeed, immanent in the world of nature and in the order of life, but

He is still more intimately present in the soul of man. Our spiritual being relates us immediately to the Infinite and Eternal Spirit, and it is this divine depth of root and resource which is the explanation of all our aspirations and the justification of the most daring hopes we can cherish of illimitable development.

II. THE CRY FOR GOD OUT OF THE DEPTHS

I. The cry for God is the natural utterance of the awakened soul of man in every land and age—the cry of man whenever and wherever he freely speaks out of the depths of his nature, an aspiration which all history confesses. It may not always be an intelligent or conscious cry, but a seeker after God man has always been and must ever be, because from God he comes, begotten, not made, and with a nature so constituted that only in God can he find his full and final satisfaction and rest. The surface of his life may often appear to say one thing and its depths quite another thing, but it is the cry from the depths which reveals what he truly is and what he most needs. It is his inmost wants and desires, not his hard, cold sense and keen understanding, which read most rightly the secret of his life. It is not to the surface of his life his real spiritual needs belong, but only those poor selfish cravings which are often mistaken for them by ill-instructed minds. Outwardly he may seem to long and cry for other things more

than for the presence of God, and to find his peace and joy in them ; but when his soul is moved and searched, and the fountains of its great deep are broken up, in all those crises which throw light on the inner condition and movement of his being, the cry for God is seen to be fundamental, and his longing to connect his life in some way with the life of the invisible and eternal world, an irrepressible longing, which tends ever to rise into a strong and intense passion.

In the eighteenth century some clever men found an easy settlement of the religious problem by dismissing religion as the invention of priests, forgetting that it was the religious instincts and wants which made the priest and his institutions at all possible. Man is as distinctively a religious as he is a social being—religious for the same reason as he is domestic, political, intellectual, and artistic. It is his nature unfolding to divine realities and relations, seeking its corresponding objects and satisfactions. The beginnings of his religion, like the beginnings of all other things in his history, may be dim and vague and feeble, but it ought to be judged as we judge the other things, by its essential quality and most perfect expression, and not by its early and rude forms, not by the physical beginnings of spiritual instincts and the sense-conceptions and sense-language of primitive religious feelings. It is not independent of his mental and moral development, of his general condition and culture. It grows as he

grows. It is not something grafted upon his nature from without but comes out of his nature—a component part of himself, which he must train and develop. Revelation is necessary to its purifying and perfecting, but revelation does not and cannot create the religious capacity or instinct. For a revelation to be received and understood there must be that in man to which it appeals—something in the depths of his personal being akin to what is in the infinite and unsearchable depths of God. Matthew Arnold used to say that religion, if it is to continue, must be based, not on traditions and documents, but on its natural truth ; and, of course, that is so, if by its natural truth we mean its correspondence with the fundamental facts of life and with the generalised experience of mankind. We need have no hesitation in affirming boldly its natural truth when we call to mind that there is nothing in the history of our race older and more universal, more central and commanding, than religion. Its many and various forms, the great historical religions and the older religions out of which they grew, all have their roots struck deep in human nature. Whenever and wherever man begins to reach the truly human level, he begins to worship, and the more human he becomes, the more do the sentiments of awe and reverence, dependence and submission, reinforced by the larger trusts which longer and wider experience give him, become natural to him. It is just because he is what he is that

his spiritual attitude is that of a believer and worshipper; and had he no other Bible than his own soul, he would never be without a living witness for God. In its wonder and awe, in its fear and hope, in its sense of goodness and truth and beauty, in its aspiration after perfection, in its shame because of failure, in its joy in obedience and service and sacrifice, and in all its idealising yearnings which never in these mortal years get their right and complete command over the life, he who watches and studies wisely and patiently will discover God, and from the sympathetic observation of all such experiences have the persuasion confirmed that religion is natural to man, and that the more of God man takes into his life the more natural he becomes. It would be easier to deny the tendency of matter to a common centre, or the tendency of man to draw to his fellows, than to deny the native tendency and movement of the human soul to God. Its only language may be a cry, but how full of meaning and prophecy is that cry!—the cry of the soul for God as it comes to us down all the ages, from every people and from every literature which utters the mind of a people, and from the noblest spirits of every race interpreting most clearly the voice of humanity as it speaks through them. “All men,” said Homer, “cry after the gods.” In “every nation,” said St. Paul, “men seek after the Lord, if haply they may feel after Him and find Him.” “The human soul,” said Tertullian,

“is naturally Christian. The testimonies of the soul [to God] are as true as they are simple, as simple as they are universal, as universal as they are natural, as natural as they are divine.” “If we will but listen attentively,” said Max Müller, “we can hear in all religions a groaning of the spirit, a struggle to utter the unutterable, a longing after the Infinite, a love of God.”

There is not, I am persuaded, even a touch of exaggeration in the statement that the greatest discovery of the nineteenth century was the discovery of the ancient religions,—of what men before Christ and before Moses, in a dim and far past and in countries like Egypt and India, thought about God and life. It has made us hear clearly, rising from every land and from every age, from men divided by leagues of space and centuries of time, ignorant and enlightened, mean and noble, the cry out of the depths of the soul for God, even the living God.

Everywhere in our own age as well as in past ages may be heard the cry for God. It is the advanced spiritual desire of humanity. To-day, as yesterday, out of the depths of his soul man cries to God, however much his noisy passions, follies and cares, and the tumult of the world, may make inaudible the voice of his deeper mind and deeper heart. It was once said by a celebrated English lawyer of our time that the man who could not get on without religion, who could

not occupy his mind with love, friendship, business, politics, science, art, literature, and travel, must be a poor kind of creature. It is, on the contrary, the man who can be wholly satisfied with outward and earthly things apart from God who is the poor kind of creature, living upon the surface of his nature, with the energies of his spirit still dormant, or so suppressed and overborne that they are in danger of dying out. To be truly a man is to have infinite capacity for God, to have desires, affections, and needs which the things of civilisation and culture cannot satisfy, which can only be satisfied in communion with the Divine. Man, be he what he may, is made to be a seeker after God ; and, because he cannot escape from himself, he cannot escape from God. The cry for God is heard as soon as he comes to himself, and it becomes clearer and more persistent, more passionate and pathetic, the further he goes into himself. In his more careless moods he may play with doubts, amuse himself with negative views and cheap rationalism, and treat religion as if it were merely something to be examined, pulled to pieces, and criticised ; but out of the depths of his unbelief the unconscious faith of the soul never fails to make itself heard. In spite of crowds of easy livers here and everywhere and the extraordinary supply of the means of excitement, which, giving vivid interest and attractiveness to the outward life, tends to stupefy and deaden the religious sense, men cannot live utterly contented

without God. The way they are caught now and again by all kinds of fanaticism proves that the promise and potency of religious faith are still there. It is also an impressive fact that behind all the surface play of the forces in modern life that tend to obscure or even to challenge and deny the fundamental religious beliefs, the religious nature of man may be seen asserting itself—and often in strange ways. The philosopher's bold statement that man becomes more and more religious is not without warrant. The religious affections may be changing, here and there, their objects and modes of expression; but they are not losing their energy. The phenomena which are often regarded as signs and proofs of religious decay are more justly interpreted as religion passing through a process of transformation. There are movements of thought and feeling, far below the upper tides and disturbing agitations which we see and chronicle, that bear silent but strong witness to the upward-looking instincts and impulses of humanity. There is, as has often been pointed out, hardly a form of the deeper thinking and deeper living of our time which does not reveal the inherent and indestructible religiousness of man. The ideal substitutes for God upon which our more serious and cultivated unbelievers have been spending their devotion these many days prove how deep in the soul and unescapable are the religious instincts and needs. The cry for truth, for right, for justice, for love, is a cry for God. The

moments in which men long and strive most purely and intensely for the triumph of truth and justice and love are moments of unconscious prayer—the prayer which includes in its sweep all our unselfish desires and yearnings and strivings. “All my springs are in thee,” said the Hebrew psalmist. God is at the root of all our ethical aspirations and purely human enthusiasms, and to Him they lead. Without Him they remain partial and fragmentary ; only in Him do they find their centre and unity, their strength and stay.

2. And thus are we led to observe that the cry for God is the aspiration of the whole nature of man when he is true to it. It is not an isolated thing, the expression of one faculty, a single experience ; it is in the structure and strain of our being, in its living unity of powers and tendencies and manifold needs. In all the faculties and affections of our complex nature we are created for God, and through them all we are meant to rise upward to Him.

God is a demand of the intellect as well as a longing and need of the heart. Reason seeks God as much as any other of our nobler human powers, and in the fully and symmetrically developed man it is ever seen to be a faculty of reverence. Out of the depths of all true and earnest thought on the mystery of the world and life the quickened mind aspires to God, rises instinctively to the one supreme and universal Mind which the order of things bespeaks, and in which alone it can

find a satisfaction proper to its characteristic nature. Thought as it deepens confirms and justifies our own religious aspirations and trusts. You remember Shelley's line,

"O thou Immortal Deity

Whose throne is in the depth of human thought,"

and the philosopher's saying that, while a little knowledge inclineth men to atheism, depth of knowledge brings them back to God. Because in mind as well as in heart and conscience man is kindred to God, the full development of the mind must lead at last to God, and God, we may be sure, has not so made the world that the honest and thorough study of it will lead men away from Himself. The complete witness of the human reason to God is yet to come, but God is its inevitable goal. The end of all deep thinking must be to put men more and more into the mood and attitude of worship. Much of the intellectual movement of our times may indicate instability and superficiality, but in its more serious forms it is the modern spirit dissatisfied with old and familiar explanations of the material and spiritual universe, yet seeking the innermost truth and reality of things, crying in its own way with the ancient Hebrew for God and confessing with the Christian saint that it is restless until it finds rest in Him who is the truth itself.

And what has been said of deep thinking may be said of every form of deep feeling. It must render us

religious, deep calling unto deep. The sense of beauty which makes poets and painters, and is more or less in all men, belongs to the image of God in man and is meant to put us in touch with the spiritual and eternal in all created things, and to raise us into communion with Him to whom St. Anselm prayed as the Absolute Beauty. Admiration, the power of perceiving, appreciating, and enjoying things lovely and great and wonderful, rises into adoration. Seas and skies and mountains, the dawn of day, a night of stars, kindle in the susceptible soul the sentiments of worship. The feeling which noble music produces is of the nature of aspiration ; it is a longing toward some divine good, consciously or unconsciously a longing toward Him who is the source and centre of all good and all harmony. It has been said of the highest kind of music that the hearing of it enables one to realise his immortality. It touches and awakens some inner sense which our common experience only partially satisfies ; it fills the mind with those great and high feelings and with those far-reaching thoughts that pass beyond all earthly bounds and wander through eternity. And the same is true of all the deeper parts and passions of our being. Our human affections at their best have their flower and fruit in spiritual and heavenly aspirations. Our human love of goodness stirs in us the divine love, and is included in it, and opens our nature to God as the sun opens the earth in spring. Our desire of excellence

—excellence of character and excellence of work—bears witness to God and is a cry after His perfection. Our moral aims and strivings are fulfilled in religion. Our religion is the fulfilment of the deepest instincts, affections, needs, and experiences of our nature. As the fire seeks the sun and the river the ocean, so does our life in all its deeper and larger aspects move towards Him who is its beginning and its end. We must have God to understand and explain our own nature and life. He is the answer to all that is good and best in ourselves—to our powers of intellect, imagination, affection, conscience, to our faculties of worship, aspiration, and hope. “When I awake,” said the Hebrew saint, “I shall be satisfied with God.” “The life of man,” said one of the fathers of the Christian Church, “is the vision of God.” Out of the depths our souls, as they awake, cry for God; and only with God can they be finally satisfied—only in communion with Him, spirit with spirit, can be found the fulness of life and joy.

3. The cry for God is an importunate cry in all the critical moments and experiences of life. What is true of the depths of our nature is true of the depths of our life as it is lived in the world. In its deep places, where we come face to face with its serious realities, we are taught what we truly are and are made aware of our divine relations and needs. Under the pressure of critical emergencies the most fundamental

things in our life come to the surface. In our great and sore straits, if at no other time, the soul reveals its divine kinship and lifts its cry to God.

It is true that our deep experiences are not all sorrowful. Joy may be as profound as grief, and out of the depths of joy every sound-hearted man breathes forth his gratitude, not merely for good achieved or found, but good received. In all its supreme moments life turns inevitably to God. In all our deep experiences God has a part, and almost in spite of ourselves we recognise it.

But be glad and grateful as we may and ought to be for all that brightens and sweetens life, yet as things are now it is sorrow more than happiness that drives us to God. We have a nature endowed with infinite capacities for pain, and there is no escape but an ignoble one from some form of the pain which makes the cross the true symbol of a large part of every man's life. "Perhaps to suffer," wrote the Swiss theologian, Vinet, in one of his letters, "is nothing else than to live deeply. Love and sorrow are the conditions of a profound life." A truer word was never spoken. The tragedy in which we live is meant to educate us. There would indeed be no understanding of life at all did we not know from experience that in life's depths we receive our best teaching and training. Out of the depths have come the finest poetry, the finest music, the finest speech of the world. "The Bible owes its place in literature,"

said Emerson, "not to miracles, but to the fact that it comes from a profounder depth of life than any other book." Out of the depths have come the most inspired and inspiring of the psalms of faith, both ancient and modern. Out of the depths men have brought blessings which are rarely found in green pastures and by still waters. We never know how much God is the one great need of the soul till we go down to the depths.

There are depths of physical weakness and suffering out of which men cry to Him whose will concerning them they often forget in health and ease, and only remember when sickness comes in and shuts out the world.

There are worldly anxieties and losses which rudely break up all the shallow optimism that has no deeper root than the self-complacency produced by prosperity, and which take men down below the surface of life into its deep places where they learn to pray, or to pray as they never prayed before.

There is the sorrow of bereavement, common yet never commonplace, the pain that comes from broken fellowships ; and in their spiritual solitude and desolation men are driven to seek higher help and comfort than any which the world can give.

There are experiences of fallibility in understanding what we ought to do ; critical hours in life when serious responsibilities press, and grave questions which mere

acuteness cannot settle ; and men, in their extremity, feel the need of a wisdom which they do not find in themselves, and of a guidance which their fellows cannot give, and they cry unto God, "Lead me and teach me."

There are depths of disappointment and failure in our best work,—sympathies imperfectly met, misplaced trusts, broken purposes, and defeated hopes ; and it is especially the ministry of failure even in the noblest things to draw forth the powers latent in every human being, and to make God felt as the one supreme necessity of life.

There is the struggle with moral limitation and weakness,—the sensitive temperament, the ill-balance of a finely endowed mind, the want of will-power, the over-growth of impulses good in themselves,—inheritances which make life so tragic to many—the struggle with forces within and forces without which seem adverse to a noble development, and which make the most aspiring and faithful souls feel that they cannot do the things they would.

The psalm from which our text is taken is familiar to many devout people as one of the seven penitential psalms. It was dear on this account to Chrysostom, Augustine, Savonarola, Luther, Hooker, Owen, Baxter, Wesley, and to many more of the elect spirits of our race. And it surely cannot be that any man capable of deep feeling can be wholly ignorant of the saddest tragedy of human life which is seen in the conflict between desire

and duty, in the effort to reconcile the ideal and the actual, and to be at peace with God. Who does not know of this struggle, interpret it how he may? Who has not cried out in the agony of it, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me? When before the tribunal of his heart one passes in review the irrevocable years, what wonder if

“Oft his cogitations sink as low
As, through the abysses of a joyless heart,
The heaviest plummet of despair can go.”

Though it is only one experience of the spiritual life and must not be allowed to overshadow all the rest, yet the sense of dissatisfaction, deepening into the sense of guilt, lies near the heart of all personal religion worthy of the name. It marks the awakening of the higher life; it is the beginning of the upward movement. The worst conscience is not the one which is most sensitive to evil and most troubled by wrong things done and good things left undone, but the conscience which is so dull as to have no experience of guilty pangs and terrors, and which can make its possessor able to fit his greatest transgressions into a self-satisfied view and scheme of life, and to reconcile himself to memories of passion and shame. In men morally healthy and well developed the sense of sin, of evil done with full consent of the will, is a reality, not a shallow emotion; it is a profound grief, the thought, not of their weaker

moments, but of their sanest hours. It is simply self-knowledge.

It is a universal law of the higher life that the better a man becomes the more sensitive he is to sin, and not only to his own sin, but to the sins of his fellows, the sins of the nation, of society, of the church, of the community in which he lives. It is the best men who feel most keenly the burden of human iniquity and confess the abounding moral evil of the world as if it were their own evil; it is they who are most conscious of the wrongdoing of their fellows and suffer most on account of it, and not the actual wrongdoers themselves. It was so with the Hebrew poet. The pathos of the great lovers and helpers of mankind is in his psalm. It is the utterance of an intensely personal emotion, but it is more than personal. He speaks in the name of Israel, merging his own feeling in the shame and repentance of his people. "I wish," said that great prophet and saint of God, Frederick Denison Maurice, "to confess the sins of my land and time as my own." It is almost impossible to imagine a truly godly life without this underlying sensitiveness and sadness, without this suffering heart of holy love and sympathy which is the thing likest God in this world.

In ancient India, perhaps more than fifteen hundred years before our psalm was written, men sung a hymn which obviously came out of the same experience as

this passionate Hebrew poem of penitence and prayer. It was translated out of the dead Sanscrit tongue by Prof. Max Müller. These are the English words :—

Let me not yet, O my God, enter into the house of clay :

Have mercy, Almighty, have mercy.

If I go trembling like a cloud driven by the wind :

Have mercy, Almighty, have mercy.

Through want of strength, thou strong and bright God, have

I gone wrong :

Have mercy, Almighty, have mercy.

Wherever we men, O God, commit an offence before the heavenly host :

Wherever we break the law through thoughtlessness :

Have mercy, Almighty, have mercy.

III. THE DIVINE ANSWER TO THE CRY OUT OF THE DEPTHS

Is there any divine response to the call of humanity for God, to these many and varied cries out of the depths of our human being and life? There must be in the nature of things, we are persuaded, such a response, something outside of man answering to his inner life and fulfilling its needs, actual movement and manifestation on the part of God corresponding to our natural cravings after Him. Out of the depths man cries, down to the depths God must come, meeting with a corresponding answer every real want of the souls He has made to seek after Him, if haply they may

feel after Him and find Him. Whatever may be the relations between human aspiration and divine condescension, whatever be the conditions of the coming down of the heavenly help to human need, it is simply impossible for any religious soul to think that there is no approach of God to man. Unless life be a tremendous unreality and illusion, and we come into the world only to be fooled and cheated ; unless the universe departs from its order in dealing with the spiritual necessities of mankind and the cry for God meets with exceptional treatment, quite unlike that given to the other functions and attitudes of our nature—it is simply inconceivable that the fundamental cravings of the soul can exist without their satisfaction, and the prayer from the depths remain unanswered. Many of our religious teachers may say too much on this matter and speak presumptuously of what God has done and can do, but their overstatements to those who are living in the consciousness and communion of God are better and nearer the truth than denials and negations. It is, indeed, not difficult to believe in divine condescension, in an answering, revealing, redeeming God, when one truly believes in God—believes, that is, in infinite and eternal goodness. It appears inevitable that man should look with longing and hope for help from on high,—for he cannot understand his life, its whence and why and whither, apart from God. It cannot be, he is sure, that having no choice of existence, he should be here in this world

endowed with a mysterious nature, called to live a life full of most serious significance, without the presence and help of God. He has a right, he feels, to trust Him from whom he comes, and to believe that no light from heaven can lead astray, least of all those great religious aspirations and wants which have lived through all human ages, over-reaching all stretches of history, and are still the highest necessities of the soul. No strong crying and tears will make God answer our selfish or fictitious wants ; but that He is responsive to what is best in man, that He is answering day after day, age after age, the spiritual aspirations and needs of humanity, is a necessary belief to everyone, Christian or non-Christian, who admits the reality and closeness of the bond between God and man, and the affinity of man for that life in God which is the true end of his being.

“O Israel, hope in the Lord ; for with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption.” “He is mindful of His own : He remembers His children.” The movement cannot be all on the side of man. Job had caught a glimpse of an eternal truth of life when he rested his hope of vindication and deliverance upon the desire which his Maker had toward the work of His hands. That the desire of God has brooded over humanity from the beginning, and still broods over the life of the children of men, is a thought which holds a central place in the literature of religion ; and however difficult it may be to reconcile this lovely, human way

of thinking of God with our abstract conceptions of Deity, it brings us closer, we feel sure, to the divine reality of things than ways which we may fancy to be grander and more philosophical. We are fond of contrasting the littleness of man and the awful brevity of his days upon this earth with the immeasurable creation which science reveals; but if God be love, then our passionate human life must be more to Him than a whole universe of passionless worlds. What answer can masses of clay and stone, however huge and old, give to the desire of His heart? Can we frame any worthy thought of God which excludes the idea of His longing for the love and trust and obedience of His children? If the word "Father" spells but one syllable of the Divine name, then we may speak not only of man's need of God, but reverently of God's need of man—of divine love that seeks the answering love of its sons and daughters, of Deity ever going forth out of the abysmal depths of His perfection to give Himself to His creation and His children because it is His nature and property so to do.

It is told of Pascal that often he seemed to hear God saying to him, "Thou couldst not seek Me had I not already found thee." Yes! we seek God because He has first sought and found us. The cry out of the depths is more, therefore, than a mere human breathing—it is itself a divine inspiration. Our pure unselfish longings for truth and goodness, our prayers for union

with God, are, as St. Paul taught long ago, the Spirit making intercession for us,—that highest human voice which is ever one with the Divine voice, which is the Divine voice rising from the depths of our humanity and speaking through our spiritual needs. In the movements of the human spirit we see the workings of the Divine spirit. It is the Divine love of goodness that cries out in us when conscience bears witness for good. It is the Divine hatred of evil that cries out in us when conscience awakes in protest against evil. It is because we are made in the moral image of God and are united to Him, not by baptism or conversion, but by creation, that our whole nature thrills with what moves the Divine nature. In its last analysis there can be no noble aspiration in man which is not an impulse from Him in whom we live and move and have our being. In the realm of our inner life God does not begin His work where we leave off. It is not man down here and God up there, with a vast stretch of distance between. In all the experiences of our life and growth He is present, mingling His life with ours, silently and potently. Not here and there, not now and then, but always and everywhere He is near, acting upon the human spirit from within as well as from without, immediately as well as mediately, speaking down to and up from the depths of the heart and conscience—deep answering to deep.

We interpret, and rightly interpret, the various

religions of mankind as man seeking God ; but they may also be regarded, and rightly regarded, as God seeking man. "Unaided reason," men have been in the way of exclaiming, as they contemplated the various religious systems of the world outside the Hebrew and the Christian religions. But we may well ask, with Cardinal Newman, whether the reason of man is ever unaided ? There are not two kinds of religion—natural and revealed. From the point of view of human capacity and seeking and effort all religion is natural : from the point of view of divine manifestation all religion is revealed. The Logos doctrine of the Fourth Gospel, whatever else it teaches, teaches the divine activity in our world from the beginning. It would be an error to suppose that God neglected the larger part of mankind because of His more intimate dealings with one section of the human race. It must be true, if God be one and His name one, that men of like passions and needs as ourselves, who come from God and belong to God, and are nourished physically by His air and sunshine and fruits of the earth, must also have provision made in the divine order of things for the sustenance of their spiritual life, and that it is not left entirely to the tender mercies of their fellows whether they shall have God or be without God in the world. It must be true that God cares equally for the souls of all His children, and that He finds access to them, helps them, teaches them, com-

forts them, saves them, by methods and means that are not seen and temporal, and by ways in which no man can tell whence He cometh and whither He goeth ; and that He is only limited in the giving of Himself to them by their capacity to respond and receive. People of old used to think that the Divine action was confined to here and there, now and then ; but the conviction is growing and spreading that the only defensible conception of the moral action of God on humanity is that of a continuous and impartial influence limited to no age or race. To our enlightened feeling it is becoming more and more presumptuous to say that His spirit can only work along one line of human thought, or can only bring men to Himself through one set of defined successions of emotion or experience. Personal intimacy with God is not an experience special to Jews or Christians. The knowledge of the revelation of God in Hebrew and Christian history is an unspeakable blessing, but those whom, in the order of Providence, it never reaches, are not thereby excluded from the communion of the spirit. A truer and larger faith in God as the everlasting Father and Teacher and Saviour of mankind has made it no longer possible for intelligent and believing men to regard all religions outside the Jewish and Christian pale as superstition and falsehood, or to keep up the old pitying and condescending attitude towards them. Their immaturities and corruptions we no longer allow to cheat us of the

right to say : God is good to all ; whither shall we go from His Spirit ? He has never left Himself without a witness, never left multitudes of His creatures without His help, without light and guidance, without comfort and salvation.

“The Unseen Power, whose eye
For ever doth accompany mankind,
Hath look'd on no religion scornfully
That man did ever find.

“Which has not taught weak wills how much they can ?
Which has not fallen on the dry heart like rain ?
Which has not cried to sunk, self-weary man :
Thou must be born again !”

The deep needs of the soul which make man look longingly for help from above and beyond himself, even from God, may be interpreted as a cry for knowledge of Him with whom he has to do, a cry for reconciliation or union with Him, a cry for light and guidance, a cry for strength and consolation and peace. The divine response to this vast and varied cry of humanity has been made, we believe, though in varying degrees, to the whole race of mankind.

“Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name,” is a cry out of the depths which man has raised to God in every land and age. It is as natural as it is vital. To know the character of the Unseen Power that orders our birth and death and all our life, and what His relation and

attitude are to those whom He made to seek after Him, is a craving which every human being exercising normal powers must at times feel and express. And in some way and some measure God has been answering this cry, been revealing Himself to man through all the ages of man's life here upon this earth. Revelation has been slow and gradual, not because of any Divine reluctance or caprice, but because it waits upon human development, upon the quickening and unfolding of man's highest powers. In troubled and bewildered hours man has been heard complaining, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself"; and yet the light has ever come as fast as he could bear it and receive it. There is no want of revelation. There is, indeed, nothing but revelation. From the beginning God has been revealing Himself to men by the order and beauty and bounty of the world, through the natural affections, by the teaching and discipline of life and the education of history. Knowledge of nature and man is knowledge of God. In finding order, harmony, bounty, beauty, truth, wisdom, justice, goodness, and love, God is found. It is all revelation—from nature to man and from man to highest man. God has ever been actively present in the world, and especially in man and in the upward movements of his intellectual and moral life. We dare not pretend to limit the ways by which He makes known His personality and His presence, and moves, illuminates, and

guides His children. He draws nigh to them, not only in and through His creation and the course of history, not only through the teaching and example of His great prophets, holy servants, and beloved sons, but immediately—mind with mind, spirit with spirit. In all ages men have had experience of an immediate presence—of a God who has access to their inmost being and acts in their secret life, who reveals Himself by impressions upon their spirits, and whose voice, when they are hushed to listen, is heard, not in their ears, but in their souls.

Yes! God is ever coming down into our life—coming more and more. His Advent is unceasing; new light from the Eternal source of light is ever flowing into human souls. What is needed is not more activity of manifestation on the part of God, but more susceptibility to the Divine manifestation on our part—souls which we take pains with for the sake of the unseen and spiritual, and try to make sensitive to God.

The cry of our humanity for reconciliation and union with God is also a cry which God is ever answering. The great obstacle to religion in our world is not ignorance, but sin. More than enlightenment, we need salvation. Can all our civilisation minister to a troubled conscience? Can all our culture heal a guilty pang? Can the knowledge of any scientific, philosophical, or theological truth subdue an evil passion? But in the depths of our weakness and sin God is our

salvation. The deliverance of man is dear to God. It is the essential nature of love to seek and to save. Because God is love He is ever coming down to the depths of our life, depths of sorrow and sin, the deepest depths of degradation, in order to help and to bring to Himself by all the power of His love His wayward and disobedient children. Whether it be a fallen or a rising world we live in, we know in our hearts that we need reconciliation with the God of the world. Blessed be His eternal love! He has never been outside His world, but has been always in it, bearing the sins and carrying the sorrows of our race. Its history is the history of redemption, the history of the unceasing efforts of Him with whom we have to do, to influence without compelling the vagrant and stubborn wills of men. Through all the human ages, ever since sin began to darken the face of the world, the seeking and saving love of God has been a reality. All the great attitudes and acts of God are eternal. "That which was from the beginning declare we unto you." "His goings forth have been of old and from everlasting." He was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, but Christ did not commence the Divine ministry of reconciliation, nor did He exhaust or end it. The work of Christ is based on the deeper and larger fact of the love and mercy and care of the Eternal toward all mankind. We are learning its deepest lesson when we see in it a picture of what God

is always doing : always helping His children, always saving them in His infinite goodness and mercy. And as it was then, it is now and ever shall be, world without end.

And not only through Christ, and men inspired with the spirit of His life and the charity of His Cross, does God reconcile the world to Himself ; but the whole constitution and course of things are so ordered as to bring men at every point into contact with God as the God of salvation. The supernatural works everywhere through the natural, the Divine through the human. Unto Nature and unto all the forces which enter into human life have been committed the ministry of reconciliation. One God worketh through all and towards the same good and gracious ends. There is no weak compassion in Nature, but there is no want of mercy and tenderness and grace. Its laws so perfect convert the soul, and its severity as related to man is part and means of his discipline and education. The external conditions and incidents of life are all providential, and however they may be produced, God deals with us through them, moving us to forsake sin, and to find in His order and will our peace.

And not only without but within his life does God work on man, stirring his soul, inclining and strengthening him to follow the good, yet with no sense to him of constraint, but only of quickening and co-operation. We seek God because He first seeks us. And the

meeting-place is often in the lowest depths, where we are struggling with weakness and sin, or are sinking under them. At the point where sin leaves us in the darkness of shame and despair God in His mercy finds us, and is nigh to help and save.

The most central truth of our religion is just the helpfulness, the universal and eternal helpfulness, of God. This is the heart of the religion of the Hebrew poets and prophets. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thy help." "In God is my salvation and my glory ; the rock of my strength and my refuge is in God." This, also, when we put aside all those strange accretions which have gathered about it in its passage through the thoughts of men, is the message of Jesus Christ, to whom God was the Eternal Shepherd of souls, who seeks until He finds. It is the message which the Church has been repeating age after age, clearly or faintly, in differing and often confusing phrase : God is with us—with us in the deepest depths, with us in our greatest humiliations, with us in our bitterest shames, with us in our terriblest sorrows, with us to forgive and save, to strengthen and comfort. It is the glory of Jesus Christ that to-day, as yesterday, He inspires men who come directly under His influence with this enthusiasm of faith in the redeeming mercy and love of the Eternal. To those of us who have been born in Christendom the hope of the old Hebrew saint in plenteous mercy and redemption, in infinite

resources of saving love and power in the Divine nature, is ours in yet greater fulness. The gospel of Him who sounded the depths of human sorrow and sin, who descended to hell in another and truer sense than is meant in the Creed, who went down into the depths of the world's evil and felt its power—His gospel is a gospel of hope. What is emphatically His secret is the new and greater trust and hope in God which He implanted in the minds and hearts of men. His most central thought concerning human suffering is that it is joy in the making. His most central thought concerning abounding sin is more abounding grace—infinite possibilities of moral recovery and repair. Men and women! haunted and persecuted by sleepless memories of passion and failure and shame, you have no right to despair of yourselves, for that is to doubt God. His love is deeper than all the depths of moral evil into which you can sink. The hope of salvation to the uttermost has ever come to men through the experience of real and intimate fellowship with God. In all lands and ages the men who have stood nearest God have believed most grandly in His infinite charity and grace. Through Him who said that He was one with the Father has been preached unto the world the forgiveness of sins. Because God is love, holy and inexorable love, He must be for ever and ever a God who forgiveth sin—the infinite giver of a power that makes men better, filling them with new tempers,

new affections, new loyalties, through which the weak become strong and the bad good—the infinite giver of a power which takes away sin in the only sense sin can ever be taken away, by making the sinner hate his sin, turn against it and away from it, and love and follow the good.

In recent days we have heard much, perhaps too much, of “Old Theology” and “New Theology.” What is described as the Old Theology made much of the sense of sin and the need of forgiveness. It regarded human nature chiefly under the aspect of sinfulness and guilt. It forgot that human nature is not a simple and single thing, and that a gospel to commend itself to all men must be wide as human need. Its marvellous strength in the days when it was heartily accepted and believed grew out of its limitations, but these also were the cause of its weakness and its decay. It provoked a reaction from which we are at present suffering. Our liberal theology is too often just as partial and one-sided, failing to meet the needs with which the old orthodox presentation of religion chiefly dealt. A well-meaning religious teacher was speaking on the beauty of goodness to a gathering of poor people in the slums of a great city. “Your rope isn’t long enough for the likes of us,” shouted one of his hearers. Now, it is not wisdom to think that we have touched bottom because our plummet has ceased going down. It may only mean that the soul and life are too deep for our sound-

ings. What is described as "New Theology" must have much of the Old Theology in it to enrich and complete it, if it is to satisfy in any real and abiding way the spiritual needs of men. Sin and forgiveness, reconciliation and union with God, must not hold in it a secondary place. Its preachers must have the historic sense, and come not to destroy but to fulfil. The thought of the immanent God which has become so real and vivid in our time that it seems to many like a new revelation, does not, wisely understood, lessen our faith in the ever-revealing and ever-redeeming God. But it is required of religious teachers who would meet the deepest cravings of humanity, not only to believe in the Divine Immanence, but to have personal experience of God's present help and salvation. St. Augustine tells us that his chief reason for writing his imperishable confessions was to praise God before men for raising him from such depths of sin, "lest any other might lie down and sleep in despair and say, 'I cannot awake.'" It is still preachers who can tell men from their own experience of the love and mercy and grace of God, whom our world most needs. Of all men, the preacher must not be weak in faith; he must be no doubter, no cynic, no pessimist. He must be a great believer in the great things, an unconquerable optimist, a man of abounding hopefulness; for he lives to inspire and diffuse hope, to make men feel and believe that they live in a world, not under God's wrath and curse,

but under His love and blessing, and that neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, will be able to separate them from the Eternal charity and care.

When the saintly Quaker, John Woolman, lay on his deathbed, the feeling, he said, "of the extent of the sin and misery of my fellow-creatures separated me from the Divine Harmony, and was more than I could bear. But in the depths of my distress I remembered that Thou, O Lord, art omnipotent, and that I had called Thee Father ; and again I was made quiet in Thy will and looked for deliverance from Thee !" To God we must ever look when there is darkness without and within. We must not let the sorrow and sin of the world rob us of our faith and hope. There can be no such thing as unchanging and persistent evil in the world. For God is never outside of the world. He is ever indwelling and at work in His moral as in His physical creation, and present in all shapes and depths of evil as the infinite spirit of goodness working for goodness, the everlasting Father and Saviour of men. "O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plenteous redemption."

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED ?

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”—Acts xvi. 30.

THE question, “What must I do to be saved?” is a common question, yet it is never commonplace. In some shape it is upon almost every lip. It is one of those great human questions which men ask age after age, and ask as if they had never been asked before. It is new to every man because it is vital to every man. Our deepest needs know neither to-day nor yesterday. They are always and everywhere the same.

It is a question which is full of interest to every serious man, and to every man in his serious moods. Our moral and spiritual needs are as real and sometimes as pressing as our physical necessities. They are not always felt—they are the needs of our deeper heart and deeper mind; but in our truer and better moments, and in all those experiences which greatly move and search us, we know and confess them to be real and supreme.

It is from the depths of life, and not from its surface,

that the cry comes, "What must I do to be saved?"—that is, when it is a genuine cry; the cry not of awakened self-love but of awakened godliness; a cry for deliverance from sin, and not simply a clamour to escape from the punishment which sin inevitably brings in this and in all the worlds. The sense of sin is a reality, a genuine human experience which will not be ignored, and which no reasoning can reason away. Instead of being, as we have been told, "a remnant of savagery and barbarism," sure to vanish with the triumph of intelligence, it is, on the contrary, the sign of all signs of an onward moving being, of a progressive moral nature; it grows with man's growing power of moral sympathy and insight, and will never leave him so long as he is able to see himself better than he is and vision is beyond achievement. Our grief for sin is really our grandeur in disguise, the inverted image of our greatness, the shadow cast by aspiration, the feeling awakened in one who has heard the call to a more perfect life which he knows he can obey.

There may be certain things in human life which are well accounted for on the supposition of an animal nature slowly fading and dying out of man, but with every new advance in knowledge, with every new and larger perception of the moral ideal, with every new accession of spiritual light, new forms and opportunities of sin come within the range of vision and possibility. The sins which our Lord said are most deadly are not

physical, but spiritual in their origin and quality—the perversion and corruption of the higher nature.

We may have no theory compelling us to speak of ourselves as totally depraved and with “no health in us,” for God, that is good, is ever immanent in His creation and in His children, and if we make our bed in hell, behold He is there ; but we know the burden of sin. In our deeper moments and moods the temper of moral content is strange to us, and sin—the wilful choice of evil instead of good, with all the weakness and degradation which follow from that choice—comes home to us, as a fact, not a fiction ; a reality, not a make-believe. We know in our heart of hearts that we have done that which we cannot justify ; that we have not lived up to our light ; that we have failed to realise the good which we were free and able to realise and to which we were drawn by a secret obligation and reverence ; we know that under the pressure of voluntary inclination we have again and again yielded ourselves captive to evil. In these revealing moments, we cover our faces because we can hide our transgressions no more.

The conviction of sin, where it is genuine, is due, not to fear of consequences, but to moral illumination. It is the thought of our wise, not of our foolish hours ; of our strong, not of our weak moments. The terrible cry of Paul, “What I would I do not : what I hate I do,” must be the sum and expression of the musings

of every thoughtful man. Like the French king, we must each know the two men of that great tragedy of conscience. There is much of the sinner in the saint, as there is much of the saint in the sinner, and it is only the holiest saint who knows how near he is to the worst sinner. Whoever is self-satisfied is easily satisfied. The better we become the less self-complacent are we. It is the best men seeking the best who are most troubled by the memory of past failure, and most conscious of present shortcoming. The only man who uttered no regrets, betrayed no sense of failure, was conscious of no shortcoming, was oppressed by no unfulfilled ideals or purposes, acknowledged no sin, was He whom His disciples confessed to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

It is one of the supreme characteristics of the Christian revelation that it quickens and deepens in man the sense of sin. Jesus Christ comes not to judge and condemn, yet His Holy Presence in our human life is itself judgment and condemnation; at once the glory and the shame of our humanity. The revelation of the more perfect always convicts of shortcoming and failure. The law enters and sin abounds. As we stand face to face with Jesus Christ, and His eyes search us through and through, we are touched as never before with the sense of sin; the greater light reveals the greater darkness; our self-delusions and self-complacencies vanish; we remember

our omissions of duty as well as our positive transgressions ; we pierce beneath our actions to our motives and affections, and that one word of human experience which we miss in the prayers of Christ falls from our lips—" I have sinned."

The reality of sin is increasingly felt as we perceive and realise its consequences ; how it weakens and deadens those faculties and affections which make us the spiritual children of God ; how it wounds and kills the fine humanities of our nature, and darkens and disorders human life and human society. Sin is personal, but it is more than personal in its consequences. By the disobedience of one, many are made sinners. By our folly and weakness and wickedness every man of us helps to make the race fall and to keep it fallen. The mystery which men make of the world's moral condition comes back upon us as the mystery of individual unfaithfulness and transgression.

The sense of sin is a painful burden, but is a blessed burden after all ; a sign not of death but of life ; not of falling but of rising. To be weak and wicked is bad, but not to know it and feel it is worse—the worst doom of a careless, sin-loving heart. Remorse, I often say, is not the deepest hell : the deepest hell is that in which there is no remorse—the painless hell—where the gnawing worm is dead and the scorching fires are quenched. The final result of the disregard of moral law is not suffering—conscious suffering, that is—but

incapacity to suffer. Not to any fixed or finished condition of evil does suffering belong, but to the conflict between good and evil, to the struggle between life and death. It is the painless hell, I say, that is the worst hell, and there are thousands of men and women around us who are, as far as we can judge, in this hell at this moment—men who are bad and are content to be bad ; whose self-indulgences and dishonesties, hatreds and cruelties, never give them a sleepless night ; women whose habitual indifference to all highest and best things never brings the tinge of shame to the cheek. Let us thank God if we are not so far gone in a selfish and worldly life as to be insensible to our moral condition ; let us thank God if our sin is finding us out in tormenting memories that will not let us sleep ; in unquenchable fires of regret and shame. In such pain there is hope ; in such shame there is the power of God unto salvation ; such a sense of sin is the beginning of all redemption and all progress.

