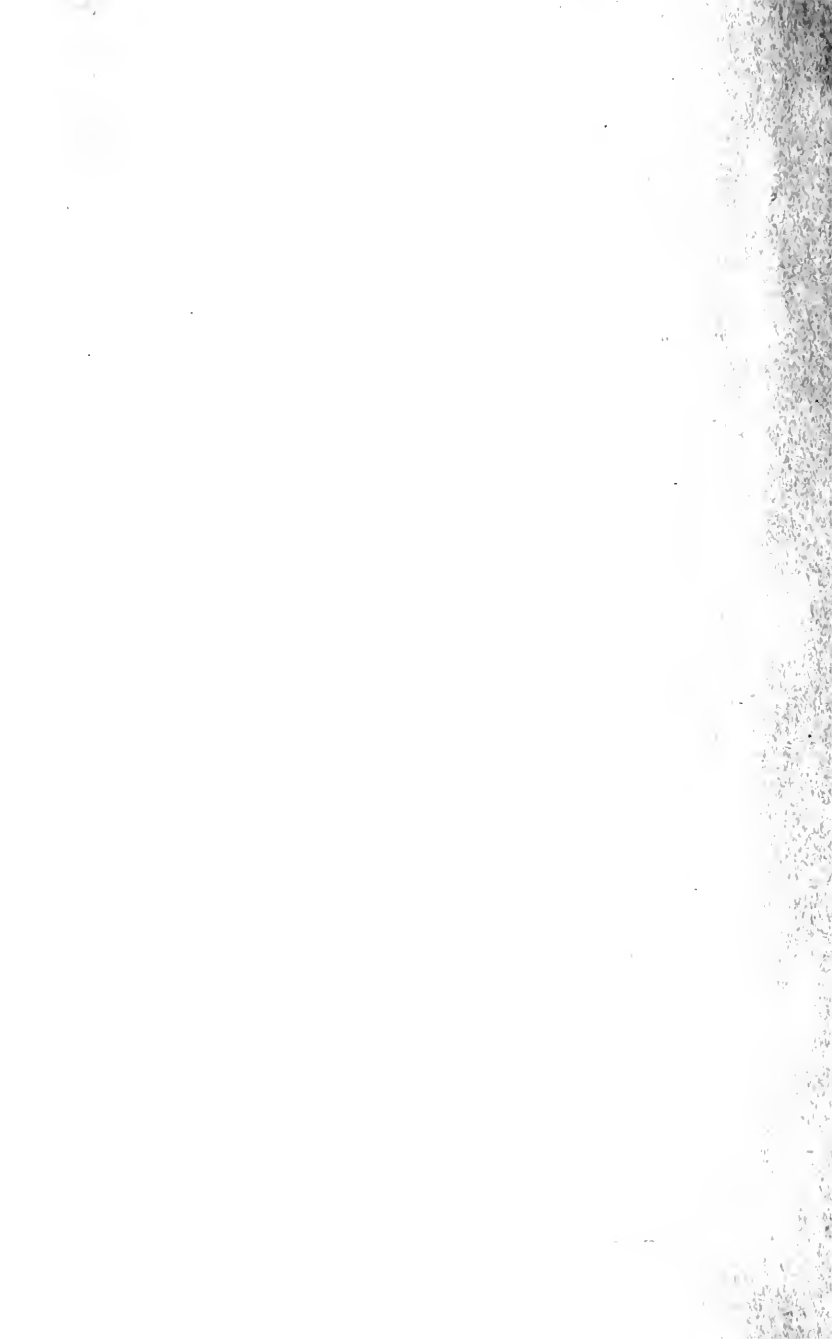


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THE EVANGEL OF THE STRAIT GATE

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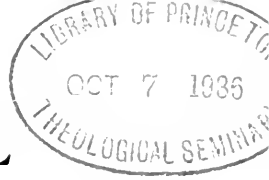
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THE EVANGEL OF THE STRAIT GATE

BY THE REV.

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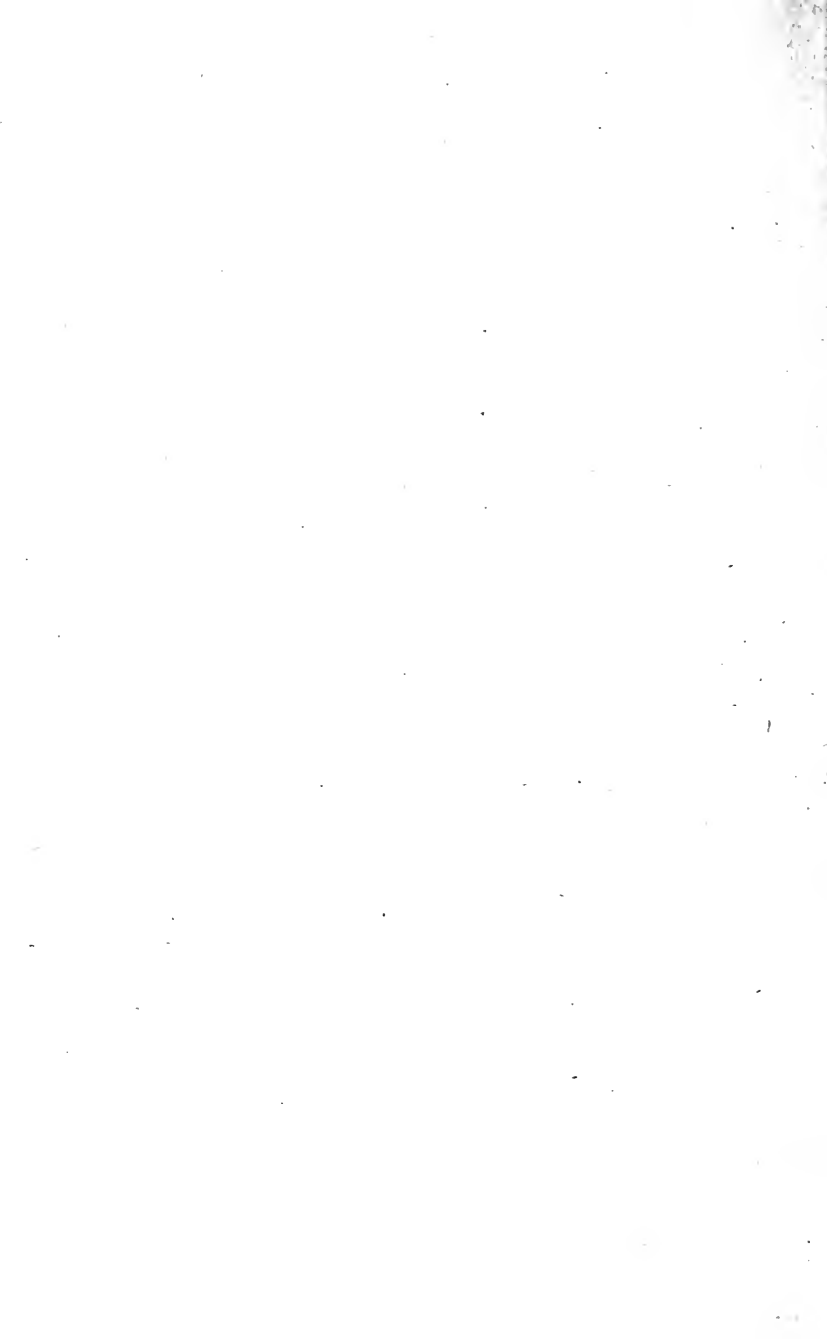
AUTHOR OF 'THE CROSS IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE'
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TO
MY FATHER
WHO LED ME INTO THE WAY
AND TO
DE WITT CLINTON TAYLOR
MY COUNSELLOR AT THE GATE
I INSCRIBE THESE MESSAGES
OF ITS EVANGEL



P R E F A C E

THESE selected addresses are based upon three affirmations. One is that the living God has been revealed in Jesus Christ. Another is that there is an eternal life to be lived in the midst of time, in the presence of God, and by the power of His Spirit. The third is that this eternal life is entered into through an experience in which conscience, desire, and will are enlightened, renewed, and surrendered to Christ. Of that experience and its issues these addresses are the exposition.

The missing note in the preaching of to-day is the note of persuasive urgency. The moral loveliness of Jesus, the obligations of the Christian life and service, the winsomeness of the Christian character, and the comfort of the more gracious and tender Gospel truths, are all presented with an accomplished artistry and a skilful embroidery. A sociological message is being delivered with such concentration and energy as to free it from any trace of indifference. Yet it sometimes suggests that Christianity is little more than a movement for the social betterment of the people. But there has been a neglect of the counsel to 'do the work of an evangelist.' That has been left to the special missionary, the Salvation Army, or the preacher at the street corner.

We too seldom see the man who stands, as Baxter said, at the church door to call men in. We are busy tending the flock. We are less engrossed in seeking and saving the lost. That is why the note of urgency is not heard in the preacher's voice. In these addresses, as in every address with their purpose, it is the note dominant.

The data and the proofs which are necessarily relied upon are the incidents of this experience. The Christian Scriptures, especially of the New Testament, have been cited as the first line of testimony. But the chief appeal has been made to the witness of to-day. That evidence, in word and life, is both the only final apologetic of the faith and the only illuminating exposition of what it means to be led into the narrow way and to enter in at the strait gate. There lies the peril of the evangelist. He is tempted to exaggerate, to dramatise, even to invent. Let me set it down, therefore, that there is no reference which is not entirely true, whether it has been made only in a brief sentence or recorded with more detail. Were it prudent and were it kind, places, dates, and names could be given. There are pages of every evangelist's journal which are too sacred for even the most reticent allusion.

GLASGOW, *September* 1916.

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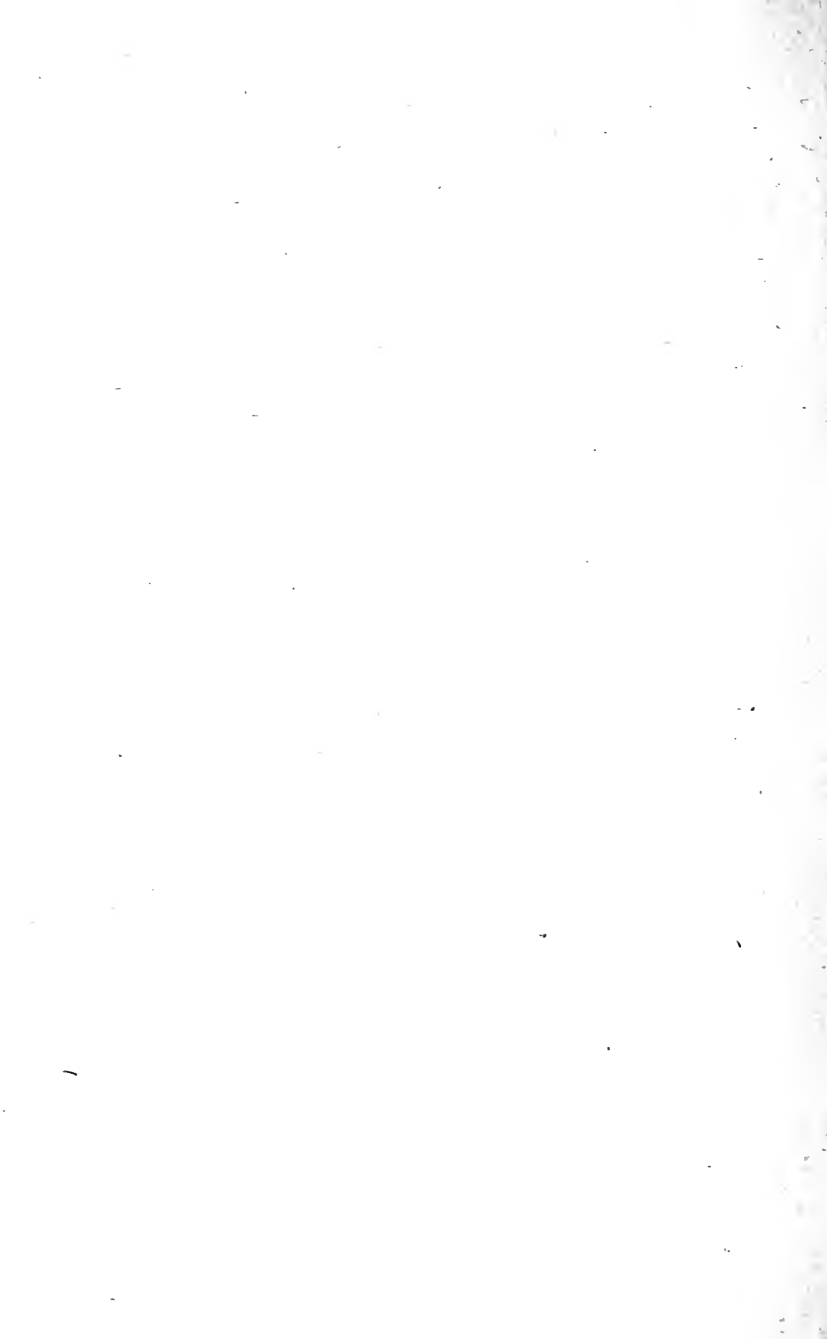
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I

THE GATES TO LIFE

‘Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.’—MATT. vii. 14.

THIS parable of the strait gate and the narrow way made a vivid appeal to the Eastern mind. Every city of the time stood, not on a great thoroughfare which passed through its midst, but at some secure and commanding distance from its course. The Eastern city was enclosed by massive walls, whose gateways were not mere openings through which one could pass at a step. They were passages with more than one turning in their course. A traveller to the city must leave the broad road, and betake himself to the narrower way which led to the city gate. The pilgrim who visits Jerusalem to-day must turn aside from the travelled highway through the land, along which the world’s traffic has passed from time immemorial, to climb the narrower approach, and enter into the city through its angled gate.

This figure of entering in through a gate sets forth the universal religious experience. All the faiths and worships of humanity bear a message of a way and a gate. Jesus employs the similitude again and again. It has caught and held the Christian imagination, and given urgency to its appeal, and enrichment to its songs. The truth it urges is that the life of faith in

2 THE EVANGEL OF THE STRAIT GATE

Christ cannot be entered upon without a high seriousness of mind, and a steadfastness of resolve, and that it comes to an hour when there must be a surrender of the will, a renunciation without reserve of what has been cherished and valued, issuing into an habitual and joyous self-denial. The making of this surrender is the entering in at the strait gate. The soul that passes in through the gate finds—life.

No figure is broad enough to express the whole breadth of Christian experience. The figure of the gate and the way does not touch all its issues. For one thing, the way begins before the gate is reached, and it continues unto the end. Bunyan, with his unerring insight and unfailing accuracy, sets his pilgrim in the way before he comes to the gate. For another thing, there is more than one gate in the way. As we pass onward we are face to face with gate after gate. We make surrender after surrender, renunciation after renunciation, exercise an ever nobler and sweeter self-denial, and enter into a fuller, richer life. For a third thing, this is not a shadowing and limiting progress. The way seems too narrow only to those whose feet have never entered it. The gate seems too strait only to those who do not know that God's commandments are exceeding broad. Christ's law is a gracious liberty. His service is a perfect freedom. His statutes become our songs in the house of our pilgrimage.

This experience of entering in at the gate presents itself in four chief phases. As we pass through them we enter into city after city of enlargement and peace and delight. Consider these four phases in turn.

I

Consider, to begin with, *the gate of conversion*.

There is an experience without which no man can be a Christian at all. There is an hour of awakening in which the spiritual world becomes a supreme reality. There is a decisive change which must pass upon the soul whereby the whole trend of life is determined. For that experience we have no better name than conversion—the turning of the soul to God. Great souls have described its anguish and its deliverances in some of the most moving records of human life. Men of lesser genius and more placid emotions have borne their witness to its times of faltering and its days of peace. Simple and unlettered souls have related their fear of its sternness and narrowness, and their unexpected calm when they set their feet in the way. Here is the youth whose career has stretched out before him and held his whole spirit in a tense desire. Here is the man who has scorned the religious temper and mocked at the call to self-denial. Here is that other who has lived to himself and cherished his secular dreams of a selfish ambition. Here is another who has lived in heedless and wanton outrage of truth and purity. Yet there came the hour when all of these awoke to the truth in Jesus. A deep sense of the wrong and shame of their past years fell upon them. A conviction of the spiritual poverty of life began to afflict them. They turned their feet into the narrow way. They came to the strait gate. There they made their surrender, and as they passed in to the fellowship of Christ, they found life.

4 THE EVANGEL OF THE STRAIT GATE

This acceptance and surrender does not always begin with a distinctively religious experience. It is not always an acceptance of the mercy of God in Christ, made in some never-to-be-forgotten moment, when the grace of God to sinful men has been brought in upon the heart. That experience may be passed through only in after years as the consummation of a solemn decision unaccompanied by religious emotion. It is sometimes a refusal to yield to a searching temptation; or a victory over a besetting sin; or the acceptance of a burden which will make the step heavy all life through. It is sometimes the chivalrous choice of a course of action which has despised the gain of things seen and temporal. The man who has relinquished a soft and easy life that he may stand in the ranks of those who make the supreme sacrifice has set his feet in the narrow way and entered in at the strait gate. Not until afterwards will it be made manifest that in that hour of costly decision he had really surrendered himself, without reserve, to Christ. But that hour will come.

Some years ago a student in the University of Glasgow, who had come in from a country home where a steadfast piety was observed, found himself in the narrow way. He had begun to slip into habits which would have been condemned by the serious eyes of those who loved him. He knew how anxious would have been their thoughts had they known of the company he kept. He felt his life condemned by the example of Christ. He turned his feet in a new endeavour into the narrow way. But the strait gate with its demand for surrender and renunciation and

self-denial daunted his spirit. One evening he went forth to walk the streets in a lonely unrest. As he turned the corner of one of the quieter thoroughfares the voice of a blind man sitting on the steps of a Savings Bank rang out on the air: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.' He stood still. He knew himself to be standing before the strait gate. Then he turned and hastened back to his lodging. There he knelt and humbled himself with broken confession of the pride that had so long ruled his will. He accepted Christ. He passed in through the gate, and he found—life.

II

Consider the second phase, *the gate of service*.

We are saved to serve, and we are not safe unless we serve. The man whose life, however he may occupy his hands, is not a service of Christ, has no right to bear His name. The man who spends his energies in the amassing of a selfish wealth, whose ambitions, even in things honourable, focus on his own advancement, whose mind is centred on his own profit or pleasure, is not walking in the way. This demand for service is not merely a call to what is known as Christian work, although no redeemed soul will fail to find his place of helpfulness among his fellow-believers. But God does not call every man to be an apostle or an evangelist. Many men have no talents for the conspicuous activities of Christian service. They have neither the gift of the sower in the time of spring, nor of the reaper in the days of autumn. God does not

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ask the man of five talents to serve as the man of ten. But He does ask that every man who is walking in the way shall accept his life as one of costly self-denying service. It may be some sacrifice of his wealth, or some discharge of his obligations in civic and political life, such as may rob him of ease and leisure and luxury. It may be some ministry to the sick or the poor, to the criminal or the castaway, which may continually strain his temper and vex his spirit. It may be some unselfish method of conducting his business, which will limit its profits in order to better the condition of his employés. It may be a loyalty of mind and hand to a master which disdains mere eye-service. It may be the bearing of some humble part in the prosecution of a religious enterprise whereby the coming of the kingdom of God is advanced.

But this service, whatever it may be, will present itself as a strait gate. It will demand the hours in which he might enlarge his knowledge and enrich his mind. It will call for intercourse which will continually offend his tastes and chafe his spirit. It may rob him of the opportunity of sharing in the art and the music of his time. Dale of Birmingham points out that many men declined the public life of that city because of its impoverishment to mind and taste. Henry Drummond came in from his contact with the vagrant sins of young men with drawn face and dejected spirit. A young man, whose name Scotland came to revere, entered the Christian ministry, refusing an alluring academic career, and declining a coveted position, that he might give

himself to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor. But many men refuse to make this surrender even although they have confessed their faith in Christ. They refuse the strait gate of service, and they fail to find—life.

One of our American novelists has set this truth in a clear light.¹ He tells the story of a young girl who was unaware of her descent from an ancestor of colour. Her father and mother had died without making the disclosure. Her fair skin and aquiline features gave no hint of her origin. The time came when she had to be told. She faced the question of her obligation to those whose blood she shared until it became a sleepless anguish. She went down to their meetings. She mingled with them in closer contact, to find that her training had given her a revulsion to their habits and ways. For months she stood before the strait gate. But at last she accepted the call of Christ, and made the great surrender and gave herself to the uplifting of the long-enslaved African people. Then she found—life. A new liberty was given to her thought. A new purpose set its mark upon her character. A new joy flooded her spirit and its sheen was on her face. The narrow way led her to the strait gate of service, and she entered in to the life of the city of God.

III

Consider the third phase—*the gate of holiness*.

If service is the inevitable occupation of the hours, holiness is the distinctive token of the spirit of the way-

¹ W. D. Howells, *An Imperative Duty*.

8 THE EVANGEL OF THE STRAIT GATE

farer with Christ. To be true and pure and just, to be humble and gentle and forgiving, to be loyal under all temptations of imagination and desire, to keep oneself unspotted from the world—these are the marks of the Christian soul. Yet how hard it is to attain to this sanctity! Old habits hold us in bondage long after we are ashamed of them. Petty indulgences sap our prayerful resolves. Modes of speech become second nature even when we realise their pettiness. If the impulses of youth die down, the bolder passions of middle age and the craftier appetites of older years maintain a new tyranny. We crave for the praise of men with a ridiculous vanity. We refuse to accept our lot in life, and discontent poisons our blood with its venom, and fills our lips with murmuring. ‘The good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do,’ is the confession of every sincere heart. Yet ever and again we find ourselves standing before the strait gate of holiness. We find that God’s spirit is taking of the things of Christ and showing them to us, and that He is rebuking us for our low level and our mean content. We hear the call to a fresh surrender of our will to Christ, and a reconsecration of our life to His obedience. We discern that the narrow way is an upward calling, and we stand before a strait gate through which we must pass. Then our whole spiritual future depends upon whether we will accept the call, or whether we shall refuse it, and so sink back to an ideal and an attainment which even the worldling scorns. That is the tragedy of many Christian lives. There, if anywhere, Christ’s words stand true, ‘Few there be that find it.’

The refusal of this strait gate receives its exposition in the spiritual declensions set out in the Scriptures. We see Lot refusing it when he pitched his tent towards Sodom. We mark the tragedy of the denial, when his wife looked back to the city whose life she would not renounce. We see Aaron falling from the spiritual ideal of worship when he made the golden calf, and King Saul discrowning himself, and refusing his fresh anointing, in his wilful disobedience. We see the men who went back from Christ because of His hard sayings, and we read of Demas, the deserter, who refused holiness through the love of this present world. Never does a man receive a heavenly vision, to which he is disobedient, never does he hear a still small voice that calls him to a nobler consecration, to which he refuses to respond, but he has declined to enter in at the strait gate, and he finds—death.

Think of the gracious experiences of the accepting of this gate. One man has gone to a Conference of devout believers, and, in the early morning hour, as he has seen the past rise up, blotted and flawed, he has passed in with a new dedication through the gate. Another has come under the influence of some saintly personality in whom the narrow way disclosed its grace, and he has made his fresh vow, and the gate was passed. Another has endured a time of tribulation, and in the days of his chastening has taken that forward step which made him a partaker of God's holiness. Consider a single simple instance. Let me recall a devout believer who worshipped in the Old Craigs Kirk in Stirling. He was a man whose austere life held young hearts with a solemn awe.

10 THE EVANGEL OF THE STRAIT GATE

One Fast Day, as in the old Scottish custom, the people were gathered to prepare themselves by due examination for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, he found himself standing before a strait gate. The preacher spoke on the words, 'And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God' (Ezekiel xv. 62-63). All the wondrous mercy of God toward him rose up in a fresh remembrance. His past attainment stood out, tainted and spotted. He was confounded and ashamed as he realised his need of forgiveness. He bowed his head in a new consecration. He came out to make confession in a humbler penitence. From that day the noble austerity of his life was chastened into a new moral loveliness. He had entered in at the strait gate, and he found—life.

IV

Consider the fourth phase—*the gate of death*.

This is the last gate, as Bunyan tells us in his sentences of glowing beauty, which every man must face in the end. The passing of this gate is not the mere act of dying with the fog in the throat and the sinking of the heart. It is the leaving behind us of the world of light and beauty, of love and service. It is the facing of that future state about which even Jesus has spoken with reserve. There are two ways and only two ways of facing the fact of death. One of these is to shrink

back from its experience, to rebel in spirit against its law, and to yield to its necessity with a sullen heart. The other is to accept it as part of the kindness of God, to regard death as God's good angel, and to surrender ourselves to His will and time. He who so enters this strait gate rises above that fear of death to which some men all their lifetime are subject to bondage. He makes the gate of death the time of his consummating surrender.

So Moses went up to his lonely dying hour to pass away with God's kiss on his lips. So David sang his swan song of thanksgiving and penitence and humble faith. So Simeon could chant his anthem, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.' So Stephen could look up into heaven and see it open as he fell asleep. So Paul was willing to unmoor his boat and pass out on the voyage to the other shore. And so, in our time, many of our bravest and dearest have faced this fact of death, and as they accepted it, when passed to serve in the ranks of war, they entered in through the gate, and they found—life.

'Few there be that find it.' Find what? The gate and the way? No. These do not need to be found. They cannot be escaped. They present themselves in every hour of a testing moral choice. What is found is—life. When Jesus said that the few find life, He was stating the truth which shadowed His own heart. How few joined His company! 'The number of the names together were about one hundred and twenty.' How many in all the ages have gone down the broad way, and followed the multitude to do evil! But Christ was not making any arith-

12 THE EVANGEL OF THE STRAIT GATE

metical and statistical estimate. He is endeavouring to arouse men's minds to the urgency of their peril. He refused to satisfy the curiosity of the question, 'Are there few that be saved?' He Himself said that they would come from all the ends of the earth to enter the kingdom. Here He is uttering a sigh that so many stand at the beginning of the way, and yet fail to enter in at the gate.

How shall we be moved to enter in at these gates of conversion, and service, and holiness, and death? The answer that makes all clear comes from Christ. Hear His appealing word—'I am the Way.' As we mark how He entered in we can follow in His steps. We stand with Him in the Temple in His unspotted childhood, and see Him entering the first gate when He asks, 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' We see Him entering the second gate when He comes up out of the waters of baptism to begin His ministry, and we hear the word, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' We see Him entering the third gate as He faces His temptations, and steps out on the lonely way to His cross. 'For their sakes I consecrate myself.' We see Him passing through the fourth gate when He accepts that death of physical agony and spiritual anguish He might have avoided, and we hear His triumph cry, when He enters the city, 'It is finished.' Lift up your eyes from the thought of renunciation. Too much has ever been made of it. Renunciation is not the keyword of the Christian life. That is the mistake of the ascetic Romanist and the austere and sombre Puritan. Lift your eyes to Him who is not only the

Way, but also the Gate. Accept His message of God's redemption. Surrender your wills to Him in an impassioned abandonment. You will find the way, though narrow, is broad enough for truth and love, and the gate, though strait, is wide enough for all that makes life sweet. 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

II

THE COMING OF THE WORD

'The word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.'—LUKE iii. 2.

WHEN Luke writes, 'Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar,' he is not merely marking a point of time. He is not setting down the names of these rulers and priests simply to fix the precise date of the ministry of John. He is recording the beginning of a new epoch in the kingdom of God, and he is setting out the stage and recalling the personages upon it. He is summoning up the powers and principalities with which the new movement must contend. His mind travels to Rome where Tiberius Cæsar reigns in imperial majesty. Pilate, Herod, Philip and Lysanias, each in his office, rise before him. He recalls Annas and Caiaphas in the sullen temper of their shrunken state in Jerusalem. How arrogant is their authority! How confident is their pride! Yet all this brave array is doomed. To a gaunt-figured, lean-visaged, meanly-clad man, the son of a Jewish priest, living his life of ascetic devotion in the wilderness, there has come the word of God. It has come to quicken the conscience of the people, to renew their faith and to redeem them from their bondage. It will rise up and confront all these

rulers and governors, and their tyranny shall wither away.

Now this is the crowning instance of a constant truth. As often as the word of God comes a new epoch begins. It comes into a world where temporal power and spiritual darkness hold a proud dominance. It is met by the scornful word, the hostile blow, the crucifying cross. But the word of God comes always with the one purpose. It comes to redeem, and to deliver men from the bondages of the spirit, the soul, and the body. As the word enters men's hearts, as it is translated into power and action, the dominion of evil is broken. Despotisms pass away. Tyrannies are cast down from their throne. The word of God grows and prevails. A new epoch in the kingdom of God has begun.

Look at this truth in the three large spheres of its action. First—*the coming of the word in the redeeming of the world*. Second—*the coming of the word in the redeeming of the age*. Third—*the coming of the word in the redeeming of the soul*.

I

FIRST: *In the redeeming of the world.*

The master-truth of the Christian Gospel is that God is redeeming humanity to Himself and His obedience. The history of that redemption is engrossed in the most solemn and most enduring of all literatures. The constant factor in that history has been the coming of a word of God which has been the vital force of every advance. The word of God comes to Abraham in Ur

of the Chaldees, and he leaves his home to be God's minister in the redemption of men from the faith and worship of gods that pass as the stars pale in the morning light. He begins a new epoch in the kingdom of God. It comes to Moses in the solitude of Horeb, and He comes forth to redeem Israel from their bondage of body and soul, and to write a new volume of God's ways with men. It comes to Samuel in the silence of the temple, and he is inspired to quicken Israel to new hope, to break the yoke of their oppressors, and to set God's people free. So the word of God comes to Amos, and to Hosea, and to Isaiah, as the shadows are growing long on God's wilful people, to call them to a redemption by returning and resting in God. It comes to Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and other prophets of the exile, when night has fallen, with the same message and purpose of redemption. In this long succession John the Baptist is the last and noblest prophet, and his eyes beheld the breaking of the dawn in the dayspring from on high. Then came the consummating Word of God—in Christ Incarnate. 'The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' As Jesus went up and down the land in the shining glory of His holiness, and as His voice rose and fell on the soft air of Galilee, and its pleading was heard in the synagogue and in the upper room, men knew that the Word of God had come. All history testifies that the completing epoch in the history of redemption had begun.

Now this succession of prophet and redeemer, each

with his word of God, forms our spiritual heritage. Their messages are engrossed in the book which we call the Bible. To all time the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments are the word of God. We need not deny that God has spoken to all His children. We should not refuse to believe that other races have had their seers who have found parts of His ways. It is true beyond all doubt that men who have felt after God have found Him in the measure of their power of vision. Nor need we declare that these Scriptures are the last word to be spoken by God. We cannot, we dare not, limit the Holy One of Israel. It may be that God who has spoken in time past to the fathers by the prophets, and has spoken in these last days unto us by His Son, may yet speak unto men by a New Testament of the Holy Ghost. But above all other words men have yet heard the Bible is the Word of God. These Scriptures have an authority to which the soul instinctively submits, and a power which neither heart nor conscience can deny. They verify themselves in the experience of the soul, and God's Spirit still bears witness with the word. They have an abiding and imperishable life, and in them, and through them, the word of God still comes to men.

The supreme reason of this permanent spiritual power of the Bible can be seen in the method of its working. The Bible has a unique value because it is *the record of the revelation of God*, stage by stage, as men were able to bear it, until they saw Him as the Father in heaven. It records God's ways of dealing with His people. It tells the story of His redeeming

grace, and it enshrines the climax of that story in its record of the manger cradle, the radiant holiness, the wondrous ministry, the atoning cross, and the empty tomb. The record preserves for us the infinitely tender and appealing words of Christ. All of these things give it a unique pre-eminence. But its power and authority rest more securely on the truth which experience verifies, that the Bible is *the organ through which God still speaks to men*. Its sentences are not mere echoes of a voice that is still. Its words of psalm and prophecy, of recording gospel and pleading epistle are ever being inbreathed by the breath of God's Spirit. The words on the page, or on the speaker's lips, become the word of God only through the Spirit. Then they become vocal again, and they resound in the consciences, and quicken the hearts of heedless men.

For this reason the word which comes is not always some new, strange, hitherto unuttered message. There is no new commandment except that which was spoken at the beginning. There is no other gospel than that which we have received. There is no other faith than that which was once delivered to the saints. The word of God may be unheeded, by many, but it never dies. The word that comes is often some eternal truth reaffirmed and reset in the tone and accent of the time. The word of God that came to John in the wilderness was that of his master, Isaiah, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' Even the word on Christ's lips was frequently some old message, picked out from the sentences of some law-giver or prophet with

His awakening question, 'Have ye never read?' So, to all time, the preacher can take up the old messages and, as they are upon his lips, the word of God comes. They are made quick and living by the power of the Spirit, and light and love and peace are shed abroad within the human heart.

How then is this world to be redeemed? It shall be redeemed, as in days past, by the coming of the word. This is the light to men's feet and the lamp to their path. This is the incorruptible seed of the kingdom. This is the quick and powerful sword of the Spirit. As it is spoken, as it falls upon men's ears, whether they live in the midst of the old and corrupt civilisations, or whether they are to be found still under the darkness and ignorance of heathenism, whether they have become callous to every high ideal, or whether they are animated by a spirit of rebellion against purity and truth, it quickens men's spiritual vision, it rouses them to a new hope in God, and it redeems them from their captivities. It casts down the powers and principalities of evil from their throne. It breaks all oppression. It chastises all tyranny. Every Tiberius and Pilate, every Annas and Caiaphas, is brought low. The world has been redeemed only by the coming of the word.

II

SECOND: *In the redeeming of the age.*

The wide sweep of this truth is seen in the redeeming of the world. Its certainty is as evident in the redeeming of the age. Every generation has its own

peculiar perils and problems. Many of the questions which vexed our fathers have answered themselves. Perplexities unknown in the last century trouble our hearts. Every age needs a redemption of its own, and that redemption is wrought out through the coming of the word.

This truth can be illustrated from every page of Christian history. Recall the Apostle Paul contending with that circumcision heresy which would have strangled the infant Church in its cradle; Athanasius confronting that Unitarian conception of Jesus which bleaches Him of His Godhead; Augustine dealing with the spawn of licentious doctrines which attempted to corrupt Christian morality; Luther facing that subtle and deadly wrong of a Romanism which forbids men to go right into the presence of God and to receive the forgiveness of their sins from Him alone; Knox establishing the religious liberty and social wellbeing of Scotland; Wesley rescuing the masses of England from their irreligious stupor; Carey arousing Christian men from their apathy towards the heathen; Chalmers quickening the faith of his countrymen that they might cast off the chill and formality of legalism. With what weapon did these servants of Christ redeem their age? With the word of God. By some word which had burned its truth into their own hearts they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, and redeemed their age.

There is nothing our age needs more than a fresh redemption. All men are shadowed and troubled by two outstanding evils. The first of these is a new outbreak of war. Upon a world somewhat unex-

pectant, and in some ways wholly unprepared, there has burst a tornado of hate and aggrandisement, of pitiless cruelty and proud aggression, which has smitten the nations with destruction and death. As men shudder at its cost in precious life, and grieve over the loss of some of the noblest achievements of the past, as hot tears of sorrow course down women's cheeks, as thinkers are stricken with amazement and wonder at the entail of the passions of hate and vengeance which have been aroused, there comes the question, How shall this age be redeemed from its bondage to evil? That redemption shall not be achieved by force. Neither by the onset of big battalions, nor by the murderous hail of shells, nor by a diplomacy whose treaties are torn in pieces without a qualm, can this age be redeemed. It shall be redeemed only by the coming of the word which quickens men's consciences, convicts them of their sin, and leads them all to kneel round Him who is the Prince of Peace.

The second outstanding evil is our social unrest. The hostility of class to class, the battle-cries flung out from rich to poor and poor to rich, the clamorous demands for larger wages, ampler leisure, softer lives, the fierce disdain of philanthropy, and the passionate hunger for an entirely secular good, trouble and torment our minds. What a seething pot our social life has become! How quickly discontent breaks out into lawless violence! What is our need? No one is called upon to depreciate the efforts of patient thinkers and self-denying workers. No one need undervalue the societies and agencies

which are attempting to better the social conditions of life. No one need become impatient of any theory of social order which can state itself. But not through these can our social unrest be healed. This flood of hungry earthly desires is not to be controlled by a few locks and sluices. We require something more vital, more transforming, more spiritual. We require not simply control and amelioration, but regeneration. As Herbert Spencer says, 'By no process of alchemy can you get golden conduct out of leaden instincts.' The fair fabric of a noble social order cannot be built by ignoble men. Mrs. Browning sets the truth :—

'Life develops only from within.'

We need to realise again that man does not live by bread alone. We require a fresh vision of the unseen and eternal, a deeper sense of brotherhood, a keener sympathy between employer and employé, a nobler passion for social justice, so that the coarse lusts of greed and envy, and the love of ease and selfish pleasure shall be purged out of all our souls. That is the redemption required by our age, and it can be attained only by the coming of the word. When some word of God about Himself and His righteousness, about the human soul and its true life, about the meaning of the world both to God and man, and about Christ and His love and cross, becomes power within the heart, then the old oppressions shall pass away, the age-long tyrannies be cast down, and a new era of justice and truth shall be ushered in. Then—not till then !

III

THIRD : *In the redeeming of the soul.*

Here the truth narrows down to a personal issue. Both the redeeming of the world and the redeeming of the age are dependent on the redeeming of the soul. We are redeemed one by one. The life in Christ is always a thing of 'Thou and me.' Christ's message, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,' is always spoken to a single soul. The word must first be a seed in the heart of the individual man before it can bring forth the white flower of a blameless life and the red passion fruit of service and sacrifice. The word must first be a fire in the bones before it can become power on the lips and righteousness in the life. So the word came to John. It was heard in his protest against the wrongs of the age and his pleading for repentance, but the word came to him when he was a child, in his father's home. It came again as he fled into the wilderness in the anguish of his spirit. Its first redemption was that of his own soul.

There is an hour when the word of God falls upon the ear like the pealing of a bell in the midnight silence. There are moments in which the soul knows that God has spoken. The word comes to each of us in a different way. To a little child it comes in the knowledge of a pure personality in whom the word is once more made flesh. To an unstained youth, wistful for God's blessing, it is heard in the appeal of a father's prayers. To a young man, whose steps have begun to wander, it comes in some haunting sentence of rebuke. To a man, whose past life has

robbed him of peace, it comes as a message of that love that will not let him go. To another, who has been keeping God out of his life and has been desecrating his soul by earthly passions, it comes with the cry, 'Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead.' As the word is responded to, the powers of evil within are cast down, the dominion of evil habit and self-indulgent worldliness is broken, and the soul is redeemed and set free to serve the living God.

'Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.' There are some who are quick to catch the accents of the Holy Ghost. Who are these? 'The word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias.' Who was Zacharias? A priest of God, walking in the commandments and ordinances of the law, blameless. There is no legacy you can leave your children so enriching as the testimony of a life spent in the service of God, and the memory of a spirit open to God's appeal. The word came to John 'in the wilderness,'—in the solitude and the silence where every other voice was still. God's word still comes in the wilderness. In the quiet of the Sabbath day, in the stillness of some hour of meditation, in the loneliness of some bereavement or disappointment or failure, in that humbling solitariness after a fall, the word will come and the soul is facing redemption. The first office of the word is to lead a man into the narrow way and bring him face to face with the strait gate. 'Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.'

III

THE MESSAGE OF THE NAME

‘Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.’—*MATT. i. 21.*

WHEN a Hebrew father and mother chose a name for their child they enshrined in the word a momentous experience, or a gracious providence, a pledge of loyalty, or an impassioned desire. Rachel when she lay a-dying called her child Benoni—the son of my sorrow. Moses, in Horeb, unpacked the longing of his exiled heart when he called his firstborn Gershom—a stranger here. David poured both his penitence and his meek gratitude into the name Solomon—at peace. So, when Mary’s Babe lay in her bosom she named Him Jesus, as He was so named of the angel. The name was the index and prophecy of what He was to be to men. ‘Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.’

The significance of this name is often ignored. There are many who hail Jesus as the teacher. He is the prophet whose message is one of eternal truth, the Master whose words of wisdom and pathos are with power, the poet whose music has caught the ear of humanity. In the long roll of the world’s great teachers His name is given the supreme place. There are others who revere His character. His

faultless spiritual beauty evokes their adoration. They assent to the apostolic declaration, 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men.' Others again acclaim Him as the leader of an ennobled and enfranchised humanity. He is the reformer who has come to deliver men from all oppression and tyranny, to redress all social wrongs, and to make this world an Eden. The name of the Carpenter of Nazareth, the man who had not where to lay His head, with His compassion for the poor and His protest against the rich of His own day, is the tower of their strength. Yes. He is the teacher who spake as never man spake. He is the moral ideal whose stainless holiness grows more radiantly beautiful as men's spiritual vision grows more keen. He is the leader who has set up the kingdom of God among men. But he has a nobler ministry, a diviner service, a more costly sacrifice. His one comprehending purpose is to be the saviour of men from sin.

How does Jesus save His people from their sins? A man's sins—every single transgression, and the whole course and current of evil both in heart and life—present themselves to the conscience in three aspects. First: *sin is a fact, with the issues and consequences of a fact.* We leave the years of our life behind us, but the deeds done in the body are as real as and more enduring than the everlasting hills. Second: *sin is a moral and spiritual condition.* The evidence for that truth is with us in every moment of our lives. Third: *sin is a habit, under whose tyranny we are all held.* Jesus has come to deal with the fact, the condition, and the habit of sin.

I

FIRST : *Sin as a fact.*

Every man knows the reality of the fact of sin. Every man has played the fool, thoughtlessly or wilfully or wantonly. Every man has trespassed beyond the boundary walls of modesty and courtesy and charity. Every man has left the highway of truth and purity and honour to wander in forbidden fields. Every man has been traitor to his covenant and disloyal to his vow. Every man has missed the mark, and failed to rise to his high calling and to achieve his destiny. Whether our iniquities or transgressions are written in any book of the eternal counsel or not, they are written in the indelible record of our own past. A man cannot leave his past behind. When a sin is done, it is not done with. Every man comes to some hour when, with more or less emotion, he cries ' My sin is ever before me.' The deeds done in the body are facts as eternal as the soul out of whose dark mutiny they arose.

Now that is the truth we are all too willing to forget. We are sometimes counselled to forget our wrongdoing, as the true secret of leaving it behind. There is a time to forget our sins, but that is only when they have been atoned for, amended as far as that is possible, and have been forgiven. The truth is that our sins will not be left behind. Ever and again the past evil is presented to us, and conscience from its throne utters its condemnation. Who does not know the hour when a man's sin seems to rise from its grave and point its accusing finger at him ?

The rash deed of a man's wayward youth looks at him out of his children's eyes, and records itself in the motions of their blood. The petty malice and the secret disloyalty of a woman's frail hour stare at her from the pages of the novel over which she is idling her time. A familiar word upon the ear will call up a deed which refuses to be forgotten.

Look at this truth in some of the marked instances in Scripture. Think of Joseph's brethren in the hour when, unrecognised by them, he was asking his eager questions and lavishing his strange kindnesses, as they endure an almost unsupportable anguish for that sin which they thought remained hidden to men. Think of David, seeing in the disorder of his own household, and in Absalom's daring and wanton outbreak, the issues of that fall in which he had been false both to truth and honour. Think of Ahab, walking in the cool of the day in Naboth's garden, revolving his pleasant plans for the enhancement of its beauty, when suddenly Elijah meets him face to face, and his sin rises like an apparition. Who does not understand these proofs of the fact? We think with a pathetic fellow-feeling of that man who looked up and saw on the corner of a building in a growing town in one of our oversea dominions the name of a home in his own native city. In the instant the memory of a deed of self-indulgence committed within that home—a deed he thought dead and forgotten—stood out in accusing reality, and brought a cry of pain to his lips. If Jesus is to save us from our sins He must deal with the fact.

II

SECOND: *Sin as a moral and spiritual condition.*

The rebel thought and evil deed are not merely facts of history. They are symptoms of a moral and spiritual condition. That condition of soul was expressed in the Old Testament in a figure whose power to realise its loathsomeness and deadliness has never waned. That figure is leprosy. Leprosy is a disease in the blood whose horror fills us with an uncontrollable shrinking and a sickening fear. The leper is not merely the man of putrid scab and rotting members. The leper sometimes stands out to the unskilled eye as sound of flesh and fair of skin. But a single speck on the arm, a few scales on the body, a white spot on the brow, and the inward and almost incurable disease is betrayed. Then the leper is isolated from home, and love, and the sweet intercourse of life. So sin, whether open and flagrant, or a mere motion within, is the leprosy of the soul.

The New Testament writers view this moral and spiritual condition with eyes as full of condemnation as the fact of guilt. The terms they use, by their variety, express their detestation and dread. Paul calls it the carnal mind which is enmity against God, as though every man lodged a defiant rebel in the secret of his soul. James lays it bare as a fire within the moral nature which has been kindled of hell, whose flames dart out in bitter burning on the tongue. Peter thinks of it as an inner world of ravening appetites. John sees it as a lawlessness—a state of

anarchy—in which love itself has been desecrated. The writer to the Hebrews regards it as a deeply rooted weed, hidden in the soil, which rises up in its season to pollute and poison the garden of the Lord. But Jesus always uses the perfect and most fitting image. He speaks of this condition as a spring, or well, out of which there flow the foul issues of men's deeds. 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man.' Who has not known the defilement of this stream? Who has not flushed with a vexing shame as he has marked the constant outflow from within? Who is not amazed and saddened at the welling up of evil even in the hour of prayer? In a book of somewhat turgid imagination this truth has been set in a memorable way. The writer conceives two men meeting in hell. In that under world, he affirms, each man can look through his neighbour, and mark the motions of his mind and see what is lurking in his heart. A smile of greeting is on the face. Courteous words are upon the lips. But each man sees the spawn of bitter hate and venomous passion working within the other's soul. At times the deeds done in the earthly life were regarded with remorse and even with pity, but this moral condition roused a disgust which passed away only when every man sank into a callous despair.¹

But the height of this offending is not realised until we understand what this condition is in the light of God's countenance. The real root and focus of our

¹ *Letters from Hell*, p. 54.

sinful state is its alienation from God, and its antagonism to His holiness. Has any of you here a wayward son or daughter? You know how you are stung to the quick when you think of their misdeeds. You know the keener thrust of pain when you remember that the tale of their wanton life is passing from lip to lip. But your quenchless anguish, which visits you in the sleepless watches of the night, is caused by your knowledge of their alienation and antagonism. In the letters of George Meredith there is one whose poignancy of feeling exceeds that of every other. It is a letter to his son after years of alienation. The young man had fallen ill, and was reported to be in need, and his father wrote him: 'We have been long estranged, my dear boy, and I awake from it with a shock that wrings me. The elder should be the first to break through such divisions, for he knows best the tenure and the nature of life. But our last parting gave me the idea that you did not care for me, and I am so driven by work that I do not contend well with misapprehension of me and disregard.'¹ Will you mark that line 'our last parting gave me the idea that you did not care for me'? Meredith sets his pain in the gentle and reticent words of a master of style. But he reveals this truth that a son's wrongdoing, and the shame of his life, do not smite a father's heart with so keen a blow as alienation and antagonism. It is that alienation and that antagonism which is the very essence of our sinful condition, and that smites the heart of God. If Jesus is to save us from

¹ *Letters of George Meredith*, i. p. 319.

our sins, He must deal with this moral and spiritual condition of the soul.

III

THIRD: *Sin as a habit.*

All who spend their strength in winning men and women for Christ have times of disappointment. They see a man confessing his faith with a high rapture, or they mark a woman's new-born devotion, and they rejoice in the clear note of steadfast assurance in their speech. Yet they are amazed to find that these ardent souls slip and fall, and they wonder if the work of grace has been real. They forget that sin is a habit with its power. A man who has become a victim to strong drink has taken his vow of abstinence with tears of penitence. He has set his name to his pledge with deep emotion, and has begun to walk in a new strength and liberty. For a month all went well. Then he was seized in the grip of his old habit. Few understood the battle he had fought. Few knew the physical torture as the craving of his thirst assailed him. He fell. But he was not insincere, he was the victim of the tyranny of a habit. We all know this truth in our own experience. Have we not all made our vows? Have we not been taken captive by Christ's holiness, and assured ourselves that we would turn away our eyes from vanity? Have we not been so conscious of Christ's love, and so learned the meaning of His cross, that we have whispered to ourselves that never again would sin have dominion over us. Yet we have fallen and awakened to shame at our defeat, and have

begun to wonder whether Christ can really save us from the power of the habit of sin.

This is the explanation of our defeat and failure, and the strange inconsistencies of our lives. This is a truth we continually forget in our estimates and judgments. We all cherish hard thoughts of one another. We all make silent protest against each other's offences, and even mutter words of reprisal, of which we would be ashamed were they to be repeated to our fellow-men. We all fail in charity, and play the Pharisee in our merciless condemnation of those who have been caught in some open sin. For we forget the tyranny of habit. We do not realise how long the automatic action of our customs, tastes, moods, impulses, and even the usages of our physical frame, retains its power. 'I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.' That is the concise statement of the power of the habit of sin. One reason why Jesus was so gentle in His judgments and so patient in His dealing, both with passion-driven sinners and with His own erring disciples, was His knowledge of the power of the habit of sin. Yet if we charge our hearts to be forbearing and forgiving to our fellow-men, we must be resolute with ourselves. An evil habit must be exorcised. Its power can be broken. For Christ came not only to take away our guilt, and to renew our wills, but to break the power of cancelled sin.

IV

How then does Jesus save us from our sins? How does He save us from the fact? With the

fact itself nothing can be done. It is past, like the snows of yester year, but, alas, not gone like them. As we all know a deed once done can never be undone. But the real poignancy of the fact of sin is its guilt. Nothing else in reality can be dealt with, or needs to be dealt with. We cannot enter into any one's fellowship, or receive and reciprocate their love, unless the past and its evil, which has sundered us, be forgiven. Reconciliation is the first need of every sinful man. We need to be assured that God's anger is turned away. We need to be persuaded that He is now at peace with men. When we are able to believe in His forgiveness, because we know that the sins of the world have been borne by Christ on His cross, and that pardon now waits for every penitent, we can enter into the peace of a lowly self-surrender, and cast ourselves on God's mercy in the words with which Thomas Hood, in his tender charity, describes the mind of one who fled from the harsh judgment of men to the infinite mercy of God :—

‘Owning her weakness,
Her evil behaviour,
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Saviour.’

How does Christ save us from the moral and spiritual condition of sin? He has come to deal not only with our past, but to heal us in the core of our being, by the power of His regenerating Spirit. He has come to create a new heart within us, to call us to repentance, and to quicken us to that faith which brings us into a new attitude toward God. He has

come to renew our will, so that however hard may be our battle we are intent on keeping the commandments of God. The man who knows himself forgiven, and lays open his whole moral nature to the cleansing and renewing grace of God, will find his soul redeemed.

How does Christ deal with the habit of sin? What moral question has more tormented universal humanity? Not by Oriental contemplation in its selfish idleness, not by monastic seclusion with its morbid passions, not by the starving of the natural affections of our body which is God's, not by ascetic methods of prayer and obedience—not by any of these works of righteousness. Only by a complete surrender to Jesus, and an unbroken fellowship with Him, will the power of sin be quelled. In one of Shakespeare's sonnets he describes a mood in which sad remembrance, and a sense of loss and a lack of things desired, move him to tears. But he catches up his heart with the words:—

‘But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored, and sorrows end.’

SONNET XXX.

So we can take not only our sad remembrances, our sorrows, and our lack of things desired, but our weakness and our fear, and every need of our soul to Christ, and, keeping ourselves in the love of God, come forth from every battle with the habit of sin more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

IV

THE LOST SENSE OF SIN

‘For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.’—ROM. viii. 3 (R.V.).

ONE of the marked features of the religious life of our time is a lost sense of sin. Never was Christ held in higher regard. He is the dominant personality of the civilised world. To His character all men accord an adoring reverence. His word is the final authority in the spiritual life. Yet that sense of sin which so afflicted and tormented His spirit, that realisation of sin as a heinous wrong to God, a revolt against His will, and the burden of His heart, has greatly passed away. How seldom do men write in their diary ‘My sin is ever before me’! How seldom do men bow down in the house of prayer, not able to lift up their eyes unto heaven, and cry, ‘God be merciful to me, a sinner’! How few seek another’s presence at midnight with the urgent demand ‘What must I do to be saved?’! The broken confessions of the Penitential Psalms, the agonising supplications of Scripture, the experiences of those religious classics which our fathers read with tears, and even the message of the Gospel itself, have all become unmeaning because of this lost sense of sin.

Here, in this text the source and secret of the sense of sin is disclosed. They are set down by a master both in its experience and significance. That source and secret, Paul says, is God's condemnation. That condemnation is threefold. It is, first, *the condemnation by a law*. 'I had not known sin but by the law.' It is, second, *condemnation by a life*. 'What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,' God has done by 'sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.' It is, third, *condemnation by a cross*. 'God sending his own Son, as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.' We shall take these three in order.

I

FIRST: *Condemnation by a law.*

We all realise the wide range and varied purposes of a law. A law condenses a moral truth into an imperative obligation. It is a barrier against wrongdoing, and a guide into the path of obedience. It is a source of inspiration and a constant call to a more loyal fulfilment of the tasks of life. A law is also a means of education. It imprints moral truths upon the mind, and it brings them in upon the conscience. But here we cross the threshold into the most searching office of a law. That is its power of moral condemnation and spiritual conviction. 'I had not known sin but by the law.' Whenever a law stands out in clear statement, so that some moral truth is seen, then some contradicting wrong also stands out in its unmasked foulness. A man requires only to

see a moral standard engrossed in some just law, whether it be stated in a clause on a statute book, or heard in some appeal on a speaker's lips, or attested by some event marked by the conscience, to find his life condemned and the sense of sin tormenting him.

Mark the evidence of this in simple instances. Look at it in regard to the games which absorb so much of the time and interest of our lives to-day. Let a player in any game be made aware that some practice of his is not quite straight, and that he has taken some clever advantage of his opponent. No one may accuse him. No one may have detected his wrongdoing. Other men may continue to adopt his tricky method. But he has seen a higher law of honour. He has become assured, to use popular language, that he has not been 'playing the game.' At once condemnation is pronounced, and he has a sense of sin. Take another case. A young artist with a craving for popularity and its rewards paints a series of cheap and flashy pictures which appeal to the tawdry sentiment and mean standards of the crowd. Verily, he has his reward. But as he gives a more patient study to his art, and a humbler discipleship to the great masters, he sees a higher law both of the purpose and the method of his art. In the moment he is ashamed of the meretricious work of his callow days. He is condemned and bears a sense of sin. Look at it in our daily business life. Here is a man who has made his living in a trade which wrings its profits out of the degradation of the people. His business and its customs are followed by multitudes. There are keen brains who offer a strong and

subtle defence. But he comes to the hour when a higher law of responsibility, and a nobler conception of what a man's hand should find to do, dawn upon him. In the stillness of an anguished mind he finds himself condemned by this higher law, and he bows his head in a new sense of sin.

This is the condemnation which Paul has disclosed in his own experience. Paul is the rich young ruler of the years after Christ. He would have stood in his young Pharisaic days and declared, 'All these things have I kept from my youth up.' But the moral law was suddenly deepened. It was given an inward and spiritual reach and grasp. Its holiness searched into the depths of Paul's spirit, and he shrank and shuddered before it like one whose secret scab had been suddenly exposed. He tells us he had almost run the gauntlet of God's moral law. But he came to its tenth and last commandment, the most inward and spiritual and searching of all. That commandment said, 'Thou shalt not covet.' It flashed its light into the inner chambers of his heart, and the young Pharisee's pride and ambition, his partisan zeal and pitiless hate, and his complacent content with himself were discovered. Then he passed into a new sense of sin. 'I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' He was condemned by the law.

How do we stand toward this condemnation? There may be some who think that they can sit unmoved because they are untouched by any commandment. There may be others who hold their heads high, because they are willing to declare that

they have not walked in any way of evil, and have not played the fool with the licentious. Or there may be others who tell themselves in the unthinking words of a popular writer that 'they should not worry about their sins.' But when a man finds his thoughts and ambitions and habits set out not by some coarse-fingered statute, but set in the light of that law which is only God's countenance in its infinite holiness, these complacences wither. Look into your life here and now. Marshal before your own conscience your cherished desires, your secret imaginations, your unwhispered ambitions. Summon up your envy and jealousy, your offences against truth and honour and kindness and love. Recall what you did yesterday, or even your deed of the night gone by. As these stand out in the light of that law which demands the loyalty of the heart to holiness, you will cry in a humble penitence, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness : according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.'

II

SECOND : *Condemnation by a life.*

The law, as Paul tells us, does not always produce conviction. It is, he says, 'weak through the flesh.' That is to say, our evil nature with its bias to sin, our callous hearts dead in their own trespasses, our corrupt consciences defiled by past disobedience, and our love for darkness rather than light, blunt the condemnation of the law. There are hardened hearts which

no piteous sight can move to compassion. There are coarse minds which no tender emotion ever refines. There are mean men whom no generous appeal can touch. So, in this business of the soul, there are men and women in whom 'the power of the flesh'—of their sinful nature—is so potent, that the law of God is foiled. For, will you mark that all those who have been condemned by the law were the very flower of humanity? They were the men and women of whom it has been said that they had a genius for religion. From their childhood they were responsive to every noble appeal, sensitive towards things pure, tender to the very thought of God. It is for them that Faber speaks :—

‘O God! who wert my childhood’s love,
My boyhood’s pure delight,
A presence felt the livelong day,
A welcome fear at night.’

It has been the great souls of humanity, Buddha and Socrates and Plato, and Peter and John and Paul, and Augustine and Bernard and Luther, with Bunyan and Wesley and Brainerd and Chalmers and McCheyne, and all that great succession who hungered and thirsted after righteousness—it has been these who were condemned by the law. ‘But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,’ when the law was weak through the flesh, has sent His Son ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh,’ that men who have defied the condemnation of the law might be held by the condemnation of the life.

We are on simple ground when we speak of con-

demnation by a life. Every one of us has known it. We never read the record of any self-controlled and self-reverencing life without feeling the prick of shame. We never come into close touch with a life of unfaltering courage, meek endurance of wrong, and patient sacrifice, without being reprovèd. There is no condemnation so swift as the silent condemnation of sanctity. Recall those men who marked the moral strength of Ion Keith Falconer as he witnessed for Christ in Cambridge, who were so smitten with keen rebuke for their own idle and trivial lives, that they scarcely dared to meet him in the streets. Realise the condemnation of that student who besought his unexpected visitor to be gone, as he marked how the pure brow flushed with shame when the eyes fell upon the obscene volume that lay open on the table. Think of that woman of shame shambling along Piccadilly at midnight, as she was greeted with a word of entreaty and of sympathy by the Christian Sister whose mission it was to seek such poor, lost, despairing souls. Hear her protest as sanctity sought to win her to the place of shelter and peace. Mark her question as she looked up in a bewildered wonder—‘Are you an angel?’ But listen to the passionate outburst of weeping as the chaste arms of the Sister gathered the wilful and erring woman to her bosom. No one had ever so condemned her sin. But we need not go to such distinctive cases. You have never known any one who walked in a stainless purity, from the mother who bore you to the man who has been your steadfast strength, whose motives were the nobler and whose aims were the more unselfish as life

went on, you never knew any one whose impoverishing sacrifices made other lives sweet, without finding the baseness of your desires and the pettiness of your spirit rebuked. You were condemned by a life in the flesh.

But there is only one life which passes the final condemnation on ours. That is the life of God's own Son. Every other life fails in some feature or in some grace. Every man must take his place on his knees with his fellow, and cry with the penitent, 'I have sinned.' But this life of Jesus Christ in the flesh, with its unspotted holiness, its meekness and gentleness and patience, its radiant peace in the midst of scorn and its perfect trust in God in the darkest hour, condemns us all.

Bring up our lives into the awful light of Christ's sinlessness. Writers on sin declare that all our sins are those either of sensuality, or pride, or selfishness. Take up your sins of sensuality—your wanton deeds, your coarse allusions, and *risqué* jests, the current of your vagrant thoughts, your craving for sights that no pure eye should see, your trifling with the glamour of passion, and set them against the story of Christ's unsullied purity, His absorbed devotion to all things holy, and His pain at the very shadow of temptation—and mark how you are condemned. Take up your pride—your contempt of others, your scorn of the weak and the poor, your disdain of the unaccomplished, your petty self-esteem about your personal appearance, your social position, or your gifts, your deep conceit in anything you have achieved—and set these iniquities in the light of that life of Him

who emptied Himself of His glory, and bound Himself with the towel of a lowly service, and came to minister to men, and again you will feel your condemnation. Take up your selfishness—your love for pre-eminence, your desire to sit in the chief seats at life's feasts, your yielding to self-indulgence, your refusal to bear the burdens of others, the stinting of your gifts to God with the lavish spending on yourself—and let the light of the life of Him who surrendered a throne in heaven and refused a throne on earth shine upon yours, and again you will be condemned. You will understand the moral rebuke felt by one brave, honest soul who saw Christ in His spiritual beauty, and cried, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'

III

THIRD: *Conviction by a cross.*

There are some who are not condemned by the law. There are others who are not condemned by the life. It is a marvel that with the light of this life shining so clearly to-day we are all not abased and tormented in spirit. We may well be amazed at our own callous indifference. 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us,' when we baffled His condemnation by the life, sought that condemnation by the cross. He made His Son 'an offering for sin.'

This power of the condemning cross has been displayed in the case of the first sinner who was bowed down under it. It is told us in the story of the penitent thief. He was a man who knew the law.

He had been trained in it from his childhood. Its commandments had been often upon his lips. He could cry, as God's statutes rose in his memory, 'We receive the due reward of our deeds.' But he had gone down the course of his evil life without being condemned by the law. He was a man who knew the life of Christ. As Jesus went up and down through the land, as He taught in the synagogues and by the lake, and in the temple courts, and as He dealt so tenderly with the outcast and the sinner, the story of that life of holiness reached this rebel's ear. He could bear his testimony, 'This man hath done nothing amiss.' Yet he had continued in his career of crime, without being condemned by the law. But now, as he looked on Jesus through those three hours of His dying, as he marked His meekness and gentleness and considerateness, as he heard Him pray, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,' he saw, with a new insight, into the secret of that unresisting sacrifice, and he leaned out toward Jesus, making the first confession, and becoming the first witness to the power of the cross.

This experience should not be strange to us. We find it potent in our common lives. No man has ever realised that some other has suffered for him, without being brought at least to the threshold of repentance. No man has ever had the truth brought in upon his conscience that his sin is being borne in the weakness and pain and anguish of another, or that his wrongdoing has smitten some other to the death, without coming to an hour of shame. Think of that youth who had left his widowed mother's

home to escape its sober rules of life, his obligations toward its needs, and the constant rebuke of her holiness, to plunge into the prodigal's life in London. For two years he continued to sate his wicked heart with the pleasures of sin. He did not deign to answer the letters of entreaty and appeal she wrote him. At last her anguish broke her down, and she lay on her dying bed. His father's friend recalled the wilful youth to her bedside. He came too late to see her in life. But as he stood and looked upon the face, with its lines of unrelieved sorrow not yet effaced by death's kindly fingers, the older man by his side told him that it was his sin which had broken the heart and quenched the life of her who had given him birth, who had loved him with a depth of passion that made his neglect her cross. The young man, who had stood erect in a coarse pride, sank down, and covered his face with his hands, condemned by this human approach to the great dear cross.

Let every man bring his sin up into the light of the cross. There he will be taught more truths than one. He will see not only God's moral anger and its fiat against iniquity. He will also see God's infinite love, and he will find that He who smites in His wrath, redeems in His pity. There is only one thing for the man who has been humbled under the condemnation of the cross, and that is to cast himself on that mercy, which has turned human sin into the mightiest instrument of grace. Then he will take up his canticle, 'There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.'

IV

If these three condemnations fail God holds one in reserve. As a God who is very pitiful and of tender mercy, who is long-suffering and not willing that any should perish, He uses this fourth condemnation only when the others fail. It is *the condemnation of judgment*. It has been manifested in the flood which swept the earth clean, in the fire which has fallen on the foul iniquities of ancient cities, in the plagues which have decimated nations, in the destructions which have overtaken the world's proudest empires. It is manifested in the corruption of both body and soul which visits all wilful and repeated sin. If a man does not find himself condemned by the law, or by the life, or by the cross, he will find himself condemned, here and hereafter, by the judgment of God. That judgment may not be visible, in the case of a nation or an empire, in the same short span as in the case of an individual. The life of a nation continues through more than threescore years and ten. But the truth remains both in the life of the individual and of a generation—'When thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world shall learn righteousness.'

V

THE UNATTRACTIVENESS OF JESUS

‘He hath no form nor comeliness ; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.’—ISA. liii. 2.

‘And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.’
MATT. xi. 6.

THE attractiveness of Jesus is an almost universally accepted conception. The painter’s brush finds no subject more inspiring than some aspect of His grace and beauty. Our poets are quickened to high feeling when they remember His passion. Our great composers are moved to solemn music as His words sink down into their hearts. Our moralists agree that His perfect example has left a path whose rare and difficult loveliness makes it the test and the inspiration of all who will attain to righteousness. There are many who will not call Him Lord, but they are eager to join in the praise of His name, and their tributes are touched with reverence. All men realise how aptly Charles Lamb spoke when he said, that if Shakespeare entered a room every man would rise and bow, but if Jesus entered it every man would kneel.

Is this wholly true ? Is Jesus so universally attractive as these testimonies would seem to prove ? Is it not as true to say that to many men Jesus is not attractive at all, and that at times He, and all He stands for, are objects of dislike ? It is sometimes

believed that if Jesus would come again, all mankind would stand still, and lift up eyes of reverence, and listen to His words with an eager obedience. But the Scriptures teach us that this expectation may be wrong. The prophet foretold Christ's reception when he wrote, 'He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men.' The evangelist who revealed His inner life summed up the sharpest edge of His rejection, 'He came unto his own and his own received him not.' All the Apostles bear witness that He was 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.' Jesus Himself, with a shadow on His heart, described Himself as 'the stone which the builders rejected.' And His most pathetic benediction is found in the words, 'Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.'

What is the deeper truth in this unattractiveness of Jesus? It is this, that to the natural heart Christ is alien, and always remains so. As Newman says, 'Religion is pleasant only to the religious.' So that men may praise Him and picture Him, and even write hymns in His honour, and yet in the depths of their hearts there is this antagonism and dislike because He is unattractive. Let us mark the features in Jesus which repel the natural man.

I

The first feature is *the holiness of His character*.

Deep down in the unregenerate heart there is an antipathy to holiness. Human nature is not entirely

evil, but it is tainted through and through, and, in consequence, as Paul says, 'the carnal heart is enmity against God.' Not only sensual profligates like Herodias, or shallow worldlings like Agrippa, not only the youth who scoffs at sensitive purity, and the young woman whose frivolous temper makes a mock of serious thoughts, but the ordinary man and woman is made uneasy and is secretly rebuked by holiness. To ask some men, who pass muster with the world's moralists, to spend a whole day with a man of God, whose motives are rarely unselfish, whose peace is seen in the quiet contentment of his spirit, whose conduct is touched to fine issues of thoughtfulness and courtesy, whose prayers are felt when they are not heard, is to call them to live in an atmosphere which they find difficult to breathe. They are glad to escape to lower levels of conduct and impulse. Holiness scares and affrights them. In the same way Christ's holiness always troubled men. As the intense light of His sanctity fell upon Pharisee and Sadducee and discovered the devils lurking in their hearts, as it searched and exposed even the disciples, they shrank from Him. They feared the face of Christ, when lit up by the holiness of His anger, or of His desire, more than men feared the face of Moses when he came forth from the presence of God.

A century and a half ago two notable Christian ministers, William Robertson and John Erskine, were colleagues in Old Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh. On the forenoon of a Sabbath day, Robertson preached, and his subject was the 'Compelling Power of Virtue.' With that strength of reasoning and

mastery of method which are displayed in his *History of Charles V.*, he dwelt on the instinct of reverence which all men have for virtue, and declared that were virtue to appear on the earth in a form of exquisite grace it would be hailed with acclamation and exalted to a throne. In the afternoon his colleague, Erskine, whether of set purpose, or through the strange irony of coincidence, stood and declared that virtue had appeared on the earth, and had worn the raiment of a spotless moral beauty. But instead of being received with veneration, and worshipped with adoring praise, He had been hated and scorned, mocked and scourged, and haled to His cross and crucified amid derision. When Jesus Christ came, did all men kneel? Do all men kneel now? Neither in the literature of the time, nor in the conversation of the hour, nor in the secret obediences of the heart, do all men bow down to Christ. They are offended by His holiness.

II

The second feature is *the mystery of His personality.*

This reason for Christ's unattractiveness leads us into a different region of thought. There are minds which are simple and unquestioning. These are easily accessible to spiritual things, and are swiftly brought into tune with the infinite. They find the mystery of the personality of Jesus full of helpfulness and delight. But there are other men who are accustomed to the clear white light of material truths. They are eager to reduce all knowledge to terms of mathematical precision. To them Christ's mysterious-

ness is a stumbling-block. Every great personality, Hegel says, lays upon the world the penalty of explaining him. Our foremost thinkers and teachers, our statesmen and men of action, and all our leaders of commanding genius are problems to their generation. But the task in regard to them all is simply one of exploration, knowledge, and analysis. What Matthew Arnold said of Shakespeare,

‘Others abide our question; thou art free,’

can be said in perfect truth only of Jesus Christ. Simply because Christ goes beyond the reach and the grasp of the natural man he is hostile to Him, and he resents both His divinity and His humanity.

Mark the evidence for that fact in His own time. ‘Whence hath this man letters, never having learned?’ was the taunting question of men baffled by His moral insight and unearthly wisdom. ‘Whom do men say that I, the son of man, am?’ To His question the answer came, ‘Some say that thou art Elias; and some, Jeremias; and some one of the prophets.’ It was a reply which enshrined the guesses of men bewildered by the mystery of the infinite in Christ. Remember that even John the Baptist, the man above all men who might have understood the Master, sent his cry out of his prison, perplexed by the ways of Christ, ‘Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?’ Think of the most striking instance in the case of Pilate, the man who was trained in a school which taught him how to estimate men. ‘Who art thou?’ he asked Jesus in an awed whisper, as he found himself face to face

with one whose majesty of bearing and exaltation of spirit he could not understand. To-day, even among those who are willing to be His disciples, there is a shrinking from the unsearchable depths in Jesus. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways than our ways, and we tremble and flutter before the mystery of godliness, and with such an experience He is unattractive.

III

The third feature is *the authority of His claim*.

Whether it be a claim which He makes for Himself, or one which He makes upon men for their obedience and their devotion, it rouses instantly a reaction in the natural heart. The unregenerate heart always treasures a pagan ideal. It has a constant hunger for pre-eminence, and exaltation, and it has an eager thirst for, and a delight in, what this life can give. The world's ideal of life was never more finely imagined and more completely attained than in the high days of Greece. Then was conceived a manhood, self-poised, self-sufficient, self-pleasing. It was a manhood developed, disciplined, and enriched until it was able to lay a strong hand on all the realms of power and enjoyment. When the runner at the games sat at the feast in the evening crowned with flowers, when the poet or the sculptor was wreathed with laurel and hailed with acclaim, when the orator held men spellbound, when the conqueror rode in his proud and callous triumph—there the natural heart expressed itself without reserve. To all time it

protests against being called to minister to others. It shrinks from the meekness and gentleness of submission, as men shrink from Arctic chill. If any man will question himself as to his day-dreams he will find that they are precisely those of Joseph in his unschooled youth. He sees his sheaf in the field, and all other men's sheaves bowing down to it. But Christ came with a claim for humiliation and submission. He made known the meaning of that claim by the course of His life. He came to be poor, homeless, outcast, to refuse the honours the world would have bestowed upon Him, to drink His Father's cup, to walk in the narrow way all through life, and to pass in through the gate of His cross. That is the claim He makes with an imperative authority. We need not wonder that men resent it, and refuse it in the hostility of the natural heart.

Foster, in his notable essay on the 'Aversion of Men of Taste to Religion,' points out that their distaste was due in great measure to the uncouth language, repellent modes of thought, and vulgar illustrations by which it was expounded. There is truth, as all men recognise, in that discerning judgment. But the controlling truth, as Foster hints, is to be found in this natural antipathy of the unregenerate heart to Christ. Nothing more quickly arouses the defiance of a proud heart than authority. But when that authority supports a claim to control men's lives, to set the limits of their liberties, to command their powers and to employ them in His service, the natural heart in us all becomes hot with rebellion, and we are on the brink of hate. To that authority

the reply uttered in the secret of the spirit is as Jesus told us in His parable, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' Only the regenerate heart can say to his fellows, 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.' Until that experience has been passed through, Jesus is unattractive.

IV

The fourth feature in Jesus which the natural man resents is *the message of the cross*.

Here we reach the core and kernel of the antipathy of the natural man. This is the secret of all other hostilities. In the day when a man can rejoice in the cross of Christ, and can thrill with a passionate emotion as he understands its revelation of God and its love and grace toward sinners, he will know the power and understand the attraction of the holiness of Christ's character, the mystery of His personality, and the authority of His claim. It is natural for the natural man to resent the message of the cross. It comes with its condemnation of the life he lives, and loves, and excuses. It comes with a requirement of repentance, and that is the most searching and humbling experience the heart can know. It comes with a call to a lowliness and humility, which cuts deeply into the pride and self-sufficiency of the human heart. It comes with the inexorable condition that only as a little child can a man enter the kingdom of God. It comes with a demand for a confession of wrongdoing, an acceptance of forgiveness, and a surrender of the whole being to Him who has

redeemed him. That has always been the foolish thing to the Greek, and the stumbling-block to the Jew. To-day, there are millions upon whom Christ's moral loveliness has begun to dawn. It is so impressed upon us in the literature and art of the time, and is so manifest in the lives of those who have walked in His steps, that men are unable to resist its charm, even when their inward hearts fail in a true sympathy. They are willing to let the other features which they resent lie in the shadow, and as they say, become agnostic to what is too high for them. But they are not willing to accept the Gospel of the cross, and there Jesus is still unattractive.

When and how is this unattractiveness overcome? It is overcome in that day when men's eyes are opened to see Christ in His redeeming grace, and their ears are able to hear His regenerating word. There comes a time when some great need, or some baffling experience, or some disheartening and ashaming fall, or some discovery of a man's own true self, changes the whole angle of vision, and silences all the sounds of the world's music, and then he sees and he hears Christ. Then Jesus becomes, in the language of the Old Testament poet, once heard so frequently on men's lips, 'the altogether lovely.'

An incident has been told of the experience of a teacher, whose name is held in honour in the educational world for her high ideals, whose grace is manifest in every sentence she has written. There came to the school of which she was the principal a wilful and high-spirited girl, the spoiled child of a too indulgent home. The girl's caprice, her temper, her

rebel mind broke out in vexing disobedience. Her contempt for every effort to win her, and subdue her scarcely veiled hostility to the wise and gracious head of the school, vexed all who sought her welfare. The principal asked her to be her companion in a walk. For the first hour the girl maintained a chilling and studied reserve. But as the conversation went quietly on, and the needs of life, if it is to be lived bravely, cheerfully, and nobly, and the strain and burden and sorrow that come to all as the years increase, were touched upon, the young girl's face softened, and a more serious look came into her eyes. When the older woman lifted the veil from her own experience and with a shy reticence revealed the secret of her strength and tenderness and patience, the light flashed into the young mind. She saw the grace which so charmed others, and all that had been repellent became potent in its moral loveliness.

That very human experience is but the analogy of that greater enlightenment in which we awake, and are satisfied, when we see Christ's true likeness. There is a day when Jesus takes every man aside. He makes a silence in our lives. Then His voice rebukes and humbles us, but as He speaks with us, the light dawns on the soul and we begin to see what those saw in Him to whom He became both their desire and their delight. Then we wonder that when others see Him there is no beauty that evokes their desire, and we enter into the peace of that benediction, given to those who no longer stumble at Jesus.

VI

THE HARDENING OF THE HEART

‘To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.’—
HEB. iii. 7-8.

THE inward source of the refusal to enter the strait gate in the way is described in this penetrating word of the Holy Ghost as the hardening of the heart. The conception is that the heart—the inner core of our moral being, our conscience and desire and will—was once tender and sensitive to the call of God and to the life that is love and holiness. But in the hour when the decisive step should have been taken it was declined. That refusal was due to a hardening of the inner core of our moral nature so that the will rose up in a word of denial. In that hour the hardening of the heart began, and it continued until it became callous and even scornful. The man whose life might have been a walk with God became a castaway.

Shakespeare has set the issue of a momentous decision in his own vivid way :—

‘There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.’

The poet pictures a vessel waiting for the rising of the tide that she may clear the harbour bar. Her cargo

is on board, her sails and tackling are in order, her papers are in the captain's hands. The tide rises to its flood, and the time has come to weigh anchor and set out to sea. But the captain in his wilful folly is on shore carousing with his friends. At last he hastens out to his vessel to find that the tide has ebbed. Now neither toil nor skill can avail to pilot the ship through the swiftly shallowing stream.

That vicissitude in the affairs of men is an analogy of the experience of the soul. There is an hour when the tide is at the flood. Serious thoughts, pure aspirations, tender feelings hold the mind. The vision of God and His love in Christ, and of the fair vesture of a life of simple obedience, rises on the soul. The call of Christ is full of appeal. One decisive act, a clear and confessed self-surrender, and the soul would be renewed unto life, and the whole arena of action would be changed. But the heart hardens, and the will refuses to yield. The venture is not made, and all the voyage of life is bound in shallows and in miseries.

It is this solemn issue which the writer to the Hebrews faces as he addresses these early believers. He selects one of the most imperative messages of the Old Testament, as he found it in a psalmist's appeal. 'To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.' He recalls the incident in the history of Israel which the Psalmist had condensed into a single charge. That was the revolt of Israel against God's call. God had led them into the way. He had shown them His wonders in Egypt. He had been their pillar of cloud by day, and their pillar of fire by night.

He had given them bread from heaven. He had filled their lips with songs of deliverance. High hopes had swelled their breasts, and keen emotions had surged through their hearts. No call of God surely can be too high for this people ! But now, as they faced the noble emprise of redeeming the sanctuary-land from the corruption of its heathen dominion, and as they were told the cost of that keen warfare, their hearts hardened and they refused. They missed the tide at its flood. ' They who were bidden were not worthy.' They could not enter into God's rest. They died, and their carcasses were buried in the wilderness.

I

Let us look into this religious experience as it is repeated in the history of the soul. Let us consider how this ' holy delicacy of religious impressions,' as John Angell James finely names it, is so often lost. The first cause set down here is *heedlessness*. ' Your fathers tested me, proved me, and saw my works forty years ' (ver. 9).

The writer is recalling the long course of God's dealing when His mercies were new every morning. As a later poet declared, ' He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.' Yet the people lived on in their dull, unspiritual apathy with a constant relapse into strange deeds of unbelief. The sure penalty of this heedless neglect is that hardening of the heart which issues in the loss of the high faculties of the soul.

This is the most common, though it may not seem the most tragic, of all the causes of hardening of the heart. There are men and women whose childhood has been spent in a home of prayer. They have grown through youth to older years, and all their days have been encompassed by gracious providences. They have been taught the wondrous things of God's grace, and have taken His name daily upon their lips. They have known the hour in which a serious awe fell upon their spirits, and great words became significant, and God's call rang through their souls. But when they faced the demand to confess their faith, to yield up their souls, and to live on a new level of obedience, they fell into a silence. They hesitated and delayed. They did not mean to break with God. They did not dream that they were making a denial of God's claim. They merely trifled with it, quietening their conscience with the promise that to-morrow would find them willing to choose. They continued in this drifting attitude. But hour by hour, and month by month, the hardening of the heart went on, until the once-awakened soul sank into a spiritual torpor.

This truth is set clearly in some of the most dramatic incidents of the Old and the New Testaments. Look at Herod Antipas, a man who revered the character of John the Baptist and listened to his message. There was a day when a single decision would have been life from the dead for Herod. But the months passed in heedlessness. The day came when he had so far forgotten his hour of illumination that he shut up John in prison. Then came that decisive

act when the drunken braggart made his foolish boast and stained his hands with John's blood. That is the hardening of the heart through heedlessness. Or think of Felix, held by Paul's high themes, seeing as Plato never saw, the ideal of a life of integrity and purity, and shuddering at the certainty of judgment to come. The tide was at its flood. Yet he hardens his heart. He postpones his decision to a more convenient season. But when the season has come he has sunk to the level of a man who will make gain out of the noblest spirit he ever met, the one man who had moved him to righteousness. That is the hardening of heedlessness.

What a succession of spiritual disaster rises before us! It is as common to-day as ever it was. A young girl, dowered with personal beauty and charm of speech, brought up in easy circumstances, was living a frivolous and self-centred life. She was induced to attend one of the meetings held by an evangelist of world-wide name. She was arrested. The emptiness of her idle, butterfly existence rose up to condemn her. Tears came to her eyes. She was urged to remain behind, and listen to an individual message about the way. But her pride rebelled. A secret inner antagonism asserted itself, and she refused. She hurried home. She endeavoured to forget the haunting words of the appeal. She strove to blur their impression. She plunged into the old round of her absorbing gaiety. In a few days she could jest about her concern. In a few months she could turn it to ridicule in the swift mockery of her speech. In after years she was known for her bitterness of

spirit, her cynical estimate of goodness, and her scorn for the evangelist and the gospel of the gate. Her heart was hardened by her heedlessness.

This penalty is not always so strikingly evident, but it is inescapable. There is in Knaresborough, in Yorkshire, the well-known Dropping Well. The water percolates through the limestone rock, and becomes impregnated with its minute particles. As they drop they encrust and petrify whatever they fall upon. Place under this dropping water any soft and porous thing—a book, a folded handkerchief, a bird's nest—and the action of the water will turn them to stone. It is in this manner that the heart is hardened by heedlessness. Sometimes, all unaware, the man who has refused God's call is hardened by the constant drip, drip, drip of worldly thoughts, secular associations, polluting reading, and ungodly influences, until his heart is hard as stone. Of such men God says, 'They shall not enter into my rest.'

II

The second cause is *the deceitfulness of sin*.

Some hearts are hardened in a long season of careless apathy. Others are hardened by the illusions and the delusions of sin. That truth stands out in this writer's second counsel, 'But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' The spiritual fact emphasised here is that in temptation, the seducing thing seldom or never comes to us with its foul and debased features disclosed. If every lust rose up to

assail us in its gross and unsightly vileness we would bid it be gone in disgust. Only when a man has lost the power to respond to truth and to beauty, and only when, as those who have told the story of Faust have declared, a man has given himself over without reserve to the forces of evil, can sin tempt us and seduce us without first deceiving us. 'Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.'

That truth is set clearly in the oldest story of temptation and fall that the world knows. When the tempter came to Eve he did not uncover the base features of disobedience. He promised enlargement of knowledge and of life. 'When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit.' The evil was masked, else she had started back in moral horror. In the same way Esau bartered his birthright for the mess of pottage, making his refusal in a moment of a hardened heart through the deceitfulness of sin. So Balaam went with the messengers of the king of Moab without discerning that he was being seduced by his own covetousness. So King Saul committed his decisive act of disobedience, deceiving himself that he was doing the will of God in keeping back the spoil. But there is one instance in the Scriptures in which this truth is written large. When Hazael, the officer of the King of Syria, met the prophet Elisha by the way, Elisha broke out into tears. When Hazael inquired the reason of his weeping, the prophet answered, 'Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds

wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.' Hazael flushed with indignant response, 'Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?' But the day came, as it always comes, when the ruthless deed was done and it did not seem so evil. The day came, as it has come to modern military rulers, when, under that necessity which will know neither law nor mercy, he committed these deeds of pitiless brutality. His heart was hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

That spiritual history can be seen repeating itself to-day by those who have eyes to see. Men propose to themselves pleasures which seem pure, but their hearts harden, and they drift on to indulgences of which they once would have been ashamed. Men pursue their business, beginning with a keen sense of honour, but descending, as their hearts harden, to methods that simple minds are quick to condemn. Men begin with ambitions which are high and honourable, but their hearts harden, and their ambitions become more selfish and more cruel, and the path to them becomes a way of low cunning and dishonest policy. Here is a youth, who has thrilled with a chivalrous idea of life and has been too self-controlled in will to utter a base thought, and yet, as he has mingled with the world, he has slowly adjusted himself to a lower level of life and turned his back on the purities which once held his reverence. He has become, he will say, broader-minded, more liberal in his ideal, and he feels the necessity for a full-blooded self-expression to realise his whole nature. He

follows a course of life that would have bowed his father's head in shame. His heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Here is a man who, for years, maintained a scrupulous integrity but he entered civic life and he became ambitious of a public career. He began to adopt unreal ways of speech and shady methods of increasing his income. He stooped to ever meaner ways, until at last he ended his life in a felon's cell. His heart was hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Here is another who made a notable confession of his faith, and spent his early years in eager Christian service. But as his wealth grew, and the circle of his interests enlarged, he gave way to self-indulgence, and fell from one base act to another until he yielded to the most degrading passion that can torment our mortal flesh. That is the repeated story of the hardening of the heart by the deceitfulness of sin. When does that hardening begin? It begins in the hour of the refusal of the gate. It continues until that issue is reached, when, in simple truth, their carcasses are buried in the wilderness. All these fail to enter into the rest of God.

III

The third cause is *a self-conscious refusal*.

If some men's hearts are hardened through heedlessness, and others are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, there are some which are hardened by an act of deliberate self-will. The writer to the Hebrews sets them before us when he says, 'For

some, when they had heard, did provoke' (ver. 16). He is singling out some of the more daring leaders in Israel's rebellion. He is suggesting that they knew the significance of their revolt. He is declaring that some men love darkness rather than light, and choose a path of evil with open eyes, whose consequence is the hardening of their heart.

The outstanding example of this wilful and froward sinner is that King Pharaoh in whose history this classic phrase is first found. Pharaoh wilfully hardened his heart in spite of a prophet's warning, the repeated discipline of God, and the appeal of a helpless people. With Pharaoh there stand a large number of recusant wrongdoers. Some may be ranked with Orpah who could resist love and love's sacrifice, a mother's counsel and a sister's consecration, and go back to the degradation of a Moabite life. Others are in line with the rich young ruler. They stop short in the way. They see with clear eyes the cost of the strait gate. They decline the terms, and they turn their back on Christ with sorrow. These are the wilful who rebel against God until they harden their hearts against both His law and His love. A romantic writer tells us his tale of the little child playing with her companions who were vying with each other as to which had done the most wicked thing. She eclipsed their confessions of petty sins and vain imaginings when she said 'I lifted my hand and struck God.' That is what this decisive act of wilful, deliberate, and conscious sin always does. It lifts its hand and strikes God, and the blow always falls on His heart.

When is that blow given? When a man coarsely crushes down any tender thought, when he boldly scoffs at things pure and holy, when he goes wantonly to his haunt of sin although all the voices of the sainted dead are appealing to him, when he can leave the feast of his Lord and go out to betray Him, or become a deserter to the faith because of the love of the world. Then there is the sign of that hardening of the heart which was heard and yet provoked. He has reached that state when God's righteous wrath utters the sentence, 'They shall not enter into my rest.'

Why will you come into this condemnation? Why will you stand in this peril? Why will you continue to tempt God? You may repeat to yourself this simple refrain:—

'For while the lamp holds on to burn,
The greatest sinner may return.'

Yes! But the man who uses God's long-suffering to excuse his impenitence, who turns God's grace into a reason for his delay to surrender, is hardening his heart, and he will come to the day when the Master of the house shall rise up, and the door will be shut. That means simply that opportunity comes, but opportunity passes away. To-day, while the tide is at the flood, if ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts.

VII

DEATH OR LIFE ?

‘For the wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.’—ROM. vi. 23.

PAUL condenses his high argument on the interaction of the wrath and the grace of God into this brief sentence. It holds three affirmations. The *first* is that the enmity and mutiny of sin receive the penalty of death as justly and deservedly as a labourer receives his wage for the work he has done. The *second* is that the pulsing spiritual energy of eternal life is the gift of God in and through Jesus Christ. The *third* is that every man must face these two alternatives. Every man is either setting his feet in the way of death, or in the way in which he finds life. These are master-truths of the Gospel. Let us look at them in turn.

I

FIRST : ‘ *The wages of sin is death.*’

What is death ? Like life it remains, in the last analysis, a mystery, but the proofs and evidences of it are clear and definite. The signs of physical death have a certain similarity to those of spiritual death, although the one is a swifter, subtler, and more awful experience than the other. Physical death is recognised to begin with by the failure of the organism

to fulfil its functions. The eye glazes. The brain becomes torpid. The heart stops. Then the breath flutters, and at last, either with a long soft sigh or with a convulsive rattle in the throat, it ceases, and men look on the face of the dead. The second evidence is that insensibility, which can make no response to any stimulus from the outer world. Then there is the final and unmistakable proof—corruption. The body, once the fair house of life, becomes a prey to the spoilers. So in spiritual death this failure of the functions of the soul, this absence of response to the appeal of a spiritual world, and at last a moral corruption, make up its sure signs. These are the wages of death.

Let us mark the history of this penalty. Consider, to begin with, *the instancy of death*. Death passes upon the soul in the very act of sin. God does pay wages in the hour in which they are earned. We all know the meaning of the phrase 'the moment after.' We all know how instantly the sentence of death passes in the moment when the passion is sated. It is, as our poet says,

'A bliss in proof, . . . and proved, a very woe.'

In the moment of sin death passes upon the innocence and heart's ease of the soul. The pure and wistful thought is stricken, and even the honest look in the eyes has gone. In the Old Testament story, with its inspired insight, we were told that in the moment when the forbidden fruit was eaten 'the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.' So, always, death passes upon the virgin

purity, and stifles the holy desires of the soul. Like a touch of frost on the flowers of the garden, the tender and living simplicities of the soul are dead. A little child spends an hour in a picture palace where deeds of vicious purpose are disclosed. A youth looks into a forbidden scene of revelry. A man yields, for the first time, to a haunting temptation. In the instant death shoots through the soul.

Mark again *the sequences in death*. This first touch of death, in which innocence and shame and pure feeling have been withered, is followed by a more penetrating deadliness over a widening area. The first sin is like the first speck of rottenness in the peach. It spreads. For death goes on to assail all the sweet relationships of life. You can never be the same son, the same brother, the same husband or wife, the same father or mother after you have sinned against these loyalties. The bloom of the heart has been despoiled. The romance of life is gone. Something has come between you and all life's sweetest intimacies, and that is a withered faculty touched by death. A little child looks up with trustful eyes into all men's faces. He renders a worshipping adoration to those who have the care of his life. But too soon, sin withers his innocence, and doubt, mistrust, suspicion, pass on to their wilting work and the old gracious confidence is gone.

But this sequence of death continues its course. It assails all nature. The earth itself bears the marks of man's wrongdoing. But there is one sphere where sin's penalty is sadly evident. That is in the body. The loathsome sore that will not heal.

the manifest corruption in the blood, the scrofulous eye, the shattered nerve, the trembling hand, are all part of the wages of death. These are not the scars which honest toil and self-sacrificing strain have marked upon a man's features and frame. They are always significant and even beautiful. The artist interprets their nobility. No, these are the tokens of the conquests of death. When Gehazi came into the presence of Elisha his innocence was slain, and the loyal relationship to his master had been outraged. But as he stood before the prophet the next sequence in the penalty took place. His sin spread death in his body, and he went out of the presence of the Lord 'a leper as white as snow.' That visitation upon Gehazi is more dramatic than we commonly see, but it is no accident that the sin of a man's soul passes on to quench the life of his body. That truth is put in one of the most solemn happenings of the Old Testament. The people in the wilderness loathed the manna and craved for flesh to eat. They murmured in a wilful rebellion. God gave them their request. The quails fell in abundance round the camp, and the people gorged themselves with their flesh. Then the plague arose and the camp became an arena of death. The name of the place was called Kibroth Hataavah—the graves of lust. Wherever there is a lust there is a grave.

But this sequence continues. The penalty of death has issues and consequences beyond the sinner himself. It passes out to others, often to his dearest. A little child's faith and reverence has been slain by the self-indulgence, the foul jest, the angry temper of

those who were its guides. The home that should have been a sanctuary has become a hell where all aspiration dies at its birth. There are graves which men dare not visit, for the dead who lie in them yet speak in condemnation of the self-will and passion of those who can never forget their green mounds. Nay, there are some in whom sweet reason has become distraught, wandering and singing their mirthless songs with the vexed heart of Ophelia, because some one's sins has earned the wages of death, and they have been smitten by its consequences. And if you will but think of it, you will see that this penalty of death passed out from sinful humanity until at last it smote Him who knew no sin and nailed Him to His cross.

But again mark *the final issue of death*. That is its dominion in the soul. 'Sin,' writes James, 'when it is finished bringeth forth death.' He is thinking of sin as though it were born a feeble and undeveloped child coming to its maturity and then giving birth to death,—the death of the soul. For what is the last issue of death but to lose the power to hope in God, and to have the old relentings and repentings of younger years? The man who once longed to be holy, who knew that righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost were the supreme felicities of life, who had been on the brink of a complete surrender, may close his life in a spiritual torpor. For here we see the decisive proof of death. It is not the failure of the functions of the soul. It is not the lack of response to the call of Christ. It is corruption. When then the soul has become so corrupt that it can

plunge into moral slime without a qualm, and can play the glutton with evil, and wipe its lips and say, 'I have done no harm,' the full wages of sin has been paid. Shakespeare draws his corrupt soul, not in Lady Macbeth washing her sin-stained hands, not in Richard III. aghast at the procession of the murdered which seems to stretch out to the crack of doom, but in Iago, whom neither innocence, nor honour, nor trust, nor love will move.

'When devils will their blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now.
So I will turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.'

Then the soul dwells in silence, and there is no silence like that of death.

II

SECOND: '*The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*'

Life is always a gift. A seed was cast into the ground a month ago. The rain will fall in softening showers, the sun will pour forth his quickening heat, the seed will burst and its green blade will appear. How, its sower knows not. The life is a gift. A little child was born this morning. His mother heard his infant cry with a catch in her heart. She marked his soft breathing and found it music. Whence came that pulsing, breathing life? Why was that little living creature placed in her arms, while her sister has craved in vain all her years for such a crowning joy?

Life is a gift. A man was born again to-day. He had been drifting into ways of rebellion. He had ceased to feel the goad in his conscience. He had forgotten how to pray. Then a word, a child's voice, a woman's appeal, a picture on the wall, a bereavement awoke him. He was touched to the quick and moved to penitence and trust. How? He cannot tell. 'The Spirit bloweth where He listeth.' Eternal life is the gift of God.

I have seen it again and again. I have marked the boy entering his teens and reading a summer Sunday afternoon in the book of Bunyan's pilgrim, and, as the sun was setting, rising to walk in the pilgrim way. I have seen the youth trembling before the temptations of a lonely life in a great city casting himself down at the feet of Christ and receiving the gift of life in his soul. I have seen a man, drunken, and dissolute, the terror of his home, the shame of his kinsfolk, a horror to himself at times, bowing his head with broken confession, and rising up to live in the spirit. And I have seen that gift of life passing on in its conquering sequences. I have marked it renewing the soul's impulses, restoring affections and powers, creating more tender intimacies, and, at last, purging the body, not only of its grossness, but of its almost incurable infirmities, until the redeemed man has felt:—

'through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.'

'Through Jesus Christ our Lord.' That is the indispensable condition. This eternal life visits the

soul only through Jesus Christ. Shall we say that there was no spiritual life before Christ came, and that men who sought after God did not find Him? Surely there was life, but it was not 'life in Christ,' with its experiences and its potencies. Think of the kind of life which pulsed in the wisest hearts in Athens, or in Rome, five hundred years before the word of Christ was spoken! Walk down the great Sukh in Damascus, or mark the Buddhist devotee sitting in his silence, or camp near some African village at nightfall! Pass down a gay boulevard as the night grows late, or mark the men and women who belong to the 'smart set' and have no place in their lives for private prayer! Then sit down with some simple folk as they remember Jesus in His Supper, and rise with them as they go to face the toil and strain of life. How do these men and women with their self-abasing penitences, their clear songs of hope, and their meek vows of obedience, differ from the moralist of the Acropolis or the recluse of the Eastern hemisphere, or the wisest and most serious of the men and women of the world? They differ in the potency of the life given them in Christ. It may be feeble enough at times, and in none has it come to its ultimate loveliness. But it is there—a life with a new hunger, a new joy, a new horizon, a new dynamic. Each man who feels it throbbing in him cries, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord.'

The certainty and fact of eternal life in Christ can be realised in a more striking way. We cannot say that the men who knew the God of Abraham, and of

Isaac, and of Jacob, who is the God not of the dead but of the living, had not received the gift of life. We cannot say that millions, of whom Abraham was ignorant, have not been quickened by this gift. But it is a great gift of God to live after our Lord. Life in Christ is a visitation such as the old Hebrew times never knew. Had Abraham, ascending his green hill, Moriah, found the cross uplifted on its summit ; or had Jacob, drawing water from his well, found a stranger sitting in weariness on its stones ; or had Moses, on the mountain top, looked into the transfigured face of the Son of God ; or had David lifted his eyes of shame, not to Nathan, with his rebuke, but to Christ, with His look, what a gate of new life would have been opened before them all ! Abraham would have made no sacrifice. Jacob would have found every worldly thirst quenched. Moses would have summed up his commandments in one great call to love. David would have fallen down to kiss Christ's feet and wet them with his tears. A new light would have shone within their minds, a new peace been given to their consciences, and an uprush of crucified desires would have found expression in their lives. They would have been set free from sin and the law, and looked up with a new and more tender appeal—' Our Father, which art in heaven.' That is eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

III

Now every man is either in the way of death, or the way of life. But Paul sets these two truths down as

alternatives and there are only two. Every man is passing on either through the sequences of death, or the sequences of life. Tender and sensitive minds have shrunk back from accepting this stern truth of the two alternatives. Others have reacted more passionately, and have sought relief in thoughts and theories that blur the awful facts. Some have lulled their minds with the thought that those who neglect God's gift pass out into nothingness, and that the soul shall exist only as it receives this life in Christ.

But we cannot accept, even to escape our saddening thoughts, the teaching that the immortality of the soul is an illusion. Rather, with Martineau, it is true 'nothing human ever dies.' What Paul says is not that men have life, but that they have *eternal life* in Christ. Immortal existence that cannot be quenched is not eternal life. A man may live, and love, and hope, and play a high and serious part in the moral endeavour of earth and time. He may never have known, or cared to know, Him, whom to know is life eternal. He may never have had the vision of the unseen, the shame of penitence, and the joy of reconciliation. He may never have been conscious of the indwelling power of Christ. He will pass into the world beyond the grave without eternal life. Life without Christ is possible here. Life without Christ is possible hereafter. Life without Christ is possible for ever. Eternal life in this world and in every other world must be the gift of God. There are, therefore, the two alternatives—death or life. If a man will pass on in his own self-willed, head-strong way, if he will refuse to yield up his soul and

his life to God, if he will disdain to accept that new principle and transforming energy which Christ alone can give, he will, in the moment of his refusal, enter the shadow of death, and he will find it deepening its darkness until the light is gone.

There is a season on the earth when the year is at the spring, and life comes down upon it out of heaven from God. There is a season when the seed which has been lying in the soil, with a possibility of death and rottenness, and a possibility of life and beauty, springs up as life strikes within its germ. There is also a season in the experience of the soul. That season is at hand when a man is discovered to himself by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a new craving for fellowship with God, and a new desire to walk with Christ in the strength of truth and purity, awaken within the soul. Then comes the hour when an appealing prayer, a decisive vow, a single look upward, may be the opening of the door through which Christ enters to be life and light for ever.

VIII

THE STRAITNESS OF THE GATE

‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.’—Matt. xix. 24.

THE man who stands before the strait gate, awakened in conscience and quickened in will, finds its demand to be a paradox both in word and in experience. The appeals which promise peace and joy in believing, enrichment and freedom in the energies of life, are made more alluring by that promise on the lips of Jesus of rest unto the soul. But at the same time he is met with those strange hard sayings, and with that call to a surrender and a renunciation which seem to limit life and empty it of its joy.

That experience has been set in the light of one of the most impressive incidents of the Gospel. There came to Jesus a man, young, rich, of good social station, who had kept himself unspotted from the world. He realised that he had not yet attained to the *summum bonum*—the highest good—that eternal life, which is the true satisfaction of the soul, and has been the quest of all noble spirits. He had listened to Christ, and his soul had vibrated to the truths Christ taught, and the ideal of life He had drawn. He was prepared to accept a more exacting requirement. But Jesus opened his eyes to the straitness of

the gate. 'Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor.' That searched and exposed the inward state of this man's soul. He hungered and thirsted after righteousness, but his deeper hunger and intenser thirst, his controlling passion, was for what his wealth and position and authority gave him. He made what Dante called 'the great refusal.' He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Jesus turned to the disciples with a sigh. 'Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Then He added a figure, Oriental in its vivid strength. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' That is to say, it is impossible.

Now this is true of all kinds of riches. It is true of the men and women who are gluttons for silver and gold, lands and houses, titles and equipages, and for all that ministers to the life of the senses. They may have hours in which they awake to a hunger which wealth cannot appease, and in which they see the gleam of heavenly things. Yet their controlling passion and their real desire are absorbed by the lust of riches, and in the final choice these good things are held. But there are subtler, more refined, and as alluring forms of wealth. Some are not seduced by the rewards of an earthly ambition and a worldly career. They would not yield to the temptations of avarice. They have begun to understand the teaching of Jesus, and to value the simplicities, frugalities, and moral enrichment of an accepted poverty. But they also have their riches,

to which they cling, in which they trust, whose possession and power constitute their chief good. Of all of these Jesus says, 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' Let us pass these various aspects of this truth in review.

I

Consider, first, *the rich in worldly possessions*.

Jesus did not condemn the acquisition and possession of riches. He declared riches to be, when honestly gained, an achievement, and when unselfishly administered, a stewardship. But He lays His emphasis on their peril. By counsel, by parable, and by keen appeal He entreated men to beware of the perils of wealth. The deceitfulness of riches, He declared to be one of the outstanding causes of the choking of the word. The New Testament echoes the Master's solemn warning. 'The love of money is the root of all evil.' 'Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches.' 'Go to, now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries which shall come upon you.' The whole Scripture portrait gallery has no more tragic histories than those of the men who have been apostates and traitors through their covetousness. Riches tend to absorb the inner passion of the soul. They create an assailing horde of temptations. They impose habits and customs which interfere with the soul's life. They make a man feel secure, so that he sits high in pride, and

they engender his vanity, while they corrupt his conscience. When riches increase a man sets his heart upon them, and he who began his life tender of heart and generous of hand, becomes not only soddened and secularised in spirit, but mean and avaricious in older years. Riches tend to desecrate the soul.

Jesus has taught these truths in three of His most startling parables. He has depicted the unjust steward as the man who has left behind him truth, and honour, and justice, without a qualm. He has pictured the rich man, at whose gate Lazarus sat, as a man who would rise from his feast, and walk abroad in the pride of his costly clothing, while the beggar lay at his gate untended, except for the dogs who licked his sores. He has described, with even more terrible directness, the nakedness and bankruptcy of soul in which the man who had grown sleek and self-confident in his prosperity would awake in the unseen world and in the presence of God. Plainly any man who has once seen what riches may create within the soul, can also realise why this ruthless renunciation of them is the condition of entering the kingdom. But that to many men makes the gate too strait.

Yet how enriching is this acceptance and surrender and renunciation! In the early centuries Anthony of Coma, in Egypt, a young man of great riches and blameless life, heard this gospel read in church. He rushed forth to denude himself of all his possessions, and to live a lonely and ascetic life in the desert. He may have been mistaken in the mode of his life,

and his example was one of the causes of the founding of the monastery and the convent, yet doubtless he entered in at the gate. In a later day Tolstoi, in his own crude and blundering way, attempted to make the renunciation, and surely he did not fail of his reward. There have been lesser known men in our own times who have, as in the case of one, left wealth and its ease and consequence to live and serve among the poor of the East End of London; or, as in the case of another, to enter the ministry, and thereby relinquish his claim to a patrimony any man might covet; or in the case of a third, to refuse to be any longer dependent on wealth, whose mode of winning his conscience condemned, choosing rather to live and toil through years of poverty. All of these passed in through the gate. Not every man is called upon to make this sacrifice. Jesus did not bid Nicodemus sell all that he had, or ask Lazarus to shut the door of the home in Bethany. But all men must make this renunciation in spirit, and hold themselves, and all they have, at Christ's disposal. For some men, in every year of time, this is, to the letter, the step which leads through the gate.

II

Consider, second, *the rich in natural gifts*.

We know how enriching are those natural gifts with which some are endowed from their birth. The dower of beauty, or of a gracious presence, or of manly up-standing strength, the possession of a voice of compelling charm in speech or in song, the endowment

of a personal fascination which wins the hearts of all within its influence, a gift of skill in art or music or literature, which wins and holds men's regard—these are no mean riches. Yet how often do we see those who are endowed with them refusing the strait gate. They refuse because they will not surrender themselves, and renounce them. Who are more often shallowed and weakened in all serious resolve? Who yield most easily to the seduction of the sensuous? Who so often make shipwreck of conscience? Who so sadly live to the breaking of the hearts of those who love them, and pass on to a besotted, profligate, despairing end? It is these, whose young faces have been lustrous with loveliness, whose smile was potent with charm, who were so accomplished, so genial, so deeply loved. Their natural gifts were their riches, and they were the secret pride of their souls. The day came when they stood before the strait gate, and Jesus made from them the same demand as He made from the rich young ruler. He demanded that they should hold and use their gifts not for themselves, or their own enjoyment, not to acquire power and to win admiration, but for His service and for the enrichment and comfort of His poor. Only thereby could they pass through the strait gate.

George Eliot has set this truth in a contrast between two women which makes up the real tragedy of one of her earlier novels. She draws Dinah Morris with her pale face, serious air, simple and restrained manners, as almost devoid of that attractiveness which is the issue of great natural gifts.

Her accomplishment of a sober piety, with a power of speech which is a vehicle for rebuke and appeal, form no part of the ordinary riches. But she pictures Hetty Sorel with her bright colour, her glowing eyes, her grace of bearing, her simple charm, as one to whom these things are her cherished possessions. With dramatic power George Eliot describes Hetty at the strait gate, under the appeal of Dinah's moral passion, and she shows her turning from it, refusing to make her renunciation. Her beauty and its power, not her spiritual enrichment, formed the precious jewel of her soul.

How often do older eyes look on with something of the sorrow which Jesus had when He sighed over the turning away of the rich young ruler! How often does Christ, in the clear call of one of His people, ask this renunciation from those so rich in natural gifts! How splendid is the life which is entered upon when the surrender is made! We have only to think of Santa Teresa, or Sister Dora, with their beauty and charm, or of the grace and fascination of Henry Drummond and of Gordon, long before he died at Khartoum, which the world so coveted and to which it was willing to pay its adoration, as they laid down their gifts at Christ's feet, to see some of God's most nobly endowed entering in at the strait gate.

III

Consider, third, *the rich in intellectual power*.

We are reaching a higher and more difficult surrender. There is no subtler, or more stubborn pride

than that of the man whose strength of thought, whose power of intellectual apprehension, whose mastery of the problems of human lives amount to genius. Think of the scholar who has attained the first rank in some branch of learning ; or the thinker who has analysed and expounded a method of thought ; or the poet whose words have quickened men's pulses, and given them power to dream new dreams ; or the artist whose insight and interpretation has revealed the truth and beauty and nobility otherwise hidden from us ; or the men of leadership in the world's affairs who shape the destinies of the nations. How rich they are ! How naturally they stand self-poised, contemptuous of lesser men, finding their secret joy in the very exercise of their wills. Yet how clearly their riches block their way at the strait gate ! The working of the inner mind of men rich in intellectual power has been disclosed by Carlyle. He stood one day at Hyde Park Corner when the stream of carriages was passing into the Row. He saw the evidences of wealth—the costly equipages, the rich dresses, the liveried attendants. He looked at the pomp and bravery with a grim contempt, and muttered to himself, 'There is a man here who has it in him to do what not the richest of you could imagine.' That is the spirit of the man who is not rich toward God. That is the man who finds the gate too strait.

What a long roll of men of intellectual power who have refused the gate any one can make ! 'Not many wise, not many noble, are called.' We have but to think, to select only a few names, of Gibbon and Hume, of Goethe and Heine, of Mill and Morley,

of Huxley and Tyndall, all of whom every Christian man has coveted for Christ, yet none of whom would meet the costly condition of the strait gate. Faith, with its surrender and renunciation, is more difficult for them than for Cowper's cottager at her door. It would be for each of them a much more costly humiliation to renounce the self-willed use of their gifts, than for this rich young man of the Gospels to leave his wealth behind. Matthew Arnold, with his sensitive spirit, has disclosed its pathos in his 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.' He tells us how he looked into the monastery of the Carthusian monks, with their ignorant faith and ascetic life, and as the memories of his early years came over him he was filled with pathos, because he had found the gate too strait.

'Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride—
I come to shed them at their side.'

How do these enter the gate? A man cannot cast away his mind, or yield it to mere authority. He cannot deny 'the high white star of Truth.' No! But he can accept his intellectual power as a gift to be used for the kingdom of God. He can refuse to make it the instrument of his own ambition, whether that ambition be to win a name or to compel men's regard. He can humbly accept the limitations of the highest genius with which man has been endowed.

He can realise—and this is the most common refusal—that there is a world and realm of experience, of faith and hope and love, which a man enters by submitting himself to the will of God and the leadership of Christ. To all such men Jesus says that they can enter the Kingdom only ‘as a little child.’ That may be very humbling to a proud spirit. It may prevent a career after which his whole passion is bent. But it will be the passing through the gate, and he will find light and peace as he enters upon a new life.

IV

Consider, fourth, *the rich in self-righteousness*.

This is the deadliest, because the most perilous of all riches. Jesus won men to leave all, rise up and follow Him, to lay their gifts at His feet, and to use their powers in His service, even though the world thought that they all became poor indeed. But the men who most often foiled Him were those whose riches was their self-righteousness. Pharisee and Sadducee, ruler and scribe, gave no heed to His call. He set the picture of their stubborn temper and ardent pride in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The man who stood and prayed with himself, and thanked God that he was not as other men are, was the man who found the gate too strait. These men abound in every generation. They are the men who say that the religious life should not make too high a demand. They are the men who claim that a well-ordered and morally honourable life is all a man need attain. They are the men who

see no need of a keen sense of sin, and of a self-abasing penitence. They never smite upon their breasts with the cry, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner.' If they face the strait gate at all, they are swift in their refusal, and only one here and there goes away sorrowful.

What the surrender and renunciation of the self-righteous rich means requires no exposition. It has been laid bare in the autobiography of St. Paul. There we have its proud and stubborn inner heart disclosed. There we see its rigorous and yet complacent fulfilment of an ideal. There we see its disdainful refusal of the way and the gate of Christ. But there also we see a man hearing Christ's call, and in a complete self-surrender counting all things but loss, and regarding all his past endeavours as the assertion of his pride and self-will. There we see a man giving up his own works of righteousness, and in all meekness and humility yielding himself to Christ as Master and Lord and passing in through the gate.

We need not wonder that the gate is strait. The gate into every kingdom is a strait gate. The kingdom of knowledge is not entered except by the student who will renounce all that would hinder him. The kingdom of music or art is not entered except by a gate whose straitness strips a man of all sloth, all ease, even, at times, of all delights. Even the kingdom of the craftsman presents a gate which demands humility, teachableness, submission, and the laying aside of all high thoughts. Jesus Himself entered the kingdom by the strait gate. 'Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye,

through his poverty, might be rich.' In His Incarnation, in His Temptation, in His refusal of an earthly throne, in His acceptance of the cross, He entered the kingdom of God by a strait gate.

The gate is not too strait for the man who will enter it unburdened. Because men cling to their riches they go away sorrowful. Then God, in His mercy, sends them impoverishment. He takes away their wealth, and they walk in a poverty where no man heeds them. Or He deprives them of their gifts, and their once high, self-sufficient spirit is broken, and their vanity is shrived from their hearts. Or He humbles their pride, by some disappointment or failure, even in the hour of the triumph of their powers, and they turn from ambitious dreams to seek the peace that passeth all understanding. Or He takes the man who is stubborn in his self-righteousness and allows him to fall into some sin that 'stabs his spirit broad awake.' Then, all of these, made poor by God's dealing, enter in at the strait gate, and find how large and enriching and free the life is. The paradox of its ease and hardness is a paradox no more.

IX

THE PENTECOST OF THE SOUL

‘And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.’—*JOHN* xvi. 8.

IN these mystic words Jesus revealed the coming of a new era in the religious life of humanity through the advent of the Holy Ghost. By that advent the heedless world would be given a deeper consciousness of sin, a nobler conception of righteousness, and a final assurance of the condemnation of God upon all who do evil. There had been rare spirits in earlier ages who had passed through an illuminating spiritual experience. A poignant sorrow after sin, a vision of an austere holiness, and a confident conviction that there is a God who judges in the earth, breathes through the words of the Hebrew prophets. The Spirit of God has ever been moving upon the face of the waters of the soul. But all past experiences of the religious nature would be surpassed in that day when the Spirit of God would descend upon the spirit of man in a more personal, more intimate, and more potent enduement than any enraptured psalmist had known.

That prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. As Christ's little company waited in the hush

of desire, and lifted up their hearts in prayer, the Divine Personality came upon them. Their eyes were opened to see the invisible, and their energies were raised to power. Their hearts burned within them, and their tongues were gifted with a strange eloquence. But the greater marvel was this, that as they preached Jesus, who had lived and died and risen again, callous consciences were quickened, long chilled hearts were renewed, and men who had lived in darkness and loved its deeds were given a new conviction of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. That was the first of the days of the new era in religious life. Down all the course of time this keener conviction has been visiting a careless and godless world, and the cry of the penitent has been heard from long silent lips.

This Pentecost in history is really the Pentecost of the soul. There is a day when the man who has been attempting the narrow way finds himself at the strait gate. The word of God has come to him. The Divine condemnation has been passed upon his life. The message of the grace of God in Christ has been heard, and its echoes abide in his soul. He has assented and hesitated, relented and hardened, again and again. He has been in the Slough of Despond, and has come out on the other side. Then, in a strange silence, the inner world of his soul is aware of the advent of the Spirit, and he finds himself on the threshold of a new life. Some have spoken of this hour as a mood of reflection; others, as an inexpressible tenderness of feeling; others, as an impulse into which the whole force of holy desire

was poured ; others, with a finer conception, have named it the heavenly vision. But this was the common certainty, that God had become the supreme reality, and that His love and longing in the call of Christ rang through the whole realm of the soul. Then sin and righteousness and judgment stood out as the high Alps in their solemn splendour. The fountains of the deep within were broken up. The dominion of the life was yielded up unto God. That is the Pentecost of the soul.

Look into this experience in the light of the words in which Jesus discloses its three features. It is, first, *a conviction of sin*, 'because they believe not on me.' It is, second, *a conviction of righteousness*, 'because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more.' It is, third, *a conviction of judgment*, 'because the prince of this world is judged.'