I. The work of Christian teaching never comes nearer to its chief object than when it seeks, as I do now, to answer the question which every one of us must at some time have asked with real concern—"What must I do to be saved ?" And first of all, let it be clearly understood what it means to be saved. Any conception of salvation that is based on a partial or false view of life must necessarily lead to practical error, or to the loss of healthy practical influence. It is a practical

question and a pressing one. It has been interpreted again and again as merely a cry of deliverance from imaginary and other world terrors, the expression of the coward's trembling anxiety to save his own skin—to sneak out of punishment rather than to back out of wrongdoing. But it is infinitely more than this ; it is founded upon unquestionable facts and tremendous realities of human experience. It has also been mixed up with some strange errors, and with that strangest of all errors, that it is not only from sin, but from God we require to be saved. Let me ask you in God's good name to dismiss all such selfish anxieties and fears. No one can harm man save himself. Outside of himself there is nought in the universe that will destroy or hurt him. Himself right, then everything is friendly to him. Himself wrong, then punishment is the kindest and best thing for him. There is no revenge in the Divine order of the universe. The justice of God as well as His mercy seeks our salvation. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, and our Judge is also our Saviour.

Like all the great words of religion, the word "salvation" has got its true meaning much dimmed and narrowed. It needs to be constantly illuminated and enlarged by connecting it with the Biblical and Christian idea of salvation. Both in the Old and New Testament it is the symbol of a great and infinite idea. The objection to many definitions of it is that they are

altogether inadequate—that they only express a very small part of the meaning which the prophets and apostles of religion saw in it. The salvation of Jesus Christ is indeed a great salvation—far greater than most men have ever thought or imagined. It meant and it means a large and many-sided experience; the highest quality and order of human life, the highest character and blessedness which men individually and collectively are capable of reaching and realising.

1. Salvation is first a certain deliverance from the depression and dismay which spring from our knowledge and fear of the evil we have done; it is a certain relief from the shame which paralyses hopeful endeavour, and from the ignorant and guilty dread which makes the thought of God a burden and not an inspiration.

The suffering of an awakened conscience is of all burdens the hardest to be borne. This was the Nemesis that the ancients pictured as ever pursuing the ever-flying and never-escaping criminal. This was the torment that drove Lady Macbeth mad—who, with all her ablutions, could not wash out the bloodstains from her hand.

And it is the sorrow not only of those who have committed great crimes against humanity, but of every man who is haunted by lost opportunities, of every man who has fled from duties that demanded faithfulness unto death, of every man who has given his soul away in exchange for some worldly prize, of every man

who has not lived up to his light, and has not been obedient to the heavenly vision when obedience was inconvenient and hard ; of every man awakened to the sense of the irrevocable past and to the thought of what he might have been and might have done. We are commonly told, I know, that the conscientious man is a happy man, contented and satisfied with himself, but this theory is not in accord with facts. It is your most conscientious man who is most dissatisfied with himself and most keenly alive to shortcoming and failure. "Happiness of an approving conscience!" exclaims Carlyle in a well-known passage in *Sartor Resartus*—"did not Paul of Tarsus call himself the chief of sinners and Nero of Rome, jocund in spirit, spend much of his time in fiddling?" But the sense of sin is not healthy in its influence when it fails to receive any hopeful interpretation ; when it breeds morbid and despairing thoughts of ourselves and God, of life here and hereafter. It is not good to live in an atmosphere of self-reproach, self-distrust, and fear. Despair is fatal to all high and sustained endeavour. We are saved by hope.

2. Salvation means, then, in the first place, a certain deliverance from the depression and fear of sin, it means a sense of the forgiving mercy and help of God, it means the victory of faith and hope ; but all this is only clearing the ground for the great salvation of Jesus Christ. The removal of tormenting shame, of our

ignorant and guilty dread of God and fate, is only the first step in the way of the Christian salvation. There is evil in the heart and life, and from its presence and dominion we require to be delivered. The cry, "What must I do to be saved?" when a true cry, is a longing for deliverance from sin, and not, as I have said, a clamour to escape from the punishment which sin inevitably brings in this world and in all the worlds. We are not in real contact with the Divine order of the world until we feel that it is not penalty here or hereafter God wants to save us from—but sin. We bear and must bear the punishment of our sins. The remission of sin is not the remission of punishment. We reap what we sow. It is by this severity of discipline God makes us see the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Justice and mercy are eternally one. Justice is beneficent and the retributive forces are redemptive. The cry to escape from the natural penalty of sin is the cry, not of the higher but of the lower nature; the cry of a man who cares more for his own personal safety and comfort than he cares for the order and will of God. The man truly awakened and enlightened wants to be delivered from the power of evil affections and evil habits, to be saved from his infirmities and sins, even though it be by fire; to be made right with God, right with men who are the children of God, and right with the whole order of things which is of God. Let us not be deceived. There is no other way by which

a man can be saved from sin except by ceasing to be a sinner. Men not even decently moral are often heard rejoicing in salvation on the ground of certain beliefs or emotional experiences ; but they are hardly in the way of being saved—only inflated with a vain and foolish confidence. Let us not even dare to speak of being saved if we are still the willing victims of bad passions and tempers, of corrupt desires, of inordinate affections, of mean prejudices and false judgments. Let us not dare to speak of being saved if we are not being saved from the sins we are tempted to commit daily and hourly.

3. But thirdly, while it is much to be delivered from perverted and corrupt affection and to have the power of evil habit broken, yet much more remains to be done to have the fulness of the blessing which the gospel of Jesus Christ calls "salvation." Salvation is not only deliverance from sin ; it is growth in all true-ness and goodness of life. Christian character is not an incident, a result, a test of salvation—it is salvation. Salvation is character. The perfection of character and the work of salvation include the training of every power and affection to the standard of the perfect man ; the rising up on all sides of our being and life to Him who is the head. We speak glibly enough at times about saving souls—but what is the soul but the true and complete self-hood, the living man in his entirety ? To save the soul is to save the man in every faculty of

his complex being and in every relation and province of his many-sided life. The saved man is the whole man ; the healthy and fully-developed man, man at his highest and best. Salvation is not summed up in the word "culture," but it includes all the good things for which the word stands. It is not a partiality or limitation, the saving of fractions of ourselves and fractions of our life—it is identical with the highest and widest culture, with the freest and fullest growth of man ; bidding us strive, and moving us to strive, after all things pure and good and lovely, and enabling us to attain them. The work of salvation is meant to be not so much a work by itself as a work large enough to take in every other work—the work of life. It is also a work that is never finished. The saved man will ever be getting more salvation, adding virtue to virtue and grace to grace ; going on from strength to strength and from glory to glory. Here, again, let us not be deceived. Unless the character through all its feebleness and failure is tending toward the Christian completeness it is not in the line of the Christian salvation. We were made and meant to be men after Jesus Christ's type—of the same mind and spirit, character and life, and to be content with no growth and no attainment which fall short of that moral and spiritual splendour—of that divine loveliness.

4. But, fourthly, salvation is not something wrought

in and for ourselves alone ; it means a life lived not for self, but for God and mankind—it means not only character but service.

It is in the teaching of our Lord Himself we have His large conception of salvation. The name He gives it is the Kingdom of God. To be saved is to be in the Kingdom of God. Now a kingdom is a society. About any merely private salvation that ended in one's self Jesus Christ had very little to say but this : He that saveth himself shall lose himself. He always put God—God's will, God's work, and the service of God in mankind—where much religion that calls itself by His name puts self—self-interest, personal safety, comfort, peace, and final bliss. To be self-centred is in Christ's judgment to be in a state of condemnation, not of salvation—to be dead, not alive.

A man who only wishes to save himself has not learned the alphabet of Christianity—has hardly taken the first step in the Christian life. Any amount of care for one's self rightly and nobly directed, any amount of self-discipline and self-culture, is praiseworthy, but not if it is for a merely private and selfish end. Religious selfishness is just as bad as any other kind of selfishness. The selfishness which would find happiness after death just as it eagerly seeks for happiness before death, which seeks heaven just as it grasps earth, is but the old spirit of darkness transformed into the outward semblance of an angel of light. "Is

selfishness for time a sin—stretched out into eternity celestial prudence?”

St. Bernard, describing the various degrees of Christian perfection, says that the highest is reached when a man cares for himself for the sake of God—for the sake of being better able to do the will and to work the work of God. Salvation, it is true, means the forgiveness of personal sins, deliverance from personal weakness, defection, and corruption, the growth and culture of the personal life; but all this not primarily and supremely for the sake of our private well-being, comfort, and blessedness here and hereafter—but for the sake of God and mankind. Let us lay it well to heart that man's chief end is not to save himself, but to glorify God; to save himself that he may glorify God, live for ideal and Divine ends, enter into fellowship with the Eternal power and purpose, and give himself, as Jesus Christ did, for the world's redemption.

Vain, indeed, O man, is it to boast that you are saved while your brethren are at a disadvantage in the struggle for existence and in the attainment of good; vain to boast that you are saved while your business life, professional life, social and public life are full of all manner of injustice and wrong, of unbrotherliness and ungodliness. Saved!—while you live what on the whole is a self-seeking life. Saved!—while society is unsaved. We are not solitary units—our life is bound up with that of our fellows. The salvation of all is

necessary to the salvation of each ; and the salvation of each to the salvation of all. This private isolated idea of salvation is selfish, unspiritual, inhumane, unchristian. The salvation of Christ is essentially a social salvation. The less we think of ourselves in a separate way, as isolated from our fellows ; the more we give ourselves to helping our brethren, to the good of our kind, to the large interests of the world, the more do we hasten that salvation in which all are sharers, the more do we truly save ourselves—find, that is, through the Christian self-surrender, through the Christian enthusiasm for truth and justice and right and good, for God and all God's children—that which we seem to cast away : a deeper, richer, more powerful, more commanding personal life,—the free full life of the sons of God.

II. We come now to consider how believing in Jesus Christ enables a man to realise the ideal of salvation we have been considering.

A gospel to be a gospel must be a real and complete answer to the cry which in some form or other arises from the deep heart of every man when once he becomes truly awake and alive to his most serious needs. If we have no answer to this cry in all the stages of its development, then, however wise and beautiful our word may be, and however pleasing to the righteous who need no repentance, we have assuredly no gospel for a sinful, dissatisfied, aspiring, growing humanity.

Can Jesus Christ save us, the men and women of

this twentieth century? What is it in Him or proceeding from Him that saves? How does He save? These are questions that perpetually recur with fresh interest and which require to be answered anew for every generation. Now, whatever error or superstition has clouded the image of Christ in the minds of men, one conception has always in some form been held—the conception of Christ as Saviour. Obscured, disguised, perverted as it has been, we find it through all the ages of Christian history. St. Paul called the gospel of Jesus Christ “the power of God unto salvation.” Wherever it was truly believed it lifted men into salvation, lifted them from darkness to light, from death to life, from light to more light, and from life to more life. It both quickened and pacified the conscience, changed character, and brought men to fulfil the highest ends of human existence. Jesus Christ saved that old world into which He came nineteen hundred years ago—saved it when it was perishing through the fury of its passions and the weariness of its lusts, saved it by the new faith, the new hope, the new affection, the new spirit which He quickened and inspired. To the influences which He brought to bear upon the higher life of mankind, to the saving influence which flowed from His person and teaching, His life and cross, may be traced almost every point of contrast between ancient and modern history.

And from the first days until now men who have come under the influence of Jesus Christ and been

moved and mastered, inspired and led by Him, have been saved with a great salvation. But what must *we* do to be saved? Appeals to what has been already done are never quite satisfactory as an answer to present needs. To-day we need a Saviour. To-day, deep in our hearts, there is the sense that of all evils sin is the worst, that it is, indeed, the only real evil, and that salvation from sin is the only issue that can make life a noble progress and a victory. Everywhere in our human world, and under all varieties of condition, culture and character, there is one great longing and aspiration, though it may find utterance in a thousand different forms: Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Who will deliver me from the oppression of shameful and bitter memories? Who will deliver me from the dominion of selfish passions and inclinations, of wrong ways of thinking and feeling, willing and acting? Who will quicken and inspire my life with those new and nobler affections which alone can save life from the tragedy of moral degradation and decay? Who will restore me to God, to myself, to my fellows, and bring me to that perfection and peace of life which come from harmony with the Divine will? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus Christ has done all this for men and can still do it. Through Him flowed, and flows, the saving power of God, which, drawing the heart from self to God and fellow-man, giveth us the victory over sin.

He is still mighty to save—mighty to quicken and inspire the personal soul and to redeem society. But He saves not by one method alone, but by whatever He was and is, did and does, mediately and immediately ; saves by all the influences of His life and death, of His truth and spirit ; saves not by any arbitrary and magical efficacy, but precisely to that extent in which He is known and understood, loved and obeyed ; saves by his revelation of the Eternal love and sympathy and sacrifice and by bringing us into direct communion with God, as children with father ; saves by implanting in the soil of our hearts new trusts and new hopes ; saves by inspiring true thoughts, true feelings, and those divine affections and motives which are the sources of all human excellence.

The answer which St. Paul gave to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" is an all-sufficient answer, if it be read, not as a single and unconnected sentence, but in the light of the commentary upon it which the apostle gives in his letters. In nothing have men done greater injustice to the Scriptures than by quoting isolated words and texts. If we cannot with open minds and hearts study the Christian teaching as a whole, particular texts are almost always sure to confuse and mislead us.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" is not a little word denoting a little thing. It is a word of wide and profound significance. It is the symbol of an infinite

idea—an idea of which the whole New Testament may be said to be the expansion and interpretation. At the beginning of the Christian life, and to the soul spending itself on questions as to personal safety and peace, it means something very simple ; but its fulfilment covers more than we think or can think, more than the most faithful can realise in a long lifetime.

I know what it may be made to mean to a human soul weak and ignorant—full of selfish fears and anxieties about God and a hereafter ; to a poor bewildered creature without any fine desires and aspirations, trembling between life and death. In the hour of the final conflict and passion the most foolish and feeble and sinful man can so believe in Jesus Christ as the revelation and assurance of the mercy of God as to be saved from tormenting fears and be able to die in peace. To believe in Christ is indeed a saving faith when it helps one to believe in the forgiving love of God, to realise the Eternal mercy in the hour and power of doubt and despair. The religion of fear, though it is fast losing its hold on minds truly thoughtful and Christian, yet represents a stage of religious growth—a stage which must be passed through by all those who are being brought up, as many of us were brought up, under forms of belief which make men especially anxious about themselves, as if their own private safety and blessedness, and not doing the will of God, were the chief end of existence. It is well,

therefore, from time to time to meet its questions, for the highest life is not possible until men are delivered from selfish fears and anxieties. It is also one of the divinest offices of true religion to deliver men and women from this pious selfishness, to lead them away from thinking and brooding over themselves and their destiny to such a sense of the Eternal goodness and mercy as shall drive these questionings and cares right out of the mind. No longer anxious about their own safety, because they have learned from Jesus Christ that God is their Father and Saviour in this and in all the worlds, and that they may trust Him for life and death and the long hereafter, they will be anxious only to do His will and to be active sharers in that Divine and unending sacrifice by which the world is being redeemed from its evil.

Then, further, there are in the New Testament a few great sayings which speak of believing in Jesus Christ as if it were the loftiest elevation to which a human soul could rise, the nearest approach to God and perfection. "This is the work of God"—that is, the divinest thing you can do—"that ye believe on Him whom God hath sent": these words are true, not in some mystical theological sense, but as a simple matter of practical experience. It is the meaning of several sayings of Jesus to be found in the Fourth Gospel, that there is a certain believing in the Son which is impossible without a previous believing in the Father—

that is, without a certain previous development and attitude of the soul toward God in expectation, insight and obedience—a believing which corresponds to a high order of spiritual needs and aspirations. The religion of Christ is not the root but the flower of religion ; it comes not first but last : it is the Divine fulfilment and realisation of the growing needs and aspirations of humanity. “Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.” “Every man that hath heard and learned of My Father cometh unto Me.” “Unto you who believe Christ is precious.” “He that believeth on the Son of God,” says St. John, “hath eternal life”—that is, the highest and divinest quality of life—a believing plainly that is identical with the reception of the filial spirit of Christ, with loving what He loved, with living His life, with following in the steps of His obedience and service.

And to men seeking that high and divine good we call “salvation,” our Lord did not always say in so many words, “Believe on Me.” He sometimes said, “Repent.” Turn your whole mind and heart to God. He sometimes said, “Forgive, that you may be forgiven.” He sometimes said, “Obey,” “Do the will” ; He sometimes said, “Follow Me” ; He sometimes said, “Endure unto the end” ; He sometimes said, “Love Me and My Father.” But, rightly understood, the repentance, the change of mind, the trust, the obedience, the striving, the endurance, the forgiveness,

the love, the self-sacrifice, for which He called, are all forms and phases of believing on Him.

St. Paul, also, who exhorted the frightened gaoler to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" in order to be saved, told the Philippians to work out their own salvation; the Romans to "walk after the Spirit, not after the flesh"; the Galatians to "live by the faith of the Son of God," as he himself was striving to do; and the Colossians "to fill up that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ"; and all these great exhortations do but fill out and interpret the meaning, reveal the solemn infinite range and depth of this primary one, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

It would also, I think, be found that the interrogation of Christian experience would be most favourable to a large and comprehensive interpretation of our text. The ways by which men are brought into filial intimacy with God, into the fellowship of sons, which is the distinctively Christian experience, are as many and various as are the ways of the Divine approach to men. The way of Christ is inclusive of all true ways to God. As I read the lives of "the saved," of all churches and ages, and study the expressions given by different minds to their spiritual experience, their record of the way in which they found peace, deliverance from sin, victory over weakness and the world, the life and blessedness of the faithful children of God, I am reminded of the

seer's vision of the New Jerusalem which describes the pilgrims to the city of God as entering through twelve gates, on the north and the south, the east and the west sides of the city.

1. To the soul seeking salvation from the shame and fear and guilt of sin we still say, as St. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

It is the meaning of the Christian revelation that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, that, being infinite in love and sympathy, He bears on His heart the sin and sorrow of mankind, and that Christ reveals Him bearing them—reveals the Eternal passion and sacrifice. How few believe in God in Christ with a real believing! The average religious man is more pagan than Christian in his conception of God and His ways. He says he believes in the deity of Christ, but does he not miss altogether and fail to realise the vital spiritual truth of the doctrine when he thinks of the invisible God as having dispositions and intentions towards any of His creatures and children, many or few, that are not Christ-like; when he thinks that God can be less or other than that which the Son reveals Him to be; less than infinite in His compassion and helpfulness, other than the everlasting Father and Saviour of men? "The love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord" is the very heart of the Christian Gospel. It is true that the presence and spirit of Christ in human

life quickens and deepens the sense of sin, but it is also true that in the circle of Christ's influence and fellowship the liveliest and deepest sense of sin can never lead to despair. The man who truly believes in Jesus Christ believes in redeeming mercy and grace; believes that what Jesus was to sinful men and women in Judea and Galilee long ago, the Father of Christ is now and for ever to trembling human hearts in their guilty fear and shame. To believe in Jesus Christ is indeed a saving faith when it helps us to believe in God, to believe in the eternal goodness and grace, and thus to be delivered from the fear which weakens and the despair which kills.

The familiar statement, "You have nothing to do, only to believe," is a confusing and misleading one, but it has this amount of truth underlying it, that we have nothing to do to move and win the pity and love and help of God. We may begin our Christian life with the assurance that God does love us; that His attitude toward us now and for ever, in this age and world and in all the ages and worlds to come, is the forgiving, merciful, helpful, redeeming attitude. The certainty of the free, all-embracing, unchanging, unending love of God ought to be one of our permanent possessions, the possession of every one who has been born into Christendom and has breathed from childhood the atmosphere of the Christian faith and spirit; a possession which no sense of unworthiness, no

conscious want of goodness, no fall, and no failure ought to be able to take away from us. It is true that believing in the Divine love and mercy and sympathy does not undo what has been done, supply what has been omitted, bring back the yesterdays, restore the wasted substance, and obliterate all the issues of past transgressions ; but it does save us from weakening regrets and fears ; it takes the anguish and dread out of the soul ; it helps us to feel that we are recoverable ; it enables us to enter on the struggle to rise above the evil past and the evil self with confidence and courage—with the assurance that victory lies within our reach if at all costs we seek to win it.

2. To the soul seeking to be saved from the dominion of evil passions and habits still we say, as St. Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” A corrupt affection is best mastered and displaced by the growth of a new and noble affection. We often, I am persuaded, fail to understand the great Christian things by viewing them too far apart from familiar everyday experience. We know that whatever good thing wins and rules the heart may, according to its measure, be a power of God unto salvation. A distinguished man once said that in early manhood he found deliverance from a guilty passion through a devoted attachment to a branch of science. The saving potency of a true and pure love for a good man or woman has never been without its witnesses. Let a

man's life be taken possession of by a great affection, and what will it not do for him?—cleanse his unclean heart, calm and chasten his hot and eager desires, bind him over to rectitude and faithfulness, and ever urge and keep him to his best. And it is just in this way Jesus Christ has been a Saviour to many in all lands and ages. The things named are not, of course, on the same level as the Christian attachment and loyalty, but they illustrate the same law—the redeeming energy of love—salvation through the quickening of a noble and commanding affection, love in the soul washing sin from the soul. Though the smallest pebble thrown into the air falls to the earth by precisely the same law which draws Jupiter through the infinite spaces of the sky, yet that is not to put the pebble on the same level as the planet. What is meant is that what wins the heart from false, selfish, bad ways is a saving power—saves men from sin and reconciles them to goodness—that is, to God. The great word of Christianity is Love. Its gateway out of the hell of evil passion is the power of the passion for Jesus Christ. To believe in Jesus Christ with a real believing is to be filled with a passion for goodness; and it is this passion, and not any theory or doctrine that may be associated with it, that subdues the selfish passions, strengthens the will, purifies the life and redeems from all evil.

3. To the soul seeking to be saved in the sense of

realising the ideal perfection which a man may and can realise, we still say, as St. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Jesus Christ is the revelation, not only of true God, but of true man—the realisation and revelation of the Divine ideal of our human righteousness and the manifestation of its possibility to our doubting souls. To believe in Him is to believe in ourselves. He is ourselves in prophecy and anticipation. To believe in Him is to see in His life a page only too brief of authentic human history, a real part of man's life upon this earth, the type and promise of the perfection possible to every son of man. His righteousness is indeed our righteousness, our human righteousness, which we ought to seek and strive after, love and live. It cannot be imputed, but it may be imparted and won by our sympathy with it and our obedience. Character cannot be transferred any more than physical vigour or mental culture, but it may be acquired. Our personal loyalty is the cardinal and inexorable condition of attainment. Believing on Jesus Christ is not a substitute for personal obedience—it is motive and inspiration to personal obedience. It is vital with quickening power to make us obey as He obeyed, to be loyal to His spirit and law of life. Thus Christ is made unto us righteousness. And in our Christian loyalty also are all the elements required for the development of the most complete and finished type of human excellence—for the free and full develop-

ment of the complete circle of our human powers, for the attainment of whatsoever things are true, venerable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious. Jesus Christ's Christianity has an essential affinity for what is best in life and character, and the men it creates are not fanatical, narrow, one-sided men—but symmetrical, many-sided, whole men.

4. To the man seeking to be saved from that which will not let him be a true member of the human family and a good brother to all his brethren, we say, as St. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." To believe in Christ with a real believing is to be saved from selfishness, to be delivered from our ungodly and unbrotherly jealousies, hatreds, rivalries, and competitions; it is to be brought out of the circle of selfish aims and interests and strivings into sympathy with God's wide world, and into communion with all mankind. The affections which Jesus Christ inspires are all opposed to the affections which isolate and divide. His spirit is a social spirit, drawing men together in mutual love and helpfulness, making each feel, "Who is weak or wronged and I am not weak and wronged?" through individual energy and influence producing beneficent effects on the families and generations of men; making possible and actual a heredity of Christian goodness, the salvation of human life on this earth from the evils which darken and oppress it, and that triumph of the

Christian idea and order of human society which is the true second coming of Christ.

Thus believing in Jesus Christ continuously exercised is indeed a saving faith, having its final issue and result in a great salvation, a salvation that comprehends the two lives and the two worlds in all their length and breadth. Through the power of such a real believing we must become like Him in whom we believe ; His trusts our trusts ; His purposes our purposes ; His ideals our ideals ; His spirit our spirit ; His character our character ; His work our work ; His devotion to God and mankind the pattern and inspiration of our service and sacrifice.

Let us now ask ourselves, Are we being saved?— are we seeking and realising the great salvation of Jesus Christ, beating down evil beneath our feet, rising out of weakness and selfishness and all unloveliness of life toward the perfect man, giving ourselves more and more to the large and best interests of our fellows and the world, more and more filled with Christ's passion for the will of God and the service of mankind, with the spirit of His obedience and sacrifice and the charity of His cross? What avails our knowledge of salvation and the way of salvation if we are still the slaves of evil desires and habits ; if we are still allowing a spirit which is the deadly foe of the Christian spirit to move and rule us ; if we are living self-centred, self-indulgent lives, and the Divine

Passion of the Cross for the redemption of the world has never been kindled in our hearts? It is not by our theological opinions, but by our practical fidelity, Christ measures our attachment to Him. What does He care for a believing that bears no fruit unto godliness and brotherliness of life? It is our moral and spiritual sympathy with Christ that saves, that changes us into the same image from glory to glory, and sends us out to carry on His saving work among our fellows.

And how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? Here, as everywhere else, we must suffer the penalty of our neglect. Thank God there is no escape—no escape from the Divine predestination to salvation; but by our persistent neglect we are strengthening our baser nature and life, and making the work of our salvation harder and harder—dooming ourselves to be saved so as by fire. Let us be faithful, and thus avoid that only real and tragical failure in life which is to be ourselves failures. Let us be faithful—not content to be scarcely saved, but seeking and striving after the Christian completeness. Let us be faithful, so that when the evening shadows fall upon this troubled life we may each be able to say, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CROSS

“Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”—I COR. ii, 2.

IN almost every picture-gallery in Europe we see one subject represented in many different forms—the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The old painters seem never to have tired of it. And in many of their pictures we find standing or kneeling near the Cross, either as spectators or worshippers, men and women of later times. Among the Roman soldiers, the citizens of Jerusalem, the Jewish peasants, and the relatives and friends of the Crucified, we observe bishops and monks, saints and martyrs of the Middle Ages; and even occasionally the background of the picture is not that of the Holy City, but of Rome or Florence, Siena or Assisi. It is the way which these old teachers of religious truth had of telling their fellows that the Cross is for all lands and times, and not only for the people who lived beneath Syrian skies in the first century of our era.

In a million churches all over Western Christendom

men and women gather every year in crowds to re-enact in memory the closing scenes of the life of our Lord. All the resources of dramatic symbolism, of music, and speech, and silence are used to impress the lessons which the Cross can teach. The good that is done by this annual commemoration need not, I think, be questioned. It is not wasted time, Mr. Ruskin once said, to submit ourselves to any influence which may bring upon us any noble feeling. It is to be regretted, rather, that these memorial days of Christ should not be more widely and intelligently observed, and that by so many they should be allowed to pass entirely unnoticed, save for holiday and amusement.

It is not as ancient history, not as the record of vanished struggles and of sorrows long since comforted, we ought to read the story of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ ; but as a representation of things which in all their fundamental aspects are for ever true—a revelation of life, of man, and of God, which is the same to-day as yesterday. Not merely as fragmentary reminiscences of a few dim years passed long ago in Galilee and Judea on which we may exercise our critical ingenuity, ought the old, old story to appeal to you and to me, but as suggestion and symbol of universal fact and truth, able to stir within our souls at each eventful epoch of our days a new power of life. The temptation in the wilderness, the vigil in Gethsemane, the betrayal, the denial, the public judgment and rejection, the failure

and the triumph of the Cross—all these events ought to have for us an immortal significance, and not only, or even chiefly, because they concern the Jesus of history, but because they interpret and express with infinite depth and power experiences which on their moral or spiritual side belong to universal humanity. They have their ideal as well as their historical value. That, indeed, which makes the life of Jesus so inexhaustible in its freshness, so new and wonderful and helpful from age to age, is just the power which it possesses of illuminating our own lives in all their deeper passages. He is ourselves in advance, our Representative. The scenes of His life—the closing scenes, in particular—only gain their highest meaning when they are translated into moral experiences, and we are able to say with St. Paul, whose source of inspiration was Christ after the Spirit: “I suffer, I die, I am buried, I rise, I reign with Him.”

In “The Secret,” a fine but unfinished poem which seeks to represent Christianity as the flower and crown of all religion, Goethe draws a picture of man in his pilgrimage through the world in search of the highest good, coming at last to the Cross :

“ He sees, betokening hope and consolation
To all mankind, the Sign upraiséd high :
He sees the Cross, then lowers his veilé eyes ;
He feels how great salvation thence proceedeth ;
The faith of half a world glows in his heart once more.”

In Christendom there is now, as there has always been, no spiritual attraction like the Cross. Not a few here and everywhere, who are proof against many other religious attractions, are drawn by this one. It touches them, some in one way, others in another way, each man according to his temperament, his character, his culture, his experience ; but it is only the man destitute of spiritual life, if such a one can be found, who can stand beneath the shadow of the Cross wholly unmoved. We may not make much of it as a visible and material sign in our churches and homes, by our waysides and on our mountain heights. Some things which our fathers thought and said about it we may not be able to think and say, but in discarding this or that use of it, or this or that interpretation of it, we are not of those who wish to make it of none effect. It is still our symbol. The secret of its power is not bound up with any ecclesiastical exposition of it. The men who find in ecclesiastical theory and myth little to attract and much to repel, but who still glory in the Cross and find the law and inspiration of their life in the faith and spirit of Him who consecrated it by His death, are in our day a multitude which no man can number. We must not be of that small company of unpoised, unbalanced minds, who are for ever tempted to belittle what has hitherto been belauded in ways unreal and extravagant. Let not the exaggerations of men, their dogmatism or their sentimentalism, cheat us for one

moment into thinking that we do not revere the Cross, do not love it, and are not loyal to it. Let us do ourselves no such harm ! Let us not impoverish our spiritual life and the spiritual life of our churches by slighting this source of inspiration. The supreme office or service of the Cross is to quicken and nourish in the soul certain great emotions, affections and sympathies ; and if in the solitude and silence of our inner life, and in our associated life as congregations of Christ's flock, it is drawing and keeping us nearer to man and to God, then assuredly we are not among those who are making it of none effect.

Of all symbols the Cross is not the property of a sect, the monopoly of a school, the badge of a party. It belongs to all as the loveliness of the world, as our great human affections and needs, as our sorrow and sin, belong to all. It belongs to all who feel and rejoice to feel the healing touch of Christ, to all to whom He is as dear as He was to the disciples, who, though they did not understand Him yet followed Him, as He was to the women who ministered to Him in Galilee, and as He was to the outcasts who fell in shame at His feet. It belongs to all who get from it comfort, rebuke, inspiration, some help to holy living and dying. Alas ! that men should cover it with their infirmities even when gathering around it seeking salvation. Alas ! that at its very foot they should nurse bad tempers and confirm prejudices, and from behind it shoot forth

poisoned arrows—even false and bitter words against all who do not think of it as they do. Alas! that it should ever have been used to keep alive in the world the same intolerance, the same meanness and wickedness, which crucified Jesus Christ. It was not differences of conception and opinion, but self-indulgence and worldliness of life, which made St. Paul denounce many of the religionists of his day as enemies of the Cross of Christ. Not differing thought and theory, but subjection to the senses, slavery to appetite, bondage to worldly custom, moral unfaithfulness, spiritual indifference, these are the things which in the present, as in the past, make of men and women the enemies of the Cross of Christ.

The Cross of Christ does not live merely as ancient history, nor as the centre of an ecclesiastical drama, or of a theological system. It has a message—a real and living message—for us upon whom the ends of an age have come, as much as it had for the men who lived in the first Christian days. It only requires to be taken out of the atmosphere of the schools and sects, and to be brought back again into the midst of our human life, near to our human passion and need, for men to feel its wondrous charm and power.

I. THE CROSS THE SYMBOL OF THE SORROW OF THE WORLD

We may have wondered at times why one Son of man crowned with thorns and stretched out upon a Cross should have made such a deep impression on the heart of mankind : why, in a world where there are so many tears shed and so much blood, where thorns pierce so many foreheads, and the cross of anguish is so universal, that year after year for well-nigh nineteen centuries men and women have gathered around this one sufferer and wept over Him, as if the crown of thorns and the Cross were alone His. In a paper published in the interests of Labour, I read not long ago an article in which the writer said : “ There was a time when in Lent I wept for the Crucified on Calvary ; now my Eternal Lent is for the miseries of man, and the suffering and crucifixion of all the best helpers and heroes of the world.” There is much in the suggestion of that sentence which must appeal to us all. Again and again, in moments of deep feeling and clear vision, it must have appeared to us to be almost like an injustice to the suffering human millions in every country and age, a slight on the immeasurable miseries and martyrdoms of humanity, to dwell so much on what happened to one Son of man long ago. Why just Jesus ? Why the Crucified of Calvary alone ? Why should His Passion and Cross be so exalted and mag-

nified? It must surely be because this Son of man comes to us in His suffering as the Representative of all the sons of men, because His sorrow has a universal significance, because His Cross is the centre and symbol, the illumination and consecration, of all our human crosses. Our Good Friday and Easter Meditations would indeed be vain thoughts were they occupied merely with remote things. It would be a waste of precious feeling to muse and weep over the ancient story of Jesus' woe and to linger before His Cross—unless that Cross has a universal significance, and unless by the contemplation of that sorrow we are made more alive to the pathos of life, taught and stirred to bear more bravely our own sorrows, and to cultivate a finer and wider sympathy with our afflicted human kind. We may be sure that He who identified Himself so closely and completely with suffering humanity in His native Galilee, and who said on His way to Calvary, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children," would not have us spend one thought or tear upon what He once endured, were we not brought by that meditation and discipline not only nearer to Himself, but nearer to men to-day in all their toils and tragedies and needs.

To purify the emotions, it was said long ago, is the office of tragedy: to lift the spectator to such a high level that one will be ashamed to go home from the contemplation of such struggle and suffering to make

much of his own little ailments and troubles. The tragedy of the Saviour's life to which Christendom, especially on Good Friday, directs its thought, is surely being used for its divinest work when it is used to arouse and deliver us from our selfishness, and to deepen our sympathy with the wrongs and sorrows and needs of living men. It is as the Representative of mankind Jesus hangs there upon the Cross. The pathos of the sight is in its appeal to that which corresponds to it in universal human experience, in your life and mine, and in the life of the race.

In some shape the Cross enters into every human life. Do what we may it cannot be escaped. Sorrow and pain pass no man by ; and no reasoning can argue them out of existence, or reduce our fight with disease and suffering to a phantom battle—an illusion of “mortal mind.” Living in a world where the blows of misfortune are constantly falling ; where the ravages of suffering are nowhere long absent ; where every joy is every moment exposed to blight ; where development yields new pain ; where increasing knowledge, increasing refinement, increasing goodness and sympathy mean increasing sorrow, and men and women suffer, not for being worse, but for being better than their fellows, it is no wonder that the Cross appeals to human hearts everywhere as the symbol of human life, and holds us under the spell of a solemn fascination. Rejoice as we may, and as we ought to rejoice, in all that brightens

and sweetens life, yet the fellowship of suffering is wider and deeper than the fellowship of happiness. A German poet has said that the image of humanity, broken in all its limbs, transfixed in hands and feet and sorrowful unto death, has become distasteful to men ; but that can only be true of men in their light, careless, self-indulgent hours. In all our deeper experiences our feet tread the path that leads to Calvary, and we seek the Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief.

Christianity has been called the worship of sorrow, and there is much truth in the saying. It blesses those that mourn, and counts the sensitive and wounded heart of sympathy to be the divinest thing in man. It has not diminished the suffering in the world, but it has given it a new and nobler meaning, made it appear to be no longer God's wrath and curse, but God's love and blessing. It has altered its expression, changing it from selfish suffering into the suffering which comes from aspiration and pity and growing sensibility to the wants and woes of the world. Our communion with Jesus Christ, if it is a real thing and not a pretence, means that our natures with all their susceptibilities and capacities and affections, and our lives in all their relations and interests and cares, have been tuned to a higher note and brought into unison with a diviner idea, and therefore to the willing endurance of many a burden and battle and many a pain and pang unknown before. We cannot indeed imagine a Christian life at

all without this underlying sensitiveness to the sorrow of the world.

Let us lay well to heart, then, this first lesson of the Cross ; its revelation of the reality and power of suffering, of sorrow bravely accepted, borne, and so borne that it becomes a means and moment of development—a Divine education. Though He were a Son yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered. He did not suffer that we might not suffer, but rather that we might learn how to suffer. And did we but take to the inevitable ills of our days as He took to His, meet and bear them in His spirit, then would they lose their bitterness and sting ; evil would be the minister of good, our struggles would be a discipline of strength, our pain would quicken and refine our pity, our suffering be a bond of sympathy with suffering everywhere, our sorrow a divine joy in the making, our cross the power of God unto salvation.

II. THE CROSS THE SYMBOL OF THE SIN OF THE WORLD

We are accustomed to hear the crucifixion of Jesus Christ spoken of as the act of the human race, and as such in a very true sense it may be regarded. A mind prone to dwell on the mere accident and letter of things may say, "I had no part nor lot in it ; nor in any circumstances could I have shared in it, or con-

sented to it." That may be quite true ; yet we have that in us which did it ; not only that in us which admires and loves the character of the Crucified, or certain features of it, but that also which when left to itself takes sides against Christ, against the things for which He stood and for which He stands. Goethe once said, "I have never heard of any crime which I might not have committed." The crucifixion was the work of men, and we are men. In the little world of the human heart, your heart and mine, what contradictions we find, what capabilities for uncommitted sins, the very seed and substance of the evil which crucified the Son of God.

In thinking from time to time of the great world-tragedy of the Divine death, we must not think of it as far away and strange—not as happening only in the Palestine of the first century—but as an actual horror in the England of to-day. The tragedy of the betrayal, the denial, the desertion, the rejection, we see constantly acted over and over again. In reading of Judas, and Peter, and Pilate, the Jewish priests and the Jewish mob, we are reading of ourselves. The dispositions and passions, the motives and interests which moved them and determined their conduct, have more or less a hold of us all, and in all the critical moments of life they are tempting us to follow their way and take their side. Our Lents, our Holy Weeks, our Easters, would indeed be times of solemn blessing did they but open our eyes

to the present reality of what seems to have only an historical significance—to the continual betrayal, denial, desertion, rejection, crucifixion of the Son of God ; did they but strip the Passion and death of Christ of their antiquarian and merely theological aspects, and make us realise that so long as men and women have weak, selfish, worldly, corrupt hearts, the Cross and Passion cannot be confined to one land or century.

We shrink back from Judas with abhorrence—but let us not put away from ourselves the thought that we may be guilty of a like treachery. A divided allegiance is itself a treachery. Does not the love of gain, or the love of place, or the love of comfort, often induce men here and now to betray truth, to betray love ? We do not, as Ruskin once said, disbelieve our Christ—but we still sell Him. How we blame Peter for denying the best Friend a man ever had—how it fills us with a feeling of half-anger, half-pity, to see him turn coward and liar. And yet the denial of Christ is a very common form of sin. To deny what we know to be the highest, to live and act in another way in profession, and trade, and society, in Church and State, than the way which we know to be the best way, is to deny the real Christ.

We talk cynically of the Jewish mob crying one day “Hosanna !” and the next day “Crucify !” but how often do we see the professed followers of Jesus Christ guilty of the same inconstancy ?—as if mere lip-

worship, idle holiday adorations, and the scattering of dead leaves and branches gathered from our theological gardens could take the place of that deeper and more practical loyalty for which our honest Lord and Master alone cares—the loyalty of the life to His Father's will and work.

We condemn Pilate, hindered from doing what was right by a cowardly and criminal fear of jeopardising his own interests, and yet is not his conduct in essence just what people are guilty of every day? Now, and for ever, the deadly record stands, repeated in thousands of churches, "Crucified under Pontius Pilate"; but have we not that within us all which can do what Pilate did—sacrifice the highest and divinest things in order to please Cæsar, to advance our prospects, or to keep our place in an exclusive society or a worldly church?

We wonder that the moral and religious people of Jerusalem did not lift up their voices against the crucifixion, and yet every day in every town and village of the land the Son of God is being crucified afresh—crucified by the selfishness which prefers private interest or domestic comfort to witnessing a good and brave confession for oppressed ideas, oppressed causes, oppressed men.