I

FIRST: '*He will convince the world of sin.*'

The one thing of which the world, and every worldling of it, is not reprovèd and rebuked is sin. It is mocked at as a needless and unwholesome emotion. Those who are bowed down under a keen sense of its awfulness are sometimes pitied and sometimes ridiculed. The confessions of sin poured out by earnest spirits have no more meaning to the secular mind than the impassioned expression of tragedy uttered in a Greek chorus has to a man who is a mere creature of the senses.

The conviction of sin seems to grow feeble at cer-

tain periods. It is not a feature of the religious life of large numbers to-day. It has been said, as by Tolstoi, to be due to a lost sense of God. God has become dim, shadowy, unreal to many minds, and sin is no longer a wrong done to the infinite Personality. Others have affirmed that it is the result of a shallow conception of God. He is regarded as a soft, easy-going, teary-eyed benevolence, and the majesty of His infinite holiness, with its moral reaction against sin, is obscured. In most cases the reason is, as it has always been, an absorption in the life of the present world. Never was this present world so engrossing and so fascinating as to-day, and never were men so held by it. Hogarth has a picture which he calls 'The Gaming House.' He has drawn a company of men round the gambling table, lost to all sense and sound through their absorption in the chances of the dice. Some are rapt up in the gratification of their gains. Others are cast into despair at their losses. But the house is on fire. The flames are breaking through the roof. The night-watchman has burst in, and is calling aloud to the gamblers to escape for their lives. But they are so intent on the fortune of the game that they neither hear nor heed. In the same way the men of our time, and of every time, are so absorbed by the life of the senses, that the voice of the Spirit is not heard at all.

But no man can flee from God's Spirit. Though we make our bed in hell, He is there. Sometimes He brings the soul to repentance by His judgments. Again He rouses the conscience by His law. And

again He woos the soul by the attraction of moral loveliness. Yet how often do these fail? How often do men stride on in their wrongdoing, absorbed in the gluttony of coarse desires. But now, in this new era, the heinousness of sin is brought in upon the conscience by the Spirit of God, using that new and more potent truth of Christ, in whom men have not believed.

What is the meaning of this conviction of sin when it is disbelief in Christ? All conviction of sin depends not merely on its inherent wrong, but on its aggravation. The pitiless cruelties of an ignorant heathen man, or the dishonesties and blasphemies of a gutter waif, are not offences so black as the self-indulgent gratifications of a man encompassed by sanctities, dowered with an inherited spiritual sensibility, and nurtured in the fear of God. Sin is the more heinous as it is committed against knowledge, and light, and love. When a man perceives that his evil doing has been a defiance to holiness, and that his life has been a course of wilful disloyalty to love, he is convicted of his sin, often with an anguish of remorse. God's Spirit uses the holiness and the long-suffering love of Christ to bring in that conviction of the soul.

The meaning of that experience is disclosed in its first instance. We know the spiritual darkness of the leaders of Israel in those days when Christ walked in the Holy Land clothed upon with the apparel of His perfect moral beauty. Their condemnation was found upon the lips of Him whose compassion for the lost and castaway never failed. But their

covetousness, and pride, and hypocrisy, and merciless craft, blacken the pages of the Gospel as they evoked Christ's moral anger. Yet these rulers and leaders who knew the words of the law, and chanted its sentences every day, were not convicted of sin. They consummated their iniquity when they crucified Christ and went down from the sight of the cross with derision. But when Peter, in the power of the Holy Ghost, recalled that life whose holiness they had denied, whose grace and mercy they had slandered, and when he pointed to its crowning infamy, 'Him, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain,' their sin stood out before them. They were all abashed. Some were troubled. And some were pricked in their hearts, and cried, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' They were convicted of sin because they had not believed in Christ.

That is, to all time, the crowning iniquity. To live and move under the very shadow of holiness and yet remain unrebuked, to see infinite patience and infinite pity pouring out its treasures of grace and yet to turn away unmoved to greed and hate and lust, to be in the presence of a love which agonises over our sins and yields up its life to redeem us from them, and yet to look on with callous indifference—there is no iniquity so awful as that. The man who does not believe in Christ stands with those who set up His cross and bade men drive in the nails. In the moment when God's Spirit gives a human soul to see that sight, he will come with his confession, as that simple toiler came, who said:—

‘He has made me weary of self and sin. Yes! my
Saviour has bid me grieve
For the days and years when I did not pray,
When I did not love, nor believe.’¹

II

SECOND: ‘*He will convince the world of righteousness.*’

It is too possible to be convinced of sin but not of righteousness. The world is full of men who are assured of the power and prevalence of evil. ‘All men are liars’ wrote the Psalmist, and a man of the world has affirmed that every man has his price. A modern poet has told us the story of the man whose conviction of sin destroyed his conviction of righteousness. He discovered, after her death, that his mother, whose faith had been his bulwark against the sea of doubt, had lived a life of secret fraud. In the shock of the discovery of so black a sin in a heart he deemed so pure, all belief in righteousness was lost.

‘Gone the fond vision of his trustful youth,
Gone all the awe of natural reverence,
Gone the pure love that seemed of heaven above,
Gone all the certainty of worth and truth.’²

Men have grown cynical and become misanthropic and bitter in speech as they have lost faith in righteousness. Some, indeed, have passed into a morbid horror, as is suggested by Hawthorne in his weird fancy of *The Minister’s Veil*, where a morbidly sensitive soul covered his face with a veil he wore all through life,

¹ Dora Greenwell, *Songs of Salvation*, p. 11.

² Walter C. Smith, ‘Borland Hall.’

even on his dying bed, because of an unbearable sense of secret sin which quenched his belief in righteousness.

He will convince the world of righteousness, 'because I go unto my Father, and ye see me no more.' That word can be understood from our experience. When we have loved those whom we have lost, our memory and our judgment are busy with the estimate of their moral worth. Every man, though he be almost inarticulate and cannot find the words to express his conviction, hears the melodies of an *In Memoriam* when his trusted friend has gone to the Father and he sees him no more. From Telemachus, trampled to his death in the Colosseum, down to the last brave young missionary, who left home and love and alluring distinction behind, and now lies buried beside an African lake, how many martyr spirits pass before our minds, and we see them now clothed on with sanctity? The man who follows his father and mother to the grave, or he who stands beside his wife's bier to look on the face, once so often shadowed by love's anxieties, and now calm and free from care, not only realises with keen rebuke his ingratitude, but he is convinced of the truth, the purity, the honour, the self-denial against which he so often sinned.

After the same fashion the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them to men. It is a fact of history that, since Jesus has gone to the Father and the world has seen Him no more, righteousness has been discerned as it never was before. The Spirit has 'glorified' Jesus. Mark that word. Have you ever risen early before the dawn, and

looked out upon a valley lying in darkness? As the sober morning light stole across the heavens, the landscape, in its chief features, rose slowly into recognition. Yet the morning mist hung over the slopes, and the prospect was unattractive. The fields spread out their dark green folds uninvitingly. The trees hung with dripping moisture. The streams ran darkly in their channels. But as the sun began to flush the valley with light, and when at last he poured his beams with their splendour into the valley, the haze lifted and the whole scene was revealed in its beauty. Every grey rock, with its clinging lichens, flashed like silver. Every dewdrop had become a pearl. Every lowly floweret opened its bosom, as the morning light passed,

‘Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.’

So the soul discerns the righteousness of Christ, and becomes persuaded that righteousness is the true grace of the soul. The Spirit has been glorifying Christ down all the centuries. We know Him and see Him as they did not who touched Him with their hands. There was a light and truth too dazzling for them. They were not then able to bear it. Every individual soul comes to the hour when, against all the wrong and sin of his own soul, he sets the righteousness disclosed in Christ. He realises how crude were his first conceptions, how shallow his first knowledge. But now, he turns toward the unsearchable riches of Christ set in ever clearer light by the Spirit of God

III

THIRD : ‘ *He will convince the world of judgment.*’

Conviction of sin and conviction of righteousness consummate in conviction of judgment. There are times when this conviction fails. Force and fraud seem to get the victory. Pride and greed sit securely in high places. Cruelty and lust glut themselves and pass on unpunished. There are times we are tempted to think that the words of Lowell sum up all history :—

‘ Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne.’

But ‘ the prince of this world has been judged.’ That judgment is Christ’s, and its supreme hour was His cross. That judgment the Holy Spirit is ever making clear until it stands out even before heedless eyes as the writing on the wall of Belshazzar’s palace.

There is a cartoon by Raemaekers, the Dutch artist, in which, by his genius, inspired by his moral insight, he has set this illumination of the Holy Ghost in an intense light.¹ The cartoon was drawn when Germany was passing, with every fleshly passion in flood, over hapless Belgium, and letting her soldiery commit deeds of unspeakable horror. The artist has drawn a head with the face of a fiend, set upon a gross neck and shoulders. The eyes gleam with the gratified malice of hate and greed. The lines of the face express a remorseless and relentless bestiality. A chain round the neck carries a plate

¹ Fifth series, No. 1.

with the words, 'Gott mit uns.' But at the left-hand side of the picture there is drawn the lower portion of the cross. Only the limbs of the figure and the two feet, pierced by the nails, are seen. As the eyes are lifted from this devilish face to the cross behind, and as its witness, and its passion, and its sacrifice, flash into the mind, the judgment of the Holy One is passed upon the diabolic iniquity that leers out of the canvas. Whatever men may do, however low they may fall, this stands true, that the prince of this world is judged.

It is a high day in the Pentecost of the soul when it becomes certain of judgment, and is sure that within the shadow God waits and watches over His own. It is a day also of humbling and of penitence. As we know some men are first convinced of sin, and others of righteousness, and others of judgment. The order of conviction depends on the soul's quality. But whatever may be the order, conviction is not complete until the Holy Spirit effects them all. There are men who have never understood the Gospel, and never rejoiced in its grace, because they have not known this threefold conviction. And yet there are some who have known them all, and have not yielded. They have chosen the broad way. They have resisted the Holy Ghost, and have sunk back into that sleep from which there is no earthly waking. 'Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.'

X

THE MARKS OF THE PENITENT

‘Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.’—LUKE xv. 10.

THE Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments can be read as the case-books of repentance. The experiences of repentant men and women compose their most moving and most absorbing pages. From that first story of Adam as he hears God’s call, ‘Where art thou?’ and answers in a trembling shame, to the confession of the dying thief, the cries of the penitent are the most poignant sentences in the record. No psalm which has caught and held men’s hearts is without its note of humble confession and eager appeal. The parable which arrests the most heedless mind is that of the lost son coming back with his broken cry to seek his father’s house. The one definite source of the joy of God in man, as we learn from Jesus, is the penitence of the sinful and the erring. ‘There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.’

Now repentance is the first step through the strait gate, but it is not the first distinctive experience. Repentance is the issue of conviction, yet conviction does not always pass on to repentance. Conviction of sin is the judgment and sentence of

the conscience. But the conscience may pass its condemnation, while the will, the inner core of our moral and spiritual being, remains defiant and unsundered. That is the secret history of every spiritual tragedy. As Butler writes, in his noble aphorism in the second of his *Sermons upon Human Nature*, 'Had the conscience power, as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world.' What, then, is repentance? It is a change of mind, and a decision of the will. It issues in a new attitude toward God and toward His commandments. The Psalmist set the truth in a concrete way when he wrote, 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.'

Repentance has one indispensable quality. That is sincerity. It is not a clear perception of wrong, or a tormenting sense of sin, or an anguish of emotion. Repentance need not be deep, but it must be true. But we cannot estimate sincerity either by the surge of feeling in the soul, or by its pointed and impassioned expression upon the lips. Some men pass through hours of darkness when they are smitten with shame because of their past. Others realise, with a keen self-rebuke, that their wilfulness and waywardness have baffled the love, denied the faith, and refused the shining example of those who tried to lead them into the way. Others are well aware that they have allowed one cunning bosom sin to enslave them, and they are shadowed in spirit. And there are many others, so quick and sensitive to evil, that a haunting temptation and a recurring evil imagination bring torment to their hearts. All

of these pass through hours of a penitent emotion which seems over-strained and morbid. On the other hand, there are some of placid temperament living sheltered lives, and trained to a quiet self-control, who never feel the surge of despairing sorrow. They come to the strait gate in their unstained youth, and the way to it is not dark and troubled. But what is required in all repentance, whether keen and passionate, or not, is sincerity.

What are the marks of a true penitence? They can be described in three terms set down in the New Testament. The first is: *repentance toward God*: the second: *repentance unto salvation*: the third: *repentance unto life*.

I

FIRST: *Repentance toward God.*

There are moods of the soul and phases of religious experience which may be easily mistaken for a true repentance. One of these is sorrow for the past. Our memory holds up to us a squandered youth, or recalls the hour when we took the wrong turning at the crossroads of our young manhood. We remember the hour when we failed to keep our honour unsmirched, or even played the fool and erred exceedingly. Keen self-reproach utters its taunt. Words of regret are upon our lips. We wish we had the power to blot out these humbling recollections. But that regret is too often self-ward. It is half self-reproach and half self-pity. It is not repentance toward God. We see it in Esau, kneeling at his father's feet in a

despairing dismay because he has lost the blessing ; in Pharaoh when, in his relenting because of his sufferings, he resolved to let the people go ; and in Pilate, when with a sigh he goes forth to deliver Christ to the multitude. These are not repentances, because their sorrow is not 'toward God.' It has never been expressed with more pathos than in Byron's words :—

' My days are in the yellow leaf ;
The flowers, the fruits of love are gone ;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone !'

Another state of mind mistaken for repentance is the fear of consequences. Every man is assured that sin and judgment are bound together by an iron law. Every man is uneasy when he faces the truth that his sin will find him out. He sees the issue of his sin in the scab on his flesh, the sudden failure of his powers, the glance in the eyes of his children. He marks its effects in his position and standing among men. He becomes aware of its subtlest issue in the impoverishment of his life and the desecration of his soul. Burns understood this truth when he wrote :—

' I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard of concealing ;
But och ! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling !'

That is not repentance. A true repentance does not waive the quantum of the sin. That is the

‘one damned spot’ on which the penitent always fixes his thought, when his repentance is ‘toward God.’

Again, remorse is not repentance. This is a deeper emotion than regret or fear of consequences. But at the best it is ‘the sorrow of the world which worketh death.’ It is only self-accusation and self-loathing, and its issue is despair. Remorse often leads to the attempt to drown recollection in wild excesses, to the desolation of the unhinged mind, and to the act of the suicide by which the sinner seeks oblivion. We see it in Cain fleeing in terror from the environment of his deed, afraid that men may recognise him; in Herod, when he was exceeding sorry as he gave his assent to the murder of John the Baptist; in Judas Iscariot when he ‘repented himself’ and went out to hang himself. These were not penitents; they were the victims of remorse.

Repentance is a change of mind about sin. It is a clear and convinced sense that wrongdoing merits God’s wrath, and is the burden of God’s heart. It is that mind which no longer excuses oneself and no longer blames any other. It casts the penitent down at God’s feet in lowly humiliation, to pour out his confession with shame. It is seen in the publican smiting upon his breast; in the woman who was a sinner kneeling at Christ’s feet; and in Peter going out from Christ’s presence, when he had caught the look of Christ’s shame and grief, to weep bitterly. We can mark it in contrast when we read the *Confessions* of Augustine and then examine

the *Confessions* of Rousseau; or when we take up Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, with its keen consciousness of the sin that persists and holds a man's will in the love of it, and contrast it with Goethe's portraiture of Faust, and his keenly analysed portraiture of a heart in which remorseful regret is chiding with keen reproach. The distinction is put as decisively when we take up some simple hymn, or when we read the cry of Romanes in his penitence:—

‘The days
Can never come when anguish shall atone;
Enough for me were but Thy pity shown,
To me as to the stricken sheep that strays,’¹

and compare their self-humiliation with the passionate remorse of Oscar Wilde's ‘Ballad of Reading Jail.’ In the one case we have regret, sorrow, fear, remorse. In the other we have a repentance ‘toward God,’ with the note of that almost perfect penitent, ‘Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.’

II

SECOND : *Repentance unto Salvation.*

It is one of the mysteries of a religious experience that repentance may be toward God, and yet fail of its full realisation. It may result in a chastened mood and in a reproachful confession made with tears. But these are at times only the relieving overflow of a transient emotion. It may issue in resolves that never again will we so sin against God's law and love, or it

¹ *Life of George J. Romanes*, p. 267.

may be condensed into solemn vows with which we bind ourselves to a new rigour. The cloister stones of universal humanity have been trodden by penitents who have sorrowed for their sins, and starved their minds, and scourged their bodies, in a repentance toward God. But that has not always passed on to be a repentance unto salvation.

Consider the proofs of this fact. A widespread revival of religion passes over a community. Numbers are moved to self-abasing confession. To those who have long known them they have used the strange and difficult speech of the ashamed penitent. Yet, in spite of their intense emotion, they did not repent 'unto salvation,' and within a year they were back to the old bad ways. A meeting has been held where strong men were bowed down under the conviction of the Holy Ghost. They were led to make humble confession of the secret evil of their lives. Yet in a month or two they gave incontestable proof that their repentance was not unto salvation. Every one who has endeavoured to help another in this critical hour can recall the youth whose face shone with a keen and uplifted sense of having made a great surrender. He confessed that he saw his sins set in the light of God's countenance. Yet the after years made it evident that his repentance was only as the morning cloud and the early dew.

Look at the four great penitents whose history has been disclosed in Scripture. The words which fittingly become the hour of repentance are found on each of their lips. These words are the simple, untouched, broken confession, 'I have sinned.' Any

one who will pass them in review will understand what it is to repent unto salvation. The first of these penitents is Balaam. We see him checked in his headlong way, rebuked by God for his disloyalty in going with the men of Balak, and dismayed by the discovery of his own evil purpose. His confession of sin was sincere. He realised that his sin was against God. Yet he continues to permit the lurking devil of covetousness to dwell within his soul, and he becomes a castaway, guilty of the foulest dishonour ever committed by a man who had seen the vision of God. The second penitent is Saul. We mark him ashamed of his wrongdoing as he listens to David's entreating reproaches. We see him brought to tears when he realises that he has forgotten the anointing oil upon his head, and has been false to his high vocation before God. But he goes back to his home, and he allows the evil spirit of envy and hatred to possess him, and he ends his life in despair on Mount Gilboa. The third penitent is David. We have his picture drawn in the hour when he saw his sin in the light of Nathan's parable. We see him scorched with the flame of the prophet's condemnation. We hear his prayer of meek repentance. He felt the blood of Uriah the Hittite to be a stain, red like scarlet, on his conscience. That is a repentance toward God, and it reaches out to a repentance unto salvation. But it may be more than questioned, as we read the record of his after years, the obediences he failed to give, the habits he allowed, and the lessened intensity of his devotion, whether David's repentance was unto such a full salvation as it might have been.

All of these repentances are marred, like every other repentance, by imperfection. All of them have the right word 'I have sinned' upon the lips. But all of them come short. The fourth penitent of Scripture is the prodigal son. Jesus drew this ideal that all men might see, in His perfect portraiture, what repentance unto salvation really is. We mark the conviction of sin as the young man sat by the swine troughs. We discern the change of mind when 'he came to himself' and saw the wilfulness and waywardness of his life. We mark his will moving within him when he rose up, and set out for the father's house. We hear his confession, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight.' That is a perfect repentance 'toward God.' But as he made his way into the father's presence with the meek desire to be received as one of the hired servants, he gave the sure evidence of a repentance 'unto salvation.' For a true penitent there is one supreme blessing, and that is to be received of the Father. There is one supreme joy, and that is the Father's presence. There is one supreme life, and that is the Father's service.

Why does repentance unto God fail to realise itself in repentance unto salvation? Because we are tempted to be content with our repentance. It is not only a heresy of theology most seductive and even seemingly wise, but a constant peril of our human hearts, to regard our penitence as the sufficient propitiation for our sins, and to claim God's forgiveness because we are sorry for them. But the true penitent turns to God leaving his

repentance behind him, and accepts the mercy of God as he surrenders himself in will to God's obedience. 'Repent ye, therefore, and *turn again*, that your sins may be blotted out' was Peter's message. Every prophet, who ever came to men, began with this call to repent, but he was not content until men had turned to God and found their repentance completed and confirmed by salvation.

III

THIRD : *Repentance unto life.*

This is the final proof of a sincere repentance. A reflective mood may make a man pause, and begin some new method of prayer, or of service. A contagious emotion may seize him and he may join God's company as the mixed multitude did who came out of Egypt. The only way of making our calling and election sure is to have it sealed by a life. The only undoubted evidence of a first repentance is to have that repentance continually repeated. The penitent does not leave his experience behind him. It is the first step through every strait gate of the spiritual life. When we slip and fall, when we suffer our ideal to be lowered, when our lamp burns low, and our loins are loosely girt, when we allow some sin to infest our souls, we need to come again, and in a fresh repentance be renewed to walk more humbly with God. That is repentance unto life.

That a true repentance is always translated into life can be verified by universal experience. It is noted in the New Testament as true of the Gentiles

when the first Gospel preachers moved them to penitence. Their whole lives were changed. It has been recorded by a master of the literature of the early Roman world as the mark of its renewal :—

‘Lust of the eye and pride of life
 She left it all behind,
 And hurried, torn with inward strife,
 The wilderness to find.
 Tears wash’d the trouble from her face!
 She changed into a child!’

In the same way every Renaissance has been the issue of a repentance. When the world recovered the truth and purity of Greek learning, when, in Wordsworth’s time, literature turned from the mechanical measures of the early eighteenth century and recovered its liberty and joyousness, and when, in our own day, the world returned to simpler and truer thoughts of the Gospel, a sincere penitence fell on human hearts, and it issued in a new life. The real test of every man’s repentance is the path his feet travel, the ideals his mind cherishes, and the loves which hold his heart.

Why is a true repentance so rare? Because it is one of the most difficult things in the world. For a man to stand and confess that he has gone astray, that he has done an evil deed which has been hidden from men’s eyes, that he has been keeping God out of his life, is the most costly and the most humiliating thing a man can do. It is difficult for a youth to repent and to acknowledge the heedless word and wilful deed. It is still more difficult for a man of middle life to repent, when the first sensitive

impulses have lost their power, and worldliness has become a habit of the mind. For an old man, when a man's pride has become high and stubborn, to confess that he has mutinied against God's will, and cherished secret thoughts of iniquity, is the most difficult reach and throw of the human will. That is why the old so seldom repent. That is why the young should seize every tender moment, and beware of hardening the holy delicacy of a religious impression. That is why Jesus uttered His mystic sentence about the joy of heaven. Moore in 'Lalla Rookh' set the truth in his conception that the Peri, who sought to enter Paradise, failed to do more than shake heaven's gates by presenting the beauty of the earth and the loveliness of innocence. But he found them move back on their hinges when he bore with him the tears of a repentant man. 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.'

Few young lips are opened to sing the psalm:—

‘ My sins and faults of youth
 Do Thou, O Lord, forget :
 After Thy mercy think on me,
 And for Thy goodness great.’

XI

THE GENESIS OF FAITH

'So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.'—Rom. x. 17 (R.V.).

CONVICTION through the truth and repentance toward God are the first steps through the strait gate of life. But the gate is not passed until the third and completing step is taken. That is faith—a faith which is an acceptance and a surrender to God and His redeeming grace in Christ Jesus. That faith remains a mystery to many. But it is not irrational, because it is a belief of the truth. Faith is a natural faculty raised to power. It may be easier for some men than for others. But it is possible for all only through the influence of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man. That is its secret, and only those who have entered into it can fully understand what is meant by this new attitude and relationship to God, with its calm and consecration, its peace and joy in believing.

Now faith has its own history. It has its hour of advent in the soul, and the growth of its energy throughout the whole being. A great believer is a man in whom faith has become the splendid and daring dynamic of life. Here Paul deals with the genesis of faith, and sets it down in an aside which

simply declares what he suggests every believer knows. 'So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.'

I

'Faith cometh by hearing.'

There is a spiritual condition of unbelief, and that unbelief is due to the fact that the soul has not heard the word of Christ. There have been great epochs of unbelief when men seemed unable to realise that Christ has spoken. A haze settled upon the whole spiritual horizon and the great certainties became insecure. Then blindness happened even to Israel. In the eighteenth century the religion of England sank into a mere Deism, and the truth of the Gospel was boldly denied by men who had not ears to hear. There are men who find it difficult to escape the darkening shadows of doubt. Those who have read *Amiel's Journal* know the wistful and pathetic feeling after the certainty of God and of His grace which was never fully satisfied. To many men faith is no more than acquiescence. They are never quite sure of the verities of the Christian revelation. Romanist diaries frankly disclose the experience of men who even when kneeling at the Sacrament find the whole spiritual world become a blank, so that they are compelled to fall back on the authority of the Church for the affirmation they are unable to believe.¹ Like a fire which seems burnt to ashes, or a plant lying dead in the time of winter, or a spring which has failed, whose waters

¹ Cf. G. G. Coulton, *Hibbert Journal*, April 1916, p. 598.

will never return, faith seems to have passed away. That is the spiritual condition disclosed by Christ's pathetic question, 'When the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?'

But 'faith cometh by hearing.' A voice resounds within the soul and the conviction of things unseen, the assurance of God and His grace shine out in clear certainty. As Paul says it is not simply the truth of the word which evokes this faith. The message of God and of His being and power may be borne in upon the mind with conclusive proof. The truth of the Gospel may be so clearly perceived and so strongly held that it can be taught with cogent power. It is too easy to describe the form of godliness and to deny its power. A voice must be heard by a finer organ than the outer ear. It must be acknowledged by a higher power than the conscience. It must be a voice within the soul. 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.' When the spirit of the convicted and contrite man hears the voice of Christ speaking within, then, and not till then, has faith been born. There is a mood, a season, a moral and spiritual condition, in which we believe. Then the voice of Christ calls an appeal, and as we hear, He comes in as the guest of the soul.

This experience need not seem too strange or too high to be understood. We have a modern analogy in the natural world which affords a close and secure parallel. The electrician sets up on some high bluff by the seashore his wireless installation. He prepares his delicate apparatus so keenly sensitive that it can send its message a thousand miles away, and

can catch and interpret every vibration which is set in motion by the touch or even the breath of man. Far beyond the reach of sight a ship is fitted with an attuned instrument. But the apparatus may be out of order, or the operator may be absent from his post, or he may be drowsed in sleep, or he may be engaged in idle talking. The message vibrates and strikes his wires in vain. It is not heard. Another, a mile distant, hears and interprets the word. As he does so, personalities and truths and messages become sure and certain knowledge. They are all beyond the range of sight. But their word has been heard, and faith in them is inevitable.

In like manner the soul hears and believes. The voice resounds through the soul which has been attuned to hear it. Sometimes it is a message about Christ and His grace which is borne in upon us. Sometimes it is the very word of Christ itself. It may come as a whisper such as a mother gives to her child ; or as a call which a friend may utter in a time of peril ; or as a word of wooing and winning urgency such as a lover speaks when he craves to be trusted ; or as a counsel which wisdom offers in a time of perplexity ; or as a message of direction such as a father might give to a child making his way toward him ; or as the appealing word of One who assures us that His love will not let us go. However it may come, through its coming we believe.

That truth can be verified in the experience of all believers. If we take up the Old Testament and recall the coming of faith to its stalwart witnesses, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to Samuel, to all the

psalmists and prophets, we find it true that their faith came by hearing. If we read our New Testament we mark how many heard the word of Jesus, sometimes to be held in admiring wonder and sometimes to be moved to derision and scorn. But only those who heard with the inner ear believed. A woman by a well, a publican by the roadside, a devout spirit sitting at Christ's feet, heard not merely the words on His lips, but the inner accent of His Spirit, and they believed. To-day countless millions can bear testimony that in some hour when they listened to the story of His cross, or in some time when God made a silence in their lives, or in some moment when a call rang through the soul, they found it true that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Take a modern instance of this truth. A young man trained in habits of godliness had joined a club of Bohemian associates with whose intellectual interests he felt a keen sympathy. He rejoiced in the interplay of mind with mind, in the common delight in the more daring literature of the day, and in the witty and Rabelaisian jests which were the current coin of their speech. But the hours to which they continued their intercourse, and the tone of contempt for things that men whose worth he knew regarded as of the highest moment, often jarred upon him. The atmosphere in which he lived gradually weakened his own moral vitality, to the silent grief of his household. He left the club one night and crossed a square as the clock struck two. In the silence, as reflection was busy within him,

the scene he had quitted seemed less attractive. He awoke with a start to the fact that his keen sensibility had become blunted. A conviction of the frivolity and self-will of his life seized him. He remembered God and was troubled. As he approached his home he caught a glance of a face at a window which he recognised as his mother's. He was smitten with shame at the thought of this sleepless watcher for him. She met him as he opened the door, and spoke one sentence of a trembling apology, 'I could not rest for fear of evil.' He stood silent for a moment. Then he stooped and kissed her, and passed to his room. But the word she had spoken rang through his soul. It was to him the word of Christ. Before the morning light he had turned to God. Faith came by hearing.

II

'Hearing by the word of Christ.'

The word of Christ—the message of God in Christ, and through Christ, does not come to every man in the same way. 'God's love is as various as man's need,' writes an English theologian, and God's grace is as wise as infinite wisdom can devise. In all likelihood, every one has a unique experience in the moment in which faith is born within. It is always a solitary experience, and always coloured by our temperament and affected by our past. Yet we may venture to say that there are four distinct ways in which the word of Christ is presented when it is heard by the soul.

1. There is, to begin with, *the hearing of the written word*. The message in the pages of the Scripture must ever be given the supreme place. To all men who believe, what no man can doubt, that God has spoken to the fathers by the prophets, and to later days by His Son, the message of His love in the words of Scripture has a unique potency. If one could summon up all who have found faith as they read the Scriptures, if one could make a census roll of the defiant infidels, and the wilful profligates, and the heedless worldlings, who have been arrested by the written word, a great army would set down their names. Or, if we could summon up the number of those who have found life through believing as they humbly read and pondered some of the golden sentences of Scripture, we should find them to be a vast company among the great multitude whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

There is often a peculiarly virile and intense courage on the part of those who have heard the word of Christ in the Scriptures. They bear the impress of a fresh and original experience. Mark a few of the great names. Augustine, lying in the garden, takes up the book and reads that he may quell the anguish of his soul. As his eye falls on the words, 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh,' he becomes a believer. Luther stands in the library at Wittenberg and, as he reads the story of Hannah and Samuel, he passes through the gate he had found so strait. Knox, on his dying bed, turns to the

seventeenth chapter of John to strengthen his fainting spirit, 'For there,' he said, 'I first cast anchor in Christ.' Bunyan describes his pilgrim walking in the fields, reading in his book and finding in its pages counsel and impulse. It is almost impossible to take up the story of any Christian mission without finding record upon record of those in whom faith has been born by the written word.

2. Again, there is *the hearing of the spoken word*. The great confessions of the Reformers placed peculiar reliance on the spoken word. 'The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.' There is no doubt of the power of the sympathetic and pleading human voice to be the medium of the voice of Christ. Yet one sometimes doubts whether so many are led into the portion of the believer as there should be. That may be the fault of the modern preacher, who seems to be fully as intent in building up men in comfort, as in convincing and converting sinners. Yet it is quite safe to say that the faith would wither at the root if the preacher ceased to speak. The evidences of his power abound in the witnesses who set down their names as having been brought into this new relationship to God as they listen to the spoken word. As John Wesley sat and heard Peter Bohler, as Spurgeon went into the little wayside chapel and heard the preacher speak on the words, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' as Lyman

Abbott was quickened by the appeal of Beecher—to take only conspicuous names, so likewise countless thousands owe their souls to the spoken word. The Church needs more evangelists. It needs more men who will deal with others in patient counsel. Above all it needs more converts who will bear witness by a constant testimony to the truth, and to the power of Christ to regenerate the soul and to transform the life. It has been declared with truth, that never did any man stand forth to bear testimony as to what God had done for his soul, when that testimony was given without affectation and without ostentation, without finding that some one soul heard, through the simple accents of the believer, the voice of Christ, and hearing believed.

3. Again, it is *the hearing of the Incarnate Word*. ‘The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.’ What is this glory of the word? It is the fulness of grace and truth. It is the stainless character of Jesus. As Christ went about doing good, as men beheld Him even when no word fell from His lips, that Incarnate Word spoke to conscience and heart, and men believed.

The word is still incarnate, though in the frail vessel of humanity, and it still creates faith. It is not often that sanctity brings forth faith in a vivid and dramatic experience. Yet could we recall and estimate our past, as we may one day be able to do, we might find ourselves among those who have been led into faith in God and in His Son by the adorning

of the doctrine of Christ, visible and beautiful in the life of some humble believer. Those who have lived with gracious and loyal spirits speak of the contagion of faith. But the contagion of faith is really the uprising of faith in response to the testimony of a life in which Christ's holiness walks once more among men. It is impossible for a young heart at least to live with one who overcomes temptation, endures suffering, resists all mean thoughts, and abounds in gentleness and kindness, all of which are the fruit of faith in Christ, without also becoming unconsciously a believer.

A single witness may be cited to set this truth in clear light. A man of mature years, to whom reserve on his religious experience was the habit of his life, was once induced to speak of the beginning of his faith. 'I was led to faith,' he said, 'by an old grey head.' In reply to the look of wonder which met this declaration, he explained that there sat in the seat before his father's, in the church of his boyhood, an old man whose life was one of singular beauty. His uprightness, his conscientious fidelity, his magnanimity, and his public spirit made him the leading personality in the civic life. But his grace and tenderness, and his overflowing generosity, won for him the reverence of all who had ever been in need. His character, as he always humbly said, was dependent on the grace given him through Jesus Christ. As the old grey head of this revered believer was bowed in prayer while he worshipped, the soul of the boy who marked him was led into an assurance of God. In after years, when he was tempted to

unbelief, and when he felt the surge of his own restless passions about to carry him off his feet, the old grey head would rise again and again in his memory, until at last the message it brought created faith in the old man's Saviour. He believed because he heard the incarnate word of Christ.

4. Again, it is *the hearing of the mystic word*. Nothing irrational, or occult, or unreal, is meant by the mystic word. It is the statement of the truth that the word of Christ speaks within us and quickens faith, at times, in an action too subtle and delicate to be easily explained. The astronomer exposes a delicately sensitised plate for a whole night to the star-strewn heavens. In the morning he finds recorded there the light of stars beyond the power of even his telescope to discover.

So the word of Christ comes to us, sometimes all unaware. The voice of nature which entrances the poet of the Nineteenth Psalm may be the medium of the voice of Christ. A man may pass within a shaded wood, or climb a hill, and find all the sounds of men and their toil quenched by distance. Another may find that God has made a silence in his life, and new thoughts, new rebukes, new hopes, new desires, coming he knows not how, are knocking at his soul. A man may enter an atmosphere in which the babel of the world's marketplaces is stilled, and a new peace falls upon the spirit. Richard Jefferies has said that men do not know what they miss because they will not be still. It is always in some time of stillness that we fall into a mood of yearning, are visited by truer conceptions of ourselves and our lives, by a

peculiar tenderness toward the things of Christ, and then there comes to us Christ's whisper, or even Christ's look, and faith in Him is born with all its wondrous energies and its eternal peace. It was as Elizabeth Barrett Browning heard the word of Christ in this mystic way that she wrote her sonnet on 'The Unchanging Christ':—

‘ Speak low to me, my Saviour, low and sweet,
From out the hallelujahs, sweet and low,
Lest I should fear and fall and miss Thee so,
Who art not missed by any that entreat.’

‘ Have they not heard ? ’ asks Paul. His answer is that they have heard with the hearing of the ear, but not with the hearing of the heart, that inner core of desire and will, and, therefore, they have not believed. That was the pathetic reproach of Christ. ‘ Who hath ears to hear, let him hear ’ is the constant word on His lips. That was why the sower's harvest was so meagre. How shall men secure that heart which believeth unto righteousness ? The man who will do the will of God as he knows it will pray that God will lead him into light and truth, and will wait the visitation of His Spirit, will not wait long until he find that One who hearkens has crossed his threshold, and that faith which is the saving grace is born within his soul. He has entered in at the strait gate.

XII

CONFESSION

‘He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.’—*PROV.* xxviii. 13.

‘For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’—*ROM.* x. 10.

‘OUT of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.’ A full heart cannot but overflow into speech. And a heart full with sincere emotion, upon repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, will overflow in confession. The springs within will be unsealed and the stream will pour forth in its own beauty and with its own music. Confession is the first cry on the believer’s lips as he enters in through the strait gate into the city and the fellowship of God. Confession is a cry with two notes. One of these is the note of the penitent in the confession of his sin, and the other, the note of the forgiven in a confession of his faith. A confession of faith is a simple and obvious duty, although, at times, it may require both moral and physical courage. But a confession of sin is more complex, and the temptations to neglect it, or to refuse it, are more subtle than those which assail men when they are on the eve of confessing Christ. The two confessions have this close relationship that it is

only when both of them are made, confession is complete. The note of the one confession should pass into and blend with the note of the other. Let us consider confession of sin, and we shall understand its consummation in confession of faith.

I

In the first place *confession of sin is confession to God.*

To confess one's sins to God is to go to Him with a clear, definite, unextenuating declaration of responsibility and of guilt. The words of confession are too often upon our lips without the inward humiliation of our hearts. Confession of sins is a part of all worship and a feature of all prayer. It is one of the flaws of all public prayer, and especially of liturgical forms of prayer, that sin is confessed in well-chosen and rhythmic sentences which are so often not only vague, but so worn by their familiarity as to be meaningless and valueless. A true confession in private always makes definite mention of the lie, the slander, the outbreak of temper, or the indulgence of passion which is red like scarlet in the memory and hot like fire in the conscience. An acceptable confession in public takes up the words of penitence, as they are uttered, and fills them with a personal and individual content. In the hour when we took the sin which has blocked our way to peace with God, and syllabled it in self-condemning words, or in the even more abasing sentences coined in the silence of our hearts, we made confession.

Confession to God is the pre-requisite and condi-

tion of His forgiveness. It is the condition of forgiveness—for clear reasons. It is not that God demands, as men sometimes demand, that we shall humiliate ourselves before Him. It is not an act of reparation for our evil. It is the proof that we separate between ourselves and our sin, accept God's condemnation upon it, and humbly admit that our sins are ours and no other's. But further it is the only possible relief from the defilement of sin. We have a suggestive phrase—to make a clean breast of it. That describes, in homely Saxon speech, the cleansing of the bosom and of the conscience from the sin which we are tempted to harbour and seclude. An unconfessed sin corrupts our thoughts, pollutes our imagination, and blocks the way of God's cleansing. In confession we not only throw off the burden of our wrongdoing, but only then can we accept and receive the forgiveness of God. 'When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.' That is the torment of the unconfessed sin. 'I, therefore, acknowledged my sin unto thee and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' That is the impassioned account of the Psalmist's experience. That mirrors the heart of the publican smiting on his breast in the Temple. That opens to us the secret of the prodigal's words when he stood in the father's presence, and felt, almost before his speech was completed, the father's kiss folded upon his lips.