Certain philosophers of Greece were accustomed to say that if virtue appeared on the earth clothed in her own native loveliness, all men would fall down and

worship her. It is one thing, however, to love virtue in dreams and visions of the mind, in poetry and fiction, another thing to love her when she appears in our streets and market-places, in our synagogues and temples—rebuking our insincerities and falsehoods. We may admire and worship the virtue of dream and theory and yet cry out, “away, crucify !” to the virtue of fact—to truth and goodness in the actual world of men.

The Cross may then be used to-day as yesterday to produce conviction of sin ; to find out where we are in relation to those evil principles and passions which crucified Jesus Christ. What was done by Judas and Peter, by Herod and Pilate, by the priests and rulers and the people of Jerusalem on that first Good Friday, ought to start the question in the minds of each one of us, “Lord, is it I ?” God forbid there should come to us the terrible charge, “Thou art the man !” thou art a Judas, a Peter, a Pilate, a betrayer, a denier, a crucifier of the Son of God. No ; this must never be. And yet we know full well that it is possible to be charmed by the poetry, the music, the sentiment of religion, to be deeply interested in speculative theories of the person and death of Christ, even to feel the profound pathos of the Cross, and yet to be in spirit and life the enemies of the Crucified. Let us ever bring our emotions and moods to a practical test. Let us ever seek to nourish in ourselves and in others that love of the law and spirit and character of Christ, and of the things which were dearer to Him

than life, which sends a man out into the world to be faithful unto death, to follow the True, even though it be to his Calvary.

III. THE CROSS THE SYMBOL OF PERFECT OBEDIENCE

In the Cross of Jesus Christ we see absolute self-consecration to God in life and in death ; the loftiest manifestation of the power of man to give himself to God which the world has ever seen. It embodies, it is true, no new principle, no principle which was not clearly illustrated in the years that led up to Calvary ; rather is it the fulfilment and crown of the whole movement of His life—of the one principle, the one law, the one purpose, the one great devotion which dominated His being and doing, all His rejoicing and suffering, all His living and dying. It was the glory of Jesus to obey ; apart from His Father, He had no desires, no purposes, no interests ; in the Father only did He live. This absolute dedication of Himself to God—this absolute identification of Himself with the will of God—a power no doubt which He gradually won and possessed in the silent years which lie behind His public career—gives us the key to the understanding of His influence and His place in history. Whatever prophecies there may have been of the Divine Sonship of humanity in the experience of men, it came forth into clear and complete consciousness for the first time in

Him who said, "I do always the things that please God." It is this perfect realisation of filial union with God that is the central fact of our religion. The divinity of Jesus is the divinity of Sonhood. It is the revelation of the Father in the Son. And the Cross is the proof and sign of His perfect obedience to His Father's will—obedience even unto death. His life was not taken from Him. In one wonderful saying—the strongest words surely which ever fell from human lips—He tells us that He laid His life down of Himself, that He had power to control its events and experiences, and was not the victim but the master of fate. He will not precipitate, but He will not avoid His destiny. "Master," said Peter, "that be far from Thee"; but if Jesus had saved Himself—saved Himself by concessions to popular feeling and prejudice, and by avoiding the collisions which His devotion to the will of God made inevitable—He would not be the Christ we love to remember. From much reading of His story and meditating on His spirit, we have that idea of Him that it disturbs our sense of His dignity to suppose even for a moment that He could have yielded a little, compromised a little, and when His hour was come could have run away from his enemies or have hidden Himself. "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross"; but we feel that it is just because He is the Son of God that He cannot come down; it is His filial faithfulness which led Him there

and which keeps Him there. If for nothing else but for its example of moveless fidelity, of obedience unto death, we need to place ourselves again and again under the inspiring influence of the Cross of Christ—an inspiration which nineteen centuries have not exhausted. In its light we see at once our defects and failures, our powers and possibilities—that which both shames and stimulates the work of our high calling—a glory of obedience and faithfulness which can be realised within the conditions of our common humanity. It is not easy to put all selfish and worldly temptations under our feet, to take and to keep high ground ; to say the true word and to do the true thing when it is terribly hard to do it ; when obedience and faithfulness mean loss and suffering—a daily crucifying of the flesh with its affections and lusts ; but in every tempted moment we see Jesus—the type, the promise, the prophecy of that which we shall yet be, if we faint not.

IV. THE CROSS THE SYMBOL OF REDEMPTION THROUGH SACRIFICE

In the Cross of Jesus Christ we see the revelation and symbol of sacrifice as the law of redemption and progress—as the way of love and redemption always and everywhere. This part of its message to men has been and still is much misunderstood and misrepresented, but the abuse of a great truth is no reason for

slighting that truth ; rather is it a reason all the more commanding for lifting that truth to grounds which are far above abuse and also far above the changing explanations of the shifting centuries of thought. The lifelong sacrifice of Jesus to the will and work of God and to the good of mankind, which culminated in His death, is both the type and the tide-mark of the perpetual and universal sacrifice through which the world and men rise ever upward to purer and more perfect life.

It seems at times as though we failed to understand the highest things by seeking to understand them too far apart from our ordinary human experience. The Cross, as the revelation and symbol of redemption through sacrifice, needs to be brought back to our common life. So far as the principle is concerned, it is right to apply, and we do instinctively apply, all the New Testament phraseology of redemption to parents sacrificing themselves for the good of their children, to patriots suffering and dying for the sacred causes of justice and freedom, to the vast army of labourers who procure for us our necessities and luxuries at the cost of their nobler growth and comfort ; and when we do so all caricatures of the Sacrifice of the Cross and all parodies of the Christian redemption fall away, and we see that Jesus in His living and dying was fulfilling the law to which we owe all our best blessings, that the great fact of historical religion is the interpretation and

transfiguration of the inmost fact of life. Without shedding of blood—blood of body, blood of brain, blood of heart—there has been no remission of sins, no redemption from evil conditions, no progress from a lower to a higher state of society. Figuratively, if not literally, men have been crucified, their hands torn, their hearts pierced through with many sorrows, in the interest of every onward step and movement of mankind. It is by the way of the Cross light comes, freedom comes, growth comes, now as always. A modern writer in a volume of weird sketches tells the parable of an artist who painted a beautiful picture. There was a wonderful glow upon it, which won the admiration of all his compeers, but which none could imitate. They were eager to find out where he got his colours. They sought rare and rich pigments in far-off lands ; but when these touched the canvas their richness faded and died. So the secret of the great artist remained undiscovered. But one day they found him dead beside his picture, and when they came to strip him for his shroud they found a wound beneath his heart. It dawned upon them that he had painted his picture with his heart's blood. Yes ! The work which really helps the world—work of statesman and philanthropist—work of poet and painter and doctor—work of teacher and preacher—is work into which men put their life, their heart's blood. It is this power to give without counting the cost to one's self, this power of

suffering and sacrifice, which is the secret of all redeeming work. Putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself is what every truly Christian man here and everywhere is doing. The law of sacrifice, which is wrought into the constitution of the world, which was the law of Christ's whole life, and which was uplifted and glorified upon His Cross, is the law that is laid upon every one of us.

It is not enough that Christ offered Himself upon the Cross of the world's salvation nineteen hundred years ago ; that sacrifice has to be prolonged and repeated in the lives of His disciples if the will of God is ever to be done on earth as it is in heaven. It can never cease to be offered until the world is redeemed from its evil and reconciled to the Divine order of our human life—the true atonement.

In the sacristy of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris there is a memorial window to an archbishop who was killed in the discharge of his sacred duties amid the tumult of one of those revolutions of which Paris unhappily has witnessed so many. Beneath the window the words are inscribed, "The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The application of the text is a most legitimate and right worthy one. The ideal of the Good Shepherd is the ideal of all true and noble leadership among men ; and obedience to its heavenly vision is the sacrifice which God exacts as the price of all high and helpful service and influence. How does your work and mine look when judged by this test—

the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep, giveth His life daily, hourly, year in and year out, puts all that He is and has into His work, and without reserve and without calculation spends Himself in it? Can we, dare we, say with St. Paul, "I count not my own life dear to myself," "I die daily," "I am crucified with Christ"? The Cross is the symbol of the life Jesus lived, and it must be the symbol of the life we are striving to live. Our work must have in it that same quality which makes the Cross divine. We must not preach self-sacrifice and practise self-indulgence. The fellowship of the Crucified is the fellowship of sacrifice, and the Church of Christ the sacred order of the Cross. Good is it from time to time to be reminded of this, good to listen to the message of the Cross, good to place ourselves at the side of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and to hear Him saying to us—Brothers! Sisters! let us redeem the world together; together let us bear its burdens; together let us put away its sin by the sacrifice of ourselves.

V. THE CROSS THE SYMBOL OF THE VICTORY OF FAILURE

It is with truth Pascal says that Jesus Christ "took the way of perishing according to human calculations." The Cross is the revelation and symbol of victory, but of victory in failure and because of failure. There

never was such an apparent failure as the Crucifixion. Every form of evil seemed to have won a triumph on that first Good Friday. But things are not always what they appear to be. It was the saying of a high-minded man, who had striven in vain against an overwhelming majority in a clerical assembly, "When ye say all is over, then will be the time when all will begin." The Cross was not the end but the beginning—the beginning of victory—an endless victory to the cause of goodness in the world. Whatever else had failed, the loyalty of Jesus to the work of His life had not failed. The outward defeat was the proof of the moral victory. Had He been less faithful He would have escaped the Cross. There are successes which are sadder than any failures, and failures that are more glorious than any successes. It was by the way of the Cross Jesus went up to power and influence and glory—to the throne of human reverence and love. And somehow He knew and felt that He was to win by losing, to conquer by failing, to live by dying. And the history of all that is best on this earth is one continuous illustration of this law of the Cross. Let us not be afraid of those noble failures out of which have come all the great triumphs of the world. Let God's great cause be dearer to us than any personal or sectarian success. The lives of not a few of the great religious leaders of the last century seemed more or less a failure—Robertson's, Maurice's, Colenso's—but they are

having now a second and a better life—the victory which comes of the apparent defeat and because of it. Because they were obedient unto death God hath highly exalted them. The path to real power still lies by way of the Cross. Let us, when we are tempted to measure our work by poor, vulgar, earthly standards, recall “the unfinished life that rules the world,” that broken body hanging on a Roman cross, and the desponding cry of the disciples: “We thought that it was He who would have redeemed Israel!” Edward Irving, when he commenced his ministry in the city of Glasgow well-nigh ninety years ago, resolved that he would “demonstrate a higher style of Christianity—something more magnanimous, more heroic than this age is accustomed to.” A higher style of Christianity is more than ever our need. Let us attempt it. Let us give ourselves to it. Let it not seem beyond possibility—too great to hope, too difficult to dare. Let courage rise with danger—the courage that will welcome a noble failure rather than be content with a cheap, an easy, a mean success.

“All through life I see a Cross
 Where sons of God yield up their breath;
 There is no gain except by loss,
 There is no life except through death;
 Nor glory but in bearing shame,
 Nor justice but in taking blame;
 And that Eternal Passion saith—
 Be emptied of glory and right and name.”

VI. THE CROSS THE SYMBOL OF THE PASSION OF GOD.

In one of the ancient churches of Central Italy there is a unique representation of the Crucifixion. Behind the Christ on the Cross we catch a dim vision of the Eternal Father ; the hands of the Father behind the hands of the Son, and the nails which pierce the Son piercing the Father also. We shrink from it at first as coarse and rude, but as we think about it we feel that it is the old painter saying in the only language which he could command what has been so long and strangely forgotten, if not in form yet in reality, that God is in Christ, that the Father is in the Son, that His love had not to be won by sacrifice, that it is His love which is embodied in the sacrifice, that the Cross and Passion are the revelation in time and space, in visible and historical form, of the grief and pain of a God who suffers for and with His creation and His children. Little, no doubt, did the old Italian painter or the church of his age realise the full import of the symbol he used. Medieval theology was partly Christian truth and partly Pagan and Jewish superstition, and that is still true of much of our theology ; but truth is displacing superstition, and the law of the Cross is being seen more and more clearly to be the law of love in heaven as on earth.

It is difficult to account for the strange reluctance to associate the idea of suffering and sacrifice with God.

To be Infinite perfection, Infinite goodness and love, God cannot be a mere spectator of sorrow and sin. God and man live by one law. Every man that loveth is begotten of God and knoweth God. Creatorhood and suffering, Fatherhood and pain, love and cross-bearing, are joined together and cannot be put asunder. The Source of all feeling and compassion cannot Himself be devoid of feeling and compassion. It is not a God callous as to suffering, careless as to sin, which the Bible, Old and New, reveals, but a God living in the life of the human race, afflicted in its affliction, and bruised and wounded by its iniquity. Everywhere the love of God is seen in suffering and sacrifice. The compassion of men is not the accusation of His goodness, but the revelation and proof of it. The sorrows, the sacrifices, the martyrdoms of the world's helpers are His. The sacrifice of the Cross is not made to God ; it is made by God, it is part of the universal and perpetual sacrifice God is ever and everywhere making in order to take away the sorrow and sin of the world.

What a Gospel the Cross preaches to men and women troubled by the woes of life ! Standing up against the dark sky it says that God suffers in and with His creatures and His children, that He is the Chief of sufferers, that it is His pity and love and sympathy we see in the pity and love and sympathy of Christ and of all Christ-like souls.

What a Gospel the Cross preaches to men and

women troubled by the sense of sin and guilt, tormented by memories of passion and shame! Knowing it to be a revelation of Divine sorrow and sacrifice, we cannot believe any longer that we have any Divine indifference or hostility to subdue—the notion of an angry God to be appeased by blood is abolished for ever. It reveals a love that seeks and saves to the uttermost—not a God from whom we have to be saved, but a God who is Himself our Saviour. Let not your sins, men and women, keep you from God! You may begin a new life at once with the assurance that God loves you, that He has forgiven you, and that neither things present nor things to come will separate you from His love.

Let us members of the Church of Christ gather again around the Cross of Christ and find, as we stand under its shadow, inspiration to live a life of love and sacrifice. Let us hear and obey its call to do what we see God in Christ is doing, to be His fellow-helpers and fellow-sufferers in bearing and taking away the sorrow and sin of the world.

THE ATONEMENT

“That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us. The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them.”—JOHN xvii. 21, 22.

It is ever of supreme and vital moment to bring our religious ideas into harmony with the truth and nature of things. The doctrine of the Atonement, although it is of the essence of Christianity, has undergone constant and radical modification from age to age. It has only to be traced through its successive phases to see a progressive moral evolution. The evolution is not yet finished. Popular representations of it, if they no longer shock our notions of justice and have a demoralising influence, make man's relations to God too strained and artificial. Its generally accepted form belongs to a stage of ethical and religious culture that is passing away, and will have no place in the purer and more spiritual religion of the future.

The profound idea of Reconciliation, which is the heart of the doctrine, has been obscured by interpretations and theories that have allowed too little for the

temporal and local conditions under which the apostles lived and thought, and by language which has come through a Christian medium, but not from a Christian source ; and in changing its skies has also changed its significance—language which is not the natural and just expression of our spiritual experience, and not in accord with our mental and moral habit. It gets more and more difficult for an increasing number of serious-minded people to find in the mode of representation and style of illustration, which were acceptable to persons passing out of Judaism and Paganism into Christianity, the prototypes and adequate symbols of their Christian faith at the beginning of the twentieth century of the era of Christ. They are “faded metaphors” which no longer answer to their sense of truth.

“ Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain ”

can commend the Atonement to their reason or imagination. The ancient symbolism has its place in the history of the Christian teaching, but it is now more calculated to mislead and to confuse than to suggest the real truth. The new wine is bursting the old bottles. The great and final ideas of Christianity are escaping from their long burden of tradition and dogma, and from the Jewish forms which they originally bore, into new and more universal forms. Let those who honestly can, continue to use the archaic and Hebraistic

language of the early teachers of our religion ; but playing with words in the exposition of serious and lofty themes often comes dangerously near to grieving the Spirit of Truth. Dante speaks of being obliged to give the words he used a significance which they never had before, but a like exercise of imaginative genius is a somewhat perilous experiment when made by the teacher who to-day seeks to interpret religion. To keep phrases hallowed by tradition and the associations of worship, and then to explain them away by terms which make them mean something entirely different, is a practice that is breeding a profound and fatal distrust of the modern pulpit. Casuistry, obscurantism, and pretending to believe what is not actually believed, ought to find no favour among the disciples of Him who said, "He that is of the truth heareth My voice." We ought to love truth more than we fear departure from tradition, and not be too slow and afraid to separate the Christian ideas from their incidents, accidents, and imperfect products. God hath made us ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the spirit. The present has its claims as well as the past. Religion, like everything else, is subject to the laws of development, and the canon of its Holy Scriptures is never closed. God is eternal and unchangeable, but the revelation of His character and will is continuous and progressive, and man is the child of growth. In the interpretation of the relation of God to His creation

and His children immense progress has been made. To our thought the physical and spiritual universe have both been reconstructed. We are approaching the view of God as a Being essentially united with the universe, the immanent life of all things, while transcending all things, requiring no device to bring Him back to a harmony from which He has never departed, revealing Himself in the order of the world, and not by occasional interruptions or breaks in that order. The conception of natural law—law as a principle and method of vital action—has taken the place of juridical law by which past ages shaped their idea of redemption. The Church has also grown in grace and the knowledge of its Lord and Saviour. It has re-discovered the secret of Jesus—the large and mighty trust in God as eternal and invincible Goodness, which Jesus quickened in the consciousness of mankind. The re-affirmation of the universal Fatherhood of God in modern days has led to a renaissance of faith, and to a re-interpretation of the entire theology of Christendom. We see God in Christ, and know God by Christ, as never before, and this divine knowledge is making all things new. The whole range of human life and thought has risen to a higher moral and spiritual level. The doctrine of the Atonement must share in this uplifting and transfiguration of thought and faith and life. It must be put in a way that meets and satisfies our spiritual and intellectual needs, and while doing no

violence to what else we know of the world and life, corresponds to the truth of Christianity, at least in its simplest expression in the personal message of Jesus Christ—the proper norm of Christian theology. In the past it has been narrowed down to mean one particular thing, and been identified too exclusively with one great historical transaction or event. It is passing out of this limited significance into a larger meaning which holds all that is true in ancient doctrine, and infinitely more.

I. THE NATURE AND NEED OF ATONEMENT

When we go behind its technical sense we find in the word itself a suggestion of the true and final form of the idea of the Atonement. To be at one with God is the Atonement which is the profound and vital need of humanity; and the making of humanity one with God—the process of realising the Divine ideal—is the work of Atonement. Not to be at one with God is for man to be at war with himself, and in imperfect and wrong relations with all other beings and things. Only in moral oneness with God can he find his full and final perfection and peace.

Atonement thus considered is the supreme idea and ultimate purpose of all real religion. In the highest form which religion has reached historically, it receives, both in word and life, its perfect expression. In the prayer of Jesus, "That they all may be one, even as

Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us," the idea of Atonement finds its most spiritual utterance. In the life of Jesus we see, as in a visible parable, what it is for man to be one with God. He is the historical representative of that perfect union of the human and Divine of which the constitution and experience of man have always been the prophecy.

The essential unity of God and man is the only foundation on which any adequate conception of the Atonement can rest. It is the truth of truths concerning this subject. But the tendency of religion in its cruder forms has ever been to emphasise and magnify the distance between God and man, and out of the attempt to reduce that separation have come the gross ideas of sacrifice which, passing over into Christian thought, have gathered about the Cross and put it to an open shame. We must learn to think of God as in man and his life, and not as outward, separate and remote, coming near only by arbitrary miracle, and related only by artificial conjunction. The idea of union with God is involved in the idea of man. The genealogy of man as man has no merely zoological root. His childhood to God is the most radical fact of his being. He is God's offspring, begotten, not made. Deity and humanity are not two alien natures, but one nature. The essential life of man is akin to the essential life of God. Reason, thought, feeling, justice, truth,

mercy, and love are kindred in God and man. The Divine is but the human seen in its source and perfection. "I and My Father are one" is an idea true of all humanity.

God and man are in idea one ; but the fulfilment of that ideal is the long and slow work of God and man "labouring together" in the succession of ages. Not in any first man do we see the ideal relation between God and man realised. The sublime affirmation of the Hebrew seer, "God made man in His own image," is prophecy, not history—the end seen from the beginning. It is the last and not the first Adam that bears the image of the heavenly. The manifestation of the sons of men as the sons of God is not the starting-point but the goal of human progress. History is the story of the making of man in the Divine image ; it reveals man becoming less animal and more spiritual, climbing up from low estate to the true life of a son of God—to sit with Christ on His throne. In Jesus Christ we see the Messiah of the spiritual evolution, the mark of our high calling, showing us what we realise slowly, the type and promise of our ultimate perfection and destiny.

What the Atonement means is a matter to be determined by the facts of our nature and condition. It is clearly not a lost unity that has to be restored. Man cannot have departed from a type which he has never realised, fallen away from a standard he has never

reached. Union with God is a moral relation to be attained, not preserved. The race of mankind has never been more one with God than it is to-day.

“In Adam’s fall
We sinnèd all,”

is theory, not fact. The Christian doctrine of Atonement is not bound up with any such unscientific and unhistorical positions. Science has removed Adam to the region of myths, and the whole theology based on that foundation must therefore be reconstructed. It is the rise, not the fall, of man with which the study of history makes us acquainted. The advance, it is true, has been painfully slow and gradual, and not without reversions ; but looking largely at history—

“Since time began
We see the steady gain of man.”

There is a Divine order which no disorders can disturb, and to which falls are but stages of evolution. We are living in a growing, not in a ruined world, under God’s love and blessing, not under His wrath and curse. Imperfection is no proof of depravity. Tendencies must be distinguished from results, and powers and passions, good in their right degree, be separated in thought from their misdirection and perversion. It is from an outworn view of human nature there has come the idea that the natural development of man must inevitably be that of constant and chronic

enmity against goodness and God. Growth is the law of the world. The sense of sin is not the sign of degeneration, but of a moral uprising. It is, as Carlyle says, "the beginning of all progress," and until it is awakened, man is little more than an animal. What we see, when we look back, is man rising through many struggles to his true life, seeking God by a law of his being. "Nearer, my God, to Thee," "Restless, till I rest in Thee," are words which interpret the conscious and unconscious aspiration and movement of man's whole life upon this earth. Because man is what he is, he cannot remain satisfied in the outer circles of being, nor endure to be far away from Him who is the Beginning and the End of his life. Toward and into that inner circle of unity between Father and Son he must press and enter, if his life is to be anything but a living death. From this point of view, the Atonement that is a vital human need is no making up of a previous strife, but the fulfilment of the Divine idea of man. It is effected through self-development and self-realisation. Man comes to God as he comes to himself; and to come to himself he must come to God.

Atonement is, further, the reconciliation of the whole man, and his whole life and world, to God. To be one with God is to be one with the entire truth and order of things with which man and God, working together, have to do. The physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual life of man, his personal and social life in all

their relations and aspects, are one life in the Divine idea, and have to be brought into conformity with the Divine purpose and will. A high and noble reconciliation is possible between the lower and higher elements of human nature, and on it depend our inward peace and outward power and progress. Good and evil within us are not separate powers and passions, but degrees of the same thing, the right use good, only the abuse evil. The union of the mind of man with the Absolute Mind, the correspondence of his thought with fact and truth, is the aspect which the Atonement takes in the region of the intellectual life. Thinking as we please, believing as we like, is the alienation of the mind from God. It is the teaching of all experience that we are conditioned morally, as well as physically, and can only develop healthily as we follow certain lines which, though implicated in our nature and revealed in our experience, are no more the creation of experience than are the laws which keep and guide the stars in their courses. The Divine order for men in social relations is clearly meant to be that of a family; and we are only in our right, or righteous state, when we are living and working together fraternally. We cannot be one with God until we are one with our fellows, cannot be within the circle of right universal relations until we are in right relations with those who are nearest to us. The self-regardful type of life is enmity against God. Reconciliation to the laws of justice,

love, and brotherhood is reconciliation to God. The laws which regulate the immediate communion of the soul with God are more subtle and less capable of exact expression than those which regulate our physical and social life; yet there is a Divine order here without variableness, an order which is revealed and confirmed by all religious experience. It is the pure in heart who see God; it is he who dwelleth in love who dwelleth in God; and it is what St. John calls "the Son," the filial mind and spirit in man, that brings him to the Father.

Reconciliation to our earthly lot, with all its fixed and inevitable conditions and issues, is another aspect of the Christian idea of Atonement. To be at peace with God is to be at peace with things, with all the things which God has ordained for our human discipline; at peace with the laws of labour and struggle and change, with the laws of life and death. And it is just in proportion as man brings himself, or is brought, into conformity and harmony with the laws that control and guide his destiny, and with the whole idea and order of his being and life, that union with God becomes a reality, reconciliation is effected, and the Atonement practically completed. There is no other way of atonement than the way of obedience—every man's free obedience to the Divine laws of his being and life.

But who is thus at one with God? It is the selfish will and order, not the Divine will and order, which is more or less universally followed and obeyed. Man

everywhere is in conflict with himself and in conflict with his fellows because he is in conflict with the Divine will, because he is at strife with the order which God has ordained for him and his life, because his powers and affections are estranged from God and are restless in their departure from Him. It is only by a figure of speech we can speak of breaking God's laws. We fail to obey them, set ourselves against them, and they break us. The moral order requires no special and external vindication of its majesty. God does not need to be appeased, for His laws never fail to punish sin in their own good time and way. But compensation He does not exact or need. It is not the suffering of the sinner, but his restoration to goodness and a life of conscious harmony with the Divine will that satisfies the holy and righteous God. Propitiation, expiation, and substitution, in their current interpretations and forms, are as little in accord with what we see to be the order of things in the universe as they are with the tone and tendency of the teaching of Jesus and the real and profound needs of the enlightened soul.

II. THE WORK OF GOD IN THE WORLD IS THE WORK OF ATONEMENT

Conceptions of the Atonement have hitherto been very largely framed upon the thought that Deity is

irresponsible. But Creatorhood and Fatherhood have their obligations and duties as well as creaturehood and childhood. The Creator cannot leave His creation unfinished. The Father must seek to be one with His children and to bring them to perfection. We have no choice of existence, but He from whom we came, if only to satisfy Himself, will have regard to the work of His hands and respond to the appeal, "I am Thine ; save me." The movement will not be all, or chiefly, on the side of man. It is the essential nature of love to seek and to save. The righteousness and blessedness of man are necessary to God.

The work of atonement is God's eternal work—a universal world-process. We cannot conceive of the Divine Goodness as ever being insensate and passive, or as other than ceaselessly compassionate and helpful. The life of sacrifice is the law of love for heaven as for earth. Because God is love, to create is to suffer, and to call mankind into being is to be afflicted in its afflictions. Wholly outside His world God has never been ; He has always been in it : at the heart of its age-long struggle between good and evil, taking upon Himself the sins and carrying the sorrows of our race. It was not a new and strange work the beloved Son of God came to do, but the work which He saw His Father doing continuously. The Divine mission of Jesus is not so much an isolated interpolation in human history as the reflection and revelation of the universal and

eternal labour, passion and sacrifice of God. Without Jesus the world was for thousands of years, but not without the merciful, gracious and redeeming God. "His goings forth have been of old and from everlasting." The whole economy of things is so ordered as to bring men at every point into contact with God. This is the final meaning and end of all the forces that enter into human life. By all the natural processes and experiences of life, by the discipline of hardship and toil, joy and sorrow, by the retribution that warns us back to right, and the moral purpose that is in all events, God from the beginning has been reducing and destroying the separation between Himself and His children.

But the work of God on man is not so much a forcing process from without as an inducing process from within. Influence, not coercion, is the Divine method. Immanent in all men, He co-operates with the aspiration and effort of every man toward light and goodness, and therefore with the universal movement of the race. He is the ultimate Cause of progress and the Unseen Source and inspiration of all our human strivings to draw near unto Him—even of those very strivings which in our ignorance we make with a view to reconcile Him. We seek Him because He first seeks us. The spirit of truth and goodness is His Spirit; and what we find of that spirit in ourselves and in others, in this age and in all ages, proves that God

is ever nigh to our humanity, giving an atoning energy and effect to all noble striving and sacrifice.

The Divine action on man is mediate as well as immediate—through men, whom God raises up, endows and inspires, and in whom He lives and suffers, and by whom He makes known His character and will, and reconciles the world unto Himself. Many have taken part in this Divine ministry of reconciliation before, as after, the advent of the Son of God. Revelation is especially the means of Atonement, revelation that has grown clearer from age to age, as men have become more developed morally, and more sensitive and receptive spiritually. God must be known for men to become one with Him. A true knowledge of God removes the fear that is born of ignorance, and quickens in human souls that spirit of faith which is the strength and salvation of humanity.

III. THE WORK OF ATONEMENT SPECIALISED IN JESUS CHRIST

The most remarkable and characteristic thing about Jesus, and that which gives the keynote to His place and mission in the world, is His absolute renouncement of the idea that He said or did anything of Himself. "Not I, but My Father," is the sum and substance of His teaching concerning Himself. It is the Father's work into which the Son enters. It is

not Christ apart from God, but God in Christ, said the apostle, who is reconciling the world to Himself.

The entire manifestation of the Son of God, and not merely the death on the Cross, was, and is, the power of atonement in the life of Jesus Christ. With Him there entered a new and Divine power into human history. Those who are unable to separate the Incarnation from the normal processes of human life, nevertheless see in it the climax and crown of a vast upward movement which in all its great stages was a Divine revelation. Whatever prophecies there may have been of the Divine Sonship of humanity in the experience of men in the past, it came forth into clear and complete consciousness for the first time in Him who said, "I and My Father are one." It is this perfect realisation of filial union and communion with God that is the central fact of our Christian faith. The consciousness of sonship to God is also the distinctively Christian experience. By all the methods of personal influence Christ quickens in human souls prepared to receive it His own sense of filial relationship to the Father of spirits. Drawn by sympathy into spiritual intimacy with Him, they are drawn by Him into filial intimacy with His Father. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God." Further, it is the filial spirit that Christ quickens in human hearts that is the medium of our communion with God, and it, when fully attained, makes God and man

at one and at peace. It is this experience of sonship produced and perfected in man, and not an external historical transaction, that is pre-eminently and peculiarly the atoning work of Jesus Christ. (It is in the Gospel of St. John we find the Atonement presented as a fact of consciousness or experience. The Johannean Atonement has been set over against the Pauline Atonement, but the contradiction is not so inward and radical as it is often represented to be. When St. Paul gets clear of Judaistic and other entanglements, and rises into the pure air of absolute truth, his word is not essentially different from that of the apostle of spiritual religion.)

The whole ministry of Christ, from its beginning to its close, was a ministry of reconciliation—a power of atonement. By what He was, what He said, and what He did, He sought to make God known, to save men from those false ideas of the Divine character and ways which set human thought and feeling wrong, to expel suspicion and fear from their hearts, and to make them realise that they were His Father's children, and therefore had no right to despise themselves or despair of themselves. They saw in His compassion the Divine compassion, in His love the revelation and assurance of the Divine love, in His forgiveness the type and promise of the Divine forgiveness, and in His sufferings Divine goodness suffering freely to save the sinful. Coming to know God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ is to trust and rejoice in God, and to have

sympathies and harmonies created where previously dwelt antipathies and antagonisms. When on earth our Lord also sought to make men in all the relations and provinces of their life at one with the Divine Will. He fought against disease, ignorance, injustice, hate and all forms of selfishness, as the enemies of God and man. The great burden of His message was God's kingdom, God's order, and He suffered and died daily to reconcile men to the Divine order of their life.

The Cross, although it embodied no principle that was not illustrated in His life, was yet the crowning manifestation of the principle, of the law, purpose, and spirit of His life. It was the sign and symbol of the perfect identification of Himself with man and with God. It was no wonder that in a strain of prophecy He looked forward to the Cross as the means of raising Him above all the mists and clouds of mortal misunderstanding, prejudice, and hatred, to a spiritual height where He would be seen in all the glory of His Divine obedience and charity, and from which He would draw to Himself the love and loyalty of mankind.

No word sums up and expresses more fully the influence of Jesus Christ than the word Atonement. By what He was and said and did, by the power of His spirit and the affections He quickens, He makes men, to-day as yesterday, at one with God, at one with their fellows, at one with themselves, and at one with life in all its larger and deeper meanings and ends. The

history of the religion of Jesus is a history of Atonement. That short life, to all appearance crushed and ended on the Cross, has expanded into the life of Christendom, and been an endless power of progress. The faith and spirit of Christ, wherever they go, subdue discords, heal alienations, harmonise differences, and so make peace.

IV. THE ATONEMENT AN UNFINISHED, CONTINUOUS AND PROGRESSIVE WORK

The Atonement was not completed when Jesus finished His work on earth. In Him it found and finds its ideal fulfilment, but not its actual completion. The isolation of His work from the universal work of God in the world and from the work of the Church (that is, the Christian part of humanity) is wholly without warrant in the New Testament. Both in Gospel and Epistle, and with endless richness of appeal, men are called to be what Jesus was, and to do what He did. All the great things attributed to Him are expected and demanded of His followers. It is one of the unspeakable results of His influence on men that they are moved to follow in His footsteps, take up His Cross, fill up that which is behind of His sufferings, and become active sharers in that Divine, eternal sacrifice by which the world is being delivered from its evil. It is not by imputing, but imparting righteousness; not by sub-

stituting His obedience for ours, but by inspiring us to obey ; not by displacing, but reinforcing our personal will and activity, Jesus Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. The outward facts of His life, the Crucifixion and Resurrection especially, only gain their real and highest meaning when they are translated into moral and spiritual experiences, and we are able to say with St. Paul, "I am crucified with Christ" ; "I am risen with Christ." It is not by any outward reliance on what Jesus was and what He did the world is to be saved, but by men who, through the power of His Spirit, have been brought into moral union with God, and are inspired by the passion of the Cross, entering into the work of Christ and prolonging and repeating His sacrifice in their own lives. They are the hiding-place of His power, and His ever-renewed and ever-growing body. "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, so have I sent them into the world." "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them." Bearing the sorrows and iniquities of the world, taking away its sin by the sacrifice of himself, helping to reconcile it to God—this is what every man is doing who bears worthily the name of the Crucified, and lives and burns in His fellowship.

Every Sunday in thousands of churches God is thanked for "the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ." That thanksgiving, when thoughtfully offered, is inspired by faith and hope. For what

we see around us is not a world really redeemed, but only a world that is being redeemed. The actual redemption of humanity is coincident with its moral and spiritual progress, and can only be accomplished by the slow and constant operation of the Spirit and power of God. But the Divine power is no abstraction, and the Divine Spirit no wandering ghost. The unit of power is not God nor man in isolation. God in the world, reconciling it to Himself, means God and man working together : the Divine power and Spirit in human hearts and lives, permeating and quickening them as the infusion of a higher life. The Atonement is still in process of completion. Into the Son's work, which is also the Father's, we are called to enter ; called to hasten, by our life and labour, the time of the great Reconciliation, when man's moral being shall be received into the unity of creation, and things in heaven and on earth shall be one, and God, that is Good, be all in all !

“ Dear Father of the human heart,
The whole wide world atone ;
What Thou hast been to us, impart
To all ; make all Thine own.”

THE GOD OF JESUS

“To glorify with one accord and one mouth the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Rom. xv. 6.

IN one of the dialogues of Plato it is said that the highest attainment of man is to know the gods aright and to live accordingly. The author of the Fourth Gospel, in the memorable prayer which sums up in words of truth and loveliness the spirit and purpose of the life of Jesus, says that it is eternal life to know God.

The proper study of mankind, we hear it often said, is man. Is it not God? The greater includes the less. Religion is the voluntary communion between two distinct and free personalities, God and man; and yet, without ceasing to believe this with utmost conviction and confidence, there is a deep sense in which we may think of God as the ultimate and all-comprehending Reality. Whether we look without or within ourselves, it is with God we have constantly to do. All knowledge of nature and man is knowledge of God. We find God when we find the truth and law of things.

We find God when we find ourselves, and find Him more and more as our spiritual life rises into clearness and power. We find God wherever we find Order, Harmony, Beauty, Truth, Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, and Love.

But it is not by mere searching on our part we are left to find out God. God is constantly finding us out—even when we leave Him unsought. St. Paul rebuked men long ago for having no knowledge of God: "Some have no knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame." His rebuke would not have been pertinent, there would be no moral guilt in ignorance, if God were unknowable. It is because God can be known of men with a real knowledge—a knowledge that corresponds to reality, that ignorance of God is not only sorrow but sin.

It is a mysterious universe truly in which we live, but not a universe which we can describe as unknown, unknowable, unintelligible. What we call its mysteries are the limitations of our powers. There is not anywhere the faintest sign that He with whom we have to do is hiding His secrets from us. Their unfolding simply waits upon our development. The unknown exists because of our finite and immature powers, our limited experience and imperfect character, but not the unknowable. To know God we only need the disciplined and earnest mind, the pure and sensitive imagination, the sympathetic and faithful heart, the

loyal will, and the filial spirit of trust, love, and obedience. God is in His world, the cosmos is His revelation, and we have but to open our eyes and minds and hearts to the things that are near us to see power and wisdom and goodness, and to be assured that we live in a Divine universe. "That which may be known of God," said St. Paul, "is manifest in man." All that is noblest, sweetest, and best in human life and character is a revelation of God. The Hebrew Psalmist argues, "He that made the eye, shall He not see?" and the Christian poet completes the argument, "He that creates love in human hearts, shall He not love?" There is nothing good in man which has not its perfect and infinite counterpart in God. In the Invisible and Eternal Life from whom all beings and things proceed, there must be that which corresponds in a spiritual and infinite way with the powers and qualities which are highest in man—thought, wisdom, purpose, goodness, and love. We have therefore but to get acquainted with ourselves, with the noblest aspects of our humanity, in order to become acquainted with God; and when we find God in ourselves we are thereby prepared to find Him everywhere—especially in Christ. For the coming of God in Jesus Christ is not an isolated event, an entirely new thing in the history of our race, but the fuller unveiling of Eternal Reality, a more perfect manifestation of the Holy and Merciful Presence in which man has always lived. We must not separate the less perfect

from the more perfect forms of the Divine manifestation. God in Christ and God out of Christ are not two but one. Man and Christ and God are of the same nature. Whatever God is, He is always and everywhere. It is only unveiling or manifestation that can be referred to time and place, or come under any of our finite laws or limitations. The incarnation of God in the Jesus of history is not a departure from but a part of the Divine order of the world, the supreme instance of a process of Divine revelation that is ever going on, such a specialising and concentrating of the life of God in man as to be in a unique and perfect way the Light in which we see light—the Light of the world.

The question, What is God? is the first and the last question of religion; and the history of religion is but the story of the rising and unfolding of the spiritual life of man towards the Divine Reality. God is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever; but man is the child of growth, and his growing life means growing knowledge. It is a mistake, therefore, to assume that the term "God" denotes a fixed conception, and that it has a definite and determined meaning, the same three thousand years ago as to-day. On the contrary, its meaning changes with every enlargement and deepening of knowledge. While no language can fully tell what this brief and simple word "God" is used to signify, yet century after century, as mankind rises into the life

which is life indeed, it is a word into which is being poured a holier grandeur of meaning, and which contains more and more all the awe and reverence, all the trust and love and worship, of which the human heart is capable.

The fundamental idea in religion is the thought of God. All else is built upon it. It is that which in every form of religion determines all its other beliefs, fashions its modes of worship, and most influences the lives of its adherents. True knowledge of God is almost everything in a healthy religious life: everything for inspiration, everything for strength and peace and joy. There are many religious questions for whose answers we can wait without any detriment to our spiritual life, but the answer to the question, What is God? is a present and an imperative need. The character of God is the foundation of all our hopes.

All religion is contained in the one word "God." Yet "nothing is easier," as Cardinal Newman once said, "than to use the word God and mean nothing by it." What do we mean by it? What is God to us? Jesus Christ has done very little for any of us if we have not got through Him true knowledge of God—knowledge enough to banish all distrustful thoughts and feelings, to make us at peace with things and to fill with high and noble meaning every day's life and work and experience. What we believe about Christ is indeed only important in so far as it helps us to think about

God as He thought, and feel towards God as He felt, and live the life of Divine obedience that He lived. He did what He did that our faith and hope might be in God. But as in the years before His Advent, so in these Christian years, there is a vast multitude of men whose religion is as no religion at all, powerless to inspire filial trust and hope, love and obedience, because it is not in a real and large sense the revelation of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many of us are more Jews than Christians. Along with much else in the elder religion the Christian Church took over the Hebrew Deity. It was the God of Abraham and Moses more than the God of Jesus Christ whom our fathers worshipped. And is it not strange how religious people to-day who call themselves by the name of Christ persistently turn their backs upon the one Master of Christians and go searching for their religion among the records of an earlier time? Here and there in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and Prophets, we find lofty and grand utterances which almost anticipate the day of Christ, and prophesy of Him as the first streaks of morning light prophesy of the coming noon. But why should we prefer the light of early dawn to the glory of noontide, or descend from the heights of vision to which Jesus Christ has led the religious mind of our race to the little hills on every side? To gain the clearest and largest vision of God we must stand on

the summits of the world's spiritual life and climb their loftiest peaks; we must train our eyes to dwell on the new grandeur and loveliness in which Christ has set the thought of God.