But confession of sin must reach God's ear through

no other, under any claim of priestly authority. We understand the fascination of auricular confession. It is easier than direct confession to God, and we all are tempted to take the easier way. The Confessional would not have continued if it had not offered some an easier method of pouring out the tale of a dark iniquity. But, apart from the perils of the indelicate suggestions and prying inquiries of the questioning priest, apart from the invasion of the liberty we have in Christ, and apart from the wrong done to the consciences of men written large in the history of Romish countries, this practice means, in the end, that the penitent, believing man, is prevented from going right into the presence of God as a child goes to a father. 'Confess ye your sins one to another' gives no sanction to the priestly Confessional. The wiser Romish interpreters frankly admit that the counsel is to mutual and brotherly helpfulness. There is no trace of this form of confession in the primitive Catholic practice. It was not fastened on the Church until 1215, at the Fourth Lateran Council. As Hooker says decisively, 'These opinions have youth in their countenance: antiquity knew them not.'¹ Take the sin that lies upon your conscience, the fault, the custom, the neglect, the weakness of will, the chill of heart toward things holy, and simply, definitely, humbly, confess it to God Himself, and confess with the same breath your faith in Christ, and you will be forgiven and cleansed.

¹ *Ecclesiastical Polity*, bk. vi. chap. iv. p. 14.

II

In the second place *confession of sin is confession to men.*

This confession is as much neglected as confession to God, for it is sometimes more humbling, and, therefore, more difficult. It may not be always necessary, and sometimes it has become impossible. There may be a deed of the long past years, a word spoken in an ungoverned hour of youth, a purpose cherished in the heart which never became either a word upon the lips or an action in the life. It may serve no purpose to confess these sins unto men. Christ's counsel, 'Let the dead bury the dead,' yields the true obedience. It may be that others who have been implicated by us and with us would be exposed, and silence may, therefore, seal our lips. In such cases God does not deal hardly, and our consciences will find relief by the constant confession of our lonely prayer. But there have been men haunted by the past who have gone to God with a cry for forgiveness, and yet have not received their liberty and their peace, because they have refused to wear that most humbling sackcloth of a confession to men. 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy.'

This confession to men is sometimes the only proof and security of sincerity. It was the mark of the shallowness of Saul's penitence that he turned to Samuel, and craved to be honoured before the people, and refused to make the public acknowledgment of

his disobedience. The Penitential Psalms, which we all use in our hours of self-humiliation, were simply the public confessions of the great penitents. The day of atonement was the annual day when sin-burdened men and women made their pilgrimage to the Temple and openly confessed their sins. In the New Testament this public confession has a larger place. The converts of John the Baptist streaming down to the Jordan, Zaccheus, standing up in the midst of the company with self-reproachful acknowledgments, the men of Ephesus burning their base manuscripts in the market-place, are only examples of the necessity and blessing of open confession. Nathaniel Hawthorne has set this truth in that heart-shaking book, *The Scarlet Letter*. Arthur Dimsdale, the preacher, the evangelist, who could proclaim the Gospel with a pathos and a passion born of his deep knowledge of its power, refused to make confession to men. The anguish of his penitence, the outpouring of his cries to God, and his flaming zeal in his ministry, were of no avail so long as the confession to men would not pass his lips. Hawthorne describes this man's closing days, and evokes our pity and our fear as he describes his going down to a death of unforgiven despair because he will not make confession to men.

How brave and how ennobling is this public confession! How much we love the men who have the splendid courage to make it! Dr. Samuel Johnson stood bare-headed for a whole day in the market-place of Uttoxeter in the spot where his foolish young pride prevented him standing behind his father's bookstall.

He stood there to confess that sin of his youth unforgotten because unforgiven. He went homewards at nightfall with the peace of God in his heart. Dr. Chalmers rose up in the General Assembly of his Church and confessed his error before a stilled and wondering company. He acknowledged his ignorance and his heat and his partisan feeling. When he sat down and covered his face with his hands, he was exalted not only in men's hearts but in the grace of God. Augustine Birrell stood up in the House of Commons, but the other day, and humbly confessed that he had done wrong and failed in his high office. When he sat down every man realised that he had done one of the most courageous and most ennobling deeds. He had not only confessed his wrongdoing to God, but poured out his contrition before his fellow-men, and he who humbles himself, after that fashion, will be not only forgiven but exalted. A sin unconfessed remains a secret sin, and a secret sin holds dominion over the soul. The public confession is the breaking of its chain, and the passport to the forgiveness of God.

III

In the third place *confession of sin is confession to the wronged.*

Here we touch the most difficult and most delicate of all confessions. Yet there is no confession more imperative than this humbling admission to those against whom we have sinned and that restitution and amendment by which it should be followed. There are men who are convicted of sin, and even

repentant for their evil, who remain unforgiven of God because they will not acknowledge their wrong to those they have injured. 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' That is the law of Christ.

Towards the end of a week of special meetings a young man who had been present every night waited after every one was gone. He was in evident concern. He was plainly a man who had been trained in the discipline of the faith, and was reverent in speech and devout in spirit. Yet he bewailed that he knew himself to be outside the fold of Christ. There seemed to be no reason why he should not believe the truth of God's mercy, and yield himself and his life to Christ's obedience. But he was held by some undiscoverable bondage. He came on the next night, the last night of the course of meetings, in still deeper anxiety. In the conversation the question was put to him, 'Is there nothing you are concealing? You will never enter into Christ's peace until you make a clean breast of it. That may be your barrier.' He assured the inquirer that he had nothing to hide. Next morning he sought the preacher's door, shortly after the dawn. He was shaken, strained, trembling, after a sleepless night. He poured out the story of his wrongdoing. Five years before, when an assistant to a master who had treated him kindly, he had stolen from the till. He had been married for a year, at that time, and

his young wife had fallen sick. To procure her special delicacies he had taken a small sum from the till every day. That had been the burden on his conscience, the shadow on his spirit, the barrier to the peace and fellowship and service of Christ. He had known the remorseless tyranny of an unconfessed sin. He was told that he must confess and make restitution to the master he had wronged. He went his way in a new courage, and to his surprise he found his former master so moved by this humbling confession, that he not only freely forgave him, but broke out in a cry of shame, 'I fear I tempted you by the scanty wage I paid.' He came back and, in a new joy, he found the completing blessing of the forgiveness of God.

How liberating, how enriching, how exalting is this confession to the wronged! It makes a man one of God's noblemen in the very act. Our conduct to others is the witness against us that we realise its necessity. We are quick to insist that other men shall confess the wrong they have done to ourselves. We are eager to see men humble themselves and apologise and crouch to us. Let your brother's offence alone. It may be that you cannot forgive him until he repents and confesses. But you can cherish and maintain your own spirit of forgiveness. Nothing will help you more instantly to gain that forbearing and forgiving spirit than the confessing of your sin to those you have wronged. It may be that they were accomplices in your wrongdoing, and even tempters in your fall. It may be that your offence was one of your thoughtless years. That matters nothing. Your sin is your own. Confession

to the wronged with such restitution as may be possible, is a certain element in your confession to God, and it is a condition of your forgiveness.

This truth is made cogent by a fine passage in Morley's *Life of Gladstone*.¹ In 1836 Mr. Gladstone was a young man of twenty-seven years of age. He had all a young man's zeal, and keenness of championship for positions he has assumed. The Government of the day had recommended for the chair of divinity at Oxford a certain Dr. Hampden, who afterwards became Bishop of Hereford. Gladstone was a keen partisan of those who opposed Hampden, and condemned his opinions, and endeavoured to prevent his appointment. Twenty years afterwards, when a sounder judgment was possible, the heat and hasty zeal of his conduct made him ashamed. He wrote a letter to Hampden which many might think needless, to express his regret. He confessed how ignorant he was. He admits 'the forward precipitancy of my youth,' and humbly acknowledges his lament that he acted in a manner so different from what he can now approve. That frank, unpalliating confession to one he had wronged is a notable example of the grace and nobility of the character of the man who was justly called 'a great Christian.'

When and how this confession is to be made must be left to the individual conscience. No public or general counsel is of any avail. There may be instances in which silence is both kind and wise. There may be ways of expressing a repentant mind which

¹ Cf. vol. i. pp. 167, 168.

are more delicate and more remedial than any distinctive act. But this is a certainty that when confession is wise and restitution is possible both should be made. One solemn thought urges us all to the fulfilment of this sacred obligation. That is that the opportunity may pass away, and we may come to a day when it is too late to fulfil the prompting of God's Spirit. What can be more desolating than to come to the hour when some hard word or unkind deed, or some sin against the honour and purity of another rises up in the memory and burdens the conscience, but the heart that was wronged has ceased to beat? Who does not stand in fear that the mood of a true repentance should visit us only when standing around another's grave? The man who has been convicted of sin, and has repented toward God, should confess it not only to God, and to men, but to the wronged. Then we can claim the promise, 'If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse as from all unrighteousness.'

IV

In the fourth place *confession of sin consummates in confession of faith.*

When the confession of sin in the fulness of its music has been made, the confession of faith becomes a delight. To be ashamed of Christ seems to be impossible. To be daunted either by fear or by force, or to refuse to face the scorn of men, the tribulation of life, and the tasks of a believer, seems to be a thing of the past. We are willing, we are eager,

to bear our testimony everywhere. We crave to be numbered among the people of God. The heart has believed unto righteousness, and confession is made unto salvation. Then forgiveness passes upon the soul. Then the new birth becomes a certainty to ourselves. Then we find our feet within the gates of God's Jerusalem, and all the glory of the Holy City is before us. Things once dark become clear. Things once forbidding become beautiful. There is certainly no hour more entrancing than this hour of self-conscious experience. In such an hour all the great psalms and hymns were born within men's hearts. Chalmers spoke of it as a time of Elysium. The Apostle Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, describes its issue in a word of deep significance. 'Repent ye, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, so that there may come *seasons of refreshing* from the presence of the Lord.' It is in the hour of the confession of our faith that our sins are blotted out and the season of refreshing visits us. To Greek writers the word Peter uses recalled the fresh breath of the morning which quickened every weary man who had waited through the night for the coming of the dawn. It reminded him of the tide which rose slowly over the sands strewn with the wreckage of the shore, and cleansed them of their defilement. It suggested the showers of the spring falling upon the parched earth, and reviving and quickening every lovely growing thing. So the penitent whose confession of sin has become a confession of faith finds himself visited by a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

XIII

DRESSED IN BEAUTY NOT MY OWN

‘Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.’—PSALM xxxii. 2.

‘That I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.’—PHIL. iii. 9.

THE imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ is a withered and discarded phrase. Yet the Reformers of all communions inscribed it in their historic confessions with impassioned conviction. A generation ago devout believers, held in reverence for their sanctity, uttered it in their prayers with a trembling emotion. And to all time, in a succession never broken, men and women to whom it has been not only unreal and unmeaning, but an offence, as a sentence framed by teachers who are held in the thrall of Paul’s Rabbinic reasoning, will awaken to its truth and grace. They may coin their experience into the current speech of the time, but they reach the same assurance that they stand before God in a righteousness which is not their own, but is Christ’s, received by them through faith alone.

A little cottage meeting in an upland village had dispersed, and the good man of the house came out to convoy the speaker across the moor. He was a man no longer young, as the whitening hair

and dimming eyes declared, but his iron frame and steadfast tread showed no lessening of his superb strength. He had been a callous and defiant unbeliever, proclaiming his unbelief in God and the Gospel with a fearless energy of unshakable conviction. But he had been caught in the revival of 1859. After months of moral and spiritual wrestling he had been found in Christ. The echoes of his struggle were heard all his years in the pathos of his prayers. It was a still clear night and the two men walked on in silence, under the wide, clear heavens strewn with myriad stars. The speaker's text had been, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' He had appealed for a nobler ideal and a higher attainment in righteousness, and he had closed by declaring that the wedding garment for which the King would look when he came in to see the guests was the robe of character. As they entered upon the moor the older man began to speak, half musingly, on the searching and rebuking message of the evening, and to express the need of a greater loyalty to Christ's command. Then he added, 'Five-and-twenty years ago I found peace in being clothed with the righteousness of Christ. There I found shelter, and there I find shelter still; and there, when the King comes in to see the guests, I shall find shelter—at the end.' His eyes were lit up with his absorbing fervour. With an intense and straining hand-clasp he was gone.

The younger man walked on troubled and self-questioning. He had preached the new birth and the new life, the need of the forgiveness of sins, the

acceptance of the mercy of God in Christ, and the self-renunciation which is its complement. But the older man's words lifted his eyes to a heaven whose moral canopy was more wondrous than that of the stars. A thought of Pascal's read that morning, which had affirmed that too few had a faith of God which saw Him as He is, flashed into his mind. In the light of God's infinite holiness the sins and faults of his youth stood out as never before. The daring wilfulness of many of his idler moods, and his unconfessed distaste of holiness, seemed to render him liable to the penalty of the sin that hath never forgiveness. His whole nature seemed crimson red with the stain of his wrongdoing. He needed something more than he had yet received before he could meet the glance of the King. He knelt, and also sheltered himself, as the older man had done, in the righteousness of Christ, accepted as his in that hour of faith. When he arose he stood under a third heaven of grace, higher than his thoughts had ever reached. The psalm was upon his lips, 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.' He went homeward with McCheyne's two lines making music within:—

'When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own.'

Now what is the spiritual content of such a religious experience? It is always individual and always lonely. But it is surely open to be shared by every human soul who fulfils its conditions. Has this righteousness by faith been received only by a few,

or is it open to universal humanity? Is this experience the only mode by which the soul enters into a full and complete and final standing before God through being found in Christ? Let us endeavour to analyse it.

I

FIRST: *The righteousness which is by faith is the righteousness of a new relationship to God.*

The relationship of man to God by nature is one of alienation which passes into enmity. 'The carnal heart is enmity against God.' That truth need not be enforced on any who have lived within heathendom. Its gluttony for evil, its enslaving superstitions, and the trembling terror which seizes men's minds at nightfall, give evidence of this truth. It is equally clear to every man who is honest with himself. 'There is something in us all,' writes Principal Rainy, 'which objects to God.' To our common consciousness God is a source of fear, a being from whom we shrink, and from whose holiness we hide ourselves. Too often we remember God and are troubled. We reach a stage when, with the men of pagan Rome, we do not like to retain God in our knowledge, or to acknowledge His sovereignty over us. But when, each one in his own way, we come to see God in His truth and goodness and mercy, we change our minds toward Him. We stand in a new relationship to Him, a relationship of trust to the Maker of our bodies and the Father of our spirits. Our faith may be no more than a

grain of mustard seed, but it is potent to alter our relationship, and to reshape our lives.

Now, next to being loved, to be trusted is the most satisfying attitude that one spirit can take up toward another. It brings us into a relationship which quenches all enmity and alienation. A child may have been wilful and petulant until its mother's anger has been roused, but when the little arms are clasped in a sobbing confidence round the mother's neck, the trust confessed in the clinging pressure banishes all alienation. The man who has erred in his word or deed, and wronged us to our wounding, comes to us trusting in our magnanimity and kindness, and his trust brings him at once into a new relationship. In a similar manner, when a human soul, hitherto cherishing base thoughts of God and rebellious in will against His demands, turns to trust in God, he enters into a new relationship. In that new relationship he is forgiven. His sins are not imputed to him, and his faith is counted to him as righteousness. He is still a frail and feeble man in all moralities. He will be tempted to recreant thought, and he will yield. Night by night he will come with his confession of slip and fall. Yet he will not lose his trust in God. That determines his relationship to God, and his standing before God. He is accepted, not for his own righteousness, but for the righteousness implied in his relationship of faith.

The two outstanding instances of the Scriptures illustrate this aspect of the truth. When Abraham came out of Chaldea, turning from the gods which pass away to the true and living God, who knew

him, cared for him, and sought fellowship with him, he entered into a new relationship to God. He was not perfect either in faith or obedience. He was still greatly ignorant, and his face would yet be filled with shame. But as he built his altar and made his covenant in sacrifice, he trusted God, and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness. In the same way the writer of the Thirty-second Psalm came to a day of alienation and fear, such as David knew when he kept silence in a sullen impenitence. His wilful heart became more stubborn day by day. But when he humbled himself and cast himself on the infinite mercy of God, in an act of faith, he stood at once in a new relationship to God. He was a frail and faulty man. His walk with God would not always be close and intimate. Yet his trust in God's love and grace gave him the standing of those who are accepted and are forgiven. And in the same way the publican went down from the Temple justified, clothed upon with the righteousness of the new relationship. So down all the centuries those who have trusted God have been accepted, not for their own righteousness but through faith. They have been able, like Bengel, to close each day with the soft word of confidence, 'We are on the same terms, Lord.' That is a righteousness of faith.

II

SECOND : *The righteousness which is by faith is a righteousness of a new principle of life.*

In the moment in which a man trusts in God and

takes up a new relationship to Him he is born again. In that new birth he is endued with a new principle and energy of life. The germ of the holy character is implanted in his soul. But it is only the promise and the potency of righteousness. It is the dream of an attainment, a devotion to something afar, the will and purpose of a strength and beauty yet to be. Yet that principle within him determines what he is. Not his emotions, not the expression of his convictions, not the grace of his prayers, and not even the tenor of his commonplace day, but this inward and secret passion of his will marks the man's true quality. He has not only been forgiven and accepted, but God has wrought in him the root and rudiment of righteousness, and he stands before God's all-seeing eye in a righteousness imputed to him in his act of faith.

There are analogies which make this conception clear. The gardener plants an acorn in the loam, and soon the green shoot appears. He names that little, tender, almost formless green stem an oak. It bears no resemblance to the oak in the meadow, with its gnarled and knotted trunk, its stubborn arms, and its spread of branch and leaf. But to that frail, little, upspringing thing the gardener imputes the perfection it will one day attain. A painter takes his brush and draws upon the canvas a few initial strokes in an hour of clear conception and fresh inspiration. There may be no more than a rough and hasty sketch of what will yet be a finished masterpiece. The visitor to the studio may be struck more by the crudeness of the colouring and the startling contrast of the light and shade. But to

the painter it is a picture, with a name, and when he has spent his thought and time upon it the face will stand out in its beauty. He imputes a perfection it does not yet possess. So the human spirit, at present compassed about with infirmity, whose hours are strangely mingled with effort and aspiration, lapse and indulgence, flushings of joy and tears of remorse, may seem to have no claim to be counted as righteous. But he has believed in God. He has yielded himself to the will and the power of God. The Divine One who knows the hour of self-surrender, and marks the true bent of the soul, accords to him a righteousness not yet achieved—a righteousness which is of faith. The cry of penitence, the craving of the heart for holiness, the girding of the loins to walk in the way of a stricter truth and purity, the throb of a true devotion to Christ, all are yet imperfect, but they are the promise and potency of a perfection yet to be, and the principle behind them is counted by God as righteousness.

‘ All instincts immature,
 All purposes unsure,
 All I could never be,
 All men ignored in me,

This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.’

III

THIRD : *The righteousness which is by faith is the acceptance of the righteousness of Christ, in a faith which makes us one with Him.*

The righteousness of faith through a new relation-

ship, and in the potency of a new principle, brings us only to the threshold of the New Testament truth. These do not constitute the righteousness of the saints in Christ. The old man with the shining eyes, who gave his testimony under the stars, knew a deeper secret than these attain. Yet in the infinite mercy of God we can believe that He accepts those who have the righteousness of the new relationship and the new principle, and does not impute their sins to them, but accounts them as righteous in His sight. There are children of God whom Abraham might not acknowledge, and yet God is their Father in heaven. There have been times of ignorance that God overlooked, in which men groped after Him, and surely He was found of them. God does not deal with the man who knew not all His will as He does with the man to whom He has made known His ways. He does not ask from the man with five talents what he expects from the man with ten. 'In every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.'

So the great heathen, whose dream and desire sought after God, whose discipline schooled their souls to righteousness, who put their trust in Him, although His face was shrouded by darkness, were justified in their faith, and it was counted to them for righteousness. So the wistful and wondering devotees in whom the spring of a new life had been quickened by the Eternal Spirit, who were striving to walk by their feeble glimmer of 'the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,' were also accepted as righteous, through

their faith. Even the Hebrew saints, from Abraham to the last devout soul that died at the dawn of the kingdom of God, who trusted in the power of what the writer to the Hebrews calls 'the better hope,' were accepted as righteous in God's sight. In the same way there are many who have never joined the fellowship of Christ's humble folk, and have never risen to the height of the revelation of God in His Son, and have never stood with mingled penitence and love beneath the cross, and yet, through their new relationship and the throb of the spiritual life in their souls, they have been accepted of Him.

But they have not entered into the fulness of life in Christ. They have not stood complete in Him. For one thing, their faith has never quite escaped that taint of salvation by works which has corrupted all religion, and bound its heavy yoke upon men's spirits. For another thing they have never entered into the fulness of peace and joy men have who believe in God through Christ, and have accepted Christ's righteousness as theirs, when they have felt the deep-dyed faultiness of their own. All the deathless hymns of the Christian faith, all the splendid zeal for the Christian Gospel, all the noble martyrdoms of the Christian history, and, one may dare to say, all the more radiantly tender, beautiful, and self-denying sanctities, are born within the souls of those who have meekly and humbly accepted the righteousness of Christ.

That experience is the consummating moment in the soul's surrender to God. There comes a moment when not only the things we have done in the flesh,

the foul procession of thoughts within the soul, the whirl and dance of feeling which stir the blood in our veins, but even our generous deeds, gentle moods, kindly impulses, yes, and even our sob of penitence and our hour of far-visions faith, are seen to be all flawed and faulty in God's sight. There comes an hour when we are too conscious that, were God's great light to be cast upon our souls and our lives, men would hide their faces from us ashamed. In that hour a man cannot trust in the new relationship, or the new principle of life. He comes to see his sin as Christ saw it. He shares in his measure, in Christ's grief and burden for it. He consents to Christ's sacrifice as the means of his reconciliation, and the source of his forgiveness. In an act of faith he identifies himself with Christ, and becomes one of that great company, and a member of that body, of which Christ is the Head. He believes not only in the marvel but in the miracle of forgiveness, and he rises to know himself not only forgiven but redeemed, and to stand for ever within the righteousness of Christ. In that moment, in every hour of his life, and at the end, he hopes to stand 'dressed in a beauty not his own.'

The blessedness of this righteousness by faith in Christ has features which every believer recognises. 1. The first of these is the assurance of pardon. The word is too often upon our lips without any real feeling of its grace. A youth who had forged his master's name, and lived in daily and nightly foreboding and fear of discovery, so that every footstep that came suddenly upon him gave him a shiver of

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the case

terror, discovered that no word was so potent for felicity as pardon. When the master whom he had wronged not only forgave him but restored the sum to the firm, the skies shone with a deeper blue and the face of every man seemed lined with goodness. The whole world was changed. 2. The second is a sense of peace—not merely peace of conscience but peace with God. There comes upon the soul the assurance that God loves with a personal and particular love, and therefore nothing in the past and nothing in the future can daunt us. It is the peace which passeth all understanding, that makes every morning bright, and calms and strengthens in the day of vexation and strain, anxiety and disappointment. 3. The third is the supreme power of the noblest motive the will has ever felt. Only the man who knows that he owes everything to Christ, and that he stands ‘accepted in the beloved,’ will be impelled to that loyalty and devotion which puts on strength and beauty and aspires to be conformed unto Christ’s image. Yet he ever meekly recognises that his hope and confidence are to stand ‘dressed in a beauty not his own.’

Why do men refuse to be thus found in Christ? Is it not because they find the acceptance of the righteousness which is by faith the narrowest part of the strait gate? It is the casting down of that pride which rules in the innermost citadel of the unsundered heart. To pass through that experience has been described as being crucified with Christ! It is the crucifixion of that self-will which is the secret and citadel of our alienation to Him who loves us.

XIV

CHRIST FASHIONED WITHIN

‘It pleased God . . . to reveal his son in me.’—GAL. i. 15-16.

‘My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.’—GAL. iv. 19.

‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’—COL. i. 27.

WE are all familiar with the saying that in every man there are three personalities. But a truer reading of human nature modifies this statement. There is only one personality, but that personality lives and moves in three worlds of thought, desire, and will. The first of these three worlds is that of our ordinary thought and our transient feeling as they are expressed in the intercourse of life. The second is the world of inner desire, with its self-communing and unconfessed hopes and fears. We all know this inner world with its ambitions in which we live, its fancies and imaginings, its unspoken conversations, its unheard debates. We keep it hidden away from our fellow-men, but ever and again its door is opened and what is passing within is disclosed. As we sit and speak with some friend we unlock our heart to him. Some sudden happening reveals an attraction or a distaste which we have never confessed. Or, in some crisis of our life, we disclose in an unexpected word or deed the undercurrent of our thought and

desire. But within and behind these two, there is a third realm. It is a world wholly unknown to our fellow-men, and greatly dark to ourselves. It is the Holy of Holies—the shrine of the soul. The other two are only the Outer Court and the Holy Place.

We know how real this inmost and benmost sphere of life is. When we were children there were names which were household words, places familiar in every feature, incidents which were the great events of our short history, persons who were our guides. Many of these have melted into the infinite azure of the past. We cannot recall them by any act of will. Yet let some name stand out on a page, or let some word fall upon our ear from a speaker's lips, or let some old faded letter come into our hands, and at once, swimming up out of this secret inmost world, there come the names, faces, events, personalities, upon which we thought death had laid its binding spell. They were not dead; they were only lodging in this inmost and benmost world of our being. Or think of the mystery of our dreams. We sleep, and picture after picture rises in our imagination. We become actors on a stage whose scenery we have never beheld. We live in a world so full of contradiction to the real world of our knowledge that we are bewildered even while we dream. We often wake with a thankful cry that we have been passing only through a fantasy of the night. Whence come these visitations? They are the uprush from that limbo of the under-world, whose gates seem to be fast sealed in our waking hours, and they seize upon our minds and dominate our thoughts.

Take a still more convincing proof of the reality of this inmost world. One man conceives an impassioned emotion of love in a single moment of time. Another is seized by an unexpected and unconquerable dislike. Another, long held in reverence, breaks out into a sudden crime. Another passes through a great change in life which, in one hour, transforms his whole outlook. We wonder at these happenings. Their source and secret is that they are the effects of a movement, perhaps a revolution, in this inmost and innermost world of our being. Out of its opened gates there have streamed impulses, passions, hopes, ambitions, which have long been lying dormant, or have been held in check by strong self-control. But the barrier has been broken down, and they pass out to hold dominion over our lives.

With this truth is bound up the most mystic issue in religious experience. The broad law of a victorious Christian life is that Christ must be dominant within the soul. Christ must be fashioned within. It is not enough that Christ should control the outer court of our life, our judgment, our habits, our intercourse with the world, or even our worship and service. It is not enough that Christ should be the Master in the second chamber of our being, and that we should think on Him with reverence, and dwell upon Him in quiet meditation, and find our minds glow with tender feeling towards His moral loveliness. Christ must pass in through the two outer courts. He must enter to abide within us, and to hold our will in the hollow of His hand. He must be the indwelling personality who will fashion us like

unto Himself. The whole history of the Christian conquest is the fashioning of Christ within.

There are three clearly outlined stages in this fashioning. The first is—*Christ born within*; the second—*Christ formed within*; the third—*Christ perfected within*.

I

FIRST: *Christ born within.*

There is a decisive spiritual change by which a man becomes a Christian. We should not encourage any narrow thoughts about the circumstances of its happening, or the emotions which it arouses, or the words in which it finds expression. We are all so different in age and situation, in our past and even our present, in our training and our temperament, that no two men ever have had the same experience in this vital change. For that reason it is described in Scripture under many names. It is called: 'being renewed in the spirit of your mind'; 'being quickened together with Christ'; 'being called out of darkness into his marvellous light'; 'becoming a little child'; 'awaking as from a deep sleep'; 'passing from death unto life'; 'becoming a new creature in Christ Jesus.' But Jesus always uses the final, the perfect, and the most beautiful word, and He names it—the new birth. 'Ye must be born again.' 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' 'Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' Until that spiritual change has taken place, the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, with its transforming and

entrancing ideals, and its meek and lowly obediences, is not within our ken. Nothing else so differentiates one man from another as this being born again. When two men have been born again they know it by a sign which is surer than the mason's grip, and swifter than the lover's glance. Where does this new birth take place? Not in the outer world of daily thought and action, and not in the inner world of self-communing. It takes place in this inmost core of our being. What is it in simplest terms? It is Christ passing into the secret place of our soul, a spiritual presence, to be fashioned within.

To that experience Paul refers in one of his strange words. 'It pleased God to reveal his Son in me.' There was a day when Paul was Christ's bitterest enemy. His whole man, throughout all the three worlds of His being, was in revolt against Christ. His outer life was an unresting campaign against Christ and His people. His mind was closed against the Gospel, and was surging with the persecutor's madness. His inner spirit was dark with an intense hate, more deadly than he cared to confess. But the inmost core of his being was a fortress held in defiance against Christ. We know how Jesus laid siege to Paul. We can mark the steps by which He conquered him. Paul's large, sane, penetrating mind began to understand the wisdom of Christ's words. Jesus in His grace and loveliness began to creep into the study of his imagination. Then Christ passed into the second world of Paul's deeper thought and more wistful desire. The conviction that the way of his walking was not securely right brought forth

self-reproaches and strange relentings. The record of that stage of experience is to be found in the words, 'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' But Christ was not yet born within. There came that moment on the road to Damascus when the great light shined about him, and the voice of Christ rang through him, and the barrier of the shrine was broken down, and Christ passed in to dwell at the centre of his being. God had revealed His Son in Paul.

That is always the first stage in the fashioning of Christ within. It is not so vivid or so dramatic in men of a different make and with a different history from that of Paul. It does not usually require to effect so tremendous a change. It is not often so consciously realised. But it always changes the man at the core of his being. It is always an event in this inmost and benmost world. It is always the coming of life, and it comes in a moment. 'This is conversion, the passing, as the Bible calls it, from death unto life. Those who have stood by another's side at the solemn hour of this dread possession have been conscious sometimes of an experience which words are not allowed to utter—a something like the sudden snapping of a chain, the waking from a dream.' ¹

II

SECOND : *Christ formed within.*

Every organism at its birth is lowly in its form and function. To use the language of science it is only an

¹ Henry Drummond, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, p. 94.

embryo. It has few members, feeble capacities, an undeveloped life. When a man is born again he is only a Christian in embryo. Christ comes into his inmost world as the germ of the new life which is yet to flower out into the beauty of holiness. So Paul writes to these Galatian believers who have been born again, but are veined and flawed by faults, 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.' He is setting forth, in his own intense way, under this strange and daring figure of the pangs of motherhood, his desire to see Christ formed within them in a fuller loveliness.

We all understand that tender desire. We all know how crude was our knowledge, how dim our vision of His grace, how unruly our wills, when Christ was first born within. We have sometimes wondered whether we were Christian at all in those early days of immaturity. Yes—Christ was revealed in us, but He was not formed in the soul. As we have yielded ourselves to His will, made larger room for Him in our hearts, and given Him a fuller dominion over our lives, He has been more fully formed within. A young believer is a deep delight to God and to man. There is no more gladdening experience than that of the young soul who has set Christ on the throne in an unstained youth. There is none which so fully ensures a life of peace. But a young believer never wears the spiritual grace of an old saint. Painters tell us that a child's face, soft, rosy, dimpled, is scarcely worth the skill of the artist's hand. It is some old, worn, deeply-lined face which has passed through temptation, prayed in

hours of strain, shed hot tears in the night of penitence and sang in the days of victorious faith, now scarred and seamed, yet radiant with the beauty of holiness, which the painter loves to portray. It is the old believer who wears the highest spiritual beauty. Grace for grace, and grace after grace, grace upon grace, and grace in grace, have been given out of Christ's fulness. Christ's compassion, His unflinching courage, His tenderness with the erring, His meekness to the froward, His lowliness of bearing, His zeal for God, have all been developing and deepening into beauty, as Christ has been formed within.

It may be that some one is tempted to think that we are losing touch with reality when we speak of Christ being formed in the inmost core of our being. It may seem that we are speaking in too high, too daring, and too mystic a way when we declare that Christ may be fashioned within the spirit of man. But it should not be a strange thing to any one to say that one personality may possess and pervade another. It is quite within the range of our experience that one personality has become the life and force of another, so as to be formed within. Browning, with his usual insight into the working of the soul, has set this truth in his poem 'By the Fireside.' He describes a simple scene. He shows us a husband and wife sitting by the hearthstone in the evening hour. They have lived in a close and unsullied fellowship. They are both growing old. The husband tells his wife how deeply and potently her personality and character have penetrated his:—

‘ My own, see where the years conduct,
 At first, ’twas something our two souls
 Should mix as mists do ; each is sucked
 In each now : on the new stream rolls,
 Whatever rocks obstruct.’

That is the old man’s first statement of this strange possession of one personality by another. He recalls the closer, more tender, more potent intimacy of spirit with spirit, as life went on. Then he passes to the scene of the perfect consummation. It came, as they stood at the close of day, on a rustic bridge over a quiet stream :—

‘ A moment after, and hands unseen
 Were hanging the night around us fast ;
 But we knew that a bar was broken between
 Life and life : we were mixed at last
 In spite of the mortal screen.’

Do not think that is a conception which has surged only through a great poet’s heart. I have seen it time and again in the simplest men and women sitting by the humblest of firesides. And I have seen its spiritual counterpart in the men and women in whom Christ had been born, and in whom He was being formed, year by year, in grace after grace, until life and life ‘ were mixed at last in spite of the mortal screen.’

III

THIRD : *Christ perfected within.*

‘ That God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which

is Christ in you, the hope of glory.' This hope, made confident by the experience of its power, breathes through the aspirations of all the New Testament saints. Paul's prayer is consummated in John's unforgettable anthem, 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' What is the reality to which this hope looks out? The day is coming when all that is earthly shall pass away, and all that is temporal shall be no more. The body in which we dwell, the eyes with which we see, the lips with which we speak, the hands with which we toil, the brain with which we plan and purpose—all the outer and fleshly world of our being—shall pass into dust. The two outer worlds belong to time, and, with time, they shall pass away. What shall remain is this inmost world of our personality where Christ has been formed within. There shall Christ be perfected. We have been planting our bulbs in the earth in the knowledge that—

' There is a day in spring
When under all the earth the secret germs
Begin to stir and grow before thy bud.'

As the life within begins to move, the outer husks and coverings fall away into death and rotteness. But the life sends up its living green shoots into the world of light and beauty. Then the form of the plant begins to appear, and finally the flower lifts its head in the mellow sunshine. So Christ, born within and formed within, shall, in that new atmo-

sphere of light and love, be perfected, and we shall be 'conformed unto the likeness of God's dear Son.'

All this rises up to a solemn issue. It brings us face to face with the alternative which cannot be escaped. Either Christ has been born within, and is passing on to a perfect fashioning, or some other personality is becoming the indwelling and dominant spirit of our inmost being. There is a sentence in the Gospel which no one can read without being brought to a pause. 'And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him.' Up to that moment Judas had held the shrine of the soul against the Evil One. Christ had been his fellow sentinel to keep the watch with him. He had had his hours of conviction. He had known the power of Christ to arouse the nobler passions of the soul. He had almost repented. Now, as Jesus gave him the sop, there was that appeal to him which might have ended in a true repentance and a complete surrender. But in the act, there uprose his wicked heart, and Judas passed from the gate of heaven to the door of hell. That spiritual tragedy happens every day. Christ seeks and haunts the footsteps of those who are like to be cast away. He makes His appeal to them still, even as they sit at His supper table, 'Behold: I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' That is the timeless word of the wondrous music with which Christ seeks entrance that He may

be fashioned within. But the shrine will not remain empty. If Christ be denied, some other will enter in. The Evil One will become dominant, and we shall be fashioned unto his likeness as too many men have been.

‘ O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray ;
Cast out our sin, and enter in ;
Be born in us to-day.’

XV

THE POTENCIES OF FAITH

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world : and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'—
1 JOHN V. 4.

FAITH is the master word of all religion. By faith is meant the sense of the unseen and eternal, the certainty that God is, and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, the assurance of solemn realities apprehended in an experience of the soul. 'Faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen,'¹ is the definition of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and he proves his definition in the roll-call of the heroes of faith which he appends to it. A Christian faith is an assurance of God, and of His love, and grace in Jesus Christ. The man who has heard Christ's voice and responded to it, and has surrendered his soul to Christ's keeping and his life to Christ's guidance, is a believer.

In the moment in which a man believes he becomes conscious of what has made faith difficult, and will continue to test it all life through. That impediment St. John calls 'the world.' He does not mean the visible realm of nature, nor does he mean the aggregate of humanity—the world of men and women.

¹ American Revised Version.

It is the spirit, and power, and energy of evil, lying behind the visible world, using and corrupting the things of the senses, embodied in many shapes and forms, policies and agencies, and always opposed to truth and purity and goodness and God. Sometimes this evil spirit and force of 'the world' is manifested in a foul idolatry; sometimes in a scornful philosophy; sometimes in a profligate licence and luxury; sometimes in a ruthless ambition; sometimes in a brutal militarism. To this spirit of evil there is always opposed, in unceasing conflict, 'whatsoever is born of God.' All spiritual aspiration, all moral passion, all endeavour after righteousness, all sacrifice for human wellbeing are born of God. The inspiration and strength of all these moral and spiritual energies is faith, which is the first-born of God within the soul.

Faith, then, faces the world and it overcomes. It has three potencies: first, *the potency of vision*; second, *the potency of venture*; third, *the potency of victory*.

I

FIRST: *Faith as Vision.*

By vision is meant a perception of truths hidden from unenlightened eyes. Faith is contrasted with sight, which beholds the outward world of light and order and beauty. It is contrasted with knowledge, which is the mastery of the facts and laws of the visible world, and of the data of universal human experience. Faith is not to be contrasted with reason, for faith should be both reasoned and reasonable.

But it rises above a mere intellectual apprehension of, an assent to, moral and spiritual truth. It has an environment of which multitudes are not aware, and a consciousness of a Personality whose shadow some men have never seen upon the path. Faith is an impassioned consent of the soul in its prospect of the spiritual world.