It is a remarkable fact that we find in the Gospels and Epistles very few direct references to the nature of God—to what God is essentially, apart from the universe and humanity. The teaching of our Lord is chiefly directed towards considering the unity of God and man under the symbol of His own Divine sonship. But three great statements concerning the nature and character of God have come down to us from early Christendom: God is Spirit; God is Light; God is Love. We can hardly call these statements definitions; yet they are, perhaps, the nearest approach to definitions of God which the human mind can frame or comprehend, and in the history of religious thought they are unique. There are no other passages in Scripture which deal so directly with the sacred reality of the Divine Being and Life, none which search so far the deep things of God and admit us to such an intimate knowledge of what God is in Himself. Through them we almost see the Invisible and know the Incomprehensible. The simplest mind cannot fail to understand their meanings, but the profoundest and subtlest cannot exhaust them. St. John says of one of them, "God is Light," that it was a message received from Christ, and though not in the least likely to be a literal saying, yet it is plainly

what He must have taught His disciples to believe—a record of St. John's impression of the revelation of God in the teaching and life of his Master. The same may be said of the third statement, "God is Love." Jesus may never have used the actual words, but through Him came that knowledge of God. It had been always true that "God is Love," but He first made it a reality to the world. He said as much when He taught His disciples to say "Our Father," and when He declared, in virtue of the perfection of His filial spirit and life, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

Taken together, these three statements—"God is Spirit," "God is Light," "God is Love"—may therefore be justly regarded as the sum and symbol of the Christian revelation of God, of the Divine knowledge which makes of Christianity the absolute or universal religion for all mankind. For what Renan said of the first may be said of the three: "They are the sure words on which the edifice of eternal religion must rest."

In the Christian Church for many centuries the doctrine which gives to this¹ Sunday its name has been regarded as summing up the Christian knowledge of God; and it may, I think, be so regarded when we separate and consider alone its inner thought. It would not have entered as it has done into the very soul of Christendom, and been so rich in devotional and practical power, if it had not enshrined great truths and satisfied

¹ Trinity Sunday.

genuine spiritual aspirations. Intelligent and devout Christian people have not been nourishing themselves for ages on a teaching concerning God which is at the heart of it irrational and false. "No thought," says Carlyle, "that ever dwelt honestly as true in the heart of man but was an honest insight into God's truth on man's part ; and has an essential truth in it which endures through all changes an everlasting possession for us." The doctrine of the Trinity was meant to recall and suggest the richness and fulness of the Divine manifestation in man and his world ; and after we have put aside all such terms as "persons," "triune," "co-essential," "co-eternal," "co-equal," which belong not to religion and Scripture but to philosophy, we can have little hesitation in accepting the substance of its teaching. There are few, if any, Christian believers who do not know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit : not, of course, in the sense that they receive and are certain of an abstract doctrine and can use its language, but in the sense that their religious experience corresponds to these modes of God's revelation of His goodness and love and grace.

There can be no doubt that to those who understand and use it rightly the doctrine of the Trinity is the symbol and safeguard of a large and progressive faith ; yet it has been other than a quickening influence to many who accept it. The knowledge of God which ceases to grow, like all other knowledge, soon ceases to be knowledge

at all, and degenerates into a lifeless opinion or dogma. To another class the doctrine of the Trinity has been simply a perplexity and bewilderment. In the Church, from early times, it has also been such a cause of strife and controversy that one has often wished that Christian teachers had been content with the three great statements, "God is Spirit," "God is Light," "God is Love," and not have added to them much which appears not only to differ from them but to contradict and deny them. The great creeds and confessions of Christendom, in speaking about God, erred unquestionably in defining or in trying to define what is undefinable, and in saying much more than is really sayable. But we can always go back to Jesus, the one Master of Christians, and to the religion of Jesus—the religion of His life and teaching—which is both the starting-point or foundation and the test and touchstone of historical Christianity and Christian doctrine. It is indeed one of the most hopeful signs of our religious times that the minds of so many believing men are full of the thought that the religion of Jesus must be disentangled from the after-growth of a religion about Jesus, or that has Jesus for its central object instead of the God of Jesus. We are learning of Christ as never before; seeking to see God with His eyes, and making more and more our study the Divine knowledge which received such vast development through Him, and which we find summed up in these three simple but

sublime statements: God is Spirit, God is Light, God is Love.

I. The statement "God is Spirit" is the nearest approach to a definition of Deity to be found in the Bible. It is a conception which was not unknown in pre-Christian times. It was well said, as by the author of the 139th Psalm, before it was said by Jesus. The great truths of religion cannot be original in the superficial sense of originality. Intimations of them, more or less dim or clear, will be found here and there, and as the ages move on they will become less dim and more clear until at last they shine out in pure splendour in the life and teaching of some great prophet of the race. And it is just this service of realising the eternal truths of religion and of revealing them free from all limitations which gives Jesus His absolutely unique position in the history of religious thought and makes Him so precious to men everywhere who believe. In His fellowship our dim insights and aspirations shape themselves into perfect clearness, and in His light we see light.

God is Spirit—not *a* spirit, as if He were a bodiless person or ghost, or one of many spirits; not even *the* spirit, as though He were the sovereign spirit in a world of spirits—but Spirit, free from all the limitations of space and time, eternal and infinite, the all-surrounding and indwelling Life, transcending everything yet immanent in everything, the one Presence in which

we live and move, the air we breathe, the light by which we see, the power by which we work, Spirit of our spirit and Spirit of the universe.

In the affirmation "God is Spirit" we have perhaps the most revolutionary and evolutionary truth in its implication that was ever announced, and so absolutely simple that its simplicity makes it the final word upon the subject. And yet it was addressed, not to a company of philosophers, but to a humble woman, eager to draw Jesus into a discussion concerning the ancient feud between Jews and Samaritans touching the true place of worship. We may be sure that the meaning which the words would convey to her untaught mind was the meaning intended by Jesus. To such a one as she was it must have been a bold and direct way of saying that God is everywhere, free from all bondage to the outward and material, not tied down to one special place, but filling all places with His presence. It is lofty teaching that God is Spirit, and they who worship Him in spirit and in truth will find Him everywhere near; but how natural and self-witnessing it is in its character. Whether the temple be on one mountain or another mountain is a vain question to debate if God is Spirit. It was a high yet not a hard truth for the Samaritan woman to receive. The highest, profoundest, most inexhaustible truths are not necessarily hard to be understood. They breathe their meaning into the receptive heart. We are led through our own needs

to the right interpretation and application of them. The emphasis which Jesus placed upon this thought of God is well shown in the order of the original sentence : " Spirit God is "—the most emphatic word, according to the Greek usage, coming first. It cannot therefore be in any merely negative sense that God is Spirit. He is not only invisible, immaterial, unlimited, filling all space yet not bound by space, filling all time yet not of time, filling all material things yet not material in any sense ; He is Life and the Giver of life ; not unsubstantial, but in the fullest sense real, having all the attributes of conscious personal being—thought, feeling, and will—perfectly and infinitely.

Let us not cherish any thought of God and His ways which cannot be harmonised with the truth that God is Spirit, and let us not shrink from applying it where it needs to be applied. There are no truths more unrealised and unused than are the great first truths of our religion. Let us but realise that God is Spirit and it will compel us to drop all conceptions of Deity as an isolated and insulated Being, dwelling apart from the universe and appearing now here and now there. Let us but realise that God is Spirit and it will lift us out of many a controversy into a region where our questions can have no meaning : many crude notions of spiritual things will pass away, and all external and materialistic views of Creation, Providence, Inspiration, Revelation, Incarnation, Atonement, the

efficacy of Sacraments, and the conditions and methods of communion with God will cease to be held.

On the other hand, because God is Spirit let us not imagine that His Being and Presence must therefore be vague, illusory, or inaccessible. The very opposite is the truth. His omnipresence and providence can only be conceived as we realise that He is Spirit. Limit Him, divide Him, exclude Him, confine Him, shut Him up in any one world, or temple, or rite, or book, or man, and you banish Him by these limitations from boundless realms and from millions of souls. Because He is Spirit He cannot be brought within the range of our senses. He can only be spiritually discerned in nature and in human life, in the Bible and in Christ. Because He is infinite Spirit He is by no means exhausted in His revelations. He is more than any finite manifestation of Himself—even the highest. “My Father,” said Jesus, “is greater than I.”

God is Spirit, and man is a spirit. This truth is the heart of religion, and its rational basis. It is in practical recognition of this truth that thousands of congregations all over the land are at this moment seeking through the symbols of prayer and praise to draw near unto God. Worship is, indeed, only possible on the assumption that there is something in the worshipper akin to something in the Being who is worshipped. It is the Divine in man which seeks for fellowship with the Divine above and beyond him. It is because we are essentially

spiritual beings and God is Spirit that we can commune with Him, know His mind, discern His ways, enter into His purposes, and receive His inspiration.

“Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”

The practical bearing of the statement that God is Spirit is shown in the requisition that the true worshipper must worship Him in spirit and in truth, that is, in a way corresponding to the Divine Reality and with the whole inner assent of the soul. According to Jesus, true worship is the communion of spirit with spirit—the viewless human spirit with the viewless Divine Spirit. Although it seeks for itself, by a law of our nature, fitting symbolic expression, and is helped by such expression, yet it is essentially a spiritual act—the human spirit’s reverence, submission, trust, love, adoration, consecration, in the presence of Him who fills all space and inspires all souls, and to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.

II. A more profound and comprehensive description of Deity never perhaps fell from human lips than this statement : “God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” One feels that he ought only to repeat it and say nothing about it in the way of interpretation or explanation ; that he ought to leave it alone in its love-

liness and grandeur to speak to each hearer in his own tongue its Divine message.

Like all our great words concerning God, Light is a figure, yet a figure which we feel brings us nearer the Divine Reality than any more literal word could possibly do. It is rich in suggestion, and in meditating upon God it is suggestion more than definition which we want. What in the heavens above or the earth beneath could serve better as an emblem of Deity than light—clear, pure, beautiful, and illimitable in its diffusion ; penetrating, searching, and revealing in its power ; silent, subtle, and beneficent in its influence.

It was a true and lovely inspiration which led men in pagan lands and times to identify Deity with light. Apollo, Zeus, Jupiter in Greece and Rome, with gods of kindred name or meaning in India, Persia, and Egypt, all bear witness to the power of light to awaken wonder and worship in human hearts. "Let there be light," said the Elohim of the Hebrew poem—a command right worthy to be the first word of Deity. To the poets of all ages and countries the dawn of day has spoken of the Divine power and glory. Herder was persuaded that the form of the Genesis story of creation must have grown out of the daily watching of the coming of day, whose successive scenes follow much as they are pictured in that early poem of a world's birth. When we consider, speaking in terms of matter, that the earth owes everything to the sun, we cease to wonder

that in far-off days men, confounding God with His manifestations, bowed their heads in adoration toward the Dawn, and that still in many churches of Christendom, preserving a transfigured reminiscence of this ancient sun-worship, the altar is placed at the east and worship is directed towards it. "The Lord God is a Sun," said the Hebrew poet. "God is Light," said the Christian apostle.

While the statement "God is Light" includes part of the thought suggested by the words "God is Spirit," it adds to it the thought of wisdom and truth, righteousness and holiness, and their manifestations. When we say that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all, we affirm that He is perfectly and absolutely wise, that in Him and in all His ways there can be no folly, error, mistake, uncertainty, doubt, deceit, or insincerity. Men have attributed and do still attribute foolish things to God, but let us ever bring all we are taught or told to this supreme test—God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Better believe that the greatest and best men, the Fathers of the Church, the Prophets and Apostles, were victims of error and mistake, than hold to anything that makes us question and doubt the perfect and infinite wisdom of God. There are some things which God cannot do. He cannot lie. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot in anything or anywhere act inconsistently with His character. He and truth are one. He keepeth truth for ever. Let God

be true, though every human teacher be wrong and every theological creed or system be false.

When we say, "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all," we affirm that He is perfectly and absolutely righteous and holy, and that therefore He cannot wrong anyone or be false to anyone. He cannot but be, always and everywhere, righteous and holy, even though we may not be able to see it, chiefly because He is infinite and we are finite, and are so accustomed to estimate things as evil or good according to their relation to local and passing affairs or to our private happiness and comfort. It sometimes takes long spaces to see how just and righteous God is in all His ways—a longer space sometimes than one man's brief span of mortal days, whose experience may seem to throw doubt upon it. In his ode on the burial of the Duke of Wellington, Tennyson says of England's hero—

"Whatever record leap to light
He never shall be shamed."

And is that confidence too much for us to fill our hearts with in regard to God and all His ways?

When we say, "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all," we not only affirm our belief in Wisdom, Truth, and Righteousness without a flaw, but in Wisdom, Truth, and Righteousness in the constant process of manifestation. It is of the nature and property of light to manifest itself and to make manifest. God is

in all things, and all things will reveal Him more and more clearly and completely. We need have no fear, therefore, of any of the assured results of investigation and knowledge, and as little fear of the final outcome of the great social movements of our time. Every day the meaning of the Eternal will become less and less dim. The darkness is in us, not in Him.

“God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.”

The first expression of the Divine will contained in the Bible, “Let there be light,” is symbolic of the Divine purpose and action through all the ages. From the beginning God has been pouring forth His light as fast as man has been able to bear it. He is the Father of lights. All our lights are the outshining of His light—light out of Light. What we call the light of Nature, the light of mind, the light of conscience, the light of experience, is the light of God. It is the light of God which we see in the face of Jesus Christ—light without shadow. And Whitsunday has just reminded us that to-day, as yesterday, the light of God shines direct into human souls, that revelation is constant and unceasing, that God is pouring upon all flesh His enlightening Spirit and sending to men countless messages of wisdom and truth.

The early Friends were called “the children of the Light” because they believed so much in the Light that

lighteth every man that cometh into the world—in God's direct communication of Himself to the souls of men. Let us be children of the Light. Let us not fear that God will ever fail to send forth His light and His truth, or leave us comfortless. Let us not fear to follow the light which is of His gracious sending wherever it may lead us. Let us fear rather to follow the counsels of selfish prudence and worldly expediency. To be in true fellowship with God we must live, not as children of the darkness and the mist, but as children of the light and of the day—hating and fighting against, in ourselves and in others, all that is foolish and false and wrong. Through you and through me God says, "Let there be light." That great and sublime word must be our cry—the aspiration, the purpose, the striving of our days. Through you and through me God seeks to enlighten His world. We must give freely and unreservedly of the truth and wisdom we have received, fearing nothing, concealing nothing, grudging nothing; letting our light shine before men, that we may be the worthy sons and daughters of the God who is Light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

III. "God is Love" is the last and greatest of the three great words concerning God which have come down to us from the first Christian days. It is the text not only of an ancient pastoral letter, but of the whole New Testament—the climax and crown of the Christian teaching concerning God. In it is condensed

the essence of Christianity—the Gospel by which Christianity reveals its character as religion—a religion which can meet and satisfy the deepest demands of human nature, and will always remain the religion of men while they develop immeasurably.

It is important that we should take St. John's simple and profound declaration, "God is Love," as it stands, and not attempt to diminish its significance by any such inadequate interpretations as that Deity is benevolent, kind, and good to all His creatures. We are not told that God loves, or is loving, but that He is Love. His love is more than a quality—it is essence. All His qualities are but aspects of His love. If we say, He is angry, it is love that is angry. His love may at times be a consuming fire to burn out and destroy sin, but it is still love. "Wrath is a second love, its hotter flame," says a German poet. Every relation God sustains to His children is one of love, and we cannot think Him out of that relation without thinking Him out of existence. For without love God is not, and only as love exists in any possible mode or manifestation can God be said to exist. At whatever point we touch God we touch love. We cannot escape from love, because we cannot escape from God. His omnipresence is the omnipresence of love. Where He is, there also must be love—even in lowest hell: if He is there, He is still love. There would be nothing remarkable in the statement that God loves or is

loving, but there is something wonderful in the declaration that He is essentially Love. We can imagine infinite power, justice, truth, wisdom, and holiness, not pervaded and guided in their movements and manifestations by love. But it is the very opposite of this which we are taught in the text. Love is that in God which pervades, moves, controls, directs all that He is and all that He does. It is His inmost nature and essential life. It is the great first cause, the deep motive and the final goal of all His creative work.

God is Love ; and love, wherever we find it and in whatever form, is of God, proceeds from and is of the same substance as the Father. Yes ! wherever we see love we see God—His Real Presence. And if to our eyes the world of nature and the world of man are not yet shaped to the ends of love, still let us believe that whatever of love we do see there is of God ; that love, and not what stands opposed to love, is the one Divine thing—that which most truly reveals and represents God, the one everlasting verity. Let it also be borne in mind that the things which seem to deny that God is Love are not finalities but incidents in a process which is from evil to good, from good to better, and from better to best. They mean that the world is still in the process of making, not yet finished, not yet answering perfectly to the Divine purpose, not yet completely filled with the Spirit of God. But even in nature love is the fulfilling of the law,

and “the goodness and the severity of God” are essentially one. And in our human life we know from long experience that hardships and adversities are the conditions of a noble development, and that the loss and suffering which follow transgression are but the stern side of Love, and the sign and proof that God is working to secure the greatest possible blessing to His creation and His children.

Yes! love is of God—all creature love and all human love—for God is Love. There must be love in God, or there would be no love in the world, no pity in the heart of man, no tenderness of motherhood, no gentleness in the strong; for in the image of God man is made, and in God he lives and moves and has his being. All human love is consubstantial with the love of God. It is Divinity in humanity. Jesus Christ not only taught the world that God is Love, but He revealed it in His life. His love was His Father’s love, and His sacrifice not an act exceptional or contrary to the Divine Spirit but its manifestation and effect. From nature to man, from man to highest man, from the brute’s affection for her offspring to the human father’s long-suffering care and the mother’s yearning tenderness, up to the breaking heart of Christ on the Cross—it is all the revelation of a God whose very life is love, whose very essence, energy, and glory consist in pouring Himself forth, in giving Himself away for His creatures and His children.

God is Love. Do we believe it? It is, I think, one of the saddest things in Christian history that this truth of truths has been practically so disbelieved and disowned. It is hardly to be found either in the letter or substance of the ancient creeds. Even the Reformation, that memorable awakening of the human mind and conscience, did not restore it. It is one of the terribly strange and serious omissions of the Westminster Confession of Faith. And although a great change is taking place around us, and we are witnessing what is like a second birth of Christianity, yet the Christian world is still far enough away from the simple creed that God is Love, and the men are but few who receive its teaching in all its fulness.

Let us who are gathered here seek to penetrate to the very heart of the Christian message concerning God. Let the mind of Christ be our mind. Let us, as we commune with Him who is the best teacher of His own religion, catch a new and greater devotion to these ideal truths—God is Spirit, God is Light, God is Love. Let us in word and deed bear witness to them. Let us not give our moral influence to conceptions of God and His ways which we cannot reconcile with them. The laity as well as the clergy must be awake to their responsibility to truth, and to the part they have to take in delivering Christendom from thoughts of God which still hide from men the true glory of the Gospel of Christ.

God is Spirit, God is Light, God is Love—this is our Gospel. If we get this into our mind and heart, all else that we need to know will follow in its right order. Without this first, all else will be confusion, both in our personal lives and in the life of the Christian community.¹ Let us also see in these three great statements, not only the revelation of God, but the revelation of human character and duty. It was a pagan teacher who said that he who would please God must be like God—an echo or anticipation of the more familiar words, “Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

We believe that God is Spirit ; then, let us worship in the spirit and walk in the spirit, and put out of our lives all unspiritual things.

We believe that God is Light ; then, let us be children of the light, following whatsoever things are honest and true, just and holy.

We believe that God is Love ; then, let us live the life of love, and seek to diffuse love wherever we go.

¹ “There is a Catholic belief and a Catholic morality broad and comprehensive enough to form the basis of a Catholic Church and of a true Christian Unity. That belief is—that God is Light and God is Love. That morality is that we love Him supremely and each other as ourselves. That Church is composed of all who, in the strength of this belief, are habitually striving to practise this morality. That Unity is effected, not by any external conformities, but by the same interior spirit and hidden life manifesting itself in the members of all Christian communities, by acts of devotion, of humility, of self-sacrifice, of temperance, of justice, of truth, of peace.”—SIR JAMES STEPHEN.

Dante said of Beatrice, "Whenever she appeared before me I had no enemy left on earth; the flame of charity kindled within me and caused me to forgive all whoever had offended me." Our fellowship with God, if it is a reality and not a delusion, must be having a like influence upon us, making us to dwell in love—in charity and peace with all mankind. And now unto God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Spirit, the Eternal Light, the Eternal Love, be all praise and glory, the trust, love, obedience, and worship of all His children, world without end. Amen.

INTO THY HANDS

“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.”—LUKE xxiii. 46.

THERE is much that is pathetic and suggestive in the thought that the words of Jesus breathed out in the hour of His departure were part of the daily prayer which Hebrew mothers were accustomed to teach their children when lying down to sleep at night. So our Lord's last utterance when He hung upon the Cross was probably the words which He had been taught to say in infancy by Mary His mother as His evening prayer. With His child-prayer trembling upon His lips He passed away from earth.

The Psalms had been the liturgy of His worship—His book of devotion, and from the Psalms in all the critical moments of His life He drew the words which expressed His own trust and hope. In all but its first word the language of His final prayer is taken from the thirty-first Psalm. In the Psalm the prayer has reference to life ; it is the committal of the spirit in

the midst of tumult and danger to the merciful and faithful keeping of One able to protect and deliver. On the Cross, in the midst of darkness and anguish, it is used as the expression of life's last act of renunciation—the surrender of the departing spirit to God. It is not a cry like the psalmist's, to be preserved from death, but a cry to be preserved through death unto everlasting life.

But Jesus made the ancient prayer His own—made it personal, and also transformed it into a prayer of filial and most tender confidence by substituting the word “Father” for the original “O Lord, Thou God of truth.” Do we not find in the simple religion of the Book of Psalms, read and interpreted in the light of the filial faith and spirit of Jesus, all that we require for the great practical needs of life and death? Do we not find there what De Quincey called “those grand catholic feelings which belong to the grand catholic situations of life in all its stages”? In the New Testament we find little which goes far beyond what Hebrew poets and prophets said in their most inspired moments and moods. They anticipated Christ's day and were glad. “All the fathers,” said the apostle, “drank of the same spiritual Rock of which we drink.” The message of Jesus is essentially their message, but with a larger thought of God and an accent of diviner trust and hope. He said what they had been longing to feel and trying to say. In His

Gospel we find all that God had been teaching them carried forward to more perfect form.

“Father.” This is pre-eminently the word of Jesus ; His one name for God, the one note to which all His music was attuned, the central persuasion and confidence of His soul, the key to His life, the first and the last in His teaching, the soul of His religion, the symbol of His whole theology. It is the one recorded word of His youth : “Wist ye not I must be about My Father’s business ?” It was the word from heaven heard in His heart at the opening of His public career—a crisis marked by a new disclosure and realisation of His Sonship to God. It was the first word of the prayer He taught His disciples ; the word with which He accepted the inevitable in Gethsemane ; the first word from the Cross, and the last before “the deep, vast speechlessness of death.” It was the ruling passion of His life—the passion which had moved Him to intense and tireless toil and sacrifice, and sustained Him amidst the temptations of manhood—which strengthened Him in the hour of His final conflict and calmed Him with its most tranquil assurance. It was “Father” at the beginning ; “Father” all through the stormy years that led to the Cross ; “Father” when He felt His hour was come, and troubled in spirit He cried, “What shall I say ?” and it was “Father” at the end. “I live,” He once said, “by the Father,” and so He died trusting in the Father. The commending of His

spirit at the last moment to His Father was but the summing up of what He had been doing all His life. He breathed out the whole spirit of His life in that prayer. All His days He had been offering Himself to His Father to enjoy and to suffer, to do and to bear ; and so in death, and beyond death, He gives Himself into the hands of His Father.

It was but a little while before that He had been crying, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—using the words of another psalm of His childhood to express His mood of feeling ; but it was only as the shadow of a cloud passing over the sun, dimming for an instant the light. How quickly He recovered Himself to a state of filial trust ! How soon the cry of desolation was exchanged for this sublime declaration of spiritual confidence, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit !" The faith of the Hebrew psalmist was indeed fulfilled—carried out to its perfection—in the beloved Son who saw His Father everywhere ; who loved to work His Father's works ; who drank His Gethsemane cup as His Father's will, and who at the last, like a tired child falling asleep, committed Himself to His Father's care ere He closed His eyes on the light of life.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." This prayer of Jesus has been echoed again and again by generations of disciples who have lived and died in His faith and spirit. Experience shows, and it matters little how we explain it, that Jesus helps all who believe

in Him to believe in His Father. His mediation is not obstruction in the soul's way to God, but a means of direct and dear communion. It cannot be said that we have truly found Jesus if in finding Him we have not also found the Father. The Father was everything to Jesus, and He is everything to those who stand in the inner circle of the disciples of Jesus. We go to Him, and at once He would lead us past Himself to His Father. We tarry in His company, and in the depths of His fellowship we find we are in fellowship with His Father, with no one, not even Himself, between. The name in which He prayed at the last that His followers might be kept, and in which alone there is security and unity, was not His own, but His Father's: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy Name." The perfect and final action of the spirit of Christ on the spirits of men is in the fulfilment of the prayer: "As Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one even as We are"—children with Father, related to God, not in measure, but in kind, as was the blessed Son whose glory it was to have no glory of His own, to love, trust and obey His Father through life and unto death.

We rarely realise as we ought how entirely we owe to Jesus the fatherly idea of God; how that mystery of Fatherhood, hidden from ages and generations, was first revealed through Him. St. Paul does but sum up the true result of the mission and mediation of

Christ when he says : "Through Him we have access by one spirit unto the Father." It is no wonder that the phrase, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," was continually upon the lips of the apostles. This is the final utterance of the religion of the New Testament for which all else is preliminary and provisional : "Then shall He deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father."

"When ye pray, say, Father." And what name can ever be so full of meaning as this of Father when spoken by Jesus? Of all the names for God it is the most personal, the most human, the most lovely, the most helpful—the Name that is above every name. While it is true that its use is not peculiar to Jesus, it is also true that Jesus and the religion of Jesus have put such meaning and power into it, as to make it a new name for God. Something dimly like it may be found in the literature of Pagan religions, but of Gentile writings Jesus probably knew nothing. The most advanced saints and teachers of Israel could at the most say, "Like as a father pitieth his children," or "doubtless, Thou art our Father." It was the name that was needed to give full and culminating expression to the Hebrew religious spirit at its best, but it was in Jesus' revelation of God it first stood out in clear relief as the name that most perfectly expressed God's nature and relation to men. Our Christian religion has, no doubt, its roots in principles and sentiments which other

religions have in some degree shared ; but as a distinct religion it has its source in the consciousness and experience of Jesus—in His personal realisation of the filial relation and attitude to God. Jesus did not find the Father in the philosophies and literatures of the world, but in His own life. When we hear Him say “Father,” we know it to be no mere echo of a word caught from others, but the voice not to be mistaken of a Son uttering the name. He knew the Father through the communion which we find expressed in that mystical yet luminous and suggestive sentence : “No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.” It is only through sonship, through the awakened and developed sense of our kindred to God, that we find Him in all His graciousness and fatherliness, and our dim and wavering thought gradually becomes a spiritual certainty and an inalienable possession. It is only the filial spirit that reveals God to man as Father ; and therefore, He who had that spirit without measure working in His affections and will and life, felt His every word and act to come, not from Himself, but from the Father in Him, and could say without arrogance, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” God was manifest in Christ—even as an earthly father is manifest in the son who thinks and feels, judges and acts just like him, from an inner spirit like his own. In the life He lived, as in His deepest consciousness, Jesus knew and

declared Himself to be, not Father but Son—the Son whose strength and joy it was to live in the Father, and whose mission it was to reveal to men the Father, not only in His words, but in His character and works. Let us not be afraid of making the sonship of Christ too glorious and divine—only let us bear ever in mind that it is a sonship which the Gospels and Epistles declare ; that the Divinity of Christ is the Divinity, not of Fatherhood but of Sonship.

By spiritual likeness alone can God be known with that knowledge which is eternal life ; and yet of God—of His fatherly justice, love, goodness and care, all our dearest and best human relationships are the more or less faint reflections. When they approach what they ought to be, when they are rich in the truth and goodness which ought to fill them, they tend to make clear and bright our thoughts of Divine realities, and furnish hints and prophecies of those religious sentiments which are evoked in the later years of life by our practical experience and knowledge of God. And must not Jesus Himself have learned much in the same way ? Must not His own experience of the humanities which are also divinities have shaped and coloured largely His teaching ? We may be sure that the name “Father ” would not have been so often on His lips as the best symbol and expression of God’s nature and relation to men, and with such an accent, too, of tenderness, had not His own experience in the home at Nazareth led

Him to associate fatherhood with thoughts of beauty and sweetness and joy. But be that as it may, Jesus made the human home and its relationships the sign and symbol of the spiritual order in which we live—the great interpreter of God and the universe. He with whom we have to do cannot by searching be found out unto perfection, but this, Jesus said, is the form in which we may most truly think of Him and His relations to men—a Father living and working with His children. But the Fatherhood of God is no merely figurative paternity—an image borrowed from our earthly relations to express in terms which our experience can understand the goodness of the Eternal. It is a Divine image. The Fatherhood of God is, as St. Paul said, the archetypal Fatherhood. It is after it that all paternity in heaven and on earth is named.

“All fathers learn their craft from Thee ;
All loves are shadows cast
By the beautiful, eternal hills
Of Thine unbeginning past.”

To some minds the word “Father” as a name for Deity suggests either a theological and not a real relationship—the relation of the First Person of a philosophical Trinity to the Second, or the relation of God to Christian believers only ; but as it was used by Jesus it is the word of the heart, and it expresses the relation of God to the whole world of souls. The truly Christian use of the word is the large human use of it. Breathed

from the lips of Jesus it is the voice of humanity, and any narrower use of it in His name dishonours Him. "We are God's by adoption," we are told. But God has no need to adopt His own children. To remember in the far country whose son he was, to realise it, was the one redeeming thought for the prodigal. Man may or may not fulfil the idea of his Divine sonship; he may be ignorant that he is the son of God, or he may be false to the relationship when it is known; but God is above and beyond all change, without variableness or the shadow of a turning; He cannot deny Himself whatever happens. We may become more truly His children, more trustful and obedient, but He cannot become more truly our Father. Religion may reveal the fact, but the fact was before, and is independent of, the revelation. Both in word and deed Jesus tells us that this is the fact of facts concerning our humanity. Man, the son of God, is the Christian idea of man. Jesus Himself is indeed the best proof that God is and ever was our Father, and ever shall be, world without end. Not even in the most exalted moments of Divine communion did He separate Himself from men—in the meanest of whom He always saw the promise and potency of filial perfection. It was the purpose of His life to bring men to the realisation of God as their Father, and to quicken in them the sense and spirit of their filial relation to the Eternal. This is the distinctively Christian experience. In Jesus Christ

we behold that moment in the spiritual development of humanity at which man comes into conscious filial communion with God. Whatever fore-gleams or suggestions of it there may have been previously in the experience of good and devout men, it came forth into distinct and independent existence for the first time in Jesus. He is the first-born among many brethren. To as many as receive Him He gives power to become in character what they are already by nature—the sons of God! “The glory which Thou givest Me I give to them, that we may all be one.”

The Fatherhood of God, you will see, is not a little or a subordinate truth. It is one compared with which all other thoughts of God shrink and fade. Jesus put it at the centre of His religion. It is the symbol of all that is most original in His contribution to the religious consciousness of mankind, the summary of all He had to teach, the heart of His Gospel, His secret concerning Divine and human being. It is no small thing, therefore, to say of our age that it has recovered this long-lost thought of God in all its reality; that this thought has so flashed out on the modern religious mind that it can never again be obscured, that we are more and more rejoicing in its light, and experiencing its elevating and inspiring influence. How much it means! What issues it opens up!

When we think of God under the name of Father, the first thought which meets us is that of origin and

source. We come forth from God. We have our origin in His Fatherhood, with all its thought and labour and sacrifice. He is the source of our spiritual being, the very Father of our spirits. Our spiritual affections and powers are in their essential quality representative of what He is in His infinitude, and as we live in them and by them we grow in His knowledge—we know Him through the law of affinity. To have the Son in us is to find the Father in God—to know God as Jesus knew Him. It is the spiritual and filial life in man which reveals and makes real the heavenly Fatherhood, and makes it possible for man by reason of this community of being to fairly judge thoughts and deeds ascribed to God by their correspondence to the highest and best in human experience. Righteousness and goodness in their holiest significance and largest relations cannot, we are persuaded, be other than the perfection and infinite extension of those thoughts and ways of God which we find in our own minds and hearts. There are not two kinds of goodness in the universe, but one Eternal Goodness in all, through all, and above all. And it is because God is so essentially related to man, not merely our Creator but our Father, that He can know and understand us entirely and perfectly; be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, give to us a sympathy kindred to our own, and a help that is equal to all our needs.

The conception of God as Father carries with it,

secondly, the thought of perfect love and care, continuous and friendly providence, wise and impartial discipline. Jesus taught men to connect with God and His rule all their knowledge of fatherhood, all that belongs of necessity to the character and duty of a father. "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father." He is no true father who does not love his children, and He is not the perfect and infinite Father who does not love His children with an absolutely pure, unwearying, inalienable, inexhaustible love. We cannot therefore impute hate to God—not even toward the most rebellious and wicked of His children. He can do nothing in what an old divine called His "official capacity"—that is, contrary to His character as Infinite Goodness and Fatherhood. What we call His justice and His wrath are great moral realities, yet they are but aspects or manifestations of His love—His love set against all evil-doing to destroy it. He is always the Father, even when He is judging and punishing us. While we must not believe anything concerning God which does not harmonise with the spirit of Christ, there is no ground for easy optimism on our part. The Father of Jesus is the Righteous Father. But His justice is never vindictive: it is always disciplinary, part of that great system of love and help and redemption which we connect with His revelation to the world in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Divine

Providence may appear at times as if it were only power and not love, and so God a Ruler only and not the Father, but a deeper and more spiritual insight justifies after all our Christian trust. The individual, we find, is cared for in the end as well as the race, and God's perfect care, though it allows between the lines large space for man's free agency, is yet un baffled and unthwarted by human ignorance and wilfulness. What we see is the omnipresent Fatherly Spirit controlling all things and making them contribute to the large and final good of all and each.

The habitual reference of Jesus in His teaching, in His personal prayers, and in every event of life which concerned Him, to God as Father—"My Father," "your Father"—opened a new world to men and gradually changed their attitude toward everything, toward the physical and the spiritual universe, toward life and its experiences, toward death and the hereafter. "We have not received the spirit of fear," writes St. Paul, "but the spirit of sonship whereby we cry, Father."

1. The faith of Jesus in the Fatherhood of God, rightly and vitally held, affects the feelings of man towards the physical universe, making him dwell in it no longer as a stranger or a slave, but as a child in his Father's house. It inspires a home-like feeling from which we cannot escape even when most conscious of the unknown that stretches around and beyond us. We look out upon this vast universe, and we feel that

in the depths of our life we are one with Him who is its Creator, its quickening Spirit, its Ruler and Guide. Having this feeling we have confidence in things—confidence that all things are good, or are making for good. The mighty forces and agencies before which we and our fathers in our ignorance and fear once trembled, we are now persuaded are the servants of wisdom and love—mighty powers indeed, but no longer blind or brutal. The immensity and magnificence by which we were once appalled are seen to be the glory of our Father. Our spirits shrink and stoop no longer. They may still be awed, but it is a glad awe. We know that God is not outside the universe, but everywhere within it, its sustaining and directing force—so in it as to make all its ultimate tendencies and ends good. It is a travesty of the real universe that excites fear. We are adding to our faith, knowledge ; and knowledge as it grows from more to more does not deepen but removes our suspicion of things. We are still moving amid unfinished things and walking more by faith than by sight, but we are beginning to see that the Fatherhood of God has its evidence in all Nature, and that the poet's speech about passionless and pitiless forces can only be excused as belonging to such poetry as intentionally reduces to the immediate purposes of the writer the wider operations of the universe. We are beginning to see and to say that "Law is Love," and to sing with the understanding of the mercies of

judgment; for we are discovering that there is no such thing in the order of the world as evil—save to the narrow outlook. It was the confidence of Jesus that all the infinite forces acting upon the world are in the hands of a Father who cannot allow them to do any real spiritual harm to any of His children—although He is constantly controlling and using them for larger ends than they can perceive or understand. We know only in part, but we have already sufficient grounds in knowledge for believing that there is at the heart of things all the goodness we sum up and express in the name “Father,” and infinitely more. The trusts of Jesus are indeed anticipations of much that modern knowledge is slowly declaring. To Him Nature was no ruin and no empire of caprice or cruelty, but a realm of Divine order and blessing. “Not a sparrow shall fall to the ground without your Father.” The hapless bird does indeed fall, but somehow even in its falling the Divine care goes with it. And, think you, does that same merciful and faithful care ever forget or forsake any victim of wind, or earthquake, or avalanche? The other summer, far up among the Alps, I stood at the grave of one who perished in a mountain storm, and the rude tombstone had this inscription in German: “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” Let us not dare to talk of escapes from calamity and death as if they alone were providential. Our feet may not be preserved from falling, but when and wherever

we fall it is into our Father's hands. The stormy winds fulfil His good will. No matter about the poor broken body : we are not our bodies, we are spirits ; and our spirits amid all outward tumult and destruction are hidden and safe in God, the Infinite and Eternal Father Spirit.

2. The faith of Jesus in the Fatherhood of God, rightly and vitally held, affects our feeling towards our earthly life, teaching us to regard it as educational in its significance and purpose. The thought of Jesus concerning life, that it is an education, flows from His thought of God. All the education which the earthly parent gives to his boys and girls in order to make them noble men and women, God gives to His children infinitely. Thus life becomes a school, and God the teacher. Every experience is meant to be part of the Divine teaching, our pains as well as our pleasures, our hard tasks as well as our congenial labours, the penalties of our wrongdoing as well as the rewards of our obedience. The training of God is often severe, because He cares more to have goodness and strength in His children than merely to arrange for their present ease and happiness. Although He restrains and controls our freedom and will not allow us to take the fatal final step that would destroy us utterly, yet He gives us large freedom that we may learn perfectly the lessons which experience alone can teach effectively, and derive from our follies and failures a development of power and

character which could not be gained, to all appearance, in any other way.

This view of Jesus that life is an education may demand even now a wider conception of things than many religious people are consciously acquainted with ; but it is the only view of life which harmonises with faith in Eternal Goodness and Fatherhood, and the only view which accords with the deeper facts of human experience. Yes ! what God means us to get out of life is education—education by means of happiness and joy, and also by means of toil and hardship and sorrow. But we must co-operate with God in the fulfilment of the purpose of life. We must enter into His plans and help to carry them out. The prayer of Jesus on the Cross is therefore a prayer, not only for the last moment and act of life, but for every moment and act of our days ; not alone for the path where no human presence may encourage and support us, but for every day's uncertain lot and every night's dark hours ; not alone for critical excitements and surprises, that we may through all be undisturbed in spirit, but in every common duty and experience. Everywhere and at all times we need the Eternal care. Let it, then, be our unceasing prayer : Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit for this passing hour and for every hour, to train, to mould, to save, to support, to quicken, to perfect, to do with me even as Thou wilt, that I may always feel and think, behave and live, as a faithful child of Thine.

3. The faith of Jesus in the Fatherhood of God, rightly and vitally held, changes, as if by a subtle and mighty force, our whole feeling towards death, moving us to regard it, not as a sinking into an unknown abyss of darkness and silence, but simply as the passing of the spirit from the body—the living spirit, with all its powers, into the hands of the living Father—a change that will affect our personality just as little as the sleep that rounds our daily life. Let us learn from Jesus the meaning of death. It was not into an empty or unknown void He resigned His own spirit. No dark dream of annihilation troubled Him in the great disruption. He had no feeling of submitting Himself to a terrible necessity, to an inevitable doom, to an irresistible fate, to an unhuman, undivine Power which must be obeyed. No! For Him, dying was a going to His Father, the final earthly surrender of child to Father—to a Father in whom is no darkness even where darkness seemed to reign absolute and alone.

“We are planted together,” says St. Paul, “in the likeness of His death.” We are called upon to believe that what death was to Jesus Christ, it is to every child of God—a passing more than ever into the Father’s hands. And it is not our faith that makes this to be the fact concerning death. Our faith does not create the fact; it is the recognition and realisation of the fact, enabling us to appropriate the comfort of the fact that it is a Father, not a fate—a Father, not a foe—who

receives the last offering of ourselves, and that we do not perish when we seem to perish, that death does not break the bonds which hold us to ourselves and to our brethren, because it does not, and cannot, break the bonds which bind us to God, the Father of our spirits.

“Father, into Thy hands.” No one who truly believes in the Fatherhood of God can fear death. Death as a terror is abolished. The grave has no victory. The dust returns to the earth, and the earth may keep it without any hope or need of resurrection, but the spirit rises and ascends to God, and He gives it another body as it pleases Him. But we are in His care whether in the body or out of the body, and all through the mystery of that passage from the seen to the unseen. Let us not trouble about dying. Let our hearts rest where the heart of Jesus rested. No fearful adventure, no leap in the dark, can death be to those who live and die in His faith. It was said of Him that He was delivered into the hands of men to be crucified, but beneath the hands of His foes were His Father’s hands. So when we fall, it is not into the hands of disease, decay and destruction, but into the hands of the living and Eternal Father, who will keep that which in life’s last moment of renunciation we commit to Him.

4. The faith of Jesus in the Fatherhood of God, rightly and vitally held, affects our feeling toward the

whole hereafter, changing its aspect and character, making all the worlds, visible and invisible, the Father's house of many mansions, and giving us the persuasion that we cannot go where the Eternal love does not reign and where we do not live and move and have our being in it. What awaits us we cannot say ; our wisest words here are the humblest words we can speak ; but this we know, and this is everything—the Father awaits us, and there, as here, only good can come from Him. The same Fatherly love which enfolds us in this world will enfold us in all the worlds and through the endless ages. There may be an intermediate state and purging and purifying fires. But wherever we awake—in purgatory, or hell, or heaven—we shall still be with God. It is the Father who will be dealing with us, searching and trying us, giving us every reward or penalty we deserve, and making even His judgments help and save us. With sin upon our souls and with our lives set in opposition to the Divine will, it may be a fearful thing, as an early Christian teacher said, to fall into the hands of the living God. But would it not be a more fearful thing to fall out of His hands, if such a thing were possible ? Even the doom of the impenitent cannot be all terror, nor the half of it. Sin is a fearful thing, but the discipline, however stern and searching, that seeks to free the spirit from its power and stain is blessed. No ! It cannot be a fearful thing for any

of God's children, however defiled, to fall into their Father's hands.

Who can look gloomily into the future? It is superstition, not true religion, that fills the future with endless terrors and despairs. When the word "Father" was born into human thought, all doubt and dread ought to have gone out for ever. It ought to have filled the whole universe with light, and made it alive with endless possibilities of growth and good. We cannot anticipate the ways of God, and know not what disciplines and experiences may be required to restore to goodness His prodigals; but this we know, that no soul can ever wander beyond His merciful and faithful care or fall out of His hands. He is inalienably and eternally the Father. We may be sure that our redemption and perfection are everlasting necessities to Him, and that He who gives æons, ages upon ages, to the mark on a bird's wing, to the colour of a flower, to the making of a rock, will not give less time to the saving and training of His children. Somehow and somewhere we are persuaded His love must triumph over all that is opposed to it—even over the most stubborn wilfulness of the worst sinner. Whatever of precise and particular knowledge may be wanting, this at least is absolutely sure—His mercy endureth for ever, and nothing can pluck us out of the Father's hands.

It is told of the late Thomas Erskine of Linlathen

that, walking many years ago with a friend over a Northern moor, he was met by a shepherd, whom he greeted, and then added the words, "Do you know the Father?" There was no time for more. Years afterwards the same friends made the same journey, and on the same moor the shepherd, now an old man, came up and grasped the arm of him whose words had lifted him from his poor anxieties and fears into the sense that he was the object of eternal love and care, and he said, "Mr. Erskine, I know the Father now."

Men and women! do you know the Father? If you know the Father, then your attitude will be serene and fearless toward the unexplained mysteries of existence, trustful toward the universe and its laws, toward the unknown future, here and hereafter; you will be walking through life untroubled by the things which so much trouble many, assured that the one Spirit behind and through all is the omnipotent Spirit of goodness and encompassed with a sense of the everlasting love and care; your one prayer for life and for death, for this world and for all the worlds, this: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

THE LOVE THAT DOES NOT LET GO

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—ROM. viii. 38, 39.

SOME years ago a brilliant French critic ventured to criticise the style of St. Paul, or rather, his want of style. His sentences, we were told, were rugged, broken, involved, full of abrupt transitions, without form and beauty. The criticism, I suppose, will not be questioned by any student of the Pauline epistles. But at times when the apostle's soul was on fire with his theme the effect on his language was remarkable; his style rose in dignity, his thought ran into fine and lovely form, and shaped itself spontaneously into sentences of noblest eloquence. What a sublime strain, for example, is the hymn to love which we find in the midst of the practical details of his first letter to the Corinthians; and also that song of victory over death and hades which is associated with the saddest and most pathetic moments of many lives. The passage to which our

text belongs may be fairly regarded as one of the greatest passages in the religious literature of the world. Dante and Milton never rose so high as does St. Paul in this famous chapter. Hardly anywhere do we find a clearer and fuller recognition of all the elements in the world and in life which we describe as evil, yet its whole tone is triumphant. It is full of solemn joy and exultation. Surely he who wrote it saw with inspired vision. Its theology is not that of a great despair, but of a great and boundless hope. Creation is subject to vanity, but it is subject in hope. Its pains are the pains of development. We do not now see even Nature as God intends it; its prophecy has yet to be fulfilled. And we who have the first-fruits of the spirit groan within ourselves, but we also are saved by hope. It is not lost ground we are toiling to regain. The march of humanity is upward. The manifestation of the sons of men as the sons of God is the goal of human progress. To become sons of God in conscious relation and character as in idea and capacity—that is the meaning and end of human discipline. And when man is what God means him to be, Nature, too, shall be perfected with him—the system of things which is being used now to serve redemptive and disciplinary purposes shall be delivered from its bondage and share the liberty of the glory of the children of God. The end is not yet, but all things are moving towards it, however much appearances may at times give a different impression. To those who love

God and are putting themselves in line with the Divine purpose and movement all things will prove helpful: evil will not remain evil, but will be constantly changing into good. We grow by opposition. On the side of God we have God on our side. Our redemption is not at the mercy of accidents. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. The presence in human history of the highest form of the Divine life is an implicit prophecy of its ultimate attainment by all. Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the spiritual evolution, the type and promise of our final perfection. We need never doubt the God who gave us Christ; with Christ all things else are given. There is nothing too good to be true. The God who is making us and the world will not defeat His own ends by putting any arbitrary, impassable barrier between us and the perfect good which is His own purpose. God and good are one, therefore the whole universe must be moving steadily through such processes as finite growth requires toward complete and everlasting harmony with good. God has to satisfy, not only His children, but Himself. The love of God, of which the name of Christ is the symbol, is a living power of atonement or reconciliation. Bound up with our Christian faith in God are endless possibilities of redemption and development. All this struggle and discipline, all this preparation and Divine manifestation, are not for any merely temporal purpose nor for any victory less than the infinite victory. For

the joy that is set before Him—the joy of beholding a Divine humanity—the Creator, Father and Saviour of all can endure the vision of a suffering world, and the struggle of a rising and ascending race.

It is sometimes said that St. Paul made Christianity, but when we go beneath the letter of his teaching to its fundamental ideas and persuasions, then are we sure that Jesus Christ made Paul, and that if there had been no Jesus Christ there would have been no Apostle Paul. Whatever criticism may be made on portions or details of his teaching, and however its form may have been shaped and coloured by the needs of his age, there can be no doubt that what he became in character and life, what he taught and what he did, was all, as he himself loved to confess, “through Jesus Christ.” The time may come when we shall no longer be able to meditate upon the great Christian ideas according to the forms of thought peculiar to St. Paul, and when we shall no longer expect all Christian experience to flow into his moulds ; but hitherto Christendom has borrowed more of his phrases than his thought, and made his phrases symbolical of quite other thoughts than those which they symbolised to him.

We are only beginning to do full justice to his catholic teaching, to his universalism and his conception of Christianity as a religion of the spirit. His powerful mind, it is plain, saw more clearly than the rest of the apostles the universal character of the

religion of Christ and the necessity of delivering it from Jewish limitations. Once he may have regarded Deity as the Head and Patron of one race, but Christ had been made to him the Wisdom of God, and in Christ he saw the Representative of Infinite Grace, the Revelation of Eternal Charity.

The chapter from which our text is taken has been closely and sadly connected with the partial conceptions of schools and sects, but it has only to be read as a whole and in a large way to be heard crying anathema on the exclusive theories which have stolen from it their proof-texts. St. Paul's doctrines of predestination and election are not doctrines of narrowness and exclusion, but of liberality and breadth. He says substantially that God can choose whom He pleaseth, and he has chosen, not the Jews alone, but also the Gentiles. When by the exercise of the historical imagination we put ourselves in the apostle's place we discover that the one object of this chapter, indeed of the whole of the first part of the Epistle to the Romans, is to show that those who are outside "the law" are not outside the Divine mercy and care, that their salvation is included in the purpose of God. The magnificent passage I read as my text is the conclusion of his great argument. In the progress of his thought he has escaped from the atmosphere of the law into the atmosphere of the love which is the inspiration of the new and redeemed life. This love is in Christ, but the

love of Christ is only the love of God in a finite and human environment, moving and manifesting itself amid the ways of earth and time. Nothing could be more at variance with the apostle's teaching than to make the love of Christ stand out clear and bright only against the background of God's wrath or indifference. The heart of Christ is the revelation of the heart of God. The love of Christ and the love of God are one and the same Divine Reality. St. Paul begins what may be called his peroration by asking, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Then follows a sublimely imagined series of all the possible conditions or influences which might be supposed capable of effecting a separation between the soul and God. He declares with much boldness and enthusiasm that all visible and palpable dangers, the opposing forces of Roman society and the Roman state—"tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword"—would not be able to conquer them or to disunite them from God their Saviour. But his confidence takes even a much higher and wider range: rising above the passing incidents of place and time he surveys from a commanding height the whole creation. There is nought, he is persuaded, in the whole universe that need rob them of hope or disturb their faith in the Divine love. With great wealth of expression and imagery he seeks to make this persuasion emphatic. He sweeps creation into a few vast categories. No possible condition of existence, be it life or death;

no vicissitudes of time ; no farthest extreme of space, be it height or depth ; no unseen influence, no force above human ken, no hostile principalities or powers ; no, not any conceivable thing in the present or in the future, in this world or in the world to come, in the region of the known or the unknown, "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

One must be dull of mind and heart who is not thrilled by the power and beauty of this whole passage. It does us good to get near to a man who can honestly use such bold, unfaltering words with regard to such a central verity as the love of God for His children. His confession is contagious. His strong and triumphant faith—the outcome of painful and intense experience—makes us ashamed of our little faith and lack of faith, rebukes our unbelief, and raises us by the power of sympathy above the mists of doubt and fear into the clear atmosphere in which he lived and moved.

I have spoken of "little faith." And what a common thing little faith is—faith that is more fear than faith, more doubt than faith, faith that trembles and shrinks ! We find it everywhere : in hymns and prayers and sermons, and in our own hearts. We are not afraid of believing in too many things, but we are afraid of believing too much in anything, afraid especially of believing too much in the Eternal Love

which is the very heart of religion and the foundation of human hope. St. Paul's faith in the love of God is too great for us to realise. It seems too large, too daring, too wonderful to be true.

All this lingering suspicion, fear and hesitation, all this low estimate of the love of God, are the result of the religious training under which many of us spent our youth. We were trained in fear. Our earliest religious thoughts and feelings were shaped to a large extent by fear. We were afraid to trust God, afraid to believe to the uttermost in the Divine goodness and mercy. And though we know better now, we find it almost impossible to get all the evil effects of that early chill out of our system. The old pagan spirit of fear is still in our blood.

It is still the evident and immediate duty of many people living in Christian lands to set themselves at once to know God as He has been revealed to the world by Jesus Christ. To know Him is to have an untroubled and unlimited confidence in Him, and their want of this confidence shows that they do not know Him. Right knowledge of God is everything for strength and peace. It is told of one of our Scottish martyrs, oppressed by his harsh and gloomy creed, that looking up to the hills of his native Nithsdale he cried out, "I could pass through these mountains were they clothed in flame if I could only be sure that God loves me." The confidence that God loves us just as

we are ought to be our firm persuasion—the thing of all things of which we ought to be most sure. There is something seriously, ay, horribly wrong with our religious teaching if this confidence is not one of the clear, indisputable possessions of every man, woman, and child who comes under its influence. It is a great and unspeakable blessing when children grow up in a church in which they are taught from their earliest years that God is love—pure, universal, eternal love—love that makes nothing in the way of forgiveness and redemption impossible to Him. Their knowledge will save them from much distress and misery in after years. No matter what may happen to them or whither they may wander, they have rooted deeply in their hearts a faith full of endless power of redemption and consolation. It is St. Paul's strong persuasion of the love of God which men and women need more than anything else to steady and strengthen them when life seems going against them and their own hearts are fainting and failing.

The love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord is the heart of the Christian Gospel. It was what won the world at the beginning to the Christian obedience, and it is what holds the world now and will hold it, so long as there are sins to be forgiven and hearts hungering for reconciliation with God. It is independent of much knowledge which may be discredited, and of much opinion which may become a fashion of the past.

Whatever else which passes for Christianity and is supposed in some way to uphold it may decrease and disappear, this will increase and rise with purer and greater brightness upon the world. Every one of our intellectual conceptions of the mystery of the Godhead, of the Incarnation and the Atonement, may undergo a change, but the love which spoke, and acted, and lived in Jesus Christ will always touch the human heart with the deepest conviction and assurance of the love of God, and be the revelation and symbol of the Divine disposition toward the children of men.

Readers of Matthew Arnold will remember that in his essays on St. Paul he interprets our text as if the apostle were exulting in his own love of God instead of God's love of him : exulting in a love proceeding from himself instead of a love which found him and carried him away with it. It shows almost as strange a lack of insight as does the same writer's conception of the God of Israel as an impersonal force. The secret of St. Paul's calm outlook and triumphant hope, the power that enabled him to rise above all evil and fear of evil, was, most assuredly, not his own love of God, but God's love of him. The great saints of the Church have never thought much of their own love of God. It is His love of them and their fellows—a love greater than their hearts—which possessed them. "I think I am the poorest wretch that lives," said the dying

Cromwell ; “but I love God, or rather” (correcting himself) “I am loved of God.”

“ I love ; but ah ! the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee.
Lord, Thou wert long beforehand with my soul,
Always Thou lovedst me.”

In his *Reminiscences of Frederick Denison Maurice* the late Mr Haweis relates this incident : “I remember asking him one day, ‘How are we to know when we have got hold of God ? because sometimes we seem to have got a real hold of Him, whilst at other times we can realise nothing.’ He looked at me with those eyes which so often seemed to be looking into an eternity beyond, whilst he said in his deep and tremulously earnest voice, ‘You have not got hold of God, but He has got hold of you.’” Yes, there is the point. We must not measure God by our feelings and experiences. He does not change with our changing moods and states. “If we are faithless, He abideth faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” Let us learn St. Paul’s secret. His strength and peace will come to us as we share his great persuasion that our salvation, our victory over sin and sorrow, over life and death, depends, not on our love of God, but on God’s love for us.

1. Let us take to our hearts this thought—that life and none of its possible incidents and experiences can separate us from the love of God.

Life is the cause of many separations. Of all disuniting and disintegrating forces it is the most powerful. It breaks more ties than are broken by death. Indeed, death, though it separates us from the visible fellowship of our friends, does not destroy or even lessen love, rather does it consecrate and deepen it. It is life, not death, that is the great divider of human hearts. It is life, not death, that is the most searching test of love. It is the living who leave us, not the dead. Differences arise between friends which were once not even imagined—changes of mind and character more or less unconscious, frictions of opinion, mood, temper and will, sever bonds which death would only have hallowed and strengthened and sealed fast for ever.

But life, said the apostle, does not and cannot separate us from the love of God. And that jubilant expression of faith did not proceed from a man who had no true and vivid idea of the gravity of life—of its terrors and dangers, its chances and changes, its illusions and disillusion, its responsibilities and temptations. To St. Paul life was not a smooth and easy thing, but a battle full of great and solemn meanings and issues. He had known critical experiences both intellectual and moral. Many past gains had to be counted loss for Christ. At times he seems to have been haunted by the fear that, after all the good work he had done for his fellows, he might himself at the

last become a castaway. It was not because he was ignorant of antagonisms and dangers, of fightings within and without, that he was so bold. It was as if he had said : "I grant that life has its terrors ; but terrible as it is, and fraught with occasions for falling away, I am persuaded that not even life shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There was a time in St. Paul's life when he was ignorant of the love of God in Christ, but his ignorance did not separate him from it ; he was living and moving in it, though it was to him, then, a world not realised. There comes an hour—a never-to-be-forgotten hour—in the life of a man when he awakens to the reality of the Divine love, and through faith it becomes a personal and conscious possession. It may appear to him as if at that moment God had just begun to love him. It is as if a man blind from his birth should have his sight given, and on going out of doors should imagine that the sun is just beginning to shine and the earth to be beautiful. But all the loveliness and splendour have been there from the beginning. It is the man's eyes that have been closed to them. The love of God is not created by our knowledge of it nor by our faith in it. It broods over our life through long periods when we have no sense or realisation of it. Our ignorance and insensibility may rob us of much peace and joy and inspiration, but they do not, and cannot, separate

us from that Divine love which found its divinest expression in the life and love of Christ. It is ever upon us, blessing us through all the time of our blindness and darkness.

They tell us that man is so little and feeble that he is beneath the love and care of God. In His infinite greatness and glory how can He concern Himself with our interests or do aught but scorn our weakness? Is that the way we think of perfection? Have we not always more care for the small and feeble just because they are small and feeble? To Charles Lamb the wild, wandering words of his insane sister were dearer than all the sound sense and sanity of the world. If we, being evil, are moved by such sentiments, how much more the Heavenly Father? It is a poor and vulgar idea of greatness which leads men to suppose that the Infinite Greatness is above taking any interest in our small affairs and must be indifferent as to how we live and how we die. It is only the worldly great who shrink from contact with little things and so-called little men—not the truly and nobly great. In the school of Christ we have been taught that service is the greatness of man. It is also the greatness of God. Is not God the servant of His own universe? Does not His very life consist in the ceaseless giving of Himself to His creatures and His children? Because He is the great God He cares for all weak and lowly things. To behold in Jesus Christ “the brightness of

His glory," is to know that "the All-Great *is* the All-Loving too," and that our littleness and frailty do not and cannot separate us from His love.

The fear has often been expressed in recent days that though our ignorance cannot separate us from God our knowledge may—especially our new knowledge of the vastness and grandeur of the material creation. The whole tendency of scientific progress, we are told, is to enlarge the universe and to belittle man—belittle him so as to make him doubt that he can be the object of the everlasting love and care of the Lord of a myriad worlds. It is true we live in a wider universe than did the men to whom the gospel of the love of God was first preached, but this knowledge, wisely considered, does not tend to depreciate man in the scale of creation and to make him of slight account. On the contrary, he is himself seen to be the occasion of all this scientific exploration and progress whose results are foolishly supposed to belittle him. What are the size and bulk and age of material things, what distances in space and time and swiftness of movement, even though magnified till numbers fail to express them, when compared with the mind which searches, discovers, measures, and reasons concerning them all? Outward size and consequence are no true index of real worth. There is something vulgar in attaching so much importance to material magnitude and permanence, as if mere bigness were greatness and mere existence life. The greatness of man is of another

and higher order. Thought, and purpose, and love are the truly great forces in the universe ; and because man thinks and wills and loves, there is a wonder in him more wonderful than that of moons and suns. God is the Infinite mind and will and heart, and because man thinks and resolves and loves, he is kindred to God, capable of entering into communion with Him, of thinking His thoughts, of carrying out His purposes and of responding to His love, and therefore more to Him than a wide universe full of thoughtless, will-less, passionless things. The vastness of material things does not disturb our Christian faith. We can still say with St. Paul that neither this nor any other creation can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Not a few honest and devout souls in these days are compelled by their experience to interpret "life" in our text as including intellectual perplexities and doubts, suspensions of judgment on important matters of faith, uncertainties, even positive disbelief in things once surely believed among us. Growing knowledge in many directions, physical discovery, the advance of philosophical thought, the new science of comparative religion, the more purely critical study and interpretation of our sacred religious literature—these and other causes are operating to unsettle and change traditional ways of thinking about many things and to make ancient symbols fade and fail. Let us not be anxious or fear-

ful. The mind must obey its laws ; and to feel and obey the sacred claims of truth is to love God with the mind. The truth of things is also the thought of God in things. In the meantime we may be persuaded that nothing in the way of intellectual change and development can finally separate us from the love of God in Christ. Our opinions concerning matters which can only be decided by rare intellectual knowledge and keen critical acumen cannot affect our eternal welfare. Mysteries which only a select few can grasp or believe cannot be essential to salvation. That which saves all must be simple enough for all to understand and receive. It is not even conceptions of God and His ways which save. God is greater than our thoughts. Believe or doubt as we may, He is still our salvation ; and our perplexities and uncertainties, however much they may rob us of His peace, have no power to separate us from His Love.

Now and again we are all conscious of a spiritual elevation to which the larger part of our life is strange. The faculties to which and through which God speaks are keenly awake. We are strung to a tremulous intensity. We have perceptions and suggestions of realms of experience of which we are mostly ignorant. We see angels ascending and descending, and our feet move to the music of the heavenly choirs. We are alive to God and His love. We sit with Christ on the throne of His vision of the Eternal Goodness and

Fatherhood. But the glory passes. We go down again to the common levels of life. Earthly cares press upon us and claim our strength. We dishonour ourselves by coarse ambitions and mean tempers. We pursue ignoble ways till God becomes invisible to our spirits and His love for us incredible. But God has not left us. His love has not let us go : it clings to us and follows us in all our wanderings, and is as much a reality in our dark and bitter hours as it was when we were joyously conscious of it and the new song was in our mouth.

The author of the beautiful hymn beginning—

“O Love that wilt not let me go,”

had hours, even in his later years, when he was not sure of anything—not even of God ; and all the lofty and lovely thoughts and hopes with which he inspired others seemed to himself to be the figments of an unreal and vanished enthusiasm. In depressed health and lowered spirits, when care or pain has taken the buoyancy out of life, we have all yielded to doubt of God and lost for a time the believing heart. But steadfast as the sun and stars above the drifting clouds is the love of God for His children. Yes ! in spite of all the darkening and deadening influences of life, in spite of moods that rise from us like evil mists and obscure the heavens, in spite of our selfishness and worldliness and the base tempers and passions which at times vex and tear us, separating us from all that we once

reckoned to be good and fair, and effectually robbing us of our sense of the Divine nearness, the love of God is not changed toward us. We may rebel, we may be wicked, we may lose ourselves in strange and forbidden paths, our best affections and enthusiasms may die out, we may live practically without God in the world; yet no rebellion can break the tie which binds us to Him, no wickedness can make Him disown us, and no indifference can deprive us of His care. Our guilty wanderings may separate us from His blessedness, but not from His love. We often speak of "abandoned persons," "outcasts," "lost souls," but there is a Love upon this world, and upon every man, woman, and child, that never abandons, never forsakes, more constant in its care than we are in rebellion, more faithful than we are unfaithful, more anxious to bless than we are to be blessed—a Love from which no soul is ever outcast, and to which no soul is ever lost.

It is one of the worst consequences of evil-doing that it distorts our thoughts and feelings and makes us think of God other than He really is. It is only the pure in heart who see Him truly. It is only those who love who know for themselves that God is perfect love. But whether we doubt it or believe it, God loves us always—loves us when we are feeble and foolish and bad. The very remorse we feel is proof that He has not let us go; it testifies to the presence of His reproofing and redeeming Spirit. He is still

dealing mercifully with us when His love takes the severe form of justice and makes us chastise ourselves. Would that we could live in this clear atmosphere, persuaded that God is love and that His love can never forget and never forsake! We should then no longer be the victims of vague fear. We should have hope—hope for the triumph of good in ourselves and in our fellows. For when we sink into depths of evil, it is not so much our sin which hinders our deliverance as want of faith and the hope that is born of faith. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*—that wonderful parable of human life in some of its phases—there is no finer evidence of the Christian genius of the writer than his conviction that of all the evils which the pilgrim encountered, the worst was Doubting Castle, ruled by Giant Despair. When the pilgrim found himself there he believed that he had found the end. That familiar incident is the symbol of an eternal truth of human experience. It is not so much sin that conquers people at a certain stage of experience, as doubt or despair. Almost any lapse can be recovered from, if men have only heart and hope and courage enough to turn right round and begin anew. It is despair that is fatal. And one form of this despair is doubt of the love of God, want of Christian faith, which in its innermost substance is that beholding of the Divine disposition and character in the disposition and character of Christ which draws and binds one to God in confidence and hope.

When the guilty Queen Guinevere in Tennyson's poem fled from Arthur's presence she dared not to lift her soul to God, but she could relieve her heart by confession to the peaceful sisterhood of Almesbury. After that her soul rose within her and said, "I must not scorn myself ; he" (the King) "loves me still." Oh, souls of men weighed down by dark memories and fears, believe that the King of the universe still loves you—loves with a love that never changes, from which you are never separated—not in the midst of temptation and strife, not when you are disobedient and fall into wrong and spoil your life—loves with a love that loves on in spite of all your unworthiness, even though your own love of God is being utterly destroyed by your sin. "Life," says St. Paul, "cannot separate us from the love of God, nor any present things." Let us believe it with the whole heart. It is the message of Jesus Christ.

2. Let us also take to our hearts this thought, that death and things to come cannot separate us from the love of God. It is a great thing to be persuaded that this power we call death, which has been so feared and fought against, cannot sever the ties which unite us to God. It seems to separate the children of men from so much. Every day we see it in its own ancient and awful way invading human homes, breaking up circles of friendship, and laying its touch upon the dearest attachments. But let us not make too much of the isolating power of death even from this point of view.

There is a love between soul and soul which death cannot destroy—a love that loves on though the outward presence has vanished, and is often conscious even of a closer communion than when each could only half express itself through the poor medium of the body. Death means invisibility, but not the loss or destruction of love; not separation, perhaps not even distance. And how much more must it be true of God that death cannot divide us from Him, cannot pluck us out of His hands, cannot crush us out of existence? To be loved by God is to be preserved and cherished. We are His children, therefore we must live on with Him and be cared for by Him.

“Neither death.” What is there in death to affect God to change His mind, to awaken fear or suspicion as to anything He may do, or to make us think that we may no longer pray to Him for those whom we call the dead? To Him death and the hereafter are not the mysteries and barriers they are to us. Those who die to us live to Him. They are in His care wherever they are. They have not passed from His sight because they have passed from our sight—gone beyond the range of our eye and ear. The mere passage from the seen to the unseen cannot touch His influence, His love to them, His power to help them and to hold communion with them. Death can have no manner of dominion over the Love that gave us their love, and gave it, not that it might perish, but for everlasting life.

In a few short years we who worship here to-day shall have passed away from these earthly scenes of joy and sorrow, and our voices will be silent in this world as are the voices of our fathers, but we shall still be living and we shall still be, wherever we are, with God. We shall be with God there as we are with Him here. The faith of Christ makes the present and the future, the seen and the unseen, appear as one—one world and one life. Death is the end of nothing but of a certain relation to the things we see. It will leave us in the same relation to the invisible God—children with Father. Living or dying we are His : in this world and in all the worlds we cannot be separated from His love. We cannot forecast the coming life ; but when once we know and are persuaded that God loves us we are free from the fear of death and of all invisible terrors. It may be but little of the love of God we know from experience, but to have felt it at all is to have confidence in it for ever. The endless years, we feel assured, can bring no change in God. We can trust ourselves for all possible circumstances and all possible events to Him. He will not let us go.

And we must not suffer ourselves to think even of the wickedest and worst as if they could be separated from the love of God. Wherever human souls are, there God is and every possibility of help and blessing. Human souls may be lost to themselves and lost to their fellows, but not lost to God—for there is no

place in the wide universe in which a soul can be lost to Him whose presence filleth all space. Because the universe is God's there is no room in it for such a word as hopeless. The Christian definition of souls lost to goodness is—not yet found. Does not that sweetest of all parables—the parable of the lost sheep—stretch its lesson into the great hereafter, covering all its mountains and valleys with the sky of its love and making them echo with the voice of the Eternal Shepherd caring for the lost one more than for the ninety-and-nine safely folded, and seeking until He finds? But it is not a question of texts—one text against another text. It is time we were delivered from the tyranny of texts. The Christian Gospel does not rest on texts, but on the character of God made known through Christ to the world as Eternal Love and Fatherhood. Whatever be the mystery of the future—and few are inclined to map out final issues with absolute confidence—there can be no doubt that the most Christian disposition is that which takes counsel, not with fear, but with hope. It is not easy to believe that in a universe over which “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” reigns, immortality can be a curse even to a small minority of souls. While there may and must be many scenes and stages of discipline, there can be no place for an unending woe. The hope of the final and universal triumph of good in the creation, and in the hearts and lives of all God's children, grows as naturally out of the Christian

ideas and the Christian spirit as the harvest of autumn out of the sowing of spring.

It gives me joy to preach to you this glorious Gospel of the Blessed God. It gives me joy to say to you all this Sunday morning : In the midst of your toil and care, in all the temptations and dangers which beset your life, in seasons of gladness and rejoicing, and in seasons of darkness and distress when the sun gives no light by day nor the moon by night ; when you are bearing burdens and going through struggles which only Heaven knows ; when you are troubled by your own unfaithfulness and failure, and by the unfaithfulness and failure of your fellows ; when you are mourning for your dead and the fear of the unknown future oppresses you ; in all mortal changes and in the change which comes but once for all, when earthly realities are fading into shadows and the shadows of the invisible are growing into realities, in the hour of death and the day of judgment, you may believe and be persuaded that neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creation, shall be able to separate you from the love of God. And unto Him who hath given us this great victory over our fear and doubt through our Lord Jesus Christ, unto Him, the Eternal Lover and Father and Saviour of souls, be the praise and worship, the trust and obedience of His children, world without end. Amen.

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GUARDING THE HOLY FIRE

“Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out.”—LEV. vi. 13.

ANCIENT religion spoke much by emblem and symbol. Words were not its sole medium of communication with men. Its faith did not come by hearing alone. All the senses were more or less employed as a door of utterance, and observances and ceremonies appealing to the imagination were used to awaken and direct devout feeling and thought. Its symbolism was no mere priestly invention and device: it sprang from and it met a real human need: it was the recognition of a natural method of religious culture: it had its educational significance and value, and was far from being the empty show it must often have appeared to be to the unprepared and unsympathetic spectator. It was true then as now,

“Words there are none

For the heart's deepest things,”

and hence, of course, ceremony had its natural and legitimate place in the vocabulary of religion as of love.

Then, as now, men could not live by the prophet's message alone : the aspirations of the soul could not always be translated into the dialect of the understanding : spiritual passion demanded other vehicles of expression than the common forms of speech : carved stone and wood, altar and fire and sacrifice, movement and music and colour, were used to speak the word of God and the soul's sincere desire ; and stately services made great ideas vivid and impressive in a way not otherwise possible. Then, as now, things material and temporal were types of things spiritual and eternal ; and religion as an institution was made to develop, to quicken and nourish religion as a life. Even the most spiritual and best of ancient religions made free use of this symbolic language ; spoke to its children in acted parables, and exhibited dramatically the lessons which it was charged to convey. It loved to enact its instructions, picturing them as upon a canvas, displaying them as upon a stage from generation to generation.

The offices of Hebrew worship have long since passed from literal acceptance, but we still cherish some of them as emblems and figures of our Christian experiences and thoughts. Humanity never really forsakes its past. The days of its years are bound each to each in natural piety. The symbols of our ancestors are crystallised in the words we utter. Their rude observances are the true though humble origin of much that is high and sacred in our worship. The

Old world lives in the New ; Judaism and Paganism survive under Christianity. Through all the stages of religious progress men still go ; helping themselves Godward by an infinite variety of symbols. We live by symbols and link ourselves through them with the Divine more than many of us ever dream. Our symbols may be more refined and spiritual, but they are symbols still ; and they come not to destroy but to fulfil, to say a little better what symbols sought to say long ago.

The ritual custom of which our text speaks is one beautiful and instructive in itself, and full of large suggestion—long since dead as to the letter, but living still as to the spirit. The allusion is to the altar of burnt-offering in the court of the Tabernacle. It was concerning this altar and offering that the instruction was given that the fire should ever be kept burning and not be suffered to go out—an enactment well fitted to convey and to make clear and impressive the idea and duty of maintaining without break and interruption the worship and service of God in the life of Israel and in the life of every Israelite.

1. In that temple of God which we each are, upon the altar of the personal heart and life, the fire of devout desire and affection ought ever to be kept burning and never be allowed to go out.

It is said to be the prerogative of genius to light its own fire. But we have not to originate the flame of

spiritual desire in ourselves. Some spark from the heavenly altars has reached each one of us. We describe ourselves at times as seekers after God, but the truth is we seek God because He first seeks us. Our upward yearnings and strivings are the answering movement of our spirits to the touch of His spirit. It is an old tradition that the fire which burned for so many ages upon the altars of Israel without going out was first conveyed from heaven. The Divine aspiration is itself a Divine gift. Inequalities there unquestionably are even in this Divine gift ; some have what is called in the language of our day a genius for religion, and others a capacity poorer and more limited ; yet it is enough that the spark which may kindle into a great fire and blaze into a great light, and warm and illuminate every chamber of our being and every part of our life, is never wanting. The religious man is the normal man. Religion and the institutions of religion are not foreign impositions : they are not thrust upon humanity as additions from without ; rather do they exist by the very exercise of man's endowment as man. The need of God and the feeling after Him, which are the root and support of all religious observances, are not instructed into existence ; they are not of human invention, but of human nature—that deeper nature which is begotten not made, born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. The appeal of religion and of the literature which interprets

religion is to the intuitions of the race. We first feel within us what we discern to be without us. The recognition of God is the soul unfolding to spiritual realities and relations. We call Jesus, Lord,—confess Him to be the Master of the Divine life through the awakening in ourselves of a kindred spirit :

“ Held our eyes no sunny sheen,
How could sunshine e'er be seen ?
Dwelt no power Divine within us,
How could God's Divineness win us ? ”

There is not a soul anywhere, we would fain believe, who has not the Divine witness within ; life enough, if just enough, to stir now and again some longing after Him from whom we come and to whom we go. Outlaws from God we cannot be, even if we try. From His presence we cannot escape. “ Thou art nearer to me than thou art to thyself,” said the old oracle. We have no need to summon from a distant throne the God with whom we have to do. He stands at the door and knocks, and His Spirit is ever seeking a resting-place and home in the deep places of each human heart and life. It was a saying of ancient wisdom, “ No one ever passed from youth to age in unbelief,” and those times were what we describe as Pagan times. It must be even more true of those born in the age of Christ and in lands which we call Christendom. The Heavenly Call does not find us prodigals in a far country, sensualists at Corinth,

idolaters at Ephesus, or agnostics at Athens ; but members for the most part of Christian households, with our nature more or less awakened and directed to the highest good, and prepared for the prayer which is the heart of religion by the silent influences of Christian heredity and environment, through the quiet processes of gradual growth, and not through the shock of strange experiences, or by any whirlwind of revivalistic agitation. We hardly need to be converted, or ought not to need—only to be awakened and kept awake. We are in one sense beyond our own recall Christian souls, and however far we may wander as the years gather upon us we can in nowise become pagan reprobates. We may fall into unbelief born of neglect and worldliness, but we cannot guard it ; all the deeper movements and experiences of life will be constantly forcing us out of it. Just when we feel ourselves comfortable and at peace in it, secure from all spiritual intrusion and visitation,

“There flits across the soul a subtle something,
 A sunset touch,
 A fancy from a flower-bell ; some one’s death ;
 A chorus-ending from Euripides ;
 And that’s enough for fifty hopes and fears
 To rap and knock and enter in our souls” :

and while we muse the fire burns ; our hearts tremble and bow ; our spirits feel the pressure of the Divine Spirit ; we again find our souls ; piety becomes once

more a passion, and the Cross of the Christian sacrifice no longer our shame but our glory.

Let men and women trifle and forget as they may, live as if they thought prayer were but wasted breath, and the cry of the world's penitents and saints for pardon and strength and communion with the Eternal, were but the unmeaning moan and wail of morbid souls ; yet even they have their deeper moments—self-revealing moments when they are filled with uneasy feeling and a craving for something they miss ; when their apathy is smitten through and the smouldering fire of spiritual desire is blown into flame, and their life shows some dim sign and prophecy of its great change and transfiguration into a temple of God.

Few there be who have not gone so far as this in the devout life ; but a multitude which no man can number, within as well as without all the churches, have never gone any further just for the want of earnestness to fulfil the conditions and obey the laws of the continual increase of spiritual power and fervour. Amid the stress and rush of life their sense of God fades, is little more than a pathetic reminiscence or a vague dream, a reality rather to memory and hope than a living experience—the deepest of their personal relations. Feeble, flickering, fading is the holy fire upon the altar of their hearts. Often and long is it left untended and unfed ; and because of this neglect they are in constant danger of slipping into irreligion,

becoming cold and careless in prosperity, hard and bitter in adversity, the victims and not the masters of tempting circumstances. "It has been the greatest error of my life," said a great man in his old age, "not learning to avail myself as I should have done of the help of prayer." And what moral loss and failure proceed from this neglect! It is an ethical as well as a religious mistake. Superficial are we in all our observation and experience of life if we fail to see the moral lift of religious worship; how goodness and integrity are hallowed and protected by intense religious feeling—regarded and cherished as part of the service we owe to God; and how faith instead of being a substitute for right living is in truth its supreme aid and inspiration, moving one to greater effort and attainment, and preserving and nourishing in the soul those finer virtues and graces which are the flower and crown of human character.

The fire on the altar of Israel, though kindled from heaven, had to be kept constantly burning by natural and human means. The priests had to lay wood on the altar every morning, and, like the vestal virgins of Rome, to watch day and night with sleepless care lest the holy flame should die out. It is a parable of which the spiritual experience of mankind writes large the meaning. The religious sentiment, which is an essential element of human nature, needs cultivation as certainly as the power to think, or the love of the

beautiful, or our affection for parents and friends. The Divine order for the nourishment and support of our spiritual life is, indeed, analogous to that by which our natural life is maintained. The spiritual life is quickened by God, but its preservation depends on our use of means. The soul, like the body, requires to be nourished, that its love of God may be renewed and made to burn with greater intensity. Wise men, therefore, have always made much of observance and custom and habit in religion, in order to prevent the fading and dying out of the spiritual life. And what was true of the childhood of the world is also true of its manhood. There are some things which we do not outgrow. We may suffer them to fall into disuse ; in our indifference we may neglect them ; in our vanity we may cast them aside ; but we do not outgrow them. They are still necessary to healthy growth and progress. It is a sound conservatism which makes us unwilling to give up anything which the religious experience of humanity has found necessary or helpful to the maintenance of its holiest and best life, and which moves us to the regular and faithful performance of those devotional uses, private and public, that the best of men in all lands and ages have always regarded to be essential to the very existence of the holy fire in human souls.

In the great mercy of God few of us have ever gone so far astray as St. Augustine did, yet with all our

hearts we can join him as he cries out : “ Too late, too little have I sought Thee, O Thou Loveliness of ancient days.” Again and again do we require to be told to repent and to do the first works ; to stir up the gift within us ; to exercise ourselves unto godliness ; to take up neglected and rejected habits of worship ; to guard and feed the Divine fire in that Temple of God which we are—until its warmth and brightness are diffused as a permanent consecration through our whole being, touching and kindling every faculty, and giving a steady and radiant glow to every element and act of life. Let us not dream that an occasional devout wish or devout mood will ever make a devout character and life. To win and to keep the devotional mind and spirit we must choose and follow regular and systematic means of discipline and culture ; we must habituate ourselves to particular offices and acts of devotion just as we do to regular meals, although we are not always hungry at those fixed times ; we must meditate and pray till devout aspiration becomes devout temper, and devout acts devout habits ; we must cultivate and cherish spiritual affections until they become part of the basis of character ; we must exercise our faith till it ceases to be a mere sentiment or opinion and becomes a living, burning, purifying conviction and enthusiasm—a fire in the soul consuming everything there that is unworthy, a light of life like the brightness of day in our redeemed existence. We

must wait upon God more than they that watch for the morning, until the Divine life within us is established in the soul, has gained its rightful place and supremacy, and become in the highest sense our natural life and our one life, changing everything we do, all our common concerns and duties, into its image from glory to glory.