All men are believers after their own measure. We all live by faith, for life is not possible without it. A little child lives by the faith in its mother by whose hand it is led. A husband lives by the faith in his wife on whose counsel and sympathy he depends. A man lives by his faith in his partner in business with whom he co-operates. The misanthrope, the sour and sullen recluse, the bitter cynic, is simply a man in whom faith has died. But faith comes to its kingdom only in the things of the soul. Then it sees the further horizon, enters into a new world whose gates other men never find, and becomes a moral, and a passionate energy. The vital distinction between man and man is, that one man lives under the power of this world, and the other under the power of the world to come.

Now the strength and force of faith as vision depends upon the range of the horizon. Some men have faith only in *righteousness*. They believe that we live under the governance of immutable moral laws. They deny that victory lies with the big battalions. They are assured that righteousness is the supreme good. They have the conviction that truth and honesty, courage and purity will be justified in the end. Among those believers there stand those

ancient heroes of Greek and Roman history who loved and served the highest good they had discerned, and died in loyalty to truth and honour. We have never lacked these believers in righteousness. In the autobiography of John Stuart Mill, in the penetrating portraiture of George Meredith, in the high and serious writings of John Morley, we have the steadfast assertion of a faith in righteousness solemn, austere, controlling. There are men who have attained to no other faith, but they stand among us clothed upon with integrity and fidelity.

There are others who believe in *the unseen*. Faith in righteousness is merely a conviction of the supremacy of moral law. Faith in the unseen is an assurance that the world is not only under a reign of law, but is a part of a spiritual order. It is a belief not merely in such things unseen as love and truth, but in forces invisible which bear in upon men's spirits and affect their destinies. To these men the mountain is full of horses and of chariots of fire. Among them there stand Emerson with his illuminating and inspiring aphorisms, Matthew Arnold with his pathetic poems, instinct with the awe of the eternal, and Browning who, as a believer in the revelation of God in Christ, strikes with a more steadfast constancy the note of certainty and of confidence in the unseen.

The highest reach of faith is to believe in *a living God*. To be persuaded of the law of righteousness, and to affirm that there is a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness, do not rise to the level of the man who believes in God Who lives, and

knows, and loves, and cares. That was the faith which distinguished the Hebrew from all other races, and gave him the spiritual leadership of the nations. That faith was consummated in the revelation of Jesus Christ. That disclosure of God in Christ may be realised if we think of a man moving within the darkened room of a man sunk in a deep slumber. When the sleeper awoke he was dimly conscious that another personality was not far from him, and he heard the coming and going of his breathing. As he arose, he listened intently as a soft footfall fell upon his ears. As he stood still in wonder a whisper seemed to vibrate softly upon the air. But he found the message of the whisper difficult to understand. Suddenly the shutters which darkened the room were flung back, the light streamed in, and he saw the face of one who looked upon him with infinite love and desire. It was he who had awaked him from his sleep, and was now eager to hold him in his embrace. 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' That is the vision of Christian faith. Peter sets it in his compact sentence, 'Who *by him* do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.'

This succession of believers with the vision of God never fails. Some rise at the dawning in the eagerness of their quest and He meets them as they walk in the garden, and calls them by their names. Others

gather with those who wait for Him in an upper room and He comes to them with His salutation—Peace! Others walk at eventide in the sadness of a disappointed hope and He joins their company, and their hearts burn within them. Others find the morning break after a night of discouragement and defeat, and as His voice calls they say, ‘It is the Lord!’ Others stride on in a headlong course of evil, but He meets them by the way, breaks their pride, and wins them to Himself. These all have the vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and they look out on the world of the seen and temporal with enlightened and conquering eyes.

II

SECOND : *Faith as Venture.*

Every man who has the vision passes on to make the venture. Even the man who believes in righteousness takes all its risks. He stakes his course and career on the certainty of the supremacy of righteousness in the world. The man who believes in the unseen makes the venture of resisting the coarse allurements of sense. He disdains the gratification of a callous greed or a sensual pleasure. He is not dazzled by the gleam of the things of time. But the man who has the vision of God makes more daring ventures. Like Abraham he goes out not knowing whither he goes. Like Joseph, when he is tempted, in the heat of his youth, he will surrender liberty and endanger life as he makes his protest, ‘How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’ Like

Moses he will refuse the pleasures of Egypt, and choose to suffer affliction with the people of God, because he endures as seeing Him who is invisible.

These outstanding examples may seem to be too splendid for our obscurer lives. Yet in the simplest experience, and at every stage of life, the vision of faith passes into the venture. Principal Fairbairn, of Oxford, has described the venture of faith by recalling a reminiscence of his early childhood. 'As a little child I have trembled to cross at night the courtyard of a lonely country mill. Every little object that moonlight or starlight revealed to me in other than natural proportions was a source of fear, and seemed to hide shapes terrible to childish flesh and blood. But if my little hand was laid in the large hand of my father, I could cross the courtyard as gleefully and carelessly at night as at noonday.'

That is the secret of the venture of faith. There is so much to contradict our faith. We see wrong prevailing over right. We see falsehood crowned with success. We see the highest honours given to those we know to be the undeserving. We see mere worldly state, and even ill-gotten possessions, given the consideration which should be reserved for goodness and nobleness. 'The world,' in St. John's sense, seems to gain the pre-eminence. Then our own lives are full of bewilderment. Great changes alter our prospects and quench our hopes. We are daunted by insuperable difficulties, and our lives are shadowed by pain and sorrow. We feel both ignorant and frail before the craft and pitiless force of the world. We have to cross our courtyard, and we have the

trembling of the heart. But when we have had the vision of the God and Father of Jesus Christ, and can put our hand in His, we make our venture and step out, and we are always surprised by the wisdom and love of His providence.

Many days of our life call for this venture. But there is one hour in which our vision passes on to its supreme and transforming experience. That is the hour in which a man, through faith in Christ Jesus, ventures his soul and its keeping, with his life and its ordering, to Christ as Redeemer and Lord. He finds himself face to face with the great Personality with whom he has to do. His evil past, his unconfessed indulgences, the deep inner core of rebellion in his will, and all the outer world of seductive charm and of disdainful scorn, hold him back. But, in the vision of God in Christ, so clear that His love and desire are seen to be the most momentous things of time and eternity, he makes faith's greatest venture, and enters into the fellowship of Christ, and finds peace and joy in believing.

That is the experience, however various may be its circumstances, which every believer understands. It marks the critical hour of life in all the New Testament saints from John and Andrew, when they sat with Jesus, and, as the hour grew late, found the Messiah, to the dying thief who laid his sins on Jesus with a joy which almost overcame his agony. It is the experience disclosed in those books which are the treasures of many a humble home. It is the experience set in the passionate measures of our noblest hymns. The testimony to it is heard from

men's lips when they declare their faith: Many find it too sacred to speak of. Others reveal it only in the disclosures which those who know them well can understand. Some years ago a student, with much promise of becoming a classical scholar, and already noted for his keen appreciation of English style, felt the power of 'the world' so keenly that his ambitions were stirred up by its lust. But he was smitten down with a sickness. For several days he lay on the brink of the grave. Then he came slowly back to health and strength, rising from his sickbed so changed as not to be quickly recognised. In the days of his slow convalescence, his eyes were opened, and he was given the vision of God in Christ. Then vision passed into venture, and he surrendered his soul, his life, his powers, to Christ as redeemer and Lord. No one will ever hear him tell the story, but those who know him can catch in the tones of his voice, and in the vibrating message of his intenser moments, the reminiscences of those hours when his faith became venture, and he began to overcome the world.

III

THIRD : *Faith as Victory.*

The faith which is vision is not only venture in the critical choices of life, but it is victory throughout all the course of our years, and in the quiet level of every day's need. This does not mean that all our days will be a procession of triumph. It does not declare that the hopes of every loyal heart will be openly realised,

and his testimony vindicated. There are times when 'the world' and its defiant powers of evil have their 'hour' and seem to prevail. That is the meaning of 'the trial of faith,' and to live in the world is a constant trial to every man who believes. But when faith endures the trial, it not only gains the victory but it *is* the victory. Esther goes into the king's presence saying, 'If I perish, I perish.' She might have perished in her loyalty to God, but as she went in her faith was victory. The three Hebrew children went into the furnace of their affliction. Their victory was not achieved in the hour of their deliverance, but in the moment when they refused to bow the knee and accepted the penalty. The early martyrs who were slain in the arena seemed to have trusted God in vain. But even dull Roman consciences began to understand that these trembling men and women, who stood with uplifted eyes as they awaited the onset of the lions, were more than conquerors through their faith. The only peril of the believer is that which Jesus anticipated when he said, 'I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.'

Never has this truth been more clearly and appealingly presented than to-day. We have all been arrested by the sudden uprising of so many thousands of young men, and the consecration of the flower of the rising generation to the service of their country. Sometimes we have heard men make light of their motives, and ascribe it all to the martial spirit of the time, or the love of adventure, or even to the contagion of the example of others. But these young men who left us with a few difficult words of farewell,

have gone down not only to the horror of the battlefield but to the gates of death as they made the supreme sacrifice. By what have they been moved? They have been moved not merely by patriotism, and not only by a moral indignation and a passionate sympathy with the wronged. Even had they been moved by these things alone, we should have recognised that such a spirit is born of God. But the deeper truth is that they have been moved by a faith which makes them kinsmen of Christ in the spirit of His sacrifice. We do not say that they have made Christ's sacrifice, but we do say that they have made their own through a vivid understanding of its meaning, and an acceptance of His grace. They gained them the victory over the world by their faith in Jesus. Sometimes it was a latent faith discovered to themselves. They had never taken the step of confessing His name, and yet there slumbered in their hearts a belief in Him which the crisis in their country's history brought to the surface, to their own surprise. Sometimes it was a faith born of God in the hour when they faced what they felt to be the highest, and cast themselves in act of surrender upon His love and grace in Christ! Sometimes it was the searching and purging of a faith which had not been fully realised. In the hour of their acceptance of the call their faith was re-baptized.

Take a single testimony from one who answered the call. 'I don't think I will tell you any news when I say that I never felt so much the need of God as here. I pray before I go out for protection, and when I come in again I give thanks. Often it is

easy to let one's courage gallop off in a panic. Then I recall myself to sanity with a repetition, not always mental, of Psalm 121, which I think every soldier ought to know by heart. Sometimes I am selfish enough to feel how much there is to lose. Then I force myself to remember *the service*, which is difficult. If I could see that clearly always, it would be easy. The futility and grimness of it, and the air of hopeless resistance fiercely maintained, tell so much against clear sight. When I feel that way I repeat the last verse of the Psalm—"The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in"—and I feel a return to serenity.' That is the victory which overcometh the world.

In such fashion the believer should win his crown. The things that daunt and vanquish other men should leave him little more than shaken. He faces the mystery of the world, and endures its injustice and scorn, only troubled lest any word or deed of his should have provoked them. Many believers have years marked by failures which are almost defeats. Yet we have known those pure and brave spirits who have overcome in the battle of life. Paget, in writing of Dean Church, crowns his tribute by a description of faith as victory. 'It was as though he lived in a constant recollection of something that was awful and even dreadful to him; something before which he knew himself to be arraigned; something which it was strange and pathetic to find so little recognised in current views of life. He seemed to bear about with him a certain hidden, isolating, constraining, and ennobling fear, which quenched

the dazzling light of many things that attract most men. That fear helped him in great thing to be unworldly. It sustained, with an imperious and ever present sanction, his sense and care for perfect justice, in act and word, in his own life and in his verdicts on 'the past.'¹ That is the victory which overcometh the world.

¹ *Dean Church's Life and Letters*, Preface, p. 22.

XVI

THE FULL SURRENDER

‘To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.’—*ROM.* i. 7.

‘And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?’—*2 CHRON.* xxix. 5.

‘And for their sakes I consecrate myself, that they also might be consecrated through the truth.’—*JOHN* xvii. 19.

THE word saint, with its requirement of consecration, has passed out of common use. It denotes to many minds a narrow, rigid, cheerless piety withdrawn from the fair and joyous humanities of life. It is associated by others with a certain aloofness to common interests, accompanied by censorious judgments and unctuous speech. It is employed to suggest a type of character and the use of observances on a higher level than is expected of the ordinary Christian believer. But beyond all these misleading conceptions there lies the more determining feeling that the word implies a holiness to which we are not prepared to yield ourselves. We all feel that the word is too high for us. We are all tempted to content ourselves with a low ideal and a mean achievement of likeness to Christ. Yet saintliness is the note of the Christian life. The common reproach uttered by the world is that Christian men are not ‘saints.’ Even with its undiscerning

eyes the world understands what Christ was, and what His followers should be.

Now to become a saint is simply to consecrate oneself by a dedication which implies a separation from all that is evil, and the keeping of a covenant with God. This consecration is simply the full surrender of all we are and all we have. When we decline it we stand within the inner shadow of the strait gate, and yet refuse to pass out into the fellowship of God. Saintliness may be full of mystery, even to the end. But consecration is the pathway along which we travel to it. The full surrender is the entering into that path, and the features of its experience are simple and definite.

I

In the first place, it is *the consecration of life*.

Saintliness is not the entering of any order, or the adoption of any distinctive garb, or mode of speech. It is not the perquisite and privilege of a certain temperament, or the peculiar effect of especial circumstances. In the New Testament saintliness is the expectation from all who have named Christ's name. 'To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.' The Roman believers were humble folk, immersed in the duties and straining cares of home and family and daily intercourse. In most cases they were poor, despised, enslaved, masters neither of their time, nor of their powers. They lived in the midst of a corruption that appalled. They were tempted as no man within the pale of Christendom is tempted now. Yet they were called

to be 'saints.' Their lives were to be instinct with holiness, unparalleled in moral loveliness, abounding in the reverence of worship throughout the whole day's toil. Saintliness was the token and proof of their redemption. It was the state and the atmosphere of their souls. It was the quality of their character. The faith in Christ owes an incalculable debt to John Wesley for the fervour and the sanity of his evangelism. But it is open to say that the indebtedness is equally great for his constant and convincing insistence that a holiness which attains to a flawless love towards God and man, with a consequent faultlessness of bearing, is the imperative and the possibility of every believer.

What this means has been set in the most attractive picture by Mrs. Bishop in one of her records of travel. She was making her way through one of the northern districts of Persia. Her eyes were affronted by the undisguised heathenism of the village communities. Her spirit was saddened by the unrestrained indulgence of coarse passions, whose curse lay, like gross darkness, upon the people. She was given kindly shelter and gracious hospitality by the members of a little American Mission settlement. To pass out of that Pagan environment into this home of Christian ideals, to be greeted with a welcome of unselfish kindness, to witness the lives of those who were living for others, and to spend some days in the atmosphere of its peace, was to realise the meaning of consecration of life, and to find the word 'saints' embalmed in her memory. Mark her words: 'In purity of life, in ceaseless benevolence,

in truthfulness and loyalty to engagements, in kind and just dealing, in temperance and self-denial, in the dissemination in the city and neighbourhood of a higher teaching on the duties of common life—in short, in lives spent in cheerful obedience to God, and in the service of man, they showed the love which looks kindly and the wisdom which looks soberly on all things.’¹

That is sainthood—the full surrender of the life to the will and purpose of God. No ascetic scourging, no morbid rapture, no inhuman dealing with the body, no cabining of the mind, no seclusion from God’s fair world of love, and light, and beauty—unless some individual soul finds himself compelled to use a rigour he will never impose on others—make up a true consecration. It is a full surrender of the will and the desires, a separation from the world in the very midst of its activities, and a denial of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. It is not the high state of a few rare spirits who can reach a more delicate bloom. It is life after the pattern of Christ. It is walking in His steps. It is entered into by consecration. No member is left unbaptized. No pride, no temper, no habit of evil remains unchallenged and unchecked. When this life is achieved its music falls upon the world like the soft pealing of a sanctuary bell in a godless city. It rises within every home like a spring of sweet water in the bitter sea. It becomes a witness to the unseen and the eternal, for no man would

¹ Mrs. Isabella Bishop, *Travels in Persia and Kurdistan* vol. ii. p. 164; cf. also p. 355.

doubt the certainty of either, if believing men were living in the consecration of the full surrender.

II

In the second place, it is *a consecration in service*.

Consecration in life springs forward inevitably and passionately to consecration in service. Paul marks the secret of the excelling generosity of the churches of Macedonia in that they 'first gave their own selves unto the Lord.' He touches the inner core of the truth when he appeals to those who have known the mercies of God, to 'present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.'

The finest interpretation of this surrender is to be found in one of the closing episodes of David's life. His dream of building a house of God was not to be realised. In the meekness of a surrendered spirit he resolved to prepare materials. David knew how prone men are to be eager to be numbered among God's people, to claim the privileges of their fellowship, and yet to fail in consecration and in service. He gathered the multitude together and he made his appeal, 'Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?'

The Hebrew word for 'consecrate' is full of suggestion. It means—to fill the hand. 'Who then is willing to fill his hand this day unto the Lord?' To fill the hand is to take the most notable instrument of service and to occupy and engross it for God. The hand which is filled for God can touch

nothing unclean, can be filled with nothing else, can be busy only in some service for God. The figure is at once the simplest and the most complete picture of an entire consecration in service.

Mark how this meets the excuses which men made in Christ's time, as He tells us in the parable of the Marriage Supper, and the excuses men make to-day. The most common reply of the man unwilling to pass on to this consecration and to take up some office or bear some burden, is, 'My hands are full.' Men plead that the management of their business, the long hours of strenuous labour, the fulfilment of the daily round, or the calls made upon them by the interests of life and society, fill their hands full. But the question is, In what spirit are the hands filled? Are they filled 'unto the Lord'? There are men and women who live such straining lives that they have neither time nor strength left for any special service to God. The pointsman who spends a long course of hours in a signal-box where trains pass every few minutes; the head of an extensive business whose work must be done when the gates are closed and the workmen are gone; the woman whose household cares fall upon her in unremitting demand from dawn until the house is quiet again; young men and women preparing themselves for their future career who find that the midnight hour comes too early for the completion of their task—these, and all others like them, may honestly say that their hands are full. But the testing questions are, For whom are they full? Are they 'filled unto the Lord'? A man's hands may be too full. They may be filled

only unto his own worldly aggrandisement. They may be filled with the cultivation of his aptitudes, and the gratification of his tastes. In such cases, we have men and women who have not made the full surrender, and are not among the consecrated.

As a simple and steadfast fact it is the busy men and women who serve Christ. It is those already at work in the broad field of the world who find their places in the vineyard. In speech and in song, in the ministries to the sick, and the suffering, and the poor, in all the helpful activities of the Christian Church, these eager spirits find the avenues of their consecration. The man who finds that the life he lives in the flesh leaves no room for some special service of God is refusing his consecration. When Dr. Moulton, one of the most distinguished scholars of his time, was Headmaster of the Leys School at Cambridge, he found that his responsible duties often occupied sixteen hours of the day. He saw no way of lessening his toil, but he found its routine exhausting to his spirit. It was borne in upon him that, apart from the consecration required for his daily work, he might fill his hand with some special service for God. He took upon himself the conduct of the early morning worship with the boys of the school. Year by year this toilworn man gave the half hour he could so hardly spare to this morning exercise. He set it on record that that hour, consecrated in a special surrender, redeemed a dusty life from its temptation to formality, and led him, day by day, into the secret of the Lord.¹ There are men

¹ *William F. Moulton : A Memoir*, p. 131.

and women who have failed in this consecration and will never wear the grace of God's saints because they will not make this full surrender.

III

In the third place, it is a *consecration to Christ*.

It is a ruling canon of Christian ethics that the moral value of every action, and especially of every sacrifice, is to be estimated by its motive. Many men order their lives under the imperative of motives which we need not too hardly condemn. Truth is always truth and purity is always purity, whatever may be the compelling power behind it. Honourable service is often rendered for reasons which all men would commend. The love of country, the advancement of a great cause, the reform of an evil law, are worthy ends, and they constitute, when realised, commendable motives. But the Christian life has its own motives. These are higher in moral elevation and more absolute in their imperative than those regarded by the most austere of moralists. These motives rise in an ascending scale of authority and power. A progressive Christian life will obey in succession every one of them. At the beginning of a believer's experience the ruling impulse is often his own spiritual wellbeing. The New Testament is strewn with appeals for holiness based on the attainment of a Christian character. But as life progresses, and the conscience becomes more enlightened and the desires become more keen, the motives become more unselfish and more tender.

We are, then, called upon to live out the Christian life 'for righteousness sake.' Again, we are appealed to a nobler self-denial for 'the sake of the kingdom of heaven.' But for the believer the highest motive is always—'for Christ's sake.' All other motives sublime in this, and it remains the supreme motive in consecration. Whenever we shiver on the brink of some high demand, whenever we are tempted to decline the call of our consciences, or the claims of our fellow-believers, whenever we find ourselves becoming slack in worship and careless in prayer, we can be roused by the appeal of the motive—'For His sake.'

That was the motive by which God appealed to His ancient people when He bound His commandments upon them. 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.' That is the motive of which Paul never wearies, 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.' Peter echoes Paul's appeal, 'Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ; therefore pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' John makes it his whole plea, 'Because he laid down his life for us.' And Jesus, when he would strengthen Peter for all the years of service yet to come, searched him with the one question, 'Lovest thou me?' There are times in life when all motives fail but the highest. The believer has only to recall Christ's cross and its redeeming grace to find himself flooded with the power of a motive which nothing can resist.

A modern instance of this sets the truth of our consecration to Christ in its present-day aspect. George Whitefield tells us that when he was called to the ministry he spent several days in prolonged prayer. But it was not until the hour of his ordination that the great motive was borne in upon his will. 'When the bishop laid his hands on my head, if my evil heart doth not deceive me, I offered up my whole spirit, soul, and body to the service of God's sanctuary. I can call heaven and earth to witness that, when the bishop laid his hand upon me, I gave myself to be a martyr for Him who hung upon the cross for me. I have thrown myself without reserve into His Almighty hands.'¹ That is the full surrender for Christ's sake.

IV

In the fourth place, it is *a consecration in an act of self-sacrificing dedication.*

We understand how all this works in to the perfecting of that Christian character, which every man covets and yet too few attain. Sometimes we fail because we have not begun aright. Consecration is not the first but the final decision of the will, and only the forgiven can become the consecrated. Sometimes we decline because we think it will empty life of its fulness of self-expression, rob us of our liberty, and compel us to desert life's feast for a diet of bitter herbs. 'So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee' is the Psalmist's self-condemning comment. Sometimes

¹ Tyerman, *Life of George Whitefield*, vol. i. p. 48.

we shrink because of some dark memory of the past, or because we fear that we shall fail to keep our vows. As common a reason is, that, as Newman says, we are scared at sanctity. All of these impediments would be as weak as Samson's withes did we realise that consecration must be sealed by some single and irrevocable decision. In some hour when all the issues of our faith are clear, and we are conscious of the power of God's Spirit falling upon us, we can kneel down, and in an act of self-sacrificing dedication, yield ourselves wholly unto God. Then we shall pass out into consecration of life, and in service, and unto Christ. We shall be saints.

Every man who has become known for the sanctity of his character has passed through this hour. It may be allowed to cite a familiar instance because it has had the witness of a singularly beautiful Christian character. Frances Ridley Havergal may be called the expert in consecration, and she has written the most widely known consecration hymn in the English language. She had lived, like many more, a life of unguarded steps and broken resolves. Then she made her self-sacrificing dedication. 'It was on Advent Sunday, 1873, that I first saw clearly the blessedness of a true consecration. I saw it as a flash of electric light, and what you see once you can never unsee. There must be full surrender before there can be full blessedness. God admits you by the one into the other. He himself showed me this most clearly. You know how singularly I have been withheld from attending Conventions and Conferences; man's teaching has consequently but

little to do with it. First I was shown that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin: and then it was made plain to me that He who had thus cleansed me had power to keep me clean. So I utterly yielded myself to Him, and utterly trusted Him to keep me.'

That is the secret of consecration. We all know well why we have not attained it. Jesus has set it in a single sentence, 'Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.' Only in the hour of a full surrender have we fully come unto Him.

XVII

ONE TAKEN—THE OTHER LEFT

‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.’—Rom. ix. 13.

THERE is no stranger sentence on any page of Scripture. Even when we remember the Oriental use of the vivid and arresting word it remains a bewildering declaration. Had it been found only in the prophecy of Malachi we might have passed it by. But when it is re-affirmed by Paul, with his quenchless compassion for the lost and castaway, it provokes us to a deeper surprise. When we recollect who Jacob was, the meanest and least lovable of all the Hebrew personalities, and when we remind ourselves of his self-centred mind with its tenacious pursuit of his own advantage, we are tempted to protest. When we summon up his life with its twisting and turning and scheming, we wonder where Paul’s moral discernment was when he set his approval on this strange word of a Jewish prophet. Give us Esau, we are ready to cry, rather than this man who did no heroic deed, gave no generous gift, made no costly sacrifice, yet is said to be the man whom God loved. We are left with the feeling that God is accused of an unrighteous caprice, and we find it difficult to understand why the one should be taken and the other left.

The fact that one is taken and the other left is, as Jesus declared, a fact of life. An accident takes

place and one man is taken from among the débris and carried to his grave. Another man by his side goes home unharmed. A plague visits a community, and one man is smitten, while his fellow in the field beside him escapes the contagion. Two men begin a career in life. Both seem to deserve well of fortune. One succeeds to a position of influence. The other remains obscure and unknown. One is taken and the other left. But we are led to answer that although there be this mystery in the providence of God, there ought not to be this mystery in the dealing of His grace. Above all we feel that in this matter of the soul God should give every man his fair opportunity, and that some men seem obviously to be dealt with unjustly, with the consequence that while one man is taken, the other is left. Many a man thinks in his heart that when he looked along the narrow way and even faced the strait gate, he was not helped and led through it as others have been. He begins to think that God dealt with him as with Esau, rather than as He dealt with Jacob, and this word of Scripture seems to confirm his thought.

Let us look at this statement as it is expounded in the cases of Jacob and of Esau, and we may come to understand the truth which the Hebrew prophet and the Christian apostle both affirmed. Why did God regard Jacob with favour but look on Esau with condemning eye ?

I

FIRST : *God loved Jacob for his spiritual sensibility.*
With all his grave and disfiguring defects there was

in Jacob a sense of the unseen, and a conviction that God's blessing was worth more than all that life and time could give. He had the will to catch the accents of the voice of God, and to make response to His call. Down in his human heart, with all its subtle passions, there was this spiritual sensibility that made him accessible to the Spirit of God.

That is where Jacob stands in contrast to the earthly and sensuous charm of Esau. We are drawn, at the first glance, to admire a man like Esau. We recall his manly strength, his open, sunny face, his kindly and genial nature, his generous and accommodating temper. We can almost hear the ringing hail of his appealing voice as he greeted his fellows, and we can see him as he stood before Isaac, who loved him with a father's admiration. But the Scripture sets down Esau as 'a profane person.' That does not mean a blasphemer, although a careless and rough-tongued word may have been often on his lips. A profane person, in Scripture, is a man with a contempt for things holy, an irreverent and ungodly spirit. He is the man whose soul is not thrilled by the thought of the presence of God, who has no mind for either God's worship or service.

This is proved by the fact that he could barter the highest spiritual privilege of his race, the noblest heritage to which he could succeed, the very jewel of his father's soul, for a mess of pottage in an hour of passing hunger. He could do so with a coarse jest on his lips. That is the light in which the Scripture writer sees the incident of the selling of the birthright. We are held by Jacob's meanness in taking advantage of

his brother's hunger. We scorn Jacob's swift seizing of his opportunity when he saw Esau's eyes gleaming with a wild beast's desire for the red pottage. We are confident in our word of condemnation. But the Scripture sees the situation more deeply. Here on the one side there is a man within reach of the blessing for which his soul had been famished through all the years. Think of what it means to be left out of a coveted succession by the accident of birth. Realise the trial of standing on the threshold of a career but being forbidden to enter the door. Call up your dreams of the vocation and destiny which you knew could never be attained. When these dreams have pictured a noble service and an honourable succession, how great has been the poignancy of disappointment! How often had Jacob cried in secret, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after.' On the other side there stands this profane person—the man to whom the noblest opportunity, and the spiritual endowment which belonged to it, had no more value than a steaming bowl of lentils. In the record the condemnation is passed not on Jacob, but on Esau, 'Thus Esau despised his birthright.' Can we wonder that the one was taken and the other left?

We can mark this spiritual sensibility with its responsiveness to God and its sensitiveness to God's will throughout Jacob's whole life. Consider him as he lies down to sleep at Bethel. He is a fugitive and alone, a wanderer in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes. He is suffering that deepest misery, to every man with a conscience, of self-reproach and

self-despising. Note how he bears himself. The question we have to ask of every man is not whether he has yielded to some overmastering temptation. It is not whether he has found his feet in the fearful pit and the miry clay. None of us can cast a stone at Jacob. The question to ask is how a man bears himself when he lies down conscious of his fall. Had Esau found himself compelled to flee out of the home he would have made his way to the children of Heth, where he had chosen his alien heathen wife, and found his fitting welcome and his congenial company. But Jacob, with his keen spiritual sensibility, turned his thoughts toward God, stretched out his hands in prayer, and, when the stars came out, he was found kneeling in the shame of the penitent. In the midnight silence God came down the great stairway that is always open from heaven to earth and kissed him while he slept. It was that kiss which awoke Jacob, and brought the grateful cry to his lips, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

Our conscience bears witness to the infinite justice that took the one and left the other. It is not the stalwart athlete, with his virile energy, his genial charm and his sparkling jest, nor is it the man of brilliant mind with his intellectual force and vivid speech, that God loves. However commanding the man may be, if he has no reverence for the eternal, no passion for purity, no quick response to the touch of God, he is merely a barbarian. God, like every other lover, regards those who are quick to make

response and eager with desire, who will cry to Him even out of the depths of their sin, because their dominant passion is the passion for God. Our desires are our always most searching test.

‘ For the lack of desire is the ill of all ills ;
 Many thousands through it the dark pathway have trod.
 The balsam, the wine of predestinate wills
 Is a jubilant pining and longing for God.’

II

SECOND : *God loved Jacob for his moral possibilities.*

Jacob is the most strangely mingled personality in Scripture. Yet we are tempted to look at him, as at his race, with somewhat jaundiced eyes. His mother loved him with a peculiar tenderness, and believed in him with the certainty of a discerning mind. The man in whom a wise mother believes will go far. His ability and industry and foresight marked him out as a man who had great ends in view, who could school himself to attain them. He cherished a tender and quenchless passion of pure affection for Rachel, and he exhibited an untiring devotion to his children. Above all he held the faith of his fathers, and believed in the promise made to them, with an unflinching steadfastness. But he was veined with faults. His greed, his quick eye for his own interests, his shrewd using of other men to advance his ambition were bound up with a lack of courage and of openness. His besetting sin, so strange in a man who believed in God, led him to think that he could best advance himself by his own craft. We see him

robbing his brother, deceiving his father, outwitting Laban, and shrewdly blunting Esau's vengeful anger with a gift which caught his brother's eyes. Beyond all doubt he is the most mixed man morally in Old Testament history. Yet within the soul of Jacob there was the power to become a child of God. He had the capacity for receiving God's messages, and a potentiality of rising on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things.

'God judges by a light that baffles mortal sight.'

God saw behind the features of this crafty Hebrew the moving of a spirit which could find its delight in doing the will of God from the heart.

There is a metaphor in the Old Testament which is used as a parable by all the prophets. It pictures God as a refiner and purifier watching His crucible. He takes the ore which has been dug out of its vein in the rock, defiled by clay, encrusted by quartz, mingled with base alloys, and He casts it into His furnace. He sits by it as the refining fire does its work. He waits until the ore has been purified, so that He can see His face in the gleaming metal. Then He pours it into the ingot whose gold may be fashioned into a bowl for the high altar. Gold in the ore; gold in the furnace; gold in the pure and precious metal; yet always gold, despite its alloy. So God saw the gold in Jacob. He marked his avarice, his cunning, his self-will, but He saw his moral possibilities, and He purged out the base elements in his character. In long years of exile, in days of summer heat and winter cold in the hard service of Laban,

through suffering wrong and being deceived by others, by fear and sorrow and disappointment and loss, God cast this man into His crucible, until at last there was left on him only the beautiful.

To see what a man may become we should mark him in the last hour of his day of life. We are shown what Jacob was on his dying bed, and the story is one of the most moving scenes in Scripture. He had gone down to Egypt and left the land whose possession had been the dream and desire of all his years. He had meekly submitted to that fate which prevented him ever setting his eyes upon it again. We see him as he lies, old, blind, awaiting the coming of death. Joseph brings in his two sons to receive the old man's blessing before the night will fall upon his life. Jacob puts his hands upon their head, and in his benediction reveals the secret of his soul. He does not give any wise counsels. He does not call up the past with any pride in his own achievement. He does not remind the kneeling youths of the future that lies before them and of its opportunities. His memory recalls only what God has been to him, and he speaks with adoring gratitude as he bestows his blessing, 'The angel, that redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads!'

Now we can understand why God loved Jacob. There is no love which is more unselfish than the love for a man who is achieving a high moral character in spite of hampering flaw and weakening defect. We understand George Eliot's couplet:—

'I love the dear, imperfect things,
I am not myself the finest Parian.'

But there is a deeper and wiser affection than that tender sympathy for men as frail as ourselves. That is the love of God, who loves us not because of our faults and our frailties, but because He sees what we may become, and so deals with us, that we may be at length 'conformed to the image of His Son.'

What a word of comfort there is here for every man limited and impeded by his faults and flaws! One man has his tormenting greed. Another has his so vexing and so humbling temper. Another has his jibing and wounding tongue. Another has his haughty and arrogant pride. Another has that secret devil of envy which chafes and frets even at the advancement of his friend. Another has his petty and demeaning vanity. Another has his darker passion which so often imperils his purity. Yet is there the desire and the endeavour, the quick sense of shame and the hours of keen self-rebuke when we have overcome? Is it in us to yield ourselves unto God, until our spirits shall become ennobled by His Spirit, and our bodies shall be temples of the Holy Ghost? Then God will take us and chasten and cleanse us. He will meet us in some crisis of our life, as he met Jacob at Peniel, and wrestle with us until we walk with some withered faculty until the end. But He will perfect that which concerns us, and bring our moral possibilities to steadfast power and beauty. But if not, if there be no such possibilities, or if we will not submit and surrender, but choose to walk wilfully in the way that is far from the path of His ordering, He must leave us to ourselves, and the fate we are fashioning. One shall be taken and the other shall be left.

III

THIRD : *God loved Jacob for his fitness to fulfil His purpose.*

Here we come out into clear light. God looked at these men and marked the contrast between them, and at nothing more eagerly than their fitness for the divine purpose. What is God's supreme purpose so far as we can know it? It is to redeem a lost and ruined world by the revelation of His love and the sacrifice of Himself. It is to reconcile God and man in Christ Jesus. Behind His love and choice of Jacob there lay that divine passion. He chose Jacob in spite of all his failing and wandering from truth and rectitude, because he could fulfil His great purpose. That is how wisdom, both in God and in man, always chooses its agents and instruments. We do not entrust a high office to a man of fleshly appetite or of frivolous mind. We do not commit a solemn charge to a profane and self-willed reveller. God marked these faults of Esau. He saw only a vagrant mind, an ungoverned animalism, a spirit akin to the heathen with whom Esau mingled. Therefore he loved Jacob and He hated Esau. One was taken and the other was left.

That is the truth Paul is enforcing when he engrosses this sentence in his epistle. He is dealing with the strange fact that Israel has been set aside from its high place, and is in danger of becoming God's castaway. He is defending the justice of God's moral sovereignty. We sometimes read these profound words of Paul as though they meant that

God was choosing one man to eternal life, and another man to eternal death. We interpret them as though God were making capricious, unreasonable, immoral distinctions between man and man. We ought to be ashamed to give harbour to these thoughts about Paul, when we read his impassioned cry, 'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.' What Paul is showing is that God chooses nations and men, and He rejects nations and men, governed always by their fitness to carry out a high moral purpose. He refused Ishmael and set His mind on Isaac. He raised up Pharaoh, and gave him his place and power that he might be an instrument for His purpose. He chose Israel that she might bring in the kingdom of God, and now He has rejected her, because she refused His purpose. So He chose Jacob and rejected Esau.

There we see final reason for God's love to His own. God loves all men and His compassions fail not. But He loves His own, and makes them fellow-labourers in His service. Spiritual sensibility that makes quick response, and moral possibilities that can be schooled by discipline, mark all the men who are after God's own heart. But the man who will serve the great ends of His love and desire, enters into the secret place of the divine passion. Mark that in His dealing with His only begotten Son. Twice, and only twice, was the lover's confession heard from God's lips while Jesus ministered on the earth. When Jesus was being baptized, and in that hour was consecrated to His ministry and dedicated without reserve to God's service, there came that voice from

heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Again, on the Mount of Transfiguration, when He saw the cross before Him, and meekly accepted its anguish, and set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, there came once more the voice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' God's supreme love is for those who fulfil His redeeming purpose.

There was a disciple whom Jesus loved. John was a different man from Jacob. Yet Jesus loved him for the same reasons as God loved Jacob—for his spiritual sensibility, his moral possibilities, and his fitness for the divine purpose. When we read John's Gospel, and realise that he is the interpreter of the heart of Christ, we need no other reason for the outgoing of Christ's passion toward John. God is no selfish lover. He loves the unthankful and the evil. But if you respond to His call, and accept His schooling and purging of your faults, and if you lay all you have and all you are at His feet, He will love you as He loved Jacob. On that depends whether you will be taken—or left.

XVIII

NEWNESS OF LIFE

‘Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.’—Rom. vi. 4.

IN the New Testament Scriptures salvation has three aspects. One of these considers the soul in the moment of acceptance and surrender. Another regards its spiritual course and progress as it follows the upward calling of the Christian life. The third looks away off to the end, when the pilgrimage will be over, and all that time can do has been accomplished. ‘Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.’ Here the apostle is fixing our attention on the course of the Christian life. His chief declaration is that Christ lived and died not only that men might be loosed from their sins and might be given a new ideal of righteousness, but that they might live a redeemed, consecrated, and increasingly victorious life.

He sets this truth in a simple and suggestive phrase. He calls it a walking ‘in newness of life.’ The phrase flashed into his mind as he was using a familiar and impressive figure. He had been speaking of being dead with Christ, and of the consequent fact that the man who believed was dead to sin. He uses the significant ceremony of baptism by immersion,

the common, although not the universal custom, to illustrate his truth. The man who had accepted Christ stood by the river side or the baptismal pool, to confess his faith and seal his forgiveness. He went down into the water, and, as Paul vividly says, 'was buried' for a moment, and then rose to walk in newness of life. He came up out of the water of baptism as Christ rose from His grave. Christ was no longer under the laws and conditions of His earthly life. He was freed from hunger and thirst and weariness and pain, and from the clog and impediment of the body. So the quickened soul rose out of its dead state. He had broken with his past. He now lived under new conditions. He was called upon to 'walk in newness of life.'