There is no royal road to anything—least of all to the divinest things of life. Intimacy with God, the communion of the Spirit, faith, hope, love, reverence, spiritual insight, peace and joy in the Eternal Will—these things cannot be purchased with easy and indifferent living. Method and habit are just as natural and necessary and valuable in religion and in the development and training of religious character as in any other of our human relations and interests. It is impossible, we well know, to possess power or spirit of any kind without the habitual use of its accompanying forms. All our higher faculties, affections, and tastes need constant nourishment and exercise; and the higher they are the more regular and sustained must be the exercise of them in the practice that makes perfect. To produce any activity that is meant to be a continuous and constant element in life there must be unremitting attention to the conditions of its development and use. The masters of music are always in training; they not only give years of laborious study to the discipline and education of their

musical power and taste, but after all their preparatory studies they do not neglect the daily practice. But with regard to the devout spirit and life we are slow, almost reluctant, to learn that we must make much of method and habit, and that without persistent fidelity there can be no attainment. We know and are persuaded that to attain any other kind of excellence, to excel as students of physical science, as painters, singers, pianists, violinists, we must give time and thought to it, resolute purpose and steady practice ; but somehow we imagine that excellence in a life infinitely higher than the scientific or artistic life does not require any such earnest and ceaseless endeavour ; that the finest powers and affections of our human being—the capacity of religious inspiration, the power to draw near unto God and to enter into the communion of His Spirit : that these powers, compared with which genius in music or painting or science is but a small thing, may be preserved and nourished into strength and beauty without the systematic care and culture which other and lower faculties and tastes and any mechanical or professional success require and demand. Fools that we are, and blind ! Steady discipline and exercise are not more necessary to our physical and intellectual life than they are to our spiritual life. What would the body be and what the mind if they were treated as we treat our souls—left to accident and mood and impulse, without regular

times and seasons, means and ministries? It is our finest feelings which require the most constant cultivation and care. It is our noblest powers that need the largest and most uninterrupted culture.

“Our sacred selves! Have we
No charge to keep o’er this divinity
That lives within us?”

We often hear men speak about the *spirit* of prayer as being enough. Yes! it is enough; but how are we to have and to keep the spirit of prayer save as we have and keep the spirit of knowledge, the spirit of art, the spirit of love, or the spirit of anything else, save by fulfilling the conditions of having and keeping it? In pleading for devotional observances and habits, I am pleading the cause of the spirit. The men who may be said to pray without ceasing, who live almost unconsciously in an atmosphere spiritual and vital, and to whom God is the Great Companion of their days, are not the men who slight the habits of prayer; and they—the men who have mastered the art of living with God—are the only persons who can speak with any real authority on this subject. One of them says: “Evening, morning, and at noon will I cry unto Thee.” Jesus Christ was full of the spirit of prayer, His heart was a shrine of unceasing worship, and His life was a constant walk with God; yet even He felt the need of method and habit, and obeyed the law which moves

the devout soul to seek occasions of formal and concrete expression of its spiritual passion. He who lived in unbroken communion of spirit with His Father would yet spend whole nights in prayer, and make it His custom to go into the synagogue every Sabbath day.

It is often made a subject of complaint and wonder that there are nowadays so few great believers and great saints, few to whom the highest things are the most real and commanding things, few who live in the world of spiritual reality as if it were the home of their spirits, and to whom communion with God is the simplest and most central fact of their life. It is impossible to say how far the complaint is a just one ; but if genuine spiritual excellence is a rare thing in our modern world, and if in these passing days we have lost the sense of the Invisible and the secret of rest in God, we can easily give the explanation of it all. It can only be that we are neglecting to feed the fires of consecration and devotion, that we are growing indifferent to the due nurture of the spiritual life and to all sustained spiritual exercises, that we are not keeping ourselves subject to religious inspiration—not stirring ourselves up to take and keep hold of God, not troubling ourselves to master the art of living with Him, as children with their Father. While we know that we have to strive to be learned men and musical men, and successful business and professional men, we

somehow think that religion can be had without taking any pains, easily and cheaply. We are fond of quoting the poet's words, "God can be had for the asking," as if that asking were merely the asking of the lips and did not include the asking of the heart and will, the asking of the whole being and life—as if it did not mean all the seeking and striving, all the habitudes and quietudes, all the experiences of place and time, all the moral and spiritual discipline and culture, all the self-denial and self-training and self-devotion which the saints, ancient and modern, Hebrew and Christian, Catholic and Puritan, knew so well.

And there can be no doubt that a large part of the decline of religious faith about which we hear so much to-day—the loss of assured religious conviction, is due not so much to the disturbing effects of new knowledge, to honest questionings and doubts, to serious intellectual perplexities, but to far more commonplace causes; even to the hurry and unrest in which so many of us live, to our over-activity in the ways of business and pleasure which reacts in weakness, and to the gradual loss of those religious habits which are necessary to-day as yesterday to keep alive and ardent the holy fire in our hearts. Without uncharitableness, it may be said that much of our scepticism and unbelief is simply the scepticism of neglected souls and the unbelief of world-worn hearts. It is often remarked that, in our distracted and over-crowded life, it requires much

effort to keep up our friendships with one another. But think you it requires less effort to keep up our sense of intimacy with God, to know Him with that knowledge which is Eternal Life, to gain insight into His ways, to love Him, and to enjoy what the Benediction calls "the communion of the Holy Spirit"? Many of us, alas! do not take time to believe in God. By our unresting action in earthly affairs, by our neglect of meditation and prayer, we build up around ourselves the very conditions of unbelief, and thus the sense of God fades out of our hearts, and all vital recognition of God disappears from our lives. We cease to tend and feed the altar-fires, and in some hour of critical trial we wake up to the fact that the very capacity for receiving religious inspiration and religious comfort has almost perished, and we are ready to take up the moan of the dying Paracelsus in Robert Browning's poem :

"Love, hope, fear, faith—these make humanity ;
 These are its sign and note and character,
 And these I have lost, gone from me for ever."

Of course, we have lost our religion. Faith, hope, and love would not be worth having, if they could be kept with such neglect to guard the holy fire.

In these modern days, when men are so much given to commending industry and enterprise, and the tendency prevails to undervalue both the private

and public exercises of religion, we are often reminded that to work is to pray, and many of us run away with a half-truth as if it were a whole truth. To live and work in such a great way that work becomes a worship and life a prayer, there must also be the prayer of quiet thought and aspiration, the prayer of the silent hour and of the heart which invokes the Divine blessing. It is a serious fact, shown by too many examples in every community, that the most active and enterprising men, and not only in business and politics, but in philanthropy and in ecclesiastical, evangelistic, and missionary affairs, are often the men who have the least personal life. So driven are they, so eagerly responsive to all manner of good causes, that they have no time for deepening the inward life, no time to lie passive and open to spiritual influences, no time for the musing which makes the fire burn, no time for the reading which kindles the soul with great thoughts, no time for breathing together the atmosphere of worship, and no time for the lonely communion with God which is so absolutely necessary to the replenishing of the spiritual energy which noble and effective life and service both in the world and in the church demand.

It is told of Wilberforce that when an over-zealous friend asked him about the state of his soul, he replied: "I have been so busy thinking about poor slaves that I have forgotten that I had a soul."

He, perhaps, could afford to take for a time that attitude, for he had stored up in himself the results of years of severe spiritual discipline and culture. But his words, or words like them, are often used by persons to justify philanthropic activities which leave little or no leisure in their crowded days for the quiet thought which their needy souls require, and their work also, in order to make it nobly fruitful. The work cannot be better than the workman, and what we accomplish depends ultimately upon what we are. To give we must have; to do we must be. There is a distinction, sometimes very apparent, between the social work of those whose personal moral and spiritual life is in quality superficial and feeble, and the work of strong, rich, aspiring souls, ever striving to keep close their connection with the Eternal Source of inspiration and strength. The deepening of the devotional spirit and the best work in the field of religion are connected as cause and sequence. What is unfriendly to the first is unfriendly to the other. To extend religion in any wise and beneficent way we need to deepen it, and we cannot deepen it much in our fellows until we first have its life deepened in our own souls. The mind to work any truly great work is ever the mind of faith—the uplifted, illuminated, and inspired mind. Without it we may have much running to and fro and spasms of bustling and noisy activity, but little of that service

which leaves a deep and abiding impression upon the life of a community or a generation. The persistent living in spiritual realities is required, especially of ministers of religion. To do the priest's work, to bring men to realise the presence of God through the influence of public worship and preaching, one must have true priestly power, a rare and costly gift which cannot be conferred in any outward way, but without which the tongues of men and of angels will be little more than the sounding brass against which finer souls soon close their ears. To do the prophet's work one must have the prophet's inspiration, and be constantly preparing himself to receive it more and more. Indeed, whatever our work and service, and whatever our ideas and methods, our fundamental requirement is a disciplined sensitiveness to the spiritual realities of life, the temper of faith, the spirit steeped in sentiments of reverence, trust, and love, the kindled and glowing heart. It is far easier to settle or unsettle men's opinions and beliefs, to interest them in theological and social problems, and to make them think with this or that sect or party, than it is to undermine their indifference, to quicken their cold and languid souls, and to kindle in their hearts the altar-fire of worship ; and to do this we ourselves must be aglow and aflame with the life of God. We must be men of aspiration and inspiration.

It is sometimes said that the culture of the devotional life is a thing of the past. Many, I confess,

behave as if they believed this ignorant and foolish statement to be true. We are all too fond in our egotism and pride of exalting our personal preferences, inclinations, and habits as if they were the sure indication and prophecy of the tendency and movement of a whole age. But what we may have come to neglect, renounce, or despise, and perhaps not to our advantage, men may still want, and need it all the more even when they do not want it. Methods of religious culture may be revised, but we cannot dispense with the practice itself without wronging ourselves, because we have that in our souls and in our lives which needs the inspiration it gives and guards. Theories and customs of prayer may change, but our need of God and of communion with Him does not grow less. Instead of less meditation, less prayer, less worship in our days, it seems to me that we need more for the new and larger order of life and service which is swiftly coming. The old paths here are after all the paths of progress. To forsake them is to go downward. The devout spirit is too indispensable to complete character and life to be slighted, and too necessary to the finer humanities to be left untended. The inspirations of religion are required to give wings and feet to our ideals of justice and brotherly kindness and service. Coleridge sang,

“He prayeth best who loveth best” ;

but we may also say with equal truth,

“He loveth best who prayeth best.”

Many in these days who eulogise the devotion of Jesus to the service of mankind forget that from the beginning to the close of His earthly ministry He drew strength for that service from communion with God. "I live by the Father," He once said, and in these words we have the secret of His life and work, of His unwearying self-devotion to the cause of man and God.

"Forasmuch as they who love, and lean in love upon His
breast,
Reap the richer bliss of being, drink the dews of a deeper
rest,
Rise renewed in soul and sinew, greeting life with a keener
zest,
I will seek Him."

And now, before we proceed further, let us ask ourselves, how burns the holy fire in our souls,—that inner life of reverence and love, trust and consecration and loyalty towards God which constitutes the religious spirit and creates the truly religious character? Are we sustaining in ourselves the devotion and enthusiasm which nourish the spiritual life? It is so easy to become undevout, to grow insensible and callous to all higher experiences, so easy to become indifferent and careless and worldly. We have just to neglect ourselves and to let things go. Fire requires fuel—left to itself it soon burns low and burns out. The God with whom we have to

do cannot make us what we ought to be without our steady co-operation. Devout habit on our part is necessary to devout character. What about our habits? The poet tells us that

“We cannot kindle when we will
The fire which in the heart resides,”

but we also know right well that the fulfilling of the conditions on which the kindling depends is not independent of our wills. It is not the passive, idle mind and heart which God inspires. We receive not because we ask not. Unto him that hath shall be given. Do we prepare ourselves to meet God and to receive His inspiration? Is it our daily effort to keep the soul sensitive at every point to Divine influences? I preach no formalism, but I plead with you to give your religion the first place in your care, and not to allow prayer to become a lost art. I plead for the quiet hour, the quiet Sunday, the quiet meditation, the quiet prayer that you may be preserved calm and strong, amid the whirl of things, that the sense of God may warm and deepen into communion with God, and that the holy fire on the soul's altar may never go out.

2. In that Temple of God we call the family, on the altar of the Home, the holy fire ought ever to be kept burning and never be suffered to go out. Religion is necessary to the home. A house where

we merely lodge and eat together is not a home ; and a home, though it may have all things else—love, friendship, comfort, refinement—does not fulfil its true idea unless the influence of real religion is adequately there. To preserve family life from decay, to give strength and beauty to the domestic relations, to bind the home together and make its circle a unit and a source of elevating influence, nothing helps so much as simple and sincere devotional usages and habits. A worldly home cannot be a deeply united and happy one. There must be a common life in God and union there. The best we can do for our children is to create an atmosphere in the home that is favourable to reverence and faith. For they grow chiefly like air-plants by what they absorb from the atmosphere around them. If allowed to grow up in a non-worshipful atmosphere they will be injured for life. Herbert Spencer has enriched our educational vocabulary with the phrase “complete life,” and the quiet and gradual awakening and culture of the religious affections are as necessary, yea, more necessary, to the complete life of our youths and maidens than any physical or mental training. And yet how this side of life is neglected ! We send our children to the best schools that can be found and give them the best education, but that for which all other things exist is slighted—the life which relates them to God. With all their education they are not educated into the knowledge of

their childhood to God—and their character suffers. They go out into the world with little reverence for anything, and often quite unprepared to meet the critical experiences of early manhood and womanhood. In the reaction from the old coercive methods, and from the hypocrisy, formalism, and cant which too frequently accompanied them, we are in danger of the opposite extreme. A more or less refined materialism, a comfortable paganism, is creeping into family life almost everywhere—in Scotland as much as anywhere. If one single cause has been more powerful than another in the production of the prevailing religious indifference, it is, I am persuaded, the neglect of family discipline and family religion. The interest of young people in the Church of Christ must be largely quickened and nourished at home. We cannot wonder that so many grow up indifferent to it. They have seen for years nothing more readily thrust aside for the sake of passing comfort and convenience than the claims of those larger associations and interests which the Church represents in human society. I plead for nothing unnatural and artificial when I plead for the culture of the ideal and religious side of our home-relations, and for some occasional recognition of God in a simple and reverent way when we are together as families. Let us associate prayer and worship with the first thoughts of our children, with their earliest memories and earliest affections. Let us keep

the holy fire always burning upon the altar of the Home—the divinest altar that has ever been built.

3. In that Temple of God which we call the Church, upon the altars of our sanctuaries, the holy fire ought ever to be kept burning and never be suffered to go out. We shall not quarrel about words and phrases, and mistake form for substance and semblance for reality, but it is prayer and the prayer-spirit which make a Church out of a congregation. Gatherings together to hear argument and rhetoric, anecdote and music, may be good in their way, and serve some useful purpose, but they are not such gatherings together as make one feel and say, "The Lord is in His holy temple." To make the attraction of the Church pleasure and entertainment must in time foster an ideal of the Church which will destroy its whole spiritual power and influence. Many of the churches are going the wrong way to recover their lost hold upon the people. They will best meet and adjust themselves to the conditions of modern life by being made to stand for more not less as religious institutions, as centres of Christian worship and teaching and inspiration. We must not offer "strange fire" unto the Lord.

"He seeks not that His altars
Blaze, careless how, so that they do but blaze."

We must look sharply at all our devices and methods. We must commit religious work to religious means ;

use no arts in it and accept no substitutes for it. It is for a real revival of real religion we must pray and work. Sensuous excitement, however contagious, must not be mistaken for the Holy Spirit's influence. It is the heavenly fire and the heavenly fire alone that we must keep burning upon our altars and never suffer to go out.

It seems to me what we most need in our land and day is an order of churches which unite great spirituality and deep devotional power with pure and high intelligence, and can be satisfied with naught but reality and truth; Churches of the Reconciliation, we might call them, for they would stand for the union of the devout and fervent spirit with the open and enlightened mind, and with the whole scope and temper of modern Christian thought.

The older churches of Christendom have nearly all been highly favourable to the worshipful spirit, but they have not been always favourable, often, indeed, unfavourable and hostile, to the spirit of truth. They have not much cared for truth as truth, which has been too often sacrificed to the interests of organisation and to ecclesiastical cohesion. What Dr. Jowett called the great error of Jesuitism—the separation of religion from truth—is not an error peculiar to Jesuitism. We find it in nearly all the churches. They do not encourage devotion to truth as truth, and in the freest of them their teachers are

too often tongue-tied or double-tongued—compelled to hide their real thought and inspiration behind a mask of mediæval or conventional language.

What is known as the Protestant and Liberal movement in religion has been more favourable to truth and the truth-seeking spirit, but not so favourable, often unfavourable, to the worshipful spirit and the culture of devoutness and piety. “Light enough, but no heat,” was the crisp phrase in which some one described the failure of ancient philosophical systems. “Light enough, but no heat,” also describes not a few churches, both narrow and broad, Calvinistic and Liberal. They are about the last places to which one ought to resort who is seeking the atmosphere of prayer and wants to have his spiritual life quickened and nourished. But the faith which kindles no fire and never sets the affections aglow is unworthy and inadequate. The world will never be redeemed by ideas and theories and debates. The religion that is only rational and nothing more is the deadest of all dead things.

Let us frankly acknowledge that men and women of enlightened and liberal minds are often deficient in devoutness and fervour. Their dread of superstition, bigotry, and fanaticism drives them to opposite extremes of coldness and spiritual insensibility. But why should ignorance and not knowledge be regarded as the mother of devotion? Why, in the endeavour

to escape from narrow thought and ways, should spiritual passion fade and fail? There is no incompatibility between the free mind and the devout heart. The spiritual affections can just as well exist with reasonable and enlightened conceptions of the Christian verities as with foolish and ignorant conceptions. God is the God of truth, and we must surely come nearer to Him as we come nearer to His truth and think His thoughts after Him, and as we ourselves seek to be true and to have truth in the inward parts. Is it a counsel of perfection that bids us love Him with the mind? Is there not a prayer possible whose aspiration is truth, and a worship that is quickened and deepened by knowledge? Cannot we welcome the full light of this new day of God and yet keep the holy fire burning on our altars? In past days religion sang of a ruined race and a world under the Divine wrath and curse. Cannot we set to music the ideal of a rising humanity and the good news of a world under God's love and blessing? Cannot errors and half-truths, myths and legends and fictions, and words which are not the natural and just expression of our thought, be purged from our worship of Him who calls us to be children of the light and the day? Is it not time we were done singing and saying things we do not deeply think and feel, done with phrases that are the symbols of faded convictions, of beliefs we have left behind,

and which do not fit the new universe in which we are living and have no honest place and meaning in our new order of thought? Cannot our hymns and prayers give clear and full expression to our larger and lovelier trusts and hopes, to our Christian faith in the Eternal Goodness and Fatherhood, to our perception and assurance of the gracious meaning and end of life's discipline, to our interpretation of the universe and of immortality in the terms of filial confidence?

It ought, indeed, to be easier now for us to keep the fire burning on our altars and to lift up our hearts in worship. Worship may mean, and ought to mean, more to-day than ever it did; be more full of awe and reverence, of trust and hope, of inspiration and joy and peace. We see and believe better things; God is more God to us, Christ more truly Divine, the world and life and immortality more wonderful and good, and grace more abounding and infinite. We do not need to borrow emotion and fervour. We have only to feel more deeply what we feel and to think more deeply what we think, to have an emotion and fervour all our own, to have a joy and peace unspeakable, and to be carried to the highest heights of praise and prayer. It will be due entirely to our own lack of reflection and imagination and earnestness if our new thought of God and the things of God does not kindle in our souls a purer and deeper devotional fervour,

give not only light but heat, and so move and direct us

“That mind and soul, according well,
 May make one music as before,
 But vaster.”

Let me ask you, then, to face this ideal and test of the Church which these passing days require—a Church that is both a school of thought and a school of piety, full of light and full of warmth, a place where the whole truth of God is sought and loved and preached, and a place also where there is the constant stress of spiritual influence of the purest and highest kind. There has never yet been a Church that has freely and fully welcomed and united perfectly fearless intelligence and perfect piety. But there is room for it here and everywhere. No other Church is so necessary as this Church of the Reconciliation. But it begins, as everything truly great and Divine in this world begins, with the individual and the fidelity of the individual. The union of the enlightened mind and the prayerful and fervent heart is the ideal unity for which we must each strive. We must be men and women who seek constantly to keep the mind open and the heart devout, the thought clear and honest, and the spirit reverent and prayerful; and fulfilling this ideal we shall be living stones in the New Temple and Church of God whose foundation is truth and whose walls are salvation and its gates praise. We will not be of those who are

at ease in Zion, content to say, "Things may continue as they are, for they will last my time"; but of those who think of the future and work for it, and who for Zion's sake will not hold their peace and for Jerusalem's sake will not rest until her righteousness goeth forth as brightness and her salvation as a fire that burneth.

A PRAYER IN A TIME OF RELIGIOUS DECLENSION

Almighty God, the Hope of Israel and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, we pray unto Thee for all those whose confidence in heavenly things is failing, and whose love is waxing cold; for those who are wandering from Thy ways in darkness, and forgetting Thee more and more. Have mercy upon them, and turn them to Thyself. In quiet hours may memory, recalling lost feelings of religious tenderness and joy, and forsaken habits of prayer and service, awaken them to repentance. Rekindle in them, we beseech Thee, the flame of Divine love; revive aspiration and restore them to Thy salvation. Pour upon us all the spirit of faith and obedience, that we may avoid whatever weakens and destroys us, and lay hold on the life which is life indeed, and come at last to the fellowship of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN.

THE DAY'S WORK ✓

“Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening.”—
PSALM CIV. 23.

THE Psalm from which our text is taken is one of the most complete and impressive pictures of the universe to be found in ancient literature, and it breathes the very spirit of the Hebrew race. It has been called the Psalm of the Cosmos. It moves through all creation, and begins and ends with praise. Like all the highest reaches of the human imagination, it lays hold of the inner and deeper truth of things, and suggests much more than literary description can convey. He was not a man of knowledge in the modern sense, this Hebrew poet, although the wide sweep of his thought seems to speak of some contact with foreign culture, but he was at home in that knowledge of God which is Eternal Life.

No careful reader of the Psalm will fail to see that it follows mainly the order and sequence of the story of the beginnings of things with which our Bible opens—a story which in its grouping of the creative action

into progressive stages dimly anticipates our modern idea of development : yet the Psalm is no mere copy of that story—itself probably an old Babylonian tradition that assumed a new meaning and beauty under the inspired Hebrew pen. The story of genesis is the record of a past and finished creation : the Psalm is a picture of a continuous, ever-proceeding creation—a kind of prophecy of the genesis of science. All the work of the ancient record we see going on before our eyes : the wondrous week of Divine activity is every week, and its six great days are repeated in all the days. In the Psalm, as in Genesis, we see life moving on in the same ordered and stately way to the same goal ; rising up in slow and steady grandeur to man, and in man reaching its summit and crown. The going forth of man is the highest point in the vast, ascending movement—the end or goal of life on its material side. Earth's countless creatures and things find in him their fulfilment and meaning, and have helped to make him what he is. The world is in him as much as he is in the world.

George Herbert sings :

“Man is everything and more.”

Yes ! everything, but more : an epitome of the whole creation, gathering up into himself all the kingdoms at his feet, holding the secret of all earthly life—but more. In our Psalm, until we reach the text, Deity

is represented as working alone, causing the grass to grow and giving to the wild beasts their food ; but man goeth forth—goeth forth a self-conscious, self-acting being, a distinct person, a sovereign soul with power to shape the course of his own life and activity. And this going forth of man is not only the summing up and end of a creation, but the beginning of a new creation. However closely he may be allied to what is beneath him, whatever his affiliations with lower and earlier life, he belongs to another order. With him a new energy comes into existence which does not form a part of the sum of physical forces. Marvellous as is the material universe, in man is hidden a glory beyond that of all things visible. Because he thinks and wills and loves, he is kindred to the Infinite Mind and Will and Heart—kindred to God ; not only a creature formed and sustained by the Creator's power, but a son of God, begotten not made, and therefore more to God than vast worlds and burning suns. He has his origin and home in the Eternal Fatherhood, with all its thought and labour and sacrifice. It was as the Representative of Humanity Jesus said that He came out from God ; and deep in His fellowship we are persuaded of our Divine heredity, and know the lineage of every humblest soul to be Divine.

Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening.

1. Why are we here in this world, and what for ?

Has the question never occurred to you? Rather, has it not come up often in your experience? It has been at times only a vague and fleeting curiosity; it has made you pause at other times awe-stricken before the oracle of your own soul. But a few short years ago, we who are gathered in this church to-day, we who move about now on roads and streets as if we had moved about for ever—where were we? Our being, so quick at this moment with life, so full of warm and eager desires and purposes, had no conscious existence. The world knew us not, and but for His will, whose word is life, we should never have been. But He breathed into us His quickening Spirit, and out of the abyss of possibilities we came to be among the things which live and move: our eyes opened to light and colour and form and the glances of answering affection, and our ears to the sweetness of music and the whisperings of leaves, to the tones of love and the words of teachers, and we took our place in the ranks of our race, bound to our fellows, yet with an individuality distinct and separate from them all.

Why are we here, and what for? He is a little man in a little world who thinks he can give a complete answer to this question. Some of the old and familiar answers to it are in many ways unsatisfactory, but the most satisfactory answers suggest questions far beyond the wisdom of the wisest. Why did the Creative power send forth man into this world at all? What if

he were not and never had been? Can his work and labour in his brief mortal day count for much or anything in the universal plan?

The mystery is great, but it is plainly the purpose of the mystery to challenge our courage and to lead the human mind onward step by step to the conquest of the unknown. The multitude of years have taught us wisdom. Without assuming any knowledge of things which we do not really know, and impatient of all cheap and easy solutions of the human problem, yet we cannot confess to utter ignorance. We know much, and we believe and hope more.

Why are we here, and what for? We have not drifted to the place where we now find ourselves. We are not accidents, chance appearances in the world, a mass of solitary creatures unrelated to anything truly great and significant beyond and above ourselves. Of one thing we may be certain, that the whole purpose and order of the world must have some relation to our lives, and our lives some relation to the whole purpose and order of the world. We are here, must it not be? as parts of this great creation, to fill our place in it as faithfully as we can: to contribute to the development of its Purpose by bringing our individual life with all its peculiar endowments and opportunities, relations and interests, into correspondence with that Purpose; to work in harmony with the Power, the Wisdom, the Goodness which most manifestly pervade the world,

and are slowly building it up into strength and beauty.

In childhood many of us were taught that the chief end of man is to glorify God. It is a sublime answer to our question, and cannot be improved upon, if we only put the true meaning into it. We glorify God when we give ourselves to His purpose in the world and in our human life, to His will and work. And to begin our days with the idea that it is our chief end here, and now, so to develop and train and use ourselves that God may be glorified—surely this is the best thing we can take into the world. Nothing less than this will give to our life its noblest and grandest meaning.

St. Paul more than once in his letters describes himself and his companions in service and sacrifice as fellow-workers with God. The words speak of conscious and voluntary co-operation, of willing and intelligent oneness of purpose and effort, with the will and work of God. In creating and perfecting His world, in getting His will done on earth as it is in heaven, God has made Himself dependent upon the help and fidelity of His human children.

In his controversy with John Stuart Mill, the French philosopher Comte said: "My Deity (Humanity) has at least one advantage over yours—he needs help, and can be helped." Mill met the charge by the saying that the theist's God is not omnipotent, "He can be

helped, Great Worker though He be." But we are not compelled to doubt or deny the omnipotence of Deity before we can believe that our part in the Divine movement of the world is not a passive one, that we are not simple recipients and blind instruments, but allies and helpers of the Eternal Power.

There prevails here and there a kind of belief in the power of God which makes all human effort appear to be unnecessary and superfluous, and which if acted on would deaden the sense of duty and be the paralysis of energy; but few even among those who strenuously maintain it put their theory into practice. Their hearts are wiser than their heads. The indolence and indifference of men have little to do with their speculative opinions. They are due, as a rule, to low or partial development, or to selfishness and worldliness. On the other hand, what the philosopher described as the feeling of helping God, has always been cherished by the most sincere and earnest believers in the power of God over all. No one believed in the sovereignty of that power more than St. Paul, but his belief in it did not prevent him from putting forward the claim again and again, to be a fellow-worker with God. It did not diminish the sum of his personal effort, rather did it stir him to an activity which has been seldom surpassed or even equalled in any age of the world, and the reason was, he felt the power of God, not only in the world without but in the world within, filling his own

mind and heart, and the deep source and inspiration of his own energy ; felt that he himself was part of the Divine power that is working in the world for truth and righteousness, for goodness and love.

To be a fellow-worker with God may appear to be too vast and impossible an idea of the purpose of human life in this world ; yet nothing is clearer and more certain than that He who made and meant man and sent him here to work and to labour until the evening has left many things for man to do in fulfilling His plans and completing His works. The Divine power in the world is not an abstract, impersonal energy, not an unembodied and wandering spirit. God in the world creating and perfecting it means His power and spirit dwelling in and working through industrious, righteous, faithful, beneficent lives. The unit of power in the world is not God isolated from man, and not man isolated from God ; but God and man united, working purposely and continuously together ; God quickening and inspiring man and man, opening his life to be a part of the Divine life of the world. It is with perfect and absolute simplicity the religion of Jesus Christ represents this union of man and God in purpose and work. We cannot go further in simplicity. Man works with God : God inspires man. "My Father," said Jesus, "works continuously and I work. The works I do are not Mine but the Father's who sends me. I do what I see My Father doing. And as the

Father sends Me so send I you. The glory He has given to Me I give to you—that we may all be one, doing the same thing, working the same work.”

How we have lost sight of this truth! And what confessions and miseries have come of our searching and effort to find God in the world outside of and apart from man; from placing God and man over against each other as though their spheres of activity were separated by the chasm of an infinite difference! Deity has been conceived as a majestic Being dwelling apart from the universe, overseeing it and intervening now and again by special acts, but working as a rule in profound and mighty isolation, outside of and apart from the world, outside of and apart from His children. Men have sometimes wrought and fought against the evil of the world as if they had no Divine companion at their side, and felt no need of any other help than their own. Again, at other times, they have imagined that God would do it all, that they had no place in the Divine work, that it was their place to stand by and wait and pray for a human redemption, or a golden age, or a millennium that will come without their aid and co-operation. But it is not man apart from God who is to build up and redeem the earth, nor is it God apart from man, but man and God working together. When we turn and look at distant ages we see, it is true, Deity working alone; spheres of Divine activity with which man has nothing to do, in which he has no

place, no existence. An eternity lies behind us in which the power that comes to self-expression in man was as living and active in an infinite universe as to-day. Through long volcanic ages, through ages of deluge and chaos and unrest, God was working the earth upon which we now live and move into strength and beauty. Acting alone He made the world. "Where wast thou," Deity asks Job, "when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Man was not there. Things were not ready for him. There was nothing he could do. But at length he appeared. In the Hebrew poem of the beginnings, Deity is represented as summoning all His powers for the fashioning of a being who would reflect His moral image, complete His unfinished creation, and work with Him in subduing and ruling the earth. "Let us make man in our image and after our likeness, and let him replenish the earth, subdue it and have dominion." Yes! this is what we are here for—to be co-workers with the Maker and Lord of all, to ally ourselves with His creative purpose and work.

What a great and inspiring view of man's place in creation do the words of Psalmist and Apostle suggest; one to move and thrill the whole being and to give a new and wonderful interest and meaning, value and divinity, to human life. In this vast order of things we often count ourselves of little worth and significance. But our littleness is only seeming. We can think the Creator's thoughts, be conscious of His purpose,

and take some intelligent part in fulfilling that purpose. Let us not cherish any mean conception of what we can do. Nothing is so fatal to high endeavour. It is ridiculous and worse to hear men and women praying (in the language of a popular hymn) :

“O to be nothing, nothing.”

It must surely be more honouring and pleasing to Him who made us to pray and strive to be something. Our unreal and morbid self-depreciation cannot be acceptable to Him. He is glorified, not by our subjection and passivity, but by that self-consecration which presupposes self-development, the thoughtful and complete cultivation of all our human powers. It is our disciplined faculties we must bring to Him if we are to be His fellow-workers. It is not to idle and empty minds but to fully exercised and informed minds His inspiration comes. It is not weak and broken wills, but strong and consecrated wills He requires for His work and service. He needs us, and He needs us at our best. His true image and likeness is in the best we can be and do ; and only as we become like Him can we know Him, reveal Him, live His life, obey His will, and do His work. Only as we are intelligent do we show forth His intelligence ; only as we are strong do we show forth His strength ; only as we are true and just and merciful do we show forth His goodness. And it is the same with all the Divine perfections,—only as we

men, to fulfil His purpose and to build up and perfect His world.

2. We are here to share the work of God in creating the world—called not only to subdue and control, but to create. “God made the heavens and the earth,” said the ancient seer; but when God made the world He did not finish it. Creation is not finished, but is always proceeding. We stand in the midst of an unending genesis. We do right to expand the six days of the Hebrew story into the whole life of the world. The seventh day of rest, when God shall look upon His creation and find it very good, has not yet dawned. “My Father,” says Jesus, “works continuously, and I work.” And in this continuous and never-ceasing work of creation man can help or hinder, develop or retard, the creative purpose and process. Things have been made possible, but man has to make the possible into the actual. The world into which he is born has all the raw material prepared to his hand, but he is here to work it into new and nobler forms. Nature is a wilderness; he must work and labour to make it a garden and a fruitful field, and to bring all its products toward higher and higher points of excellence.

Some of you are familiar with the pathetic picture which Plutarch draws of a man of the earlier period addressing the men of a later age: “O how you are cherished of the gods, you who live now! How fortunate is your time! All Nature is engaged in giving

you delights. But our birth-time was mournful and barren. The world was so new that we were in want of everything. The air was not pure, the sun was obscured, the rivers overflowed their banks, all was marsh and thicket and forest ; we had neither inventions nor inventors, our misery was extreme." The immense change which has taken place in the environment of man since the time Plutarch recalled has been due entirely to the co-operation of successive generations of mankind with God. What we behold as we look back is God creating through man, improving and completing His world, making it more habitable and home-like, less rude and barren, fairer and more fruitful.

The one great teaching of modern knowledge is that not anything above a certain low level of excellence comes by natural law unaided by man ; that all best things in the world of Nature to-day are the result of his thoughts and toil. An eminent geologist has written a book that bears the title, *The Earth as Modified by Human Action*, and one has only to read it to see the wide range of human power and to discover how closely man is in partnership with God in carrying out and completing the creative process which is still going forward on a vast scale. True ! he can do nothing without God ; he can create no new force ; neither sun nor soil, nor plant nor seed, are of his making ; all the material with which he works, Nature has furnished him ; but what can he not do with that material, and

what has he not done? He has modified climate, made the rivers change their course, the ocean its shore, made forests grow and made new ground for them to grow in, made the parched ground a pool and the thirsty land springs of water, changed useless ore into iron and sand into glass clearer than Nature's crystals. Wonders which the writer of the book of Job declared to be far and for ever beyond man are now either counted among man's actual achievements, or seen to be possible. He has perceived the breadth of the earth, made the lightning his servant, found out the way of the wind, the path of the clouds, the secret springs of the sea, and the place where the light dwelleth. He is slowly gathering up into his hand all the forces of Nature, and is using them at his will. Browning makes Paracelsus say of men—

“See, if we cannot beat thine angels yet,”

and men have certainly beaten the angels of Paracelsus' day in the mastery of the earth. Eight hundred years ago, for example, there was no such country as the Holland of our day; God had made it possible, but men had to give it frame and form. The map of Holland now is not even what it was at the beginning of last century. It has about 120,000 more acres of land than it had then. Thus does man work with God: thus does God work along the lines of human life: thus is the ancient miracle of creation repeated: “The

waters under the earth were gathered together and the dry land appeared."

Man is not only a factor in evolution but an instrument. Not without him does Nature evolve. He has his contribution to make toward the finishing and perfecting of the material universe. The message of evolution to man is, "Thou art God's fellow-worker." Through the animal world we see him working with creative touch, carrying out the Creator's purpose, improving the type and elevating in the scale of being the creatures God has made. To bring flowers and fruits to their perfection the labour of man must be joined to the labour of God, and man must improve and finish what God begins. At his touch flowers take new form and colour and sweetness, the vine yields a finer grape, and the trees bear fruit Nature never gave them. Only indeed when man has grown up to the point at which his thought becomes one with the thought of God in things, do we fully behold the marvel of life. Thus does man in his work in the material world show that he is made in the image of the Creator, and thus does the material world testify to the positive and intimate co-operation of God and man in bringing Nature and all the products of Nature toward perfection.

3. In his own making and saving, in the development of personal faculty and character, man is called to work and to labour until the evening. What he

can do for the earth and for the creatures and things which live upon it, he can do for himself—fulfil and finish the Creator's purpose and plan. God makes nothing right-away and perfect at once. Like the rest of His work, man was left unfinished that man himself might complete what God began. The statement in Genesis that man is made in the Divine image is prophecy, not history—the end seen from the beginning ; but to see how much that prophecy has been fulfilled, to see how much man has been co-operating with God through the ages, we have only to compare the man of to-day with primitive man. All creation moved by steady gradation up to man, and from age to age man has been moving upward, slowly finding himself, becoming more and more an intellectual and moral being, more and more a son of God able to know the truth, to discern and do the right, and to love and serve the Infinite Good. Not alone and not out of nothing has he created language, literature, art, science, society, religion ; but with the help of God and out of capacities which were hidden in him from the beginning and which contained the promise and potency of his future development. Faith in man, in what he can do and achieve, and in his power to create character, does not exclude but include God as the ground of all power, the giver of all good, and the helper of all endeavour. Our knowledge is knowledge of His ways in those laws which to the religious mind

are His will. Our wisdom of experience is the discovery of the conditions of our best life,—conditions which we should never have discovered had they not existed before and beyond us, and had not the world been so framed and ordered as to make them the best, the eternal laws of moral health and strength and peace. We are to work out our own salvation because God is already and always working in that direction, and because for us to be working in the direction of His will is the order of our true development, our salvation in this and in all the worlds.

We can do nothing for ourselves without God, but God can do nothing with us, cannot bring us to ourselves, without our co-operation. To an extent practically unlimited we can make or mar ourselves. The differences between men are, generally speaking, self-made. Here at least we cannot afford to let things take their course thinking they will somehow come out right. Left to themselves they will come out wrong. Real advance is only made when voluntary, purposeful efforts aid the unconscious strivings of nature. Self-culture in the noblest and largest sense is a Divine obligation laid upon each of us which we must strive to fulfil to the uttermost, not merely or chiefly for our private pleasure or profit, but that we may be qualified to be fellow-workers with God in the world and gain ground for His kingdom, which is the true kingdom of man.

“Work out your salvation,” says the apostle. We cannot be passive recipients of the divinest blessings of life. We cannot be mesmerised into that great moral and spiritual good which Scripture calls salvation. The salvation that costs us nothing is worth nothing, an unreal rescue from an unreal danger. “Repent,” “Pray,” “Watch,” “Strive,” “Obey,” “Endure,” are the great words of the Master of the Eternal Life. God needs our co-operation or He will fail of His saving purpose. Since earliest childhood, through influences and agencies innumerable, He has been working in us and for us, seeking to redeem us from all evil and to redeem us into all goodness; but we must yield ourselves to Him and co-work with Him if His grace is not to be received in vain and the character be won which is the true crown of life. You may send your son to school and college, and do all that a father can do to give him a liberal education, but in the attainment of this one thing upon which your heart is set you are absolutely dependent on your boy's co-operation. Without his voluntary and sustained efforts you can do nothing. And in the same way the Father of Spirits cannot redeem and train His children without their help. It is in vain He works unless we work with Him. It is in vain His Christ dies unless we die with Him to sin. Goodness cannot be poured into our souls any more than knowledge into our minds without the develop-

ment of our sympathy and activity. It is an old saying which bids us pray as if God did everything and work as if He did nothing, and we always need its sharp reminder. Prayer is not meant to be a substitute for human effort, but to be the stimulus, the inspiration, and support of effort ; not meant to secure impunity for our foolish blundering, indolence, and neglect, but to keep us in fitness for working with God. It is not things which God gives in answer to prayer, but wisdom and strength to labour for the things which are according to His will ; power which comes not to displace but to reinforce personal will and energy, to hold us to our best, and to achieve to-morrow something better than the best of to-day.

But the work of God for and with man is identified not only with the salvation of individual souls and lives, but with all work we respect, honour and rejoice in ; with art, science, literature, politics, trade, with every activity that makes for the good of the community and the civilisation of nations. We must not think of Him with whom we have to do as if He only had to do with us in parts of our life and not in the whole of it ; as if He were only interested in ministers of religion, missionaries, itinerant evangelists, in supplying theological colleges with students, in starting revivals, in the size of congregations and the amount of collections. His kingdom ruleth over all, and what promotes human progress is at the same time working out His purpose

with man. In finding out what stars and rocks and plants have to say for themselves, in seeking to understand and heal diseases of body and mind, in teaching and training the young, in multiplying all kinds of useful and beautiful things, in manufacture and trade, in buying and selling, in all work in which we can honourably engage, we may have the feeling that we are in partnership with God, that we are fulfilling by doing what we do honestly and well a Divine purpose, that we are helping on God's world, and that God requires and uses our help at every step.

Not long ago I read in the biography of an eminent business man that he would never engage in any commercial enterprise which he did not think to be beneficial to the community. That is what it means to work with God in the ways of common life. It is working in accordance with His will who wills good to all, and who has put the world into the hands of men that they may work with Him in developing its resources and in making it a fairer and happier dwelling-place to all His children. The great duties, believe me, are never at the ends of the earth. Let us idealise our daily tasks and put them on the side of the Power who is working for righteousness and love in human society. Our life in all its provinces and interests, and not merely our philanthropic efforts, must be charged with the purpose and passion of our best hours and holiest experiences. It does not very much matter what kind

of work we do ; with God there is neither high nor low ; His own activity is as clearly manifest in the dust beneath our feet as in the stars above us. The supreme thing is the aim and the spirit which we bring to our work. To be fellow-workers with God in our daily calling we must have something of the Divine thoroughness, we must have larger than merely personal aims and ends, we must see that our work both directly and indirectly is an influence for good and not for evil—an elevating and not a debasing or corrupting influence, a help and not a hindrance to the coming of a better civilisation and a better society, doing something to establish justice and truth and goodness in the world, and to get God's will done on earth as it is in heaven.

4. In the saving of the world God seeks to join men with Himself and His Christ, and calls them to work and labour with Him until the evening.

In redeeming the world, even more than in creating it, God works through men and in human ways. God the Saviour must be helped even more than God the Creator. And we—if we have the spirit of sonship to God and live in the fellowship of Jesus Christ—cannot help sharing in the ministry of reconciliation and in the sorrow and sacrifice of that Cross in the Heart and Life of God which was shadowed forth in space and time in the crucifixion on Calvary. To hold back from doing what we can to take away the sin of the world is to show that in this way and to this extent we are

isolated from God, and not worthy to be called His children. It is well to note the fact that the men whose sympathy with Jesus Christ is most pure and strong have absolutely no thought of any work but the work of God. They are taken up as it were into the play of the Divine purpose and feel it not ruling them from without but quickening them from within, feel it permeating every pore of their being as the infusion of a higher life ; and thus they fulfil their Master's joy.

It is through men God helps and saves men, and creates His new heaven and His new earth. They are the hiding-place of His power, and through their hands He reaches forth to save and heal His wandering children. It was said of St. Francis of Assisi that he cared for those whom God had forgotten ; but that St. Francis cared for them was proof enough that God had not forgotten. Not instead of God, but as identical with His gracious presence and care, does human goodness do its work. Out of humanity come the Divine helpers of humanity. The Eternal sympathy and pity come to men through men. The Father works through His children. God in the world reconciling it to Himself means God in human hearts and lives ; God in Christ and in men, whom Christ inspires ; God choosing and using men to be the channels of His love, the messengers of His mercy and grace, the doers of His will and work.

We need not care therefore to make Luther's bold

saying any less emphatic. It is true that God needs strong men and cannot do without them in producing the best results in the life of the world and the Church. It is sometimes asked, Has not our religion won all its greatest triumphs through feeble instrumentalities? No! must be the answer to every one acquainted with the alphabet of Christian history. Christianity has won its way in the world largely by converting giants like Paul, Augustine, Wycliffe, Luther, Knox, Wesley, Chalmers and Maurice, and filling their hearts with the spirit of consecration to the service of God and man. Upon this rock of commanding personality Christ built and still builds the Church that is truly His. Not weak and foolish men, not timid, mediocre conventional Christians, not associations and committees, but strong devoted men, men with the burning heart that kindles its own fires of sacrifice, are to-day, as yesterday, His reliance. Yes! God needs strong men. His kingdom will never come in this world without them. Let us never doubt it for one moment. Worse than the most hopeless pessimism is the shallow optimism of those who are content to repeat as their creed, "Truth and Right are mighty and must prevail." But Truth and Right have never yet prevailed in this world without the help of true and righteous men. Let men seek to escape from personal responsibilities and relax their energies, and lo! the faith and freedom won by martyrs and patriots will soon fall confounded, fanaticism

will soon displace a reasonable and spiritual Christianity, superstition will soon reassert its sway, and passions leap forth again which will throw civilisation back into barbarism and chaos. There are those who trust to the spirit of the age to preserve the costly gains of history and to bring about the reforms in State and Church which may still be required ; but the spirit of the age is no impersonal thing,—it is the spirit of the truest and best men. They create and quicken it if it is a true, a righteous, a godly and Christian spirit.

Men and women ! what are we doing in the way of helping God to create and redeem His world ? Let us not hinder that work by our indifference, by our cowardice, by our epicurean softness and daintiness, by our politic, compromising tempers and practices, by our small-mindedness and selfishness. Let us bestir ourselves in every noble way. Not without us are God's triumphs to come. Not without us is His will to be done on earth. We are often told that the supreme need of the world and the Church is that of able and capable leaders ; but what is the use of able and capable leaders if they cannot secure able and capable followers ? Let us not underrate our influence. Every life tells. It is to the faithfulness of this and that man, and of this and that woman, we owe all that is best in our life. And whenever a good cause fails, here and everywhere, it is due to the want of noble and persistent fidelity in individuals. Do you

ask what you can do for the kingdom of God in your country, in your city, in your village?—you can at least give to it one life that is utterly true and faithful, one life loyal to the core to the will and work of God. It is not enough to contribute your criticism ; you must contribute yourselves, yield yourselves to God, become His fellow-workers, be willing to suffer that others may be blessed, to fail that others succeed, to die that others may live. This is what it means to be a Christian ! Not having comfort and peace and blissful expectations for ourselves, but so having the spirit of service and sacrifice that we cannot help entering into the Son's work which is also His Father's, and cannot help giving ourselves to the things which were all in all to Jesus Christ and for which He laid down His life.

Fellow-workers with God ! This is what you and I are here for in this world : this is why we are endowed with various gifts and why we ought to train them to the utmost and make the best of them : this is why we are placed in different spheres and stations, with different opportunities and duties. We are here where we are, and we have what we have, that we may each help God to create and redeem, to build up and perfect His world. Are we doing it—you in your way and I in mine ? The only real failure in life, believe me, is to do less than our best. What though life grows harder as we grow older, and instead of more chances of relief and rest it brings only new goings forth to work and to

labour, and new and sterner calls to high service and sacrifice?—this is surely the joy and glory of life to those who, working hardest, are conscious that they are working with God, co-operating with the Divine order of the world and the one increasing purpose which runs through the ages.

Fellow-workers with God! This is a vision of life at its prophetic best, and when one realises its meaning it becomes his greatest inspiration. There is no dead line in that man's work and no slackening of effort. He keeps his faith, his freshness of spirit, his enthusiasm, unto the end. Nothing seems beyond possibility, nothing too great to hope, too lofty to dare, too difficult to accomplish. Oh, it is good, it is inspiring, to see our work set in these large, infinite relations. Considered by ourselves and in isolation from the vast whole of things, we are frail and vanishing, our work little and broken, and our service of small value; but joined to the life and work of Eternal God, our feebleness is clothed with strength, around our fragmentariness there flows the Divine completeness, and our mortal is clothed with immortality. In union with God we have at our command inexhaustible power, power to do and to suffer, power to bear up under the praise and the blame of men, power to persevere when hopes are realised and when hopes are disappointed. We know and are persuaded that we are fellow-workers with Him whose purposes cannot fail, who gathers into His infinite

work all good and faithful work done by men among mankind, and whose power and wisdom, goodness and love, are moving and directing all things toward a glorious and immortal end—the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. To our work, then, and to our labour until the evening !

“ Death closes all ; yet something, ere the end,
Some work of noble note may yet be done.”

And now unto Him from whom we come, in whom we live, to whom we go, and who is able to keep us from falling and to preserve us faithful unto our life's end, unto Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

A PRAYER

O Thou who hast appointed unto us our place and work in life, it is our prayer that in our daily labour and striving we may be obedient to every intimation of Thy will, and be workers together with Thee in helping Thy world and Thy children. Endue us with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of power and courage and love. Make and keep us simple and true in heart, lowly in personal claim, earnest in purpose, and ever faithful, in all time of our wealth and in all time of our tribulation, to our calling of God. May we never be overcome of evil, and never grow weary in well-doing. In sympathy and service may we draw

nearer and nearer to our fellows, and to every needy cause, while for us the light shines and the darkness lingers. And when our day's work is done, may we, through Thy grace, be able to render our account with joy, as becometh disciples of Him who did Thy perfect will perfectly, and finished the work which Thou gavest Him to do. Amen.

ARE WE FORGETTING GOD?

“Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God in not keeping the commandments which I command thee this day.”—DEUT. viii, 11.

Is it not strange that men should be told not to forget their God? Cardinal Newman's memorable saying, that there are two, and only two, luminously self-evident beings, “myself and my Creator,” brings out clearly and impressively what is the essential fact of man's spiritual life—the soul's personal and direct relation to God—a fact in which all religious certitude may be truly said to lie. It is difficult at first to believe that any one can seriously think of himself and his life without thinking of God. For there is no one with whom man has so much to do as with God: always and everywhere and in everything he has to do with God—in all the operations of Nature, in all the affairs of the world, in all his relations to his fellows, in all the circumstances and events of his outward life, and in all the movements of his spirit—and yet he requires to be told not to forget God!

It is a strange and sorrowful fact, but none the less

a fact, that the temptation to forget God is one which has always beset men. Side by side with the persistent and pathetic struggle of mankind in all ages after God we see efforts quite as persistent and quite as pathetic to forget God. In the Old Testament we often find the prophets of Israel pleading with their people not to forget God. In all times their most serious teachers have warned men against the same danger. "The beginning and the end of what is the matter with us in these days," said Thomas Carlyle, "is that we have forgotten God."

To the vast mass of men to-day as yesterday, God is not a Reality—the one great, awful, and blessed Reality of life—but a mere name in the background of their feeling and thought. There is no presence from the sense of which they are so anxious to escape as the Presence of God ; no claims which are so neglected and ignored as the claims of God ; and no relationship which is less realised and less cultivated than the relationship of the soul to Him who is pre-eminently the One with whom we have to do. Their remembrance of Him, when they do remember Him, is like one of those dreamy fancies which sometimes visit us as if we had lived before in another state of existence. Other objects fill their hearts and minds—objects which come between them and God.

It is possible for men to forget God, and yet not to manifest that forgetfulness to their fellows, nor to be

conscious of it themselves. What was once said of Israel is still true of many : "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." In their easy-going religion it does not trouble them that God is not in all their thoughts ; that they are without the sense of God, if not altogether as feeling, yet as motive — a practical human motive. Their church-attendance is a Sunday morning custom and little more. Even in the hour and act of worship they forget their God in a thousand vain thoughts. Their lives would be different in every way if they truly remembered God.

You are familiar with the pathetic confession of Professor Clifford, whose life was so brilliant yet so tragic—"The heavens are now empty, the earth soulless and the Great Companion dead." Overmastered by the spirit he had invoked, carried away by deeply subtle difficulties of which simpler ages and simpler lives are ignorant, all that he knew and felt was that for him the world had lost its wonder and bloom, life its freshness and charm ; that he was spiritually desolate, alone in the universe, unloved and uncared for save by his kind—for "the Great Companion is dead." Yet to doubt God is not to lose God : the Heavenly Father was near, we may be sure, to that troubled soul in its gloom as He was to the Cross when the cry came out of its darkness, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But one often thinks that if some clear and undeniable voice could call across the

world "The Great Companion is dead," there are many people here and everywhere, within as well as without the churches, in whose lives such a tremendous announcement would not and could not make much practical difference, so little, alas! so little, is God to them.

To forget God is the temptation which besets every one of us. He with whom we have to do is always near us, yet it is only now and then that we remember Him, have any real impression of His being and glory, any vital and vivid apprehension of His Presence, of what He is to us and of what we owe to Him. A conviction which ought to equal in force that which we possess of our own existence is often dim and faint, ready to fade away and perish. As a consequence we do not see our actions in relation to God and fail to discern the rightness or the wrongness which they derive from that relation. Not till this conviction is restored to us in its freshness and strength, not till we live remembering God, will our life be what it ought to be.

We often say, God is as near to us as ever He was to Hebrew prophet or saint, and it is quite true. We have outgrown the idea of relations held by men of olden time with God which cannot be held by men in this our day. The story of God with man, of which the Bible is the record, is not, we are persuaded, an exceptional episode in the life of our race, and does

not stand alone in any artificial isolation. The two realities out of which our sacred literature came—the spirit of man and the spirit of God—are for ever in this world. They do not change with the philosophies and theologies which seek to interpret and define them. Religion cannot live merely as ancient history.

The difference between age and age considered from this point of view is not that God is at certain times nearer to men than He is at other times, but that the souls of men are not always equally sensitive to His presence. God is just as near as He is felt to be near. A presence of which one is not conscious is as no presence.

The Bible is the story of men to whom the soul and God were the two beings that stood out luminously self-evident—the story of men who had mastered the art of living with God. The secret of its power is not to be found in its science which plainly reflects the knowledge of the time, not in its poetry, not in its ethical and theological ideas, but in the sense of communion with God which inspires and pervades it. It is this which has made it in a transcendent sense the record of religious inspiration and revelation for mankind. The Hebrew was originally the man who, as Charles Lamb said of Coleridge, had “a hunger for eternity,” the man who had a real passion for God, to whom God was in truth the Great Companion, the one Supreme Presence in the world, the atmosphere of his life, his everlasting refuge and home. In this age of

Christ we have a truer and larger thought of God into which we can put everything lovable and adorable, and for that we ought to be deeply grateful ; but this, after all, is the vital question—Is God as much of a presence in our life, are we in our hearts as conscious of Him, as were the prophets and saints of Israel? For the Hebrew's sense of God is not the extravagance but the essence of religion, the very heart and meaning of personal religion. Religion is a purely personal relation to God, and the religion of Jesus the consummation and perfection of that relation. The truly religious man is the man to whom God is no mere name, reminiscence, tradition, opinion, doctrine, the memory of a child's faith, the first article of a creed, a sigh of the heart, a dream of the soul, a poetical fancy that visits him in the twilight, by the sea or among the mountains, the sum and nexus of the elemental forces, or the symbol of the unknown quantity in the universe, but the one luminous, grand and gracious Reality of life ; the one Presence from whom he cannot and would not escape: with him in the darkness his sure protection, with him in the light fairer than any dawn.

“ . . . He found some jubilee in thinking :
 For his one thought was God,
 In that thought he abode,
 For ever in that thought more deeply sinking.”

It is not what we can know and understand of God, but what we feel, experience, realise, that is the salva-

tion and inspiration of the life. The man of whom it is true that he lives all his life consciously in the presence of God is the genuinely religious man. No matter what else he has or has not, he has the root of the matter in him—that which is itself religion, the purpose and end of all revelations and mediations, of all means and ministries. He is living in the reality of religion, let his theory of it be what it may. He is at the centre and heart of all there is ; and when a man has reached God and is at home with God, his soul in spiritual contact and communion with the Soul of the universe, we need not be anxious to criticise the way he has got there, nor very much care how he describes himself ecclesiastically or defines his belief. On the other hand, a man may claim the belief of apostles and saints as his own, and be in what he considers the best of church connections ; and yet if God is not a real presence in his life, and he has no knowledge of God that is derived directly from personal experience, he is still ignorant of the alphabet of religion. The vital recognition of God is, alas ! rare even among those who are more than nominal believers. And this is a great loss ; when one looks at things aright, the greatest loss of life.

“Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God.” It is an admonition this which we all require. There is no sin more common than the sin of forgetting God. It is the besetting sin, not only of youth, but of middle

age and old age. It is the sin not only of the foolish and frivolous, the sensual and worldly, but of men working hard at their professions and trades, of women absorbed in family cares and social engagements, of teachers and students, of politicians and philanthropists, of preachers and theologians tempted to make ideas of God do duty for God. It is, indeed, not difficult to forget God. God is in the world and in our life, but not in any such way that we cannot escape from the sense of His presence. Not any of us are ever overlooked or forgotten before Him, but it is not often that we feel compelled to remember Him. He does not visibly interfere either with the course of things or with the actions of men. He is the Force behind all forces, the Law behind all laws, the Life behind all that lives, yet to many men He seems afar off and appears to do little, if anything. This is a world in which we can be unbelievers as well as believers, forget as well as remember God. It is a world in which prosperity and pleasure can be more easily secured by the self-seeking and unscrupulous than by the good, and where unreserved devotion to the will of God in the business of life has no direct and inevitable tendency to bring men what is considered fortune. It is seldom that to God's noblest and most faithful sons the world's prizes come, though there is always a sure and deep reward in the unseen realm of the inner and moral life. The kingdom of God ruleth over all, but its epochs are

moral. Judgment is always done, but not often in such a way that there can be no doubt as to its being done by those who walk by sight and not by faith, and are blind to the spiritual aspects of life and to the tendency and final issue of things.

God, I repeat, does not compel us to remember Him. His way with His children is not the way of coercion, but of influence. We may forget Him if we choose. He stands at the door and knocks, but He does not force an entrance. He is nearer to us than we ever dream, but never so near that we are moved against our wills. The world and life are shaped for the education of moral beings—beings whose awful prerogative it is that they can forget as well as remember God.

And there is nothing in which we may not forget God—all the common interests and activities of life, study, recreation, business, friendship, love, science, art, politics, philanthropy, the history and philosophy of religion, theological disputes, ecclesiastical strifes, pleasant Sunday services, and all the excitements which we dignify with the name of religious work in these days. There is no object, either good or bad, on which we eagerly concentrate our attention that may not so grow on the inner vision and spread itself before the soul as to hide all that is beyond—even God; as to banish every thought of Him whom above all others we ought to be ever ready and glad to remember. We

know from the terrible inward evidence of experience how we lose by sin, by habitual wrongdoing, the power to remember and realise God ; and not alone by those grave and flagrant transgressions which affect a man's whole moral nature and his whole spiritual attitude, but by sins we call venial and which involve no outward wickedness, which are indeed hardly recognised as sins, and which men may go on committing all their days without any suspicion of their guilt and danger. There may be no striking moral fault, no betrayal of duty, only some petty vanity or pride, a respectable selfishness, a reputable self-indulgence, not even evil things done but good things left undone, which yet have the effect of making the soul less and less sensitive to God, and of hardening the heart. A man may have all his thought and feeling so drawn toward the petty things round him and toward his own worldly interests and private comforts, that there is in his soul no sense of responsibility to a Divine Judge, no conscious feeling of any relations other than those of home and friendship and business, no conscious relations at least with the unseen and eternal. He lives an honourable life and keeps the way of truth and rectitude loyally, but not for God. He makes his plans and pursues his schemes, but without any reference to the will of God. God is forgotten in the very use and enjoyment of God's gifts. In his occupations and transactions, in his ways of doing business, seeking pleasure, spending money, and

passing time, the man forgets God. It cannot be honestly said that God counts as a force in his life. Yes! Work and amusement, family and friendship, are what we each can live for wholly, and in them all forget Him with whom we have to do in all the relations and interests of our passing days.

And this forgetfulness of God may be found not only in connection with respectable behaviour, but also in connection with much formal and conventional religiousness, and even with much lively interest in theological themes. You remember in Shakespeare's *Henry V.* Mistress Quickly's account of the death of Falstaff. Falstaff was very sick, so he cried out, said the woman, "God, God, God," three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet." To how many is God little more than an unwelcome thought which they must recall in the great hours of living and dying—a name they must utter especially when they are sick and have not many days to live? It may be no doubt a very insignificant part which the thought of God plays in their lives; but they cannot banish it altogether from their minds, and cannot escape entirely from that sense of the presence of God which is the echo in their hearts of the Divine Life in the world. There are times when their habitual indifference is broken down; face to face with death, or during the discipline of some

great sorrow or shame, they are stirred with unwonted emotion and are moved to pray; but the visible order of things commands their real interest and strength, and the thought of God has no shaping or controlling influence on their daily habit and life. They may have little difficulty, perhaps, in persuading themselves that they do remember their Creator, when in point of fact they only do not forget Him quite utterly.

The forgetting of God passes through many stages. It exists in various degrees. It is, we would fain hope, in few cases an entire forgetfulness never interrupted by a single memory of His goodness and greatness, of His authority and will. Who is, or who can be, entirely forgetful of God? And yet forgetfulness of God ever tends to grow and increase until one does not wish to remember God at all. It may be something one falls into thoughtlessly at first, but it grows and grows till things are actually avoided which suggest the great remembrance, and means are taken not only to prevent but to drown serious thought, until men can live long days and weeks without thinking of God—transacting their business, following their amusements, employing their time, spending their money and expending their powers without any thought of the uses to which God means they should apply their gifts, studying only how to please themselves, not Him. Consider this, ye who are beginning to find it easy to forget God, beginning to be so absorbed by outward things that you are

allowing yourselves less and less leisure for pursuing the things which belong to your peace; thirsting so little for God and so much after everything else; so indolent and apathetic in prayer, so active and strenuous after business or pleasure or social distinction. Beware lest you go from carelessness to worse, and begin to think and to act on the thought that there is not so much in religion after all. The mind seeking to be consistent soon frames a theory to justify itself to itself; our opinions are much influenced by our wishes. What we do not wish to remember we easily forget, and by-and-by easily doubt and easily deny—rejecting as false what we want to be false.

Very few people, very few even of the best people, think enough of God. That He is our Creator and Father, our Saviour and Judge, that we have to do with Him in this world and in the world to come, that He has the sole and absolute claim upon our obedience—this we all profess to believe; but if we believed it in a true and living way, if we realised it, if it were a real power within us, how different our lives would be! It is not possible that we can truly believe in God and yet not be very different persons from what we would be if we did not so believe in Him. By not thinking of God often enough and deeply enough, what a safeguard from evil and what an inspiration to good do we lose!

“I have set God always before me,” said a Hebrew

saint long ago, "therefore I shall not be moved." It is a favourite figure of the Hebrew poets that God is the rock of man's salvation—the true foundation, that is, of human life and the secret of its strength and stability. What would I not give to impress upon you as I feel it, that a life in which God is not remembered but habitually forgotten is a life without the best moral protection and stimulus! What takes from a man the sense of relationship and responsibility to God and leaves him without the sanctions and inspirations drawn from the invisible and eternal world, takes with it much of his moral energy and stamina, impoverishes his life in every way and at every point, narrows his mind, depresses his imagination, enfeebles his conscience, robs him of much strength for enduring trial and resisting temptation, makes him less sensitive as the years multiply upon him to high ideals, less aspiring, less enthusiastic, less heroic. You can see that this is so for yourselves, if you patiently watch and study the life around you, ay, your own life—the life within, which best interprets the life without.

Wherever God is not remembered but forgotten we often see a depreciation of the worth and sanctity even of the physical life, a disposition to hold it cheaply and in the hour of bitter disappointment to throw it away altogether. There can be no doubt that the decay of faith has not a little to do with the loosening of the ties which bind man to life. It is not easy outward con-

ditions which bind man to life. The pessimism of recent years is not so much the outcome of struggle as of ease, and the rejection of life which frequently goes along with it is due, not to impatient resentment against hardship, poverty, and pain, but to the exhaustions of worldliness and irreligion.

But there are worse losses than that of the sense of the value of the physical life involved in the loss of the believing heart. Without the vital recognition of God and His will all the best things in human life and human society—the love of truth as truth, the love of right as right, the love of man as man—will tend to grow weak and poor. It is only in theory that morality—the higher morality, at least—is independent of the sanctions and inspirations of religious faith. The best sanctities of life are in the keeping of religion. It is to minds touched with the awe of God that our common relations preserve their ideal significance and the noblest conceptions of duty have authority and fire. The emphasis placed upon ethical culture in our day should escape all criticism. But ethics must have a foundation deeper than custom, prudence, selfish calculation, and worldly expedience. Morality, as distinct from mere prudential self-interest, cannot exist in any noble form apart from faith in and communion with the living God. Even the best of motives—public benefit, the good of posterity, and the like—lack power to kindle and command. Forgetting God it will be easier to

forget the claims of the higher and wider life, the claims of difficult duty and the claims of our fellows.

The creed of a few of the finer spirits of our time finds expression in Clough's lines :—

“ It seems God's newer will
We should not think at all of Him, but turn
And of the world that He has given us, make
What best we can.”

It is as if they thought that the more a man spent Godward the less he had to spend on purely human interests, that the more he was alive to the unseen and eternal world the less he cared for doing his best in the ways of earth and time. Is it so? Who have been the best citizens of this world? Who have done the most to promote all those true and fair and gracious things which make the world attractive and build human life into strength and beauty? Who have most helped the weak and the wronged, the poor and the suffering? Have they not been the men by whom God has been most remembered—the men whose very sense of the Divine Presence and Will supplied the motive and sustained the energy of their efforts? From their communion with God came their life's true power—power to serve and suffer. The love that urged and kept them to the service of man was kindled and fed at heavenly altars. And it is well to reflect on this side of things when we find so many in our generation striving to banish God from the sphere of human relations and

bent on trying the experiment whether our great human interests cannot be advanced without any recognition of God at all. It is worth our while to call to mind the fact that nearly all the important philanthropic movements of the last century—the movements of charity, education, temperance, liberty, equality of opportunity for all, had their spring and motive in the Christian thought of God and man and the world. In the development of modern civilisation there is not a great secular reform which did not, at least in its earlier stages, draw its inspiration from a religious or Christian principle. And the remembrance of God—consciously or unconsciously—is still the inspiration of nearly all the best work that is now being done for the uplifting of mankind. It is work that depends far more than we think on the constant renewal of spiritual faith and hope and courage.

It is easy, of course, to point out men to-day who are pursuing high ideals and living noble and beneficent lives without any conscious faith in God; but all, or nearly all of them are the spiritual heirs of men whose souls thirsted for God, even the living God, and they are now living on ideas and sentiments and by habits which they would never have known but for their religious training. It takes more than one generation to get religion into the blood, and it will take more than one to get it out of the blood. What Renan said of himself many others might say of themselves: "I feel

that my life is governed still by the faith which I have formally renounced."

But there can be little doubt, I think, as to what the final result of forgetting God will be in the life of individuals, families and nations. Let us have a generation or two trained not to remember but to forget God, and let this practical unbelief have full scope for working its perfect work, then we shall see how true the old text is: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." We shall witness serious changes, ay, revolutions, in national character and life which an ancient Hebrew would have described as a nation being destroyed or turned into hell. There has never been but one experiment made on a large scale in order to see if men could live together in society while forgetting God, and we know the result. It was found that God, though ignored, could not after all be dispensed with in the life of a nation. It has been said by observant French philosophers that the effort to forget God in France, though it lasted only twenty years, "differentiates the inner thought of Frenchmen from that of any European people." The sense of a life in common cannot be kept from dying out along with the dying out of religious faith.¹ Forgetting God, man will soon forget his fellows and cease to regard himself as his brother's

¹ "No permanent cohesion can be expected on the mere ethical ground of relation between man and man."—JAMES MARTINEAU.

keeper. No argument but the religious and Christian one that we are all children of one God and Father is likely to tell with much or permanent effect against the teaching that maintains we are diminishing the world's force by taking so much care for the survival of the weak in the struggle for existence. Let the sense of responsibility to an invisible Lord and Judge depart, let the thought of God cease to be a real and living power in human society, and what will be able to check and restrain the huge greed which builds its fortunes and enjoys its luxuries on the miseries of the many? How will bitter jealousies and hatreds between different classes in the community be subdued and overcome? How will the home life which makes a fair and strong national life be preserved—the sanctity of the domestic ties, filial reverence and duty, and all that gathers around them? Alexandre Dumas, writing in the dark and troubled time which followed the Franco-German war, said: "We must have back in France the ideas of God and marriage." As a man of the world he could not help seeing that forgetfulness of God meant in the long run the decay of his nation's choicest and best life. Notwithstanding religious fanaticism and bigotry and all their dire effects, human experience proves that men grow in the sense of duty to the world about them as the sense of their relation to God is quickened and deepened, and that the remembrance of God, instead of being the paralysis,

is the inspiration of all noble energy in every noble direction.

Beneath all the relations of man to man is the relation of man to God. God is the rock or foundation of human society. The future of this or any country rests ultimately on its religious faith, on the amount and quality of its practical recognition of God. The Builder and Maker of the enduring city or nation is God. Build on injustice, build on greed, build on the lust for land and gold, build on self-indulgence, and sooner or later the stables civilisation will totter to destruction. This is the message of the Christian Church to the nation, and it indicates the service which all the churches can render to the nation. They have no quick and easy methods of solving the problems of the country and age, but in proportion as they keep alive in the hearts of the people the sense of God and their responsibility to Him, and help to train new generations of men who remember their Creator and obey His laws, they are doing more for the nation than the political, military and commercial men can do; they are doing the one work which is most necessary to social well-being, to the preservation of the best elements of civilisation and the best qualities of human character. Again and again have eras of religious revival—the revival in men of their fading sense of personal and direct relationship to God—expanded into eras of national and social salvation. It has often been pointed

out how the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield saved England from a catastrophe like the French Revolution by quickening in the popular heart faith in a living God who ruled men and cared for them.

We have to be constantly on guard against the superficial and faithless interpretation of our own times, yet I feel more and more that the great and critical battle is not between various forms of theological belief or ecclesiastical organisation, but between religion and no religion, between God and what is practically no God. Our supreme and imminent danger is not superstition or heresy, or what may be regarded as superstition or heresy, but the growing secularisation of life; not that people shall have misdirected or wrongly expressed aspirations, but that they shall have no aspirations at all—that they grow insensible and callous to the spiritual and Divine aspects of life. A wave of God-forgetfulness seems to be sweeping over the country.

Let us pray and work for a revival in the churches of a real and great faith in God as something which must precede a like revival in the community. Instead of vexing and hindering one another, instead of giving ourselves up to small problems and sectarian issues and secular entertainments and the frivolities of life, let us magnify the spiritual offices of the Church, and through all its institutions do our utmost to recall the hearts and minds of men to the reality of the living God—

the God with whom they have to do now and here—and thus make our calling and election sure. General philanthropy, politics and amusement, we ought to leave to other agencies. Even the liberalisation of theological opinion we may trust very much to the progress of knowledge and learning. What men most need is the sense of God's presence in their hearts and lives, as motive and inspiration.

And we must not forget God in the education of the children. In our day religious education in the public schools of the country has been sadly mixed up with political and sectarian strife, but I cannot help saying now and here that it will be a pity if denominational rivalries and strong party feeling should drive us on to the exclusion of all religious teaching as the only politic and peaceful solution of a difficult problem. The great end of public education is to make good citizens, and to reach that end there must be in the education given in our schools a large moral element, and to make that moral element truly impressive and effective we cannot do without the fundamental sanctions and inspirations of religion. Reverence is vital to morality, and morality rooted in reverence is the basis of the social order. Now what the State needs of religion in order to promote its best interests is that part of it which is necessary to good citizenship, and that is just the part which is common to all the religious communities of the land, namely, faith in God and in

the laws of right living as the Divine will concerning man and his life.

Let me plead also that God be not forgotten in our homes. The saddest feature in the life of many people who forget God is not the evil effect of indifference on personal character, which is sad enough, but the education of their families in practical heathenism. They themselves cannot wholly escape from the religious influences in which they were reared ; but what about their children growing up in undevout ways and learning to live without God in the world ? A family in which there is no genuine recognition of God lacks the strongest bond of permanence, and the sorrowful issue of this forgetfulness of God may be seen to-day in many disturbed and broken households, and in the general loosening of old restraints in social life.

You are familiar with a little Roman Catholic book of devotion which has this suggestive title—"The Practice of the Presence of God." It is to the practice of the Presence of God I now bid you all. God is not a question that can wait, because life will not wait, duty will not wait, temptation will not wait, sorrow will not wait ; and if the sense of the Divine Presence be the inspiration we need, then we need it this very hour. "I find great comfort in God," said James Russell Lowell in his last days ; but to find great comfort in God in the critical hours of life when extraordinary and tragical things are happening, our souls must be

prepared beforehand to receive it. We must have trained ourselves by meditation, prayer and obedience to be sensitive to spiritual influences.

Dr. Newman in his wonderful poem *The Dream of Gerontius* makes the angel say to the passing soul: "It is the very energy of thought that keeps thee from thy God." It is not the energy of thought that keeps many persons from God, but weakness and want of thought. We do not think deeply enough: we do not stir up our minds to take hold of God. We let God slip out of our minds for lack of recollection and reflection. There is no more potent cause of the loss of the sense of God than the unrest and hurry in which we live; and this busy modern life seems to grow ever more exciting and exacting, more unfriendly to meditation and calm. In one of his essays the late Professor Seeley tells us that the literary sense perishes for want of repose, and so, only more so, does the sense of God. "To enjoy God" nothing can relieve us of the hard and constant work of religious culture. To have Him as the Great Companion of our days the still hour is absolutely needed, the habit of quiet and serious thinking which seems so much out of fashion, the old customs of prayer and worship, the regular and systematic discipline of our spiritual affections, a certain attention to observances and forms which were often in past days regarded and misused as ends, but which are still necessary as means and helps to the remembrance

of God. You will find in the autobiography of a remarkable woman of our time this sentence—given, I think, as the explanation of the atheistic stage of her strange career : “ The sense of God gradually fades out of the life of those who never pray.” Yes ! we leave ourselves no time to meditate and pray ; we are too busy or indolent to think about God ; we allow our natures to dissipate among a variety of secular interests which every year grow more extended, and then we complain that God is not real to us, that we cannot realise His Presence and Love when we most need to.

Men and women ! Are you remembering or forgetting God ? Are you allowing the thought of God to be a real and living power in your daily life ? This is no question to be dismissed from your minds with your exit from this church. It is a question of direct and most practical interest to each one of you—far more than any question concerning your health or your business or your domestic comforts or your amusements. If you have never seriously considered it, consider it to-day. If you have once considered it, then reconsider it, and still again consider it. Deal honestly and faithfully with yourselves. Get rid of your self-complacencies—your refuges of lies ! Are you remembering or forgetting God ? Be quiet for a brief moment and hear your conscience speak !

Let me plead with you, young people, not to forget

but to remember your Creator in the days of your youth. It is just the remembrance of God you most need in order to read aright the whole significance of life, and to win and keep confidence in all that gives to life its noblest dignity. It is just this remembrance of God you most need to command passion, to chasten ambition, to quicken your best powers, and to guide you in all your ways. Amid the temptation and strife of your days it will be to you illumination and inspiration, strength and peace. And to win this best of blessings begin now to bring your life in all its relations and interests under the direct influence and government of the thought of God. Train your minds to turn to God. Practise His presence. Secure a few moments every day to acquaint yourselves immediately with Him. Make Him your "Great Companion." Let this be your prayer :

" My God, permit me not to be
A stranger to myself, and Thee."

FAITH IN GOD

“And Jesus saith unto them, Have faith in God, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass, he shall have it.”—MARK xi. 22, 23.

MEN in all ages have been drawn to Jesus Christ because He dared to believe in things utterly different from those which He saw around Him. He loved another order of life than that which His eyes beheld—the order of the sons of God, and He believed that it was at hand. It was the burden of His message, the supreme idea or note of His preaching. He confronted the order of human life in that ancient world and said that it must go down; and He held up the Divine order, which has been wrought into the structure of things and towards which all things have been moving from the beginning, and in the simplest and most direct way said that it was possible to make it a reality even in that land and age.

The faith which Jesus said men must have before they could do apparently impossible things was faith

in God. At the time to which our text belongs He had been speaking to His discouraged disciples about faith and what faith can do in the way of overcoming and removing hindrances. To add emphasis to what He had been saying He pointed to the hill on which the Temple stood, and assured them that if only they had faith enough they could remove that mountain—break down, that is, the spiritual tyranny of which it was the visible sign and symbol ; free their own souls and the souls of the people from the influence of the system which had made Jerusalem a city of bondage to her children. Let them have faith in God, let them summon up all their spiritual forces, and that mountain of wrong thoughts and ways which obstructed and resisted their progress would disappear and their path would become straight and plain before them. It was a work which must have appeared impossible, beyond all human ingenuity and power : and with man un-related and alone it was impossible, but not with God—for all things are possible with God ; that is, to man with God, working in the line of the will of God and strengthened by His Spirit.

In seeking to find the lesson of our text we must, as I have already indicated, put aside the fanciful meanings which have been read into it by persons who believe in the thaumaturgic use of spiritual power. We must be incompetent readers of the gospels, without wisdom and insight, if we fail to see that Jesus is not

speaking from the common levels of life but from the standpoint of high experiences, and is therefore not prosaic and commonplace in His use of language. The ways of the God whom He bids us trust, love and obey, are not ways of confusion but of order, and all the great and marvellous possibilities of spiritual power are in the line of His perfect and beautiful order. We are right, I am persuaded, in interpreting our text as a vivid statement in poetic symbolism of the power of truth and good over falsehood and wrong—over moral obstacles. Before a true faith in God mountains of obstruction will yield, hills of difficulty be made low, and hindrances both without and within will break and scatter and the way of the kingdom become a way of triumph.

1. To interpret and appreciate the great saying I have read as my text, which is repeated in various forms in the gospels, we must first understand what Jesus meant by faith. The subject, you may think, is an elementary one. What Jesus meant by faith is surely so written in our gospels that he who runs may read. It is indeed written ; but how do we read it ? Are we quite sure, notwithstanding our familiarity with the symbol, that we have any real appreciation or even knowledge of the idea ? The word is in current and constant use ; but does it hold for us the meaning—the truth and inspiration—it held for our Master when He exhorted His disciples to have faith in God, and

told them what faith would do for them and for the world—if only they had it ?

There is hardly a simpler word in the language than faith, and we are seldom at any loss in understanding its meaning when it occurs in any speech or writing on common themes. But probably not another of the great words of religion has been so misused ; hardly any convey a less clear notion, and about no one is there such diversity of opinion, and consequently so much uncertainty. It is indeed a word of many meanings. Although it sounds always the same to the ear, yet it has passed and still passes among men with many a change of signification. We constantly hear it used for such distinct things as the faculty of spiritual perception, and the objects perceived by that faculty ; for confidence in a person or principle, and for a creed, as when we say “This is the Catholic faith.” To many it is simply a technical term—the symbol of a theological virtue ; and by others it is translated into a demand for a mystical piety—for an inward experience and sentiment, which bring peace and joy to the soul—the personal assurance of salvation. It has also been often employed as if it were synonymous with credulity, or an easy acquiescence, or an act of submission to authority ; and again and again has it been used to rally a crusade against intellect.

“ Their’s not to make reply,
Their’s not to reason why.”

Even in the New Testament we cannot be always sure of the meaning of faith without reference to the context or circumstances. It is not used everywhere with the same meaning, but often in a sense quite diverse and needing to be carefully discriminated. We who inherit the Protestant tradition are much inclined to read the words "Have faith in God" in the light of St. Paul's teaching. But in the use of Jesus faith is a much simpler and more practical quality.

It is almost unnecessary to say that when the Saviour of men bids us "have faith in God" He is not summoning us to believe in definite theological propositions or opinions concerning God. His religion, it is true, has to do with the mind as well as the heart, and it does not ask for any abrupt acceptance or unreasoning emotion. What it opposes to faith is not reason, but *sight*. We are not to believe that wrong is right, or other than unprofitable and ruinous, even when the whole evidence of our senses seems to tell us that it is profitable and successful. While the faith which Jesus bids us "have" can justify itself to the enlightened and sound mind, and is far removed from credulity, superstition and fanaticism, it is not a mere matter of the intellect—a mere mental assent to ideas concerning God with which the affections and will have nothing to do and which produces no change of life and conduct. It is essentially a moral and practical quality.