This newness of life is not merely a method of living. It is a new principle of life. It is a new fount of moral passion and spiritual power in the soul. Paul does not mean merely that the redeemed man has new ideas, new convictions, new hopes. These he has in power. But newness of life is a new, inspiring, controlling, imperious energy within the soul. It is a change, not merely in the habits of life, and in the words on the lips and the thoughts of the mind, but in the very core of a man's being. In the spiritual change through which he has passed, the dormant forces within the soul are liberated, renewed, and impelled to victorious expression. A man whose whole system has been purged by a fever finds his blood pulsing with new vigour, and his frame filled with a new vitality. So the whole being of a renewed man is filled with gracious thought and high desire.

A deep bore has been made into the earth, and it has struck an artery of water unknown and undreamed of by those who cultivate the soil. At once the water springs up, cool, copious, with an unceasing flow. So, in newness of life, the unguessed spiritual potentialities of the soul are liberated, and exercise themselves in unselfish activities. A man is visited by a new and tender love passion. The paths of his feet are determined by it. His dreams are fashioned anew. His whole life is guided and impelled by this new passion which now controls his will and desire. So Christ, in the divine Spirit, has entered the soul and this new principle of life expresses itself in newness of life.

Let us consider this experience, and mark how this new principle of life realises and expresses itself.

I

FIRST : *It is life in a new world.*

It is life in a world of larger horizons, ampler knowledge, deeper significances. In many respects we must live in the same world in which we always lived. Its hills stand out in their distant blue. Its meadows gleam in their beauty. Its men and women remain the same personalities. Its toil and care, its sin and sorrow, its suffering and disappointment, abide. Yet it is wholly new, for we see it with new eyes, and we interpret its personalities and its vicissitudes with a deeper, truer, and more generous meaning.

This fresh interpretation has its analogy in the world of literature. We all know how a great genius

has taken up a period of history, or a phase of life, and set it in the light that never was on sea or land, until the dullest mind could realise its pathos and romance, the glory of its heroic sacrifices, and the sorrow of its baffled hopes. To take familiar cases, we know how Sir Walter Scott created the atmosphere in which men saw the passion and the pain of a century of Scottish history. We know again the issue of that school of writers who took up, in later times, the simple lives of the Scottish peasantry and laid bare the springs of their faith, the depths of their reverence, the strenuousness and the severity of their hard lives, with all the tenderness of their hearts. These writers touched the most familiar things, and recounted the daily incidents of untravelled lives. But they created a new mind in their readers, gave them new eyes to see, and discovered a new world lying almost at their doors. In the same way Robert Louis Stevenson took up the romance, the adventure, the interplay of the passions of trader and traveller, of black and white in the South Pacific, and opened men's eyes to see a world of which they had not dreamed. The world was there, with both its high ideals and its sordid ways, but not until men were given eyes to see was it disclosed.

So this new principle of life makes all things new. The world around us becomes sometimes more pitiable, sometimes more beautiful, always more compelling to tenderness and charity. Its men and women live before us transfigured in the new light. They are spiritual beings with infinite capacities of love and joy, of temptation and of achievement. When we

see the multitudes we are moved with compassion. The daily task, the common round, the incurable sore, the mean condition, are all new. For God has become an awful, yet a welcome reality. The living Lord walks by our side and His voice whispers in our ears, and quickens our thoughts. The Holy Spirit illumines and energises our soul, and the world round about us is made new. We see it in the man who wrote these words. Before he was dead with Christ the world of Saul of Tarsus was an arena for an unresting ambition. It was filled with personalities whom he feared, or hated, or envied, It was ruled over by a God who bade him persecute. But the world of Paul, the slave of Jesus Christ, was a world of new personalities, new affections, new desires, new ambitions, because he was living in it in newness of life. 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'

II

SECOND : *It is life with a new purpose.*

Many lives have no purpose at all. Multitudes merely drift from their first conscious years to the end. All notable lives, whether on the broad stage of public affairs, or in the narrow sphere of a humble community, are swayed by a definite purpose. But the man who has passed into this new life has his purpose made single, and finds it baptized into an unselfish nobility. He is given new thoughts and he sets new values upon neglected things. What he once hungered after, the favours for which he fawned upon men, and

endured their contumely, over which he dreamed in his brooding hours, are seen in their transiency and pettiness. He builds the faith which once he destroyed. He restores fourfold what he once took away. Every man, however feebly this new energy has begun to beat within him, finds himself living with a new purpose.

A close parallel to this experience is described in the record which one of our most accomplished men of letters has given of an unexpected change in life. A young man had entered upon a promising career in London. His life was full of variety and zest. His path lay before him as one of increasing opportunity. But his health became unstable, and he consulted an eminent physician. He came out of the consulting-room with a sentence of death. 'I have told you the worst—the very worst. I cannot say whether your constitution will triumph over this complaint. To be candid, I do not think it will. But there is no question of any immediate risk. You seem to have what I may call the patient temperament, and a vocation, if I may say so, for the invalid life.'¹ He came out stunned. To say farewell to the bustle and activity of life, to be laid aside on a shelf, like a cracked vase, to live the shadowed life, a creature of rules and hours, fretting over drugs and beef-tea, was a degrading and humiliating rôle. He passed into the *House of Quiet* a broken man. But in his quiet backwater a new life began. His perceptions became more delicate. The gush of morning air, the liquid song of birds, the sprouting

¹ A. C. Benson, *The House of Quiet*, pp. 13, 14.

of the green buds, the babble of the stream gave him a new delight. His intellectual powers grew stronger and more discerning. His tastes and sympathies were quickened. Then he awoke to his true vocation. He had hitherto looked on life around him with dull eyes. He had been absorbed by the rush and roar of the city. Now all the cries of the sick and the pained, and all the soft, low moaning of the bereaved fell upon his ear. All the needs of the young and the weak, of the erring and the fallen, rose up in appeal. He found that he had not only entered a new world, but that a new purpose, a purpose of love and service, larger, wiser, nobler, than he had dreamed of in his busy life, had been born within him in the *House of Quiet*.

That experience reaches its purest and bravest in newness of life. Then are made the vows under whose sweet bondage we find our liberty. Then the habits which have lowered our life are cast off in an hour of consecration. Then new customs begin to be the paths in which we walk. And then the whole passion of our life condenses into a new purpose to live not unto ourselves but unto Him who has redeemed us. Henry Martyn, that Cambridge student of brilliant scholarship, accepted Christ. He found his surrender a strait gate. He wrote, 'I have resigned in profession the riches, the honours and the comforts of this world, and I think it is a resignation of the heart.' He did not then know all that newness of life implied. Some time later the fuller blessing was given him, and he wrote, 'An almost supernatural fervour and deep devotion came upon me,

whilst I declared that I had rightfully no other business each day but to do God's work, as a servant constantly regarding His pleasure.' That is life with a new purpose.

III

THIRD : *It is life with new faculties.*

The old faculties are consecrated, quickened, enlarged. The memory is cleansed, the imagination given a keener vision, the conscience enlightened, the judgment adjusted to a finer balance, and the will re-inforced. All within a man is stirred up to new strength and more joyous activity. But beyond this, new faculties of sight and of speech, of thought and reflection, of prayer and of service, of grace and of courtesy, of love and hope, awake within.

The analogy to this spiritual change can be found in many instances in the natural world. Down in the mud, at the bottom of the pool, lies the dragon-fly. The dragon-fly, whose four wings flash as though set with jewels, whose slender body gleams with the richest hues of the rainbow, is found there in the garb of a common worm. It is hidden in the slime, waiting for the coming of the summer sun. When the warmer rays and stronger light have searched down into the darkness of the pool, the still worm will stir with a new life, the creeping thing, which can only crawl among the ooze, will arise and climb, and on some reed will reach the light and air, and discover itself to the warm summer sunshine. Then its eyes will open to the light, its wings will unfold, and in its quickened energy it will fly and flash among the sunbeams. It

has entered into newness of life and new faculties have been given to it.

That mirrors this experience in the new life in Christ. We have all seen some dull and commonplace man, who has not had the advantages of education or of an intellectual discipline, a man with no endowment which marks him out from his fellows. Yet he has died, and risen again with Christ, and he has put on both strength and beauty. He speaks with a power, he acts with a wisdom, he thinks with a penetration, unattained by more gifted men. How often have we lamented over men of fine mind and varied accomplishments whose native grace was a constant charm. Yet in their riotous and wilful wrongdoing they had wasted their faculties until the eyes of their seeing were blinded and the skill of their hands was gone. These great sinners might have made the great saints. To see a man living the unspiritual life, with imprisoned faculties, with undeveloped powers, remaining dull and dormant in spirit, the crawling earth-worm when he might have been soaring in the sunshine of love and joy, wearing the bloated features of the worldling, when he might have been clothed upon with the loveliness of Christ, is to fill the heart with regret, and to realise the burden of God. So much the more can we rejoice in the man and woman who becomes dowered with these new faculties of faith and prayer, and these new gifts of patience and wisdom, which are part of the inheritance of the saints, and the open sign of this walking 'in newness of life.'

IV

FOURTH : *It is life with new felicities.*

No better word can be found to describe the sweet content, the continual zest, the gladness and blessedness, which visit the man who has entered into newness of life. They manifest themselves in the temper, in the tone of the voice, in the unfailing courtesy of bearing. They radiate from within and leave their sheen on the face. In a recent report of a mission in China, a traveller is quoted who comments on the striking change in the faces of the Chinese converts. The Chinese face is frequently dull, apathetic, uninteresting, hopeless. But when some man, with features lacking in attractiveness, begins to walk in newness of life, a light gleams in his eye, a brightness shines on his brow, and the whole face is illumined with a new intelligence. The new emotions which surge within his heart, the new thoughts that entrance his mind, the new energies which are born within his will, kindle those new delights in his soul which enlighten his face and well out in word and deed. For the man who walks in newness of life the days never become monotonous, the romance of the years never fades, the interests of life are never made up, and old age is never cynical or scornful. There are pleasures which earth can give, but before the end even the desire for them will fail. There is a peace and a joy which man can give, but man can take them away. But the felicities, the sweet and sober delights that visit the soul of the man, have a deeper gladness as life goes on. 'The righteous shall

flourish like the palm-tree; they shall still bring forth fruit in old age,' is the Psalmist's song. 'The outward man perisheth, but the inward man is renewed day by day,' is the soberer message of the apostle. 'He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.' That is the Master's perfect word.

We have all known men and women who have lived in this new world, served with this new purpose, put on the strength of new faculties year by year, and though their lives were shadowed, wore these sweet felicities like a crown. Yet how many who have felt the spring of this new principle of life within them, and have found its energies working through their whole nature, have not entered into the fulness of the blessing of this newness of life. There is in the world of organic nature a condition which is named an arrested development. The tree, planted at some corner where keen winds chill its sap and blight its tender shoots, remains ungrown. It becomes stunted, unlovely, unfruitful. The State, which has begun its career with high aims, kept its course for centuries when served by men of unselfish resolve and chivalrous devotion, falls under the leadership of gross and secular and corrupt rulers. Its heart becomes hard as stone. Its ambitions become ruthless and cruel. Its methods become barbarian. All its early promise is unfulfilled, and its life declines. The child upon whose infancy has fallen some mysterious malady, holding its young faculties in an unyielding bondage, comes not to the

years of the careless rapture and never attains to a manhood of helpful strength. These all suffer from an arrested development. After the same manner the men and women in whom the principle of the new life has been implanted fail to attain. Their growth is all ungrown, their life is all undeveloped. It has been hindered by prayerlessness, chilled by an atmosphere in which nothing holy can thrive, paralysed by sin. What is the remedy? It is to walk with a new energy within the sphere of the new life. 'Yield yourselves unto God, and your members as instruments of righteousness,' is the appeal of the Apostle. Then he adds the promise and the secret of the new life, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace.'

XIX

THE THREEFOLD ENVIRONMENT

‘Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.’—
EPH. i. 1.

THIS epistle is a call to a fuller, richer, more victorious Christian life. It opens with the reminder of that eternal calling and that redemption through Christ’s blood in which the Christian life is rooted. It reminds the redeemed of the never-failing springs of their force and vitality. It appeals for truth and purity, tenderness and courtesy in all life’s intercourse and relationships. It closes with the counsel set in the finely drawn parable of the believer clad with the whole armour of God. Here, in the opening words, Paul sets down the environment amidst which the life must be lived. He visualises their situation and circumstances. He writes ‘to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.’

This environment is threefold. *First*: it is a life in Christ Jesus. It is the life of those who have passed through the strait gate and are walking in the narrow way, who have been quickened by a new birth, and are now living within the realm and order of the

ideals and commandments, the motives and the joys of those who have known Christ, and through Him have believed in God, the Father. *Second*: it is a life in the fellowship of the saints. It is the life of those who have entered into the circle of that small society of humble folk who met for common prayer, sang their simple hymns, passed out to seek and to save the lost in the streets of the city, and so found themselves in a fellowship full of inspiration, and in an atmosphere where the solemn certainties of the love of God in Christ and the pardon of their sins became clear and potent. *Third*: it was a life in Ephesus, or in one of its sister towns. These cities of Asia Minor were heathen, idolatrous, profligate communities. Base passions walked unashamed in their streets, and were nourished within their temples. The undercurrent of the life of their people was polluted by those sins of which Paul says, 'It is a shame even to speak.' Yet there, in the midst of this Pagan and ungodly society, the Christian life must be lived. This threefold environment surrounds the Christian man to this day, and it shall encompass him until he passes to that life whose sole environment is God. Let us take each of these in turn.

I

FIRST: '*In Christ Jesus.*'

The mingling in the Christian's experience of incident and circumstance, of spiritual desire and conquering faith, is set down in the Scriptures in many figures. It is called a walk, a pilgrimage, a course to be run, a fight

to be fought, a trust to be kept, a stewardship to be discharged, a dedication to be fulfilled, a service to be rendered, a sacrifice to be offered. But behind all these terms for the outward obedience, there is always implied an experience, with a secret. We must not pretend that this experience must always follow one course and be accompanied by the same emotions and use the same language. Great sinners, with hotly pulsing passions, who have at last yielded themselves to Christ's call, have their experience and speak with one accent. Those who come to Christ in the very dawn of their manhood or womanhood, clothed upon with a virgin purity, breathing a tender spirit's desire for holiness, pass through a different experience, and use a different speech. But there must have been in every instance a certain period in which they passed into this life which is 'in Christ Jesus.'

What is meant by this condensed and pregnant expression? It means that they passed into a realm and sphere and order where a new knowledge, an enlarged horizon, a solemn ideal, daring hopes, and potent powers for goodness, began to form their world and rule their hearts. It may have been entered in an hour of a definite decision. It may have been that their feet found the way as they faced a temptation whose issue was life or death. Or it may have been a gradual dawn of light and peace, in which they made a response to an appeal whose implications and issues they only dimly understood. But this was the heart and the issue of the experience, that they found themselves 'in Christ Jesus.'

The testimony to the reality and spiritual content of this experience is clear and convincing. It is to be found written in impassioned sentences in the literature which is the most enduring of human records. We find it in the great chants of the Christian Church, from the splendid abandonment of the early believers, as they sang their songs of faith when they met in fear of the persecutor's sword, down to the simpler and more quietly confident hymns of to-day, in which Christian congregations express their faith and present their desires, while they bear witness to the reality of being 'in Christ Jesus.' The testimony can be found even more explicitly and more movingly in the confessions of those who have passed through it, and have felt constrained to mark the steps in the way. These records have been inscribed by men and women of all communions. They are the true classics of the Christian soul. Whether we take up Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, or Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, or Fénelon's *Letters*, or Law's *Serious Call*, or Woolman's *Journal*, or Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, or Guthrie or Fenwick's *Saving Interest in Christ*, or Scougal's *Life of God in the Soul*, or Wilberforce's *Practical Christianity*, or McCheyne's *Memoirs*, or John Angell James's *Anxious Enquirer*,—over whose pages Dale of Birmingham, like so many more, wept in the stress of his soul as he faced its solemn appeals in the midnight hour—all of these, covering two centuries of time, bear witness, with a single voice, to the certainty of the soul's life in Christ. As convincing is the evidence of the great prayers of the Church, in which shy and

reticent souls have meekly repeated the words which expressed the truth they had found, and the hopes they cherished. He who will know what it means to be 'in Christ Jesus,' and he who will pass through the experience, need only take up his Scriptures, and study their interpretations by these witnesses, to understand that realm and order of life and love which makes the first environment.

It may be thought that these testimonies are peculiar if not unique. It may be wondered if these intense and vivid experiences have not now passed away. Certainly there are times of ebbtide in the history of the Church. There are eras when Christian folk must wait and pray for the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Yet, although it may be with an altered accent, the witness never ceases, and the experience is always the same. Take this letter, on which the ink is no more than dry, and read its open-hearted confession. 'One mark and sign I find of the great change within me. I used to sneer at my old minister and at his preaching, and think how much better preaching might be done. And yet last Sunday evening as I sat in the little country church here a new and gracious spirit filled me. It was a great contrast to the large city congregation. The church was dark except for the two pulpit lights. The walls were bare and uninviting. There were only twenty-five people present. And yet when the old man came in, and I looked at his deeply-lined face, and saw—as if for the first time—the scanty grey hair falling back from his brow, I felt a new rush of sympathetic feeling toward him,

and when he preached, and his eyes shone as he told the story of the cross and of the love of Christ, the power and grace of the message seized me, and I have never before felt so certain of the presence of Christ.' That is the voice of one who has passed into the first environment.

II

SECOND : *In the fellowship of 'the saints.'*

It is not enough to pass in such an experience, with its sacred hour, into union and communion with Christ. There may be days when it is still fresh, and the whole spiritual world is seen in vision, so that to be conscious of Christ's presence seems to meet every need. But such a life is not enough for a sane and wholesome mind. Man is body, soul, and spirit. He is a creature of affections and impulses which must manifest themselves in exercise. The life within is always nourished through the energies which touch the life without. We pass from the first environment into the second—the fellowship of the saints. We pass to share in that worship and communion and service in which we find our faith strengthened, and our whole nature exercised unto godliness.

This truth has been often ignored and is sometimes denied. There is to-day a marked decline in the attendance on public worship. There is a disregard for the hour of common prayer on the part of many who profess the Christian faith. Some urge the plea that they find themselves brought nearer to God, and more securely strengthened in their sense of His presence, by an hour of solitary silence than by the

hour of common song. Large numbers never cross the threshold of the prayer meeting, and seldom sit down with those little companies who meet round the word and its Lord. Others turn their back on the House of God, to go out to the fields that they may commune with Nature, and, to use the hackneyed and specious phrase, rise from Nature to Nature's God. Others again declare that in their lonely meditations, as they read the high and serious counsels of some long dead teacher who had deeply pondered the problems and mysteries of life, they gained more than from their public worship which so often jarred upon them. One writer has declared that a few pages of the *Imitatio Christi* schooled and stimulated her spirit as no fellowship of living men could do. Another has affirmed that to read the sayings of Epictetus in the closing hour of the day nurtured and controlled the life of the soul more than common prayer and common song. Not only in worship and in intercourse, but in service, numbers refuse to live the life of fellowship with the living, simple, tempted, praying saints.

It may be said that for this decline the fellowship of the saints is in part responsible. It has been declared that public worship and Christian service should be made more attractive. That usually means more interesting and more pleasurable to the senses, and nothing is more subtly alien to the life of the soul than that. As a matter of fact never was Christian worship more outwardly attractive and never was Christian service more full of interest than to-day. No. Behind this neglect we have the

short-sighted desire to escape the second environment. The issues and consequences, the impoverishment and anæmia of that escape, are written broadly in the lives of men and women round about us.

The truth is that the faith in Christ cannot be maintained without the fellowship of His people. The Christian life cannot survive without common prayer and common song. It thrives only by the ministry of the word and the partnership in service. The Christian certainties become unreal, unless they are continually reaffirmed as the soul enters the spiritual world which is revealed when Christ walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks and sits down with His people at His table. Every company of believing men, however bare its worship, however faulty its methods, bestows a blessing on the soul who sits humbly and reverently in its midst. There we receive illumination on the path of life. 'When I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end.' There we enter that atmosphere which is our shelter from temptation, and our quickening to fresh courage. 'When they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.' There we receive the supremest blessing, the renewed assurance of the living Lord and His keeping watch over His own. 'When the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled, came Jesus and stood in the midst.'

What this fellowship of the saints may be and do for us as an environment of life is expressed with a rare grace in this testimony: 'It pleased God in

the day when we used to meet together in Cambridge for His worship and for personal help, to draw us unitedly very close to Himself, so that few of us are likely to forget the seasons of refreshing which we enjoyed from His presence; and if, by His good providence, any of us meet in these later days, one of the readiest sentences to rise to our lips is the word, Do you remember? Then he adds his witness to the enduring power of this blessing of common fellowship. 'The moth and rust of time have not eaten away the affection which I had for you all, and those two thieves, Change and Death, which were so early busy with us, have not been able to undermine the house of our Love, nor abstract the treasure of our Faith.'¹ That is the voice of one who bears witness to the blessing of the second environment.

III

THIRD: '*In Ephesus.*'—*In this present evil world.*

There are times when we are tempted to build our tabernacle, and to sate our spirit in the luxury of the devotional life. But we must pass out to our Ephesus, our environment of temptation and sorrow and toil, with all the mystery of the unknown and the constant assault of its evil. There and there only can the Christian life reach its full.

This third environment presents itself in two ways. In the first it is our *sphere of discipline*. The world round about us is both our test and our problem. We know it to be too often victorious

¹ J. Rendel Harris, Preface to *Memoranda Sacra*, pp. v-vi.

over our faith and purity. But we must not escape from it. We must keep ourselves unspotted from its evil. We must not succumb to it, or make terms with it. We must regard it as our arena, in which we become more than conquerors as we overcome it. This thought of escaping the third environment to live only in the other two is the heresy which continually besets the Christian heart. So terrible was the pressure of the world upon the early believers, that they fled from it to build their little cells, and to isolate themselves from its sights and sounds. They ignored that large rich nature God had given them, and attempted to atrophy its pure affections, and to maim its powers. That was the heresy which built the monastery, and withdrew troubled men and women into its sheltered, guarded, unChristlike life. It presents itself in many forms to this day. We have heard the cry of those who form little sects and exclusive communities, 'Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate.' They read that counsel as though it meant that Christian men should form little coteries, with narrow tests of membership, and should not live out in the open world, as being in it and yet not of it, and as witnessing by an unfaltering testimony and an inexhaustible patience and charity and tenderness. They forget that this is the divinely appointed environment, and that by our accepting it, we not only grow strong in our faith, but lovely in our character. This is the victory of the Christian faith, to live in the midst of the dusty mart and busy street while, with a constant music, its vows our secret souls repeat.

In the second aspect this third environment is our *task*. In the most ancient record of the beginning of our race God placed the man He had made in a garden to dress it and to keep it. Our world is not a garden. It is a place of thorns and briars, and presents a task to be accomplished in the sweat of our face and the strain of our hearts. As we look abroad upon its cities with their mean streets, upon its fields scabbed and blistered by the waste and offal cast into them by the prodigal hands of men, upon its streams polluted by the filth drained into them, and upon its homes, often so narrow, so dark, so deadening to the very desire for things beautiful, we find the task to be so stern, that hope fails in our hearts. All those men and women who are endeavouring to cleanse our city life, to make our homes happier and wholesomer, to give every man the opportunity of a fairer and more gracious day, deserve our loyal support.

But things are not the real environment of the human spirit. In the last analysis the spirit can be environed only by the spirit. The things which affront our eyes and trouble our minds are only the issues of the spirit of evil. 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain.' The environment, whose transformation is our task and opportunity, is made up of the men, the women, and the children round about us. We are our brother's keeper. We are more. We are our brother's redeemer and minister. If only those who know the meaning of life in the first two environments would pass out to live in the third, with the constant testimony of their faith and holiness and service, they would win those

who are still without, and bring them to kneel at the feet of Christ. What a single devout and loyal life can do has been written in the record of Oberlin of Waldbach, of Baxter of Kidderminster, of John Inglis of Aneityum. It has been as clearly shown in an obscure upland village, where a man of humble life, gracious spirit, and absorbing devotion has changed the hearts and lives of the people. If Christian men would root and nourish their life 'in Christ' and 'in the fellowship of the saints,' they would triumphantly transform this third environment, until its fields became gardens of the Lord in fruitfulness and in beauty, its streams ran with water pure and trembling and healing as the waters of Bethesda, its homes became holy as those of Bethany, and its streets, what every street should be, entrancing as those of the city of God.

XX

CHOSEN TO SERVE

‘Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me.’—Acts ix. 15.

EVERY student of the Acts of the Apostles has two facts impressed upon him as he reads. The first is that the heathen world outside of Palestine is not only in need of the Gospel, but has been prepared for it. One imperial government holds all the nations in sway. The highways along which men travel centralise in Rome like the threads of a spider’s web. An exact and plastic speech—the Greek tongue—is in almost universal use. The thought of the learned is hungering for a new revelation. The glimpses we get of the governors, and the centurions, and the devout proselytes, afford proof that the fulness of the time has come, and that the heathen world is an open door for Christ.

The second fact is that the Gospel has become too great for the land of its birth. It is breaking the bonds of the country and the creed from which it sprang. It spreads westward to Joppa, northwards to Antioch, eastwards to Damascus. But the heathen world, the regions beyond, still lie in a darkness which is a wistful despair. What is the supreme necessity? A world prepared for the Gospel! A Gospel intended for the world! What is needed is a

channel, an instrument, a vessel, by which the Gospel shall be carried out of narrow Palestine, expounded in its breadth and inwardness and spirituality, and applied to the healing of the heathen heart. Luke, with his historic insight, sets his finger on the moment and upon the man when this momentous departure was taken. 'Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.'

The subject, therefore, is God's choice of men for His service. We shall consider, first: *God's choice of Paul*; and second: *the lessons of God's choosing*.

I

FIRST: *God's choice of Paul*.

The work was the bringing of the Western world into the knowledge of Christ, the Redeemer. As we think of the Gospel, and of the world waiting for it, we ask what kind of man would be chosen as God's instrument?

1. He must be a Jew, a man who had been taught the Old Testament at his mother's knee, steeped in Jewish thought and custom, familiar with the Jewish sacrifices, and able to understand the ways of God made known to Moses and to interpret the songs sung by David and Isaiah. He must be a pure Jew, not like Timothy whose father was a Greek, making him open to suspicion. He must be one who could enter every Jewish synagogue, and declare himself to be an Hebrew of the Hebrews. He must be, among the Jews, a Pharisee. We are accustomed to think

scornfully of the Pharisees as hypocrites. Many of them bear an eternal shame. Yet the most earnest men in Palestine were to be found in their ranks. They understood Christ as the Sadducees did not. They discerned the meaning of His message as the multitude failed to do. They saw Him as Roman eyes had no power to see. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and Gamaliel were Pharisees. The man who was to penetrate Christ's secret, and expound His Gospel to the world, must be a Jew out of the ranks of the Pharisees.

But he must be more than a Jew. He required a different birth and a more catholic training. Think of a man like Caiaphas facing a Greek or a Roman audience. Place Gamaliel with all his prudential maxims in the midst of a Pagan city and he would be mocked. Take even Peter and set him to persuade the nations 'whom God hath made of one blood,' and the Galilean fisherman would cut a sorry figure at the task. The man who should be God's instrument must be born beyond Palestine, and be Greek in thought and training. He must be able not only to speak to every villager in his native tongue, and to pluck out the inmost thought in the mind of a Roman governor, but to stand at Athens, and with a logic full of subtle power, a love of beauty clear in its vision, and a speech instinct with grace, appeal to the eager minds gathered to listen. He must be more than a Jew—he must be a Greek in sympathy and thought and speech.

But he must be more than a Greek. One great world power enforced its commands everywhere, and made its strength felt in the remotest quarter. To

be merely a Jew would be to be mocked and flouted at every turn. To be only a Greek would be to be mistrusted and despised. But the man who could rise up and say 'I am a Roman citizen' might stand fearlessly in every market-place of the Roman Empire.

What have we in the man God chose? Saul of Tarsus was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. But Greek thought mingled in his brain with Hebrew learning, and his Roman citizenship clothed him with freedom. Here is the man prepared for the work God needed to be done.

2. But let us look more closely at Paul, apart from his birth and training. Here our expectations are disappointed. We would expect that God's chosen vessel would have been a man of noble presence and of golden-mouthed eloquence. What have we in point of fact? A man with a body so delicate that if he had not spent some years of his life in prison he would not have endured for half his time. A man with a most nervous organisation, subject to some disorder, which, whatever it was, made him ridiculous in men's eyes. He was no resplendent hero. 'In bodily presence weak and in speech contemptible.' He was a little, ugly, half-palsied Jew. But he understood the meaning of it and could say, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.'

Yes, but some one says, his letters were powerful. But their power does not often lie in their easy logic, their grace of diction, their charm of style. Read them with an observant eye and you will find that their

thought is often difficult and their phrasing rugged. Their power lies in their heart. No other man ever wrote such letters where a great heart is continually pouring out its treasures of knowledge and love. It is hard to say whether they are fuller of prayers or of tears, of keen reproaches or of tender croonings over those he loves. What the man was who wrote these letters you can see as Luke reveals him in a single scene in the Book of the Acts. Read his farewell speech to the elders at Miletus, and mark that when his words are ended he knelt down and commended them in prayer to God, and then, 'They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.'

3. These things help us to understand Paul's personal fascination. But his greatness had a deeper source. His greatness lay in his spiritual nature. He had been a God-thirsty man, and he was now a God-intoxicated man. Across all the centuries we can look and find no man who stood upon so high a spiritual level as Paul, unless it be Moses, the man of God. When you have, therefore, this massive understanding, this flaming heart, this unswerving will all made the means of bearing in upon men the riches of his spiritual endowment, what better instrument can you conceive for proclaiming the Gospel of the redeeming Lord than this ardent, tender, indomitable, beseeching, entreating and weeping Paul?

Yet with all this he lacked one thing. All that he was would have made him a leader of the Pharisees whose name would rank with Gamaliel. A man of

his dynamic would have become a leader and mover anywhere. But when Christ laid hold upon him, and on the way to Damascus he heard the voice whose echo never died out of his ears, and saw, in mystic vision, the face of the Crucified, when he was converted, then his nature rose to the full height of his power. His discords were turned to harmony, his darkness to light, his bitter anger to tender emotion, his compunctions to peace. He sums up all he became in the words, 'The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' So when Ananias came in upon him, he found a man prepared for the service of God—'A chosen vessel.'

II

SECOND : *The Lessons of God's Choosing.*

1. The first is that *God chooses only prepared vessels.* We are here upon the verge of the doctrine of election, and a ray of white light shines upon it. It has been made a dogma of horror to tender hearts, yet there is no doctrine more full of grace. It has been sinned against chiefly by being stated as a bare, naked, unrelated, unconditioned truth whose whole depth we have fathomed. There is no truth which can be so conceived and so stated—not even the master truth of the love of God. God's electing grace must always be stated in relation to His character, and His purpose, and the will of man. God's choice is not an arbitrary, capricious, and purposeless self-pleasing. The good pleasure of His will is always an act of infinite purity

and infinite pity, as well as of infinite power. Therefore God chooses only prepared vessels. He chose Abraham to be the father of His people because he had believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. He chose Joseph because through the passion of his young dreams, and the discipline of the pit and the prison, he had been prepared to be a governor of men. He chose Moses because he had been schooled in the learning of the Egyptians and in the deeper wisdom of the desert, to be the law-giver of His people. He chose David from being the shepherd of the sheep to be the leader of the flock of God. So He chose Paul, because he, and no other, was prepared to bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.

That is still God's mode of choosing. He has chosen you in accordance with your preparation. Your gifts, your equipment, your character have conditioned God's choosing. How illuminating is that truth! Look back on the years gone by. You have wondered at its strange turns and bewildering vicissitudes. You have fainted at the hardness of the way. You have been bitter because of the severity of your schooling. Now you see it all to be a preparation for God's choosing. Does any one sit here with hard thoughts of God? Do you think that God has not opened up your way for you? I take you to witness that opportunity after opportunity has opened out before you, but you could not enter into God's open door because you had failed to prepare.

For what are you preparing yourself? Are you

trifling away the morning of your life? Is the dew of your youth being dried up in the heats of unholy desires? Are you spending your hours in frivolous pleasures? The noontide shall find you unprepared, and, therefore, not chosen for its nobler tasks. Or, are your maturer years being spent in self-indulgence? You will never be chosen for the great services of the kingdom. Is old age coming on you with your soul encrusted by covetousness? God has no place of blessing for you. Go on in your course. Spend your hours in acquiring the worldling's grace. Set your heart on some merely earthly end. Refuse the call and ignore the service of a spiritual life. Verily you shall have your reward! You shall stand in your lot at the end of your day. But that will not be any place of high service in the kingdom of God. 'Seest thou a man, diligent in his business? He shall not stand before mean men, he shall stand before kings.' God chooses only prepared vessels.

2. The second lesson is that *the consummating preparation is by the grace of God*. That is true of all place and of all service. Whatever may be a man's gift, or aptitudes, or training, or experience, he is not fitted for the work he ought to do except by the grace of God. Even genius has not achieved its highest without this completing blessing. Think how Paul wasted himself when he did not know the power of the grace of God! What violence he did to his nature! Who could have dreamed that behind the persecutor's drawn face and his eyes gleaming with hate there was one of the tenderest hearts ever lodged within a human breast? Who could have believed

that that narrow-minded bigot could have yearned after a whole world and seen in his midnight dream the brotherhood of man? But when he had yielded to the grace of God, his faculties were unbound, his nature blossomed out into loveliness, his gifts put on their strength, and he found the work and the place of his destiny. How great has been that place in human history! Paul had not the strength of Plato's thought, the depth of Shakespeare's insight, the grandeur of Dante's music. Yet millions of men to whom these are only names bow down in an adoring reverence to Paul. There is no other name, except that which is above every name, to whom so many look with an intense affection as the name of this tender, entreating Jew. There is none among the dead whom I so love. Ah, Paul, wert thou here I would stoop down and kiss thy feet! Yet he knew the secret of it all, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'

How many among our youth are passing on to shame with their powers squandered, their capacities narrowed, their natures stunted for lack of this grace of God! Every family has its sorrowful story of son or daughter, whom this baptism of God's love in Christ would have saved and ennobled. It would bring you into the knowledge of those paradoxes, made plain only in experience, in which you would be humbled and yet exalted, made captive and yet made free, made trustful and yet full of daring, become familiar with God and yet filled with His fear. Let the young and the unstained whom God has been following as a shadow, and let those who have had

years of disregard, or, as Saul of Tarsus had, years of deadly antipathy behind them, even now yield themselves to God, become assured of His love, and let His grace change their minds and hearts, and they will find themselves vessels chosen to serve.

3. The third lesson is that *God chooses a man for the place He needs him*. There are some here to whom this truth may bring neither help nor comfort. The comparison of your case with Paul's may seem too distant to be real. You think of the place for which God has chosen you, and tormenting questions arise within you. Why is my lot one of continued hardship? Why does a bitter poverty and a toil-some obscurity mark all my days? Why is the thing I most desire persistently denied me? Why does this defect hinder me in my service of God? Why do I suffer this hidden and incurable sore in my body? Why does my home remain childless and others ring with the laughter and play of little ones? Who can compare my place with Paul's? He was chosen to honour; mine is a place of shame. But think of Paul's place as he found it. His life story has become the epic poem of the New Testament, but what was its natural experience? He was a homeless, childless, poverty-stricken, contemned, outcast man. 'In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in death oft.' 'In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.' Can your record stand beside that? Wealth and ease may never be yours. Disappointment may meet you in every turn of your life. Your service may never be appre-

ciated, and even your purity of purpose never recognised. Yet your course has not been through such darkness as Paul's, and your death will not be so lonely as his. Yet he could write, as he looked into the face of death, 'I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.'

The place God has chosen for you may seem one of obscurity and dark with sorrow. Keep it with all content, and accept it as the place of your service. It has a greatness of which you may never know. We look too much on the seen and temporal. God sees the unseen, the eternal. Paul never dreamed that the place he filled was so great as we now see it to be. Who could have predicted that when the governors and kings who thought him a spectacle for idly curious eyes had passed away, the name and the service of Paul would make men's hearts thrill and be set in God's enduring record? Who would have dreamed that his spiritual experience would have been counted one of the heritages of humanity? Let us go hence, caring not how lonely, how difficult, how obscure our place may be. Only be sure that it is the place for which you have been prepared by the grace of God. Accept its humblest task. Answer its calls with courage. Then your work and service shall be a part of the eternal order, and you shall be a chosen vessel to bear God's name.

XXI

THE RECONSECRATIONS OF LIFE

‘And Abram went up out of Egypt . . . unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.’—GEN. xiii. 1-4.

EVERY man expresses himself, and the trend of his life, in some characteristic act. Were we to review our lives, in some dispassionate hour, we would find our ruling desire condensing itself again and again in some decision, or some service, or some repeated word. We would disclose what we are in the make and grain of our nature. The reason why we repeat the same sins, make the same choices, and find our thoughts reverting to the same current, is this truth of our self expression in a characteristic act. Abram expressed his inward passion in the building of altars. He built nothing else. He never had a secure and settled home in the land, but dwelt in tents as a sojourner in Canaan, and did not possess more of its soil than enough for a grave. But whithersoever he journeyed, wherever he pitched his tent, there he built his altar and called on the name of the Lord. At his first coming out of Ur of the Chaldees, when he passed southward from Shechem to Bethel, when he came back from his sojourn in Egypt, when he went on his journey to dwell in Hebron, when he ascended Mount

Moriah in the supreme hour of his faith, we find him building his altar unto the Lord.

What is the meaning of this recurring building of the altar? The altar was not the symbol of his faith. It was not a place of morning or of evening prayer. It was not a consecrated sanctuary where God would be pleased to come. The angels of God hovered round his tent door and met him on the highway. The building of the altar had a definite meaning. It was not only the token and the medium of his covenant with God. It was the place of the reconsecration of his life. As often as he gathered its stones, and laid the binding sods upon them, and offered his simple sacrifice, and called upon the name of the Lord, he was not merely confessing his faith. He was reconsecrating his life.

That act mirrors and explains a universal religious necessity. We do not need to gather stones from the hillside to build an altar of sacrifice. We are no longer called upon to mark off any spot of earth as holy ground. God meets with us, and communes with us from above the mercy seat, and wherever we kneel to Him, on the open heath, or in the house of prayer, there is our holy place. We all have places which are hallowed by associations and sacred through dear memories. To them we return again and again. As we pass on in life there recur our times of need, or of high privilege and enlarged opportunity and fresh call, or of defeat and shame. Then we should return to the place of the altar made at the first, and reconsecrate our lives unto the Lord. Let us sum up some of the most marked occasions of reconsecration.

I

Think, first, of reconsecration *at the changes and vicissitudes of life.*

All life is full of change. There may be a long term of years in which there seems to be little alteration in the circumstances of our lot, but the inevitable vicissitudes happen to us in the process of the suns. A man leaves his youth behind him, and steps out into the ranks of the men who carry on the world's work, to find his heart stirred with new ambitions and his feet beset by strange temptations. He feels the pulse of his manhood beating within him, and his self-control is tested to its breaking. He begins to see what life may mean for those who fail, and for those who succeed, in its tasks. Although he has built his altar in some day of surrender and acceptance, he needs to rebuild it now, and reconsecrate himself. When every man begins his career, when another personality comes into his intimate life, when a little child is born to him, or when those on whom he has leaned have passed away, the only method of meeting such changes, and of passing through them, strengthened and enriched in faith, is to build again the altar, and reconsecrate life unto the Lord.

There are other times, when no new joy or fresh impulse visits us, and no enlarged horizon allures us on. Sometimes our life seems to flow on like a quiet stream. Its years are full of expected and pleasant events. But we come to the rapids, and the current is too strong for the bravest. Or, to change the figure, our life seems to tangle into a knot, and we

cannot untie it. A reverse of fortune changes our circumstances. A tender tie is broken and the way stretches out in a shadowing loneliness. Sickness lays its hand upon us, and leads us aside from the busy paths of the world's work. We go to our physician to speak of some slight pain, and we come out from his consulting-room with stricken thoughts. We suffer a mortifying disappointment in the thing which we dreamed would crown our life, and we understand the meaning of Crabbe's pathetic cry of 'conquered hope's meek anguish.' We begin to see how little of what we covet is going to be given us, and how certainly the road winds uphill all the way. How shall we meet these disillusioning changes? How shall we face them, and not lose heart, and become bitter, and at last drift away from the path of the pilgrim, with that beaten look on our faces? We shall come back to the place of the altar which we made at the first, and call anew on the name of the Lord. We shall reconsecrate our lives unto Him.

Look at some examples of this victory of faith. Tennyson in his early youth was plunged into a year of hopeless gloom by the death of his beloved friend, Arthur Hallam. It seemed so strange a Providence that it not only blotted out all joy from his life but robbed him of his early faith in God. Under the cloud of his sorrow he wrote 'The Two Voices' with its dark suggestion of suicide. But he came back to the place of the altar. He began to recall the way of God's dealing, he gave himself to a new realisation of the love and grace of the strong Son of God, and at last, as we learn from the self-revealing stanzas of

In Memoriam, he reconsecrated his life in a recovered faith unto the Lord. All through his life he met each vicissitude with a renewed consecration until he could pass to life's last experience with a song of consecration on his lips.¹ Or think of John Bright sitting in the depths of grief, almost of despair, when his wife lay dead and the sunshine of his home was extinguished, and nothing was left except the memory of the gracious life and the too brief happiness which had gladdened him in his two years of married life. But his friend Cobden called upon him; and after wise and tender words of sympathy, he made an appeal to Bright to rise, and throw his moral passion into the endeavour to repeal those laws through whose operation there were thousands of homes where wives, mothers, and children were dying of hunger. Bright responded, and returned to the altar of his faith, and reconsecrated his life unto the Lord.² Or, think of Miss Waring, when given her sentence of death which meant a seclusion from the world of broad interests and of happy activities, going quietly to her room, and coming out in the morning with the hymn she had written:—

‘Father, I know that all my life is portioned out for me,
And the changes that are sure to come, I do not fear to
see,

But I ask Thee for a present mind, intent on pleasing
Thee.’

That is the issue of a reconsecration. Not every one may pass through such searching vicissitudes. Not

¹ *Tennyson: a Memoir*, vol. i. pp. 105-109.

² G. Barnett Smith, *Life and Speeches of John Bright*, pp. 33, 34.

every one may be able to respond to the call with such arresting deeds and words. But every one has his own vicissitudes, and they are his occasions for the reconsecration of his life.

II

Think, second, of reconsecration *in the progress of our years*.

We all realise that youth should have its hour of vigil in which its vow is taken, and that young blood should leap in chivalrous ambition. No life is safe which is not pure, and no purity is safe which is not passionate, and, therefore, loyal to goodness and to truth. But the consecration of a man's youth is not sufficient for his older years. The temptations of young manhood are sudden, hungry, assaulting, but they have not the strength and subtlety and cunning of the more insidious seductions of later years. There are men here who know the perils of middle life, when the pulse begins to beat more slowly, when burdens and responsibilities become heavier, when duty becomes sterner and toil more exhausting, and when life's interests are made up, and we are no longer saved by hope. Then we are tempted to be content with mean achievement, to seek unworthy ease, to trifle with truth and honour for the sake of what the world can give, and to yield to nameless mutinies of the flesh against the spirit. Many a man, who has run bravely in the lush meadows of youth, has reached middle life to find his high ideal blurred, his conscience no longer keenly sensitive to evil, his baser desires mastering his will. The keeping of the second watch is the more searching trial. It is easier

to mount up with wings as eagles in our unstained and eager youth, to run and not be weary so long as our natural strength abounds, than to walk and not faint in older years.

If middle life has its perils and its sad-coloured stories of decline, the temptations and the falls of old age are more amazing still. Youth is apt to think that when the steps are slow, and the hair is grey, the evil passions which trouble them will die down, and the sights and sounds of sense no longer allure. It is not so. What are the facts which so often shock and terrify us all? A man has worn the white flower of a blameless life throughout the heyday of his eager youth. He has been a pillar in God's house in the fulness of his powers. In his old age he has almost made shipwreck both of faith and conscience. Young King Saul was so uplifted in aim and desire while he was a youth that he found himself at home among a band of men whose hearts the Lord had touched. In his old age his spirit became haunted by evil, and a foul envy corrupted his magnanimous nature. Young David sang the psalms of a consecrated innocence in the fields of Bethlehem, came forth to face the foes of Israel with an unblanched face, and taught his people to joy in God their Shepherd and their King. In his old age the crown of his purity was taken from him, and the men who loved him walked the streets of his city with their faces filled with shame. Young Solomon had his dream in the night when his unstained heart chose wisdom and honour. He came to an old age whose profligacy and irreligion corrupted the people,

and have made his name a byword to all time. We ourselves can recall those whose names were once heard with respect, whose lives gave promise of sanctity. To-day they have gone no man knows where, and their names are never spoken where Christian men meet. It is too possible to begin to run well, and to be hindered, long before the end of the course is reached. Jesus pointed to the truth when He said, 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered.' The only mode of safety is to make each new stage in the journey of life an occasion of rebuilding the altar, and calling on the name of the Lord.

Every high call which has been made to a Christian man has been heard and answered by Christ Himself. Jesus is the leader of all the humble and nameless believers who reconsecrate themselves. Mark His course. When He spoke His first revealing word in His boyhood within the Temple, He built His altar unto the Lord. But when He went down into the waters of baptism, when He endured His temptation in the wilderness, when He chose His twelve apostles, when He was transfigured on the mount, when He agonised in the garden, when He came forth bearing His cross, and finally in the last act and article of death, He rebuilt His altar and called upon the name of the Lord. At all the summit-levels of His pilgrimage He reconsecrated His life to God.

III

Think, third, of reconsecration *after a fall into sin*. Here we must speak with all tenderness of the dark

passages in life's history, and speak only to strengthen and comfort. There is no hour when we are so tempted to give up the battle, to think that we have been mistaken and are now discovered to be hypocrites, and to desert from the ranks of God's service, as when we have fallen into some ashaming sin. When a man has yielded to some base temptation, and has made his bed in hell, he is sick with self-despising and in deadly danger of being cast away and lost. The peril of a fall into sin does not lie in the misery of its shame, or in the knowledge of the consequent estrangement from God. It lies in the blinding of the eyes, the dulling of the sensibility, the bitter self-mockery, and the callous indifference which follows upon it. The question never is whether we have fallen. 'All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.' Every man must cry, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' No man can cast a stone at the most flagrant wrongdoer. The real question is how a man behaves himself after he has fallen. Saul and David both yield to their besetting sin. But Saul strides on in his self-will and proud impenitence, and at length he is 'past feeling.' David sobs out the contrition of his broken heart, in the words which find their echo in all men's consciences. Judas and Peter are both disloyal to Jesus. But Judas goes out into the darkness, with a maddening remorse, to hang himself. Peter goes out into the darkness to weep bitterly and to come back again with meek confession. Demas and Mark were both numbered with the apostolic company. Demas loved the present world

and was taken captive by it. Mark yielded to its power, and in his unworthy fear was unfaithful in the service. But Demas played the traitor to Christ. Mark returned to fight the good fight of faith. What is the secret of the difference? One sinner returns to the place of the altar and reconsecrates his life. The other turns his back and is seen no more.

What then is the instant imperative of the man who has fallen into an ashaming sin? Come back to Abram who built the altar. He went down into Egypt in a time of famine. Like most men he had a faulty streak in his grain, a mean fibre in his nature, a dark spot in his soul. This sublime believer, who went out not knowing whither he went, trembled for his life as he faced Egyptian lawlessness. He played the coward. For many months he lived out a deliberate and continued lie. He said that Sarah was his sister. When his lie had been discovered, and he had been reproached by heathen lips, and his shame was shadowing his heart, he saw the way he should take. He came back from Egypt, and made his way, with his burdened conscience, to the place where he had built his altar at the first. He gathered its stones and rebuilt the altar, and there, in humble confession, he reconsecrated himself unto the Lord.

We live in a different world, meet different temptations, fall into different sins, but our healing is gained by the same reconsecration. Sanctification has been defined as a succession of fresh repentances. We may reach the heart of the truth more securely if we define it as a succession of reconsecrations.

Did every man write his religious autobiography this truth would stand out more clearly than any man dares to confess. One of the most striking instances, whose truth is avouched for, has been detailed in a modern book devoted to the work of the Salvation Army among the castaways of London. It is a story of a man of dark antecedents and coarse nature, a drunkard and a bully, whose murderous wrath men feared to rouse. He was converted to God. For some time he lived a difficult and yet victorious Christian life. Neither in his home nor in his daily occupation was he free from fierce temptations. Yet the jibe that once would have made his eye blaze with anger, the taunt that would have evoked a blow so passionate as to need no repetition, the proffer of strong drink once a consuming desire, were all triumphantly endured. But on one dark, wet, discouraging day, when misfortune befell him, and the chilling cold lowered his vitality, he fell. The people who saw him stagger through the streets did not laugh or mock. They were genuinely sorry, even the worst of them, to see this great-hearted man fall back into ruin. They marked him stumbling into his home and their tongues began to wag. But the door opened and the man came out. He had taken off his coat and put on the red jersey. He walked straight to the Army Hall, went in and passed up to the penitent form, and there knelt down and prayed. It is a far cry from a mean London street to the hillside between Bethel and Ai. But Abram and the penitent London believer both rebuilt the altar,

¹ Harold Begbie, *Broken Earthenware*, pp. 33-34

both called upon the name of the Lord, and both passed on to unfaltering victory in their reconsecration.

We have marked only the individual occasions of the rebuilding of the altar. I have not suggested the opportunities of unexpected enrichment which recur in all our lives, the opening of long closed doors, the coming of the gifts for which we had prayed with half-assured hearts, the deliverance in the hour of fear. All of these call for reconsecration. But there are some opportunities which present themselves and appeal to us with a peculiar urgency. The seasons of the Christian Year come in the annual round and each presents its own open door and appeals with its own peculiar motive. There are times of special services, gatherings for the deepening of the spiritual life, Conferences of like-minded believers, and all of these induce a reconsecration. But on the day of the coming Communion Feast, when Christ will spread the supper table with the symbols of His broken body and shed blood, and fulfil His promise of His real presence, then not even the most heedless can fail to understand the Master's desire, or to miss the rebuilding of his altar and the reconsecration of his life.

XXII

FRUIT THAT SHALL REMAIN

‘Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.’—JOHN xv. 16.

THE scene was the upper room where Jesus was spending His last night with the Twelve. Judas had gone out into the darkness of the night, in the deeper darkness of a traitor soul. His uncongenial presence, betraying his hostile spirit and sinister purpose, had oppressed every heart, and a sense of relief passed over the company. The brooding shadow was lifted from Christ’s brow. The note of trouble left His voice. An elation akin to His joy in the foregleam of His cross arose within His heart. His thoughts were busy with the future of these loyal friends gathered around Him. He was gladdened by the vision of what they were to be in God’s kingdom. He was drinking the wine of His delight as he saw the coming grace and truth of their spiritual wellbeing. That was the purpose of His living and dying. He fashioned His hope and expectation into a parable whose similitude was a heritage of the Hebrew mind.

This parable is known as the parable of the vine. It may also be viewed as the parable of the fruit.

The ruling and recurring word is 'fruit.' It is found eight times within the parable, and is the burden and refrain of Christ's utterances. The use of the word marks the expression-points of Christ's teaching, and His counsels and appeals gather round these expression-points. They disclose Christ's demand from His followers, and each mention of 'fruit' increases the demand and reveals the secret of fruit-bearing. The closing words consummate the parable. 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit.' Let us mark the four expression-points of the parable.

I

FIRST: '*Fruit.*'

By fruit Jesus means character, conduct, service. The word includes the whole outflow of a renewed personality. It implies a quickened conscience, a renewed will, a loving and self-denying temper. Paul gives it a fine analysis—'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control.'

Now Christ chose this figure, as the condensed expression for the Christian character and its issues, chiefly for two suggestions. One of these is the suggestion of the moral loveliness of the Christian spirit and life. A Christian life should be a winsome, gladdening, love-evoking round of years. Sour looks, sulky tempers, scornful words, self-willed deeds, should find no place in it. A Christian character

should have the alluring beauty of the form and colour of a cluster of grapes. It should minister to the refreshment of men, bearing witness to all things beautiful in God's providence. 'Leave them with me,' said an invalid, when a gift from a vinery was brought to his bedside. 'I cannot touch them, but they refresh me and gladden me even to see.' The Christian spirit should have all the healing power of fruit, breathing forth an atmosphere of peace, neutralising the acids of the unthankful, and purging out the distempers of our vexed and vexing world. Tennyson pays his tribute to the power of the moral loveliness of Cranmer, when he puts this noble testimony into the lips of one of those who entreated Queen Mary for his life:—

'To do him any wrong was to beget
A kindness from him, for his heart was rich,
Of such fine mould that if you sow'd therein
The seed of Hate, it blossom'd Charity.'¹

There have been men and women whose coming into a room checked the evil thought, rebuked the lurking passion, and uplifted men's hearts to higher things, until every one realised that they were bringing forth fruit, as they felt the power and charm of its moral loveliness.

The second suggestion of the figure is that fruit is not a thing of toil and effort, but a growth. The Christian life itself is always a conflict with an alien environment. It is described as a pilgrimage, a watching, a warfare, a race, a wrestling, sometimes an

¹ *Queen Mary*, Act iv. sc. i.

agony of temptation and trial. But these terms think of the opportunities and the arenas of action. The growth of the character is silent and unconscious within. As the sap rises secretly into the branch, under the action of all outward circumstance, and as it bursts forth in bud, becomes beautiful in blossom, and reaches its perfection in fruit, so the Christian character grows from within and is manifested in the bud and blossom and fruit of moral beauty. Mean ideals, foul thoughts, base habits, are discarded, as the old leaves of the beech are cast off by the coming of the new leaves in the spring.

Here we find the pathetic and repeated age-long blunder of many eager spirits. By cloistered seclusion, by the bondage of stern vows which have forbidden them the blue sky and the green fields and the love of little children, by the maiming and distorting of the powers and of the affections, men of all Christian communions have endeavoured to fashion themselves into saints. We have marked the pale, starved faces, the lack-lustre eyes, the crushed and broken bearing, proclaiming that both manhood and womanhood have been wronged, as these ascetic devotees have passed us in the streets. They were endeavouring to work up a Christ-like character. But this parable declares that the Spirit of Christ works in those who are one with Him, and through their close fellowship and tender intimacy, the strength of Christ passes into the spirit of the believer, and he grows into that grace and knowledge whose fruit is unto holiness, whose end is everlasting life.

II

SECOND: '*More Fruit.*' 'Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' (Ver. 2.)

Not only fruit, but 'more fruit' is Christ's purpose and desire. The fruitless branch is taken away. That strange saying is clearly and decisively explained in Judas, once numbered with the Twelve, but now a castaway. The fruit-bearing branch is dealt with by the discipline of the Husbandman. He uses His pruning knife—the keen purging instrument of His word. In the chastening of His varying providences, strange visitations, and searching vicissitudes, He prunes and purges with His word, and the issue is 'more fruit.'

This chastening of the Lord is the trial of all believing men. The shadow on our life, the mystery of our pain, the burden we carry and shall carry until the end, the sorrow that will never cease to grieve, the silence in our home, the lifelong thorn in our flesh—these perplex and shadow us all. Even great souls have lost their faith as they entered the cloud, and humbler men cry out when they walk in darkness. Jesus sets the meaning of it all in clear light when He tells us that what God desires is 'more fruit.' Here is a branch abounding in broad green leaf and lovely twining tendril. But it is growing to wood, and its fruit is scanty. The vine-dresser bends down the vine, cuts it back with ruthless severity until all that seemed so beautiful is stripped away. But in due season there will be 'more fruit.'

We have seen young and buoyant hearts rejoicing in the laughter and song of life, sharing with an all-forgetting gaiety its round of delights. Then we have marked the tears on their cheeks through God's dealing, and we have seen the issue in 'more fruit.' We have also seen strong, self-confident, self-willed natures, who carried their heads high, purged by God's pruning-knife, and as they were chastened of the Lord, they were made partakers of His holiness. For, in these times of shadow and trial and silence, the grace of Christ was poured into their spirits and coursed through their souls until they brought forth the fruit of a complete surrender and a nobler devotion.

But trial and vicissitude and sorrow do not prune and purge without 'the word.' Sometimes they only embitter and harden and arouse a defiant unbelief. Only when we hear some word in these times of silence are our hearts purged from their evil. 'Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.' In the hour of some dark experience a sentence from Christ's lips gives us light, the prayer of an old psalmist gives us courage, or some high appeal from an epistle calls us to a fresh consecration. We find ourselves purged and cleansed and we bring forth 'more fruit.' A young man who had lost his situation through the bankruptcy of the firm by whom he was employed, found himself unable to obtain a similar post. As the weeks passed on he began to lose heart, and bitter thoughts of God's dealing tormented him. On one Sunday morning he went, without much heart, to the fellowship meeting. He

was out of tune with the opening hymn and prayer. But when the Scripture lesson was read in course, the verse which fell to him was, 'Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?' He could scarcely finish the reading of the word for his penitential shame. He was cleansed by the word which Jesus had spoken. He went out with a renewed courage, to find that God's providence was not estranged, and to bring forth 'more fruit.'

III

THIRD: '*Much Fruit.*' 'He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.' (Ver. 5.)

Fruit, more fruit, much fruit—not merely a more abundant yield of true word and helpful deed so as to 'fill life with good works till it runs o'er the brim'—but a deeper loyalty, a fuller self-sacrifice, a more Christlike grace. He demands a meeker bearing, a more enduring patience, a more self-forgetting sacrifice, a wiser compassion, a larger charity, and even a gentler tone and a kindlier look. But mark that Jesus, with a sustained emphasis, binds up this richer grace with our *abiding in Him, and His abiding in us*. There is no fruit possible without a vital connection with Christ. The branch can bear only when unsevered from Him. Every unworldly grace in all mankind has been 'born of God.' But to bring forth 'much fruit' we need an unbroken, wholly dependent, and closely intimate union with Christ. As the life

and power of the vine energise the branch, so, when Christ abides in us, His spirit beats and pulses in ours, and finds expression in the much fruit of a Christlike obedience.

No word on Christ's lips, unless it be that word of sympathetic meaning which calls us to eat His flesh and drink His blood, is more often left out of our thought and desire. It seems to some to be unreal, and too high for men who pass along the world's dusty highways. It is regarded by others as the peculiar privilege of a few high and rare spirits. It is read by many as a snatch of poetry reflecting the mood of an hour of ecstasy. But Christ calls on every disciple from Peter and James and John to the least notable of the apostolic band, as He calls to-day on the man of large discourse and piercing vision, and the man of most untutored mind alike, to abide in Him. And He stoops, as He always stooped to our poor understanding, to make His appeal clear and persuasive. Therefore He discloses the various ways in which we abide in Him.¹

To begin with, we abide in Him when *His words abide in us* (ver. 7). To keep any one's words in tender memory, and to recall them with confidence and delight, is to find the speaker of them abiding within the inner sanctuary of our thought and desire. When Christ's words are lodged deeply in our hearts, cherished in hours of meditation, and recalled in times of trial, He abides within us and we bring forth 'much fruit.' Again, we abide in Him when we *abide*

¹ Cf. W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Garden of Nuts*, for a clear and finely touched exposition of this truth.

in His love (ver. 9). To abide in Christ's love is to continue in the sober certainty of its reality, and in the assurance that whatever may befall us Christ's love will never fail. When we find our lot to be hard, and when we are bewildered by our outlook, or when we have sinned and are tormented by accusing thoughts, to continue to believe that Christ loves us, and longs for us, is to abide in Him. And again, we abide in this sense of His love when *we keep His commandments* (ver. 10). Wilful sin imperils, if it does not interrupt, our assurance of the love of God in Christ. 'Where is the blessedness I knew?' is the question of our hymn. It is back behind us on the road where we left the path of our obedience. Is there a command we neglect, a service we will not render, a gift we withhold, an offender we will not forgive, a grace we refuse to wear? If our abiding fails, the only healing is to keep the commandment, and in the hour of our repentance, we shall again become sure of Christ's love, and also find Him abiding in us.

'Then thro' the mid complaint of my confession,
Then thro' the pang and passion of my prayer,
Leaps with a start the shock of His possession,
Thrills me and touches, and the Lord is there.'

How few so constantly abide in Christ! The names of those heroic saints who have wrought righteousness, and adorned the doctrine of God their Saviour, shine as the stars of the firmament. The humble believers, whom we all have known living out their

quiet lives, sinking for ever more deeply into the thought of God, stand with them as witnesses to the love and grace of Christ. How they glorify the Father! Take a simple illustration of the power of their testimony. A visitor to a country house was led by its owner into his range of vinehouses. As they passed into the first, the vine-grower turned with an apology for the meagre show of fruit which caught the eye. Something had gone wrong with the root of this once prolific vine, he explained. As they entered the next house he stopped and looked up with shining eyes, and pointed to the bloom and glistening dew on the abundant clusters hanging from the branches. The word flashed through the mind of the visitor, 'Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit : so shall ye be my disciples.'

IV

FOURTH : '*Fruit that shall remain.*' 'I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.'

Fruit, more fruit, much fruit, fruit that shall remain. No similitude of nature can fully express a truth of the spirit. Here Jesus rises above the limits of the parable. What is so perishable as fruit? A touch will destroy the bloom on the grape. A hot breath will imperil its dew. In a week it will wither. But the fruit of the vine, Christ, is fruit that remains. Mark the meaning of this unnoticed word in the story of those to whom Jesus spoke. Their names are dear to our children. Their words and deeds stir our

imagination and quicken our faith. Their moral and spiritual beauty are our boast and our desire. The Church and the kingdom they built remain the mightiest forces of humanity. They brought forth fruit that has remained.

The same truth is illustrated and proved in every generation. The history of Christ's Church is a long succession of believing men who fight the good fight and keep the faith, and leave behind them the fruit that remains. A young man who was crossing a Highland moor marked a lonely figure busy among its peats. He made his way to the spot and fell into an easy conversation. The Celtic reticence laid its restraint upon the peat-gatherer's words. But a shy question touched the springs of the old man's inner life, and the talk became intimate and tender. As they came down the hill together the peasant pointed out a little cottage by the roadside which had been the home of a man out of whose heart the vital godliness of the parish had come. His life had been a steadfast witness to Christ. His prayers had led others into the secret of the Lord. It was in his cottage that the speaker had entered into life. He had been buried in the churchyard, but no one knew the place of his grave, for no tombstone held the name of so humble a man. In a flash the younger man understood the meaning of the words, 'that your fruit should remain.' The old crofter, long dead, buried in a nameless grave, almost entirely forgotten, had brought forth fruit which remained in the place where he wrought out his years of lowly toil, and it

was potent for faith in men who had never seen his face. It remains still, and it shall endure when time has passed away.

‘Abide in me, and I in you.’ To abide in Christ’s words, to abide in His love, to abide in His commandments—these are the avenues into this experience. Our modern world is eager to maintain the immanence of God. There are moving voices reaffirming the truth that God is dwelling in the round ocean, and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the mind of man. There are others calling us to be assured that God is the motion and the spirit working through all things true and good and beautiful. But the most certain and the most powerful immanence is the indwelling of Christ in His disciple, and the proof of it is fruit,—more fruit,—much fruit,—fruit that shall remain.

XXIII

WHEN LIFE GROWS LOVE

‘And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.’—EPH. v. 2.

IN one of his short poems, with his own insight and vividness, Browning deals with that frequent sense of incompleteness in life, of something wanting to give life zest, and quicken its energies to glad exercise. The poet is not thinking of shadowed and troubled lives. He is not dealing with those men and women who know too well the enriching gift, or added grace, or crowning mercy which would fill life full. He is describing that mood and mind which visits us all at times even when our lives are flowing in a strong, deep stream.

‘Wanting is—what?
Summer redundant,
Blueness abundant,
—Where is the blot?’

Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,
—Framework which waits for a picture to frame.’

That is an impressionist sketch of a summer day in its splendour. The whole heaven is blue. The world is full of light, and the senses are stirred by the beauty of earth and sea and sky. But there is a blot upon it all. There is a blank as though it were a

frame upon the wall empty of its picture. Then there comes a change. Like a breath of cool, sweet air upon the brow there passes a breath of spiritual passion upon the heart. A love awakes within, and the world becomes full of the deepest interest, and life gains the keenest zest.

‘ Breathe but one breath
And all that was death
Grows life, grows love,
Grows love ! ’

The truth of the poet's exultant words is evident to us all. Here is a man, or a woman, who has found life stale and dull, and is passing on through its course, listless and apathetic, asking whether it is worth living. But the love passion awakes in the heart. It may be a love of country, a patriotism which has leaped into power in a day of national peril. It may be a devotion to some engrossing cause, such as liberty for the oppressed, relief for the afflicted, the rescue of the falling, the redeeming of the lost. It may be an absorption in art, or learning, or literature. It may be a tender affection for some dear personality who has sought and won the heart's desire. But the one breath has been breathed. All the powers of mind and spirit are quickened. The world stands out in a new significance. Life is full of fresh charm, because all that was death has grown life, has grown love.

This experience, Paul says, has its counterpart in the Christian life. He has been exhorting those who have been taught the truth in Jesus to put on the new

man which is created in righteousness and true holiness. He calls upon them to put away lying, to cease from impatient anger, to live by honest industry, to be clean and wholesome in speech, and to shred from their souls all bitterness, and clamour, and implacable antipathy. Then he comes to his climax. He discloses the secret which must lie behind it all. The endeavour to be kind and tender-hearted will fail unless the spiritual passion of love be born within. But when life has grown love, and love renews, ennobles, and inspires, life will become loveliness. We shall be followers of God, as dear children, and we shall 'walk in love.'

This truth Paul enforces from the example of Christ. He marks three of its features. He marks, first, *the manner of life when it grows love*. 'As Christ also hath loved.' He marks, in the second place, *the measure of life when it grows love*. 'As he hath given Himself an offering and a sacrifice to God.' He marks, in the third place, *the motive of life when it grows love*. 'As Christ hath loved us and given himself for us for a sweetsmelling savour.'

I

FIRST: *The manner of life when it grows love*. 'As Christ also hath loved.'

The exposition of that brief word lies open in the pages of the Gospels. Go back to the childhood of Jesus, to those years around whose details God has drawn the curtain of reserve. How the Child Jesus spent His day is not disclosed, but we know that a love

which never failed either in tenderness or thoughtfulness marked every waking hour. When He remained behind in the Temple, and Joseph and Mary learned with a keen pain that He was not in the company, they sought and found Him in His Father's house. The question on Mary's lips reveals the truth. 'Son, why hath thou thus dealt with us?' A youth of a vagrant mind, of a wilful spirit, of a thoughtless way of life would have so often cast a shadow on the mother's heart, that an act of heedlessness would not have caused surprise. And so through all the silent years, as He went out and in among the village folk, He grew in favour with God and man because His life grew love. In the obscure toil of the carpenter's shop, amidst the vexing intercourse with the baser minds of Nazareth, in the conflict of His own wondering thoughts, Jesus went on His way keeping His heart in serenity and His life stainlessly pure, because it grew love. For us who live within the narrow ways of home, and mix with chafing personalities, and meet with vexing difficulty and with thwarting trial, the only condition under which life can grow lovely is that it must grow love.

But the severest test of love is found when we face the open sea of life. In this world, as it is, there are wrongs we must endure, and injustices we must suffer. There are crosses we must carry from the dawning to the dark. There are slights and mortifications, defeats and disappointments we must accept. There are men and women who scorn and depreciate, who misinterpret and misunderstand. There are others who mock and flout us, who slander and revile. We

are called upon to walk in the midst of it all in patience and meekness and to be kind and forgiving. We fail again and again because we do not love. We become intent upon our own happiness, and ease, and dignity, and wellbeing, and love withers in our hearts. Think of Jesus all through His ministry as He was scorned and slandered, humiliated by discourtesy, mocked by authority, and yet ever walking in love.

There is one scene, described by the most discerning mind that ever pondered the love of Jesus, which has been written for the purpose of imprinting this truth upon our memories in imperishable colours. 'Having loved his own which were in the world,' says John, 'he loved them unto the end.' Then he details the proof of that love which never failed. If ever there was a time when Jesus might have had no thought except for Himself it was on that night. His hour was come. The shadow of His cross was upon His spirit. He was looking into the face of death. The anguish in the garden, the shame of His mocking and scourging, and the desolation of His cross, were already knocking at His heart. If ever He might have expected men to be tender and sympathetic, and to school their thoughts and control their tempers, it was in that evening hour when He gathered them round His table. If ever He might have resented misunderstanding, and self-assertion, and wilfulness, it was on that night when His sorrow was heard in the trembling tones of His voice. Yet it was then that these disciples came in to the feast sullen, self-centred, and sulky with pride. It was then that they cherished their thoughts of earthly pre-eminence. It was then

that one of them was lifting up his heel against Him. But it was then that His love rose in flood, and His life grew loveliness. As we picture Jesus kneeling at the feet of Judas, washing away the soiling of the dusty street, and drying his feet with the soft touch of a tender care, we see life which has grown love, and we know what it means to walk in love 'as Christ also loved.'

Look into that love, and you will find a longing desire awaking in your heart to make its manner yours. When you fret under your lot, when your spirit is hurt and fevered at men's scorn, when you are sick at heart over men's ill-will and falseness, when you are chafed by callous injustice, then learn Christ's secret of love. Go out to speak the tender word, to do the generous deed, to cherish the patient and forbearing thought, to write the kindly and commending letter, to offer the word of generous praise. You will find that Christ's serenity will become the atmosphere of your spirit, and His grace the manner of your ways. For life will grow love, and love will bring forth loveliness.

II

SECOND: *The measure of life when it grows love.*
 'As Christ has given himself an offering and a sacrifice to God.'

It is a great triumph to catch the manner of Christ's love. It is a nobler victory to attain to the measure of it. There are times when we succeed in purging our hearts of the invading devils of malice

and vengefulness. We have met the scoffing word without retort. We have taken the opportunity of helping the man who has disdained us in our time of need. We have accepted the lowest seat, when its proffer was meant to humiliate. Yet as time has gone on, and we have found that our conduct was mocked, our meekness despised, and our service accepted with a sneer, the old, fierce passion was surging within us again. We had not attained to the measure of Christ's love.

Paul enforces this demand by two words which have a somewhat different significance. He calls upon us to make our lives 'an offering and a sacrifice.' By the offering he means that continuous and repeated and daily presentation to God of the gift and the service, and the obedience of the soul which made up the normal acts of Hebrew worship. Morning by morning, month by month, festival after festival, the devout Hebrew laid his offering on God's altar. By sacrifice Paul suggests that special offering made once a year by the high priest, when the penitent presented himself before God, humbled under a sense of sin, trusting in God's forgiveness, and seeking to find himself cleansed and renewed. The measure of the life which grows love is one of a continuous offering, which rises at times to the costliest sacrifice.

'An offering.' There are times when love finds that to make the offering is a delight. There have been hours when an act of renunciation opened out a vista of alluring achievement, and our joy welled up in our heart like a spring. But there came the days and the years when we grew weary in well doing. We began to

have more regard for our own ease, and our own comfort, and to refuse the constant and unceasing offering which the life of love demands. That is the temptation of our older years, and our securer state, and our strengthened self-will. Mark its meaning in a single instance. A Christian minister of fine mind, with a rare power as an expositor, preached one evening on the words, 'Hereby perceive we love, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.' He urged that love is not love which will not die. A large congregation was bowed down under the searching message. At the close the preacher was asked to visit a dying man. He hesitated, and at last declined, as the hour was late. The messenger went to the dying man's room with a troubled heart. He expressed his regret. But the daughter of the dying man lying so still and shadowed looked up and said, 'What ails the preacher is not the late hour but a selfish heart. He has failed all through life because he has failed in love.' Who is not so condemned? We all fail because life has not grown love.

'A sacrifice.' The offering is the tribute of each day's devotion, but the sacrifice is the act of that high hour when what is dearer than life may have to be laid down. When we follow the life of Jesus from the cradle in Bethlehem, through all the years in Nazareth, and the ministry in Galilee and Samaria and Judea, we understand the making of the offering to God. But when we come to Calvary and look up into the face of Christ we understand the sacrifice. So we all come to the hour when we must relinquish

some hope, refuse some earthly advancement, take up some burden which will make our steps slow unto the end, accept our cross and carry it with a meek song of resignation which rises to a chant of joy. We have seen the meaning of that in our own time when brave young spirits laid aside the dream of all their years, and gave up their careers, to make the supreme sacrifice of their lives in their love to their Saviour and their native land. No sacrifice is ever made which is not the sacrifice of love.

There is one arresting instance which should be kept in undying remembrance. It is told in the story of Captain Scott's *Last Expedition* to the Antarctic. The little band were making their way back across the trackless fields of snow. Their food was scanty. Their dogs were reduced to a few famishing and helpless creatures. The blizzard howled upon them day after day. One of the company, whose record was one of peculiar bravery and tenderness, felt that he could go no further, and bear his share in the common task. He foresaw that he would be only a burden to the others, and that to care for him would retard their progress and imperil their lives. His companions roused him to continue. For a few miles more he struggled on. Then the end came. 'He slept the night before last, hoping not to awake; but he woke in the morning—yesterday. He said, "I am just going outside and may be away some time." He went out into the blizzard, and we have not seen him since. We knew that poor Oates was walking to his death.'¹ That is

¹ R. F. Scott, *Last Expedition*, vol. i. pp. 591-2.

love that thinks not of itself, that cares only for others, in its hour of sacrifice. We may not be called upon for so stern and costly a renunciation. But where we fail, and where the Christian Church denies its Master, is simply when, though it may have learned the manner of Christ's love, it has not accepted its measure, and the Christian life does not grow loveliness.

III

THIRD : *The motive of life when it grows love.* ' He loved us and gave himself for us.'

Such an attainment is too high for us all. But it is too high only because we have not known the power of the supreme motive. The man who is assured that Christ loves him with a peculiar personal passion, and that in that love and desire He has given Himself for him, will find the sacrifice alluring him to its fulfilment. Chalmers spoke of 'the expulsive power of a new affection.' He enforces, with his superb moral enthusiasm, the truth that a new love will expel the old evil, warping, corrupting affection. But a new affection is not born within us at a wish. Has the verb to love any imperative mood? Yet it may be created by God's Spirit, and it is created in the day that a man knows himself to be loved. It is quite impossible to refuse our affection to any one who loves us, and gives himself for us. That is the secret behind every love-story in the world.

The noblest love music of the past century is to be found in Mrs. Browning's 'Sonnets from the

Portuguese.' She was an invalid confined to her couch, and looking forward only to a few years of gradually declining strength until her shadowed span of years would come to its close. Suddenly, Browning came into her life, and to her overwhelming amazement the whole passion of his great heart went out to her. Her sense of the wonder and mystery and grace of that love, her conception of the sacrifice it seemed to involve, are poured out into these sonnets in words almost too sacred for the public eye. She records in the first sonnet the moment when her love was evoked:—

'Guess now who holds thee?—"Death," I said. But
there,
The silver answer rang—"Not Death, but Love."'

When a man believes that Jesus Christ loves him, and gave Himself for him, so that he is held, not by death but by love, he will find the motive of the life that grows love, and find no offering too continuous and no sacrifice too great.

Paul adds a touch of beauty as though he feared that this call for offering and sacrifice, even with this tremendous motive, would discourage and terrify and would misrepresent the life of love. He says that such a life is 'a sweetsmelling savour' unto God. It is a life of fragrance felt by all who come within its atmosphere. There are men and women who are upright and honourable, and high-minded, but they are often hard, strict in their judgment, untender in their speech, forbidding to the young and the frail and the fallen. They do not live the fragrant

life. Yet nothing is more sure than that all love will bring forth fragrance. Mrs. Oliphant has an essay, less wise than usual, entitled 'The Sin of Self-sacrifice.' Her own life of almost crucifying toil for her two fatherless sons, and the orphan children she adopted, corrects the teaching of her essay, and gives the reader to realise the sweet savour of her sacrifice. It is from the lives which are at leisure from themselves and do not count the cost of their service but spend themselves for the wellbeing of others, that God smells His sweetsmelling savour. Norman Macleod has told us a story of one of these lovely lives.¹ She never married. She never had a home, or a sphere of service, and she never dreamed of a career of her own. Her life was one long, tender, happy sacrifice. No hand could smooth the pillow of a sickbed as hers could do. No other presence was as the angel of the tomb in the darkened chamber of death. No broken man, or hopeless woman