The man who loves the Psalms and has drunk in their spirit will be tempted to read the exhortation "Have faith in God" as a call to simple trust—that trust which brings confidence even when we stand in fear of life, and mental peace when we are facing what we cannot understand. Distrust, we are persuaded, is not the attitude in which change, loss and trouble, and the issues of life and death, can be safely met. We must feel assured that the Divine care is behind all the incidents and events of our passing days, and beneath all the movements of life: we must have such confidence in God as to put aside while doing our duty all fear of consequences, and all anxiety about our personal safety. This is always the right thing to do; but it is not the right interpretation of our text. In many of His recorded sayings, Jesus, it is true, exalts trust as a cardinal virtue and bids us exercise it. By His revelation of the Eternal Goodness and Fatherhood He would sweep away all our unbelieving cares and forebodings, and make us strong to endure what we cannot help, and to conquer all fear of the unseen morrow. But trust is a passive quality to be exercised when everything has been done; it is the falling back in quiet submission and confidence on the good will of God. Faith, in distinction from trust, is an active quality. It is the response of man to God: not a passive, but an active response; not a partial, but a complete response; the response of the whole being

—mind, heart, and will—to God ; an entirely practical acceptance of and identification with ideal truth and good as the Divine law and order of life.

Faith in the thought and teaching of Jesus is essentially an act of the will—a moral quality whose opposite is inability to do and to dare, disobedience due to weakness or wilfulness—disloyalty. It is loyalty to the will of God—loyalty to the best we see and know—coupled with the conviction that in spite of all apparent difficulty, delay, and defeat, God's best, which includes our human best, is advancing to power and glory. Mere belief in God, in His might and goodness, is not faith according to our Master's idea of faith. He never gave the name of faith to a belief on which there was no courage to adventure. When he exhorted His disciples to have faith in God He was not asking them merely to believe on God, but to act on their belief. There can be no reality in a belief that is not acted upon, not lived by. It is not enough that we assent and approve ; the vital thing is the will to respond. Without this direct moral influence on the life we may have a creed—certain statements about God which we have accepted—but hardly anything which Jesus would have called faith. Faith is a union of intellect and will ; it is belief put into the will and passing into purpose and action ; it is actual movement in the line of the belief, as if it were the only thing that could be done, as if existence and the whole course of things must in

time agree with it and justify it. It is at once the true vision or conviction of the Divine will and the action of man's will towards fulfilling it—the giving up of one's self to do the will of God—the obedience of the life.

In reading the New Testament you must have observed how often faith and obedience are spoken of as one and the same thing. The connection between them is so immediate and vital that what is attributed to faith is also attributed to obedience. Obedience is faith exhibited in its necessary issue and result, lived out, acted out, and so made visible to the world. Faith without works is dead, is not real faith at all, because real and living faith must issue in works corresponding to the moral ideal involved in it. When the spirit within you hears God saying, "Speak the truth," "Be just," "Be merciful and forgiving," and you accept the inward whisper as a Divine command and are ready to obey it and to suffer anything rather than go counter to it—that is faith in God. You may always judge the quality of your belief by your obedience, and measure faith by your faithfulness.

We are accustomed to say that we have faith in God. The first clause of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God"—the greatest and most majestic affirmation that can come from human lips—we often repeat, and glibly. Few really doubt the existence and power, the righteousness and goodness, of God. Few really doubt that

this world is God's world, and that the true laws of life, the laws we ought to obey, are God's laws. But real faith in God is much less common than many suppose. The moral daring, the definite and unreserved committal of one's self to live and act as a servant and son of God, which Jesus called faith—*that* is still rare in the world. On the Mount of Vision we behold the Divine order of human life, but how few of us determine and carry out the determination that our daily living and doing must follow that order and none other !

And yet our Christian religion began with this faith. It began, not with the proclamation of new ideas or with a new scheme of salvation, or with the laying down of a fixed system of doctrine or ritual which must be accepted, but with the consecration of One who unreservedly gave Himself to be and to do what God required, with the courage of One who obeyed perfectly His heavenly vision—One so penetrated and possessed by faith in God, and with such an abounding confidence in the Divine order of life, that obstacles counted for nothing, or operated but as a means of calling out a greater devotion. It was His own working theory of life which Jesus called faith in God. He believed Himself to be the Son of God, sent here to do His Father's will and work, and from the beginning of His life we see Him in all things behaving as the Son of God ; receiving His directions from God alone and shaping His days by them ; refusing to be the political

agitator that His friends wished and expected Him to be ; never doing anything lower than His ideal required ; confused by no double standard, resorting to no compromises, relying on no other forces than the forces of truth and love ; not even in the most trying emergencies using any other means of producing impression and conviction : all through His days moved, mastered, guided, upheld by this one motive and purpose—"I must obey My Father's will ; speak His words, not My own ; do His works, not My own ; and in all things please Him." And so at the last we see Him hanging on the Cross, and hanging there because He had been obedient to the end. "I have overcome the world," He said, when to all appearance the world had overcome Him. But His great word is true. The Cross was victory. It was His faithfulness that brought Him there. It was failure, but triumphant failure. *He* had not failed. Well might the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews in his roll of known and nameless heroes and saints put Jesus forward as our example and leader in faith as in every other virtue—the Great Chief of faithful souls !

It was the whole-hearted, unreserved, persistent, unflinching committal of themselves to the will of God which Jesus asked from the men around Him when He asked for faith in God. They were, though sentimentally religious, living a poor, broken, compromising life. They hoped for the Divine kingdom of their

prophets' visions and prayers, but their eyes were also fixed on the glittering seductions of worldly and selfish ambition. They were eager both for the earthly and the heavenly things, but they had neither as ruling motive or purpose. They were divided against themselves, irresolute and unstable. Their confidence in the higher things was constantly yielding to fears, jealousies, and rivalries inspired by their love of the lower things. They tried to pursue a middle course, to serve two masters, to divide their allegiance between God and a world at war with the will of God. The call of Jesus was : " Have faith in God ! Free yourselves from this dualism of the moral life ! Break the tyranny of this double-mindedness ! Do not conduct half of your life on one principle and the other half on a different principle ! Let one great principle, one great affection, one great purpose, have full control of your life from centre to circumference in all its relations and parts ! Deliver yourselves to follow the will of God ! Let the will of God be your one all-comprehending allegiance ! " It was this utter singleness of motive and aim, this sole devotion and service, this absolute surrender to the absolutely true and right, which Jesus called faith in God and to which He committed Himself and His cause.

The special characteristic of the Jesus of the gospels may be said to consist in this dealing with all moral matters and all questions of duty from the standpoint

of the ideal. He simply would not take any account of prevailing conditions and of the things which are regarded to be politic and expedient. The will of God—that is, the thing which is perfectly true and just and right—must be followed without compromise, and without looking to side interests and temporal results. He, as we have seen, completely accepted the will of God as the law of His own life ; He knew no other law and no other order than that of the kingdom of God. It was to the daily practice of absolute fidelity to the Divine will and order He summoned men. This alone being of consequence, the one thing for which all other things existed, He accounted nothing that could befall a man in the way of outward loss and suffering and failure as worthy of serious consideration. The ordinary objects of human desire—food, raiment, house and provisioning for the morrow—must have a very subordinate place in the regard of all who would be His disciples. They must seek first the kingdom of God, seek first to bring their entire being and life into right accord with God and His will. And if they gave themselves with all their mind and strength to following the Divine order of life, they might be confident that what they really needed of the lower things would somehow come all right. They must take for granted the care of God while they seek to do His will. To act in anything as if they thought it not quite wise and safe to be perfectly honest and true, perfectly self-denying and kind,

would be to doubt or deny God, His presence and His providence in human life. Let the idea of God as Infinite Wisdom, Goodness and Fatherhood control their feeling and thought, and it would deliver them from putting their trust in worldly policies and expedients and the shifting subterfuges of fear and cowardice.

Have faith in God ! Alas ! how few of us have any real faith in God ! Our lives would be utterly different in every way if we had. Our lives are unquiet, troubled, distracted, confused, just for want of this faith —this entire committal of ourselves to what we plainly see to be the will of God. We behave and act as if the world were not God's world but a divided empire, as if there were more gods than one to be worshipped and served. It may seem a strange thing to say to a congregation of Christian people that our lives are weak and false and broken, because we are worshipping and serving more gods than one. The thought of other gods ruling over us, holding down our aspirations, dictating our speech, directing and controlling our behaviour, may be hateful to us when quietly considered in the House of Prayer, but in our daily lives the thought is a fact. Can you honestly say, my hearers, that you know nothing about the serving of other gods ? What is the temptation to say what others say, and to do what others do ? What is it to put aside the higher things for the sake of the

lower things? What is it to be silent when you ought to speak, or to speak with a double tongue? What is it to sacrifice some lofty ideal of duty for the sake of a mean success, or for comfort and peace? What is it to be less strictly true to principle in order to win and keep a place in church, or state, or society, or to realise some poor dream of wider influence? What is it to follow questionable methods and practices, in political relations, business relations, ecclesiastical relations? What is the meaning of our want of confidence in what is right in many of our dealings with our fellows, and of our confidence in our own smartness, shrewdness, sharpness, and in the prescriptions of a worldly society and in the maxims of an evil world? What is it when a great principle or great cause is at stake and everything should be risked in its behalf, to hesitate, to think of compromise, to turn about for some expedient by which we may escape from where duty calls and danger? Is not that living and acting as if the world were not God's world throughout, but a divided empire? Is not that bowing the knee to other principles, other laws, other influences, other wills, and forgetting and denying the one principle, the one law, the one will, the one spirit, the one God? We do not live honest, straightforward, and consistent lives, because we have more gods than one, because we do not realise that there is no other god but the one living and true God; that His will, and

not our own comfort, gratification, vanity, is the one law, the one and only thing we are to seek to do everywhere, and in and through everything, leaving the other things to arrange themselves around this central and supreme thing in the way and measure it pleases Him with whom we have to do in all the relations of life.

Have faith in God ! All crooked dealing is a denial of God. All the shrewd devices, all the politic schemes, all the means which weakness and worldliness take in order to evade loss and danger and to win desirable and even good ends, are a denial of God. We may not behave as if fraud could be profitable and falsehood could do better work than truth, not if we are seeking to serve Him to whom lies are an abomination and who desireth truth in the inward parts. We may not do evil that good may come, not if this is God's world and we are His children. We may not hesitate to tell the truth and to act uprightly because the perfectly sincere thing seems inexpedient against our convenience, comfort, popularity and worldly success, or against the interest of our party or sect ; not if we have faith in God and hold truth, righteousness and love to be the realities for which all things else exist. It is not necessary that we should succeed, win distinction, power, money, and be comfortable and happy ; it is not even necessary, as Luther used to say, that we should live ; but it is necessary that truth and righteous-

ness should be maintained and established in the world. We can be dispensed with, but not the principles which we are often tempted to barter for some selfish end.

Let me point out here that there is much real faith in God which does not know itself to be faith in God. It is so substantially and really, but not consciously. In one of his *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, Froude divided men into two great classes. On the one side there are the men who have no commanding convictions concerning duty and who guide their lives by what is pleasant or profitable. On the other side there are the men of faith—men who believe strongly in truth, justice and goodness, and cleave to them passionately. At all hazards, and in spite of all immediate consequences to themselves, they prefer and follow the right without hesitation when once it is discerned. They may see no gain coming from it to themselves, but still they resolve, "Let us do that and nothing else ; life will have no meaning or value for us if we are to use it only to serve private ends." Men of faith are, as Froude says, men who do not care to succeed anywhere or in anything if they cannot succeed nobly ; men who have but one fear—the fear of doing the wrong thing and taking the wrong side.

Why is it that these men are described as men of faith ? They are not believers, perhaps, in the conventional church sense ; they may not be able to subscribe to any of the creeds of Christendom even

for substance of doctrine ; and yet men whose lives are moved and led by simple faith in truth, justice and goodness, and who believe that in the long run the laws of the world pay respect to and establish what is true and just and good and only that, cannot surely be classed with unbelievers. They are not so in reality. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews would have given them a place in his calendar of faithful men. Jesus beholding them would have loved them and said of them, "Ye are not far from the kingdom of God" ; and of some of them, "I have not found such great faith ; no, not in Israel." To-day as yesterday, men who have the overmastering persuasion that all right things can be done and must be done, ought to be reckoned among the faithful sons of God. It is not a question of words but of things, not of names but of realities. Metaphysical and other mists may obscure the vision of a man whose deepest sympathies are all in most open and practical ways on the side of truth and justice and goodness in the world. Truth and justice and goodness are of the essence of things—that is, of the nature of God. Our ideals of duty are not phantoms of our brain but the shadows and outlines of the Infinite Perfection in whose image we are made. "To do justice and judgment," said Jeremiah, speaking in the name of God, "is not this to know me? saith the Lord." To have faith in truth, in justice, in goodness, is to have faith in God ; and we have just so

much faith in God as we have faith in truth, justice and goodness.

This unconscious faith in God is, of course, not enough, but it may be a most real and honest beginning out of which the highest faith can in time proceed. All straight and upward roads must lead at last to God's holy hill and the tabernacle of His presence. We cannot have too much faith in the moral ideal, in truth and justice, goodness and love, as the real and eternal laws of the world and life ; but we need also, for inspiration and strength, faith in the Living God who is the Source, Centre and Unity of all our human ideals, the Fountain of all goodness, who comprehends in Himself all forms of good, as the ocean includes all its waves. It is in the union of these two elements—the committal of ourselves to the moral ideal, and the recognition of God as the source of it—the One who is manifested in it and through it—we have the faith in God to which Christ calls us and the unity with God to which He seeks to restore us.

We must pray with the disciples, "Increase our faith." Moral power is rooted in the Christian confidence that this world is God's world, its laws God's laws, its men and women God's children. What increases that faith makes most directly for moral progress and true social wellbeing. But the greatest foe of religion to-day is not theoretical but practical unbelief ; not atheism, which scarcely exists, but theism empty of its

ethical significance and power. What is mourned as the decay of idealism is in reality the loss of faith in God. Everywhere we see the form of godliness without the spirit and power thereof—a holding, even in many cases an ostentatious holding, of the theistic and Christian beliefs, without apparently any experience of the practical energy which they impart. There are many persons everywhere who do not hesitate to deny the Christian name to serious and devout men who question the dogmas which have grown up about the person and work of Jesus ; but their own easy rejection of the ethical teaching of Jesus as incapable of being practised in modern society, and their own failure to take into the world a higher standard than the world can bear, give them little trouble. There are thousands in this city and members of all the churches who would not like to be even suspected of want of faith in God, but what they call their faith is not able to move a stone, much less a mountain ; it has no more moral influence on their common lives than their belief in the moons of Jupiter or the chemical composition of the stars. They think because they can repeat the words, “I believe in God,” that they have got the reality—though the whole six days of the week give the lie to their Sunday confession of faith.

Have faith in God ! Were Jesus Christ among us to-day, He would address many of us in view of our inconsistent, divided, broken, morally ineffective lives,

—“How is it that ye have no faith” ?—“O ye of little faith !” The same exclamations of surprise are just as applicable now and here as they were then and there. The same causes are in operation producing the same effects. Want of confidence in what is best, and of the determination to cleave to it, and carry it through at whatever cost, is a common infirmity. Moral cowardice is a most prevalent vice in all classes and communities of men. He who knew by a divine insight what was in man, would trace the state of social, political, commercial and ecclesiastical morality, the weakness of the Church, its declining moral influence, its unideal methods and devices, its secular and sensational agencies, and the slow progress of true religion in our land, to the want of courage which springs from want of faith in God. There is nothing which the churches of our country need more at this present hour than faith in God. It is not by conforming to the world the world is best helped. It is not by time-serving the time is truly served. Long enough have we resorted to compromises; long enough have the arts of management possessed us; long enough have we tried to serve God and mammon; long enough have we sought to win men by following worldly devices, as if they had no power to recognise and respond to what is truly spiritual. Let us trust the ideals and methods of our religion, and stoop to no artifices, even to save a thousand souls. The God of truth and holiness will not be served by what is not

utterly true and clean and good. More faith in God, and less in policy and expedient, would show a higher wisdom and nobler courage, and in the end finer and more abiding results. And Jesus said, "Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith like a grain of mustard seed, ye would say to this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, and it would come to pass—the impossible would happen, the evil that seems fixed and immovable would disappear, and the world that is now against you would be overcome."

2. In this great saying we get a glimpse of the sublime courage which possessed the soul of Jesus, the courage of one who meant to make war against the evil of a nation and a world ; who could view defeat as victory and death as a positive step in His progressive work ; who could see triumph springing out of failure and the Cross to be a means of spiritual uprising and influence. Give it a moral interpretation, and who will say that this bold utterance of the Master of all moral attainment is hyperbole ? It may not be true to describe a particular thing as wrong or as right ; but there is brave truth in saying that whatever is wrong can be overthrown, and whatever is right can be brought to pass. Faith in God that is not allied to courage and daring is not faith according to Christ. The faith which removes mountains is always allied with the finest elements of true manhood. It is fearless, but it is not the fearlessness of stupidity or fanaticism or presumption, but of

an enlightened and pure moral enthusiasm which practically brings all that is within a man to one fixed purpose and course of action. It is not afraid of difficulty. It is found where the service is hardest and the battle is hottest. It never knows when it is beaten. It falls to rise. It loves sympathy, but it can stand and fight alone rather than yield one inch to falsehood and wrong.

“If ye had faith ye would remove mountains.” Virgil said of the winning crew in his famous boat-race, “They can, because they believe they can!” His words are almost identical with words we find in the text—“Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass, he shall have it.” The trouble with many of us is that we do not fully believe that we can do what we are bidden do by the All-wise Master of our life. We are more or less ignorant of our own power—of the hidden spiritual forces of our own nature. We are afraid of great ventures because we under-estimate ourselves. We need more of that self-confidence which in its last analysis is confidence in God—the God who worketh in us to will and to do. In the disciples of Christ we see what faith in God could do for average men, such men as we find in the streets, dull in mind, timid in spirit, weak in will. The whole-hearted committal of themselves to the work of God

made them conscious of undreamt-of power, and made them capable of achieving what they never thought possible ; changed them from ordinary and commonplace men into heroes and martyrs whom we remember for ever. Forgetting themselves, and determined to bring in the kingdom of God, they went forward, and the enthusiasm of their faith operated in the very way their Master said ; it enabled them to surmount formidable difficulties, to break down mountainous obstacles, to subdue seeming impossibilities, to overcome a hostile world. And from those days to these all the greatest things that have been done for God and man have been done by men full of the energy of faith. The men of faith have achieved what is impossible to other men. For with God, in union with Him, all things are possible in the way of obedience and service. It is to this power of faith which connects our life with the spiritual resources of the universe, God has entrusted the redemption and progress of the world—the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

“ If ye had faith ye would remove mountains.” Let us beware of defining the word “ possible ” too narrowly. If men would only do in the moral what they do in the material sphere, trust moral laws and forces as they trust physical laws and forces, they would see how perfectly true to fact is the promise of our text. In the material sphere of his life nothing seems impossible to man ; he knows so much about material

laws that he has a certain quiet, unshakable confidence that none of his work will be in vain. There is nothing so daring that he does not undertake, and nothing so vast that he does not achieve. He crosses continents as though they were counties, and oceans as though they were rivers ; he levels mountains, annihilates space, and brings the ends of the earth together for mutual fellowship and service. He seeks to understand and obey the laws of Nature ; he arranges his machinery and sets the right instrumentalities in play ; and lo ! the powers of heaven come down to serve him, the forces of heat, electricity, gravitation, press forward to do his bidding, and everything seems possible.

It is not only over physical forces—forces of wind and wave, of earth and sky—man has power and dominion. In these moral lives which we are living, and in these Christian works which we are seeking to do, we can join ourselves to the spiritual forces of the universe. The elemental powers of truth and right and love wait to serve us, and they have never yet been known to fail. Here also all things are possible to him that hath faith. We may go forward with as sure a confidence in moral effort as we have in physical effort. There is in moral work a certainty of moral results following from adequate moral causes parallel to that in mechanical work. There is but one way of success in things material and moral alike—it is the way of obedience. All things are possible to men living

and working with all their strength in the line of Divine laws and purposes. Put yourselves, my hearers, on God's side, and your life becomes at once part of the eternal life of God ; identify yourselves with the Divine order of the world, and it bears you up and carries you on. Speak the true word, and the God of truth, you may be sure, will make it in some real way a word of power. Put your belief in what is highest and best with all your might into deeds, and you will find the Eternal Right fighting your battles against wrong, find that no wrong thing is success and no right thing is failure, that always the right comes out clear and victorious at the end. We are part of a universe which is moving to bring all best things to pass ; we are living in a world where all things in the way of moral and spiritual success are possible to the whole-hearted, single-minded, brave and fearless children of God.

It was this confidence in the Divine order of life which Jesus sought to inspire in His disciples. It was this confidence to which He gave the name of faith—the confidence that truth and righteousness, goodness and love, are of God and therefore must be obeyed, lived for, laboured for, suffered for, died for, and that, however to all appearances they may be thwarted and defeated for a time, they must ultimately prevail and be established upon the earth. Being of the nature and will of God, the course of things must finally agree with them. Living for them, working for them, we

have directly on our side the Power that is making, redeeming and guiding the world. We ourselves may fall and be defeated, but the true and good things for which we fight must be victorious. Our personal defeat and failure may be necessary to and be a part of the final victory. But whatever the apparent waste of effort, no good is lost. The order and cause to which our life and work belong cannot fail, but must go on from strength to strength and from glory to glory.

It is told of a famous musician that he was once spending a few days with a friend in England, who took him to a church on Sunday where he listened to a little sermon on a little theme. The next Sunday the friend invited the musician to go again to church. "I will," said Rubinstein, "but on one condition: you must take me to hear a man who will tempt me to do the impossible." It is to do what many people—people who do not look at things through the eyes of Jesus Christ—think to be impossible that I have been pleading with you this morning. It is the chief business of the ministers of Him who went to the Cross for His devotion to the ideal things, and who cared for no victory less than the infinite victory, to persuade men to have faith in God. It is indeed a tremendous demand when fully understood and realised. The reason why so few are really and completely committed to doing the will of God is just because the strain is so hard. They have not faith enough in God to direct their lives

wholly by His will and to trust themselves wholly in His hands. All through their days they are busy at compromise. Their devotion, which should be wholly God's, is divided between Him and material and selfish interests. They are not single-hearted and single-eyed ; and that is why we often hear them speaking and see them acting as if they were not the same men ; that is why, though they may be successful and popular men in the state and the church, in society and the local community, they do not exercise any lofty influence. Their lives are more or less forceless in any high and abiding way, because they are so faithless. Oh ! what mountains of evil would go down if we had only men and women possessed with the power of simple truth and goodness ; in whom the Divine laws of life were so inwrought in character that they could not truckle, could not dissimulate, could not play the part of time-server and coward, could not do evil that good may come, could not bear to be successful at the expense of their fellows, could not live idle and easy lives in a world so full of woe and want ; with no anxiety save to be obedient to the heavenly vision ; trusting the moral laws of life as they trust physical laws ; full of the courage of faith—courage to meet failure and defeat rather than swerve from the Divine ideal, courage to meet and to use success if it comes without yielding one hair's-breadth of conviction and principle !

Where are the men of faith ? Will Jesus Christ

cry in vain to you—‘Have faith in God’? Will you not so believe in Him as to share His life of faith, as to commit yourselves whole-heartedly to His order of living, as to leave Him not alone in His following of the highest, as to be His companions in obedience and service and sacrifice, and thus to prove yourselves, in the best of all ways, to be in the true succession of Christ, members of His Holy Catholic Church, which we rightly describe as “the blessed company of all *faithful* people”?

“The Son of God goes forth to war :
Who follows in His train ?”

THE ETERNAL GOD THY REFUGE ✓

“The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”—DEUT. xxxiii. 27.

THE text is one of the finest and loftiest utterances of Hebrew religion. It is mere presumption for us to imagine that any expression which we can now give to our confidence in the Divine order and care will ever go beyond the trustful and triumphant words, “The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” Most fitting and inspiring was this great assurance under the circumstances in which it was first given. The children of Israel had need to be reminded of the Eternal Refuge and Support when they were about to lose the presence and guidance of the man who had been their leader and companion in their toilsome and troubled march through the wilderness for forty years. Moses was leaving them, but leaving them with God. They were homeless, and their national future was uncertain and hidden; but to-morrow, as to-day, from generation to generation, they would be in the presence

and care of the Eternal, in the arms of the Everlasting Power and Peace.

Originally given by Moses as a promise to his people, and to inspire hope as to their national continuity and destiny, yet we are not wrong in supposing that in the strength of its assurance he himself met the last solemn and supreme moment of his life, and in dying conquered death. When he uttered the words of the text the premonition was strangely clear that the hour of his departure had come. To be alone in that hour—alone with nature, alone with God—was his strong wish. And as he leaves the society of his fellows, the noise of the camp for the silence of the mountain-top from which he is to come down again no more, we hear him saying, not only to his people, but to his own soul: “The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

It is simply incredible that this sublime utterance, breaking at first from the strong and calm soul of the dying Moses, and in later days seized upon with such spiritual avidity and wrought into Hebrew psalm and Christian hymn and prayer, is rightly regarded when thought of merely as the expression of the faith of a few souls of exceptional religious sensitiveness and devoutness, scattered here and there. It goes down, I am persuaded, into the deep places of innumerable hearts, and utters their undying wish and hope, if not their sure faith—the faith they have verified in their

own experience. The ancient words interpret and give immortal expression to a universal and indestructible need of humanity. They were true before they were written, and they would be true if they had not been written in the sacred book of religion. Centuries have passed away, and generations have come and gone, but they still lay upon us their solemn spell, and we continue to use them, as we do all the great words of the Bible, because they find us, divine our hearts for us, and utter what in us is but faintly felt and dimly thought with the clear and certain sound of complete conviction, and with the energy of a faith that quickens and strengthens our wavering trusts and hopes.

No ! the text is not the utterance of an exceptional soul, but a genuine cry of the human spirit ; not merely a line of sublime poetry, which came out of that old Hebrew's heart, but a voice from distant ages, which still expresses to the world the most fundamental of human needs, and becomes the personal and cherished confession of the confidence of every religious man, and of every man in his deeper and more religious hours. We have needs in our life which had no place in the life of ancient Israel—needs which are related to a higher social and intellectual development ; but the deepest needs of the human soul are common and universal, and know neither to-day nor yesterday. Easier conditions of existence, new knowledge and new

inventions, have not done away with sorrow and sin. The progress of civilisation has not diminished but increased our spiritual perils. We have not outgrown the need of the Divine protection and defence. Sooner or later every son of man is taught the lesson of his own insufficiency, of his need of a strength he does not find in himself, and of a shelter and support which his fellows cannot give, and no earthly interest or object can yield. The larger and more varied his experience of the world and life, and the more deeply he feels and thinks, the more does he realise the assurance of the Divine protection and care to be the most pressing and imperious of all his practical needs. Of all substitutes for God—wealth, comfort, amusement, music, beauty, learning, friendship, love, philanthropy—he must say, at least in his most searching and critical experiences, “Miserable comforters are ye all.” To state the fundamental facts of human life is, indeed, to affirm religion. In the generalised experience of mankind lies the real basis of religion. And all religion must somehow have its beginning and its end in God. Religion is God ; God is religion.

Yes! we need nothing so much now as to be possessed and mastered by the assurance of faith to which Moses gave expression in the text. There has been since his day a steady growth and development, a widening and deepening of the idea of God ; but it is still his sense and experience of God that we need for

the salvation and inspiration of life. And the true religious interpretation of the past is, that what God once was to men He is now and always. Not only to one race or generation of His children, but to all races and generations, is He near, and equally near. True religion is not the memory of what God once was in the far past, nor the hope of what He may be in the far future, but the consciousness and experience of His presence and power in this present moment. This personal and immediate contact and communion of the soul with the Eternal Wisdom, Goodness, and Fatherhood is the ultimate and primary power of religion. The truly religious man is just the man to whom God is no mere name, tradition, or opinion, but his one sure refuge and support—the man who has proved in his own experience that God is here and now to the children what He was long ago to the fathers—no less mighty to protect, uphold, and save, and no less abounding in lovingkindness and tender mercy.

“I feel that if I can believe in God I believe in all that I need,” wrote an eminent Presbyterian divine in the record of his private reflections. To believe truly and fully in God may be all that we really need to inspire and sustain our hearts, but this most necessary thing is the most difficult thing in the world. It is the hardest and rarest attainment of life. O blessed soul! that has reached and realised through its own experience this ancient and sublime trust: “The

Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

To bring men to find refuge and rest in Eternal God is the purpose and end of all Divine revelation, discipline, and teaching; of all Christian ministries, and of all the ministries, gracious and severe, of human life. We are set within a system of mediation. It is the office of the natural to lead us to the spiritual, and of the temporal to lead us to the eternal. The law of mediation is the most universal of laws, and it is everywhere the condition of Divine revelation and activity. The whole material universe is a system of mediation by which God would draw us to Himself. The creation is but the Divine thought clothing itself in visible form, and it comes forth into form, not only because self-manifestation is a necessity of Deity, but in order that the children of God may be led by it nearer to Him who is the source of their being and the unseen Power of all good. The order of human life is a still higher revelation of God, expressing depths of divinity beyond what the physical creation can set forth, and by it we may approach more closely and realise more fully the glory of God. "A man," said the bold apostle, "is the image and glory of God." The essential human powers and qualities—reason, justice, love, sympathy—are representative of what He is, and the growing goodness of man is a growing revelation of God. Through human righteousness and love,

through the care, wisdom, justice, patience, tenderness, sacrifice, and fidelity of parents, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, and friends, we are led nearer Him in whom the spiritual quality of our human being, and all the beauty and glory of our human relationships, dwell for ever and ever in infinite fulness.

In the Epistle to the Galatians St. Paul twice applies the term "mediator" to Moses, and all higher minds do, in fact, mediate between their less developed and endowed fellows and the spiritual realities of the world and life. Through men God draws men into the communion of His Spirit. There is nothing arbitrary, official, or priestly in this, but only natural, personal, moral influence—the influence not of an office, but of commanding personality, of superior power and character. In our own experience have we no key to the understanding of this law of mediation? As we have walked in spirit with the great souls of the past, and read their words, and measured our lives by theirs, have we felt no quickening movement of inward power, and no drawings to God with the bands of a man? Do we not know through the spiritual help we have received from wise teachers and friends, through the inspirations of high minds, and the transfiguration of life to our feeling and thought which came from their new and finer interpretation of things, what Emerson meant when he wrote :

“O friend, my bosom said,
 Through thee alone the sky is arched,
 Through thee the rose is red ;
 All things through thee take nobler form,
 And look beyond the earth :

.
 Me, too, thy nobleness has taught
 To master my despair ;
 The fountains of my hidden life
 Are through thy friendship fair ” ?

And what shall I say of Him who is the supreme and perfect instance of this universal law of mediation between man and God ? The Divine revelation in nature and man culminates in Him who is the image of the invisible God and the brightness of the Father's glory. His mediation is not hindrance but help to direct, uninterrupted communion. He came forth from God, not to save or detain us from God, but to lead us to God ; and He lived and died, said the sacred writer, that our faith and hope might be in God. The mediatorship of Jesus Christ, this is what it means to the Christian mind—a living Friend, human, so that the human heart understands Him ; Divine, so that through Him we know what God is like. His character is the character of Deity ; His love, the assurance of the Divine love ; His sufferings and death, the revelation in time and space of the eternal passion and sacrifice of God.

And as Christ was, so are His followers to be in the world. Christian Church and Christian ministry exist to bring men to God. Church and Bible, sacrament and creed, faith and experience, are not the refuge. They only fulfil their work when they lead us to God, and leave us to find our "all in all" in Him. When will men understand that they do not require to be protected from God, and that God Himself is their protection? Superstition, under Christianity, as well as in pagan times, has one common characteristic discovered through all its forms—to keep God away from man, to strengthen that dread and horror of God which dwells in every spiritually undeveloped and unenlightened soul. Churches and priesthoods have been organised, Bible and sacrament, and even the person and work of Christ have been used, to come between men and God, as if it were from God and not from ungodliness men required to be delivered. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee." "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." There is no refuge from God but in God. The God whom Jesus Christ revealed is Himself our Refuge and our Salvation.

"The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." I wish I could say something to help you to feel the spell of this utterance, to catch its high and sweet serenity, and to make its great confidence your own!

The Eternal God is our Refuge from the unsearch-

able mystery of life. We cannot escape from mystery. It grows with our growing knowledge. What a world this is in which we live, and how awful in some of its aspects our life in it! Does it not require something more than our little systems and schemes to keep the mind and soul in strength and peace in the midst of this troubled world and troubled life? Where else can we find the sense of shelter and security but where Moses found it long ago? "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Let us yield nothing to our fears. That the Unknown and the Unknowable may be trusted is the message of religion. Our discipleship to Jesus Christ inspires this lofty confidence in the beneficence of the universe, in a universe essentially good and making for goodness—a confidence which is the anticipation of much that modern knowledge is now slowly declaring. In the companionship and fellowship of the Son of God we know that where His trust was in Gethsemane and on Calvary ours can ever rest. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

In times of critical strain and trial to civilisation and the State, amid great political and social troubles and changes, let us not fail to remember and realise that the Eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. It is not our decrees and institutions that are upholding the world, but the everlasting laws—another name for the everlasting arms. Our

Refuge in times of distress is not parliaments and governments and compromising politicians, but the Eternal God. Our rulers and governors may help or hinder progress, but they do not decide the supreme and final issue of things. There is another Providence in affairs than the human providence. This world is, after all, God's world. Let us not therefore lose courage and hope because in the complications of disintegration and change we do not see what is to follow. In all ages men, bewildered by the vision of great changes, have pronounced the doom of the world because they were not able to see or understand the process of its salvation. Let us not be fearful even if the worst happens. The worst that can happen is often the best for the world. Jerusalem destroyed is better than Jerusalem saved, and the fall of the Roman Empire better for the moral health of the peoples of the earth than its continuance. A tremendous evil is often the shadow and herald of a vaster good. From evil good ever evolving is, perhaps, the best description we can give of the Divine method. In God we must ever trust when there is darkness without and within. To fear inevitable change is to fear God. To despair of human society is to despair of God. In the order of things principles do not yield to temporary disturbances and laws to confusion. Gravitation binds the earth notwithstanding all the agitation and noise on the surface. Light prevails over darkness, though cloud

and storm cross its course. The moral order of the world is, if possible, more sure and stable than the physical. Truth and Right are the ultimate realities. Human life in its evolution has its end, as it had its beginning, in God. There can be no evil, therefore, in any of the permanent forces which are shaping human society. Indeed, there can be no such thing as unchanging and persistent evil, for God is not only without, but within the world, ever immanent and active in the life of His creation and His children, and present in evil, not as evil, but as righteousness and goodness and redemption to overcome it.

In time of critical stress and trial to the Church let us cultivate and cherish the faith that the Eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Only weak and undisciplined minds and souls, without any real and deep life in God, can be hysterical about the fate of religion and the Church because of this or that change. Nothing shows more conclusively and sorrowfully the feeble quality of much which calls itself "faith" than the periodical panics of the religious world. The churches seem to be quite unable to free themselves from the mediæval fear of the intellectual life. O ye of little faith! wherefore do ye doubt? Not until God ceases to be God, and man ceases to be man, will wonder and worship, prayer and piety, love and sacrifice, fail and pass from the earth. There is nothing passing away but the imperfect. God does

not put out a lesser light save upon the rising of a greater. From light to more light is the Divine way. The form in which the theistic belief is held may have changed, but the Eternal Reality abides. Our conception of the method of creation is different from that held by our fathers, but God is as necessary to the new universe as ever He was to the old. Our Christian trusts and hopes, instead of fading and dwindling, grow clearer and larger. Many even of our doubts and denials are but the negative side of a more positive faith, and are preparing the way for grander affirmations. The modification of opinion is the sign, not of decay, but of growth. Our ecclesiastical separations and recombinations are full of promise of renewed strength and of wider and stabler unions. We are being unsettled in order to be better settled—settled on surer foundations. Let us shake off our timidities. Apart from all that is hopeful in modern movement, we always require to remember that our refuge and ground of confidence are not “theories,” “views,” “convictions,” the resolutions of majorities, but God Himself; and that it is not our faith, nor the faith of past generations, that is upholding the world, but the everlasting arms. The Throne of the Eternal will not be in danger even if our churches are disestablished, our institutions changed, our creeds and customs modified or abolished, and all our material securities be disturbed or taken from us. We do not support God; He

supports us. He is too infinitely true and just and impartial to be wholly and solely on this or that side in any of our mortal controversies and conflicts ; but He is wherever truth and justice and good are, and He is behind all that is true and all that is just and all that is good, both in the life of individual men and communities of men, bearing them on through apparent weakness and failure to final victory. We may trust God to vindicate and establish His own cause in the world.

In times of critical strain and trial to ourselves, amid changes in our days which make us feel as if there were nothing steadfast, in the hour of disappointment and unforeseen calamity and loss, in the darkness of temptation and sin, sickness and death, let this be our confidence : “ The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms ”—“ thy Refuge ” from the world without and the tumults of thine own spirit ; “ thy Refuge ” from all the dark shadows which haunt thee, from sleepless, tormenting memories of evil done, and from all invisible terrors ; “ thy Refuge ” when there is nothing to rest upon in what thou seest around thee, or can find within thee ; “ thy Refuge ” when thy thoughts baffle thee and thy faith fails thee ; “ thy Refuge ” from all mortal changes and ills, from the loneliness of life, and in the hour of thy final passion and conflict. Not from God, I say, do we require to be protected here or hereafter. He Himself is our pro-

tection, our all-sufficient protection. Other refuge is not needed. "Our sufficiency is of God." "My God shall supply all your need." His mercy is unfailing, and His Fatherhood eternal. In the crowd of beings and worlds we are not overlooked or forgotten. In our littleness and lowliness, in our sorrow and sin, we are the objects of an infinite care. We cannot fall out of His hands, and in His hands we can receive only good, even though that good may come by means of the severest discipline. No soul is ever left by Him to suffer unavailingly, or to perish alone, even though it be unconscious of His care. The Lord is nigh to all who call upon Him, and underneath the saddest life there are the everlasting arms. The surest and final refuge of all sufferers and sinners is in God.

And this sense of refuge and support is not conditioned by time and space. The days and months and years of this tempted and troubled life do not circumscribe the Eternal. Frail are we and vanishing when surveyed from the standpoint of this earthly existence; and yet, because God is from everlasting to everlasting, and we are related to Him as children to Father, we are not at the mercy of accidents, and death can have no dominion over us. When we fall it is into the everlasting arms. We do not move away from the merciful and redeeming care of God by moving from country to country, or from world to world. In this world and in the strange new world that lies beyond

death, in the seen and in the unseen, for the days of our mortal years and for the unending ages, the Eternal God is our Refuge.

Let us, then, take this great confidence with us as we enter on the unknown ways of life. Let us rise out of our weakness and fear, out of our poor, trembling and hesitating thoughts and feelings, and seek to live and move in the clear light of the assurance that comforted the dying Moses, and which is ours more than ever as it has been illuminated and confirmed by Jesus Christ, and by long ages of spiritual experience. Whatever else we doubt, let us not doubt that in life and in death, in the body and out of the body, in this world and in all the worlds, the Eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. And unto Him who has been the dwelling-place of man in all generations, whose never-changing will binds together the near and distant, the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, and whose goodness and mercy endure for ever and ever, unto Him our God and our Father be the worship, the trust and love, the obedience and service of His children, world without end. AMEN.

PRAYER

O Thou from Whom we come, to Whom we go, in Whom we live, the Beginning and the End of these swiftly passing days, and our Everlasting Home! give

us to discern the purpose for which Thou hast sent us here, and help us to fulfil it. Keep us from following what is foolish, and false, and unprofitable. In darkened ways be Thou our light ; in perplexing paths be Thou our guide. Take out of our hearts all suspicion and fear of Thee and of Thy dealings with us, and let our doubts grow into larger and richer trusts. Amid all the movement and tumult of life, amid all the comings and goings of the world, may our souls be at rest in Thee. In Thy Hand are our times, and in Thy Hand, merciful Father, would we leave them in quietness and in confidence ; calm and strong in the faith that Thou meanest well with us and with all Thy children, that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life, that in this world and in the world and life to come the Eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. AMEN.

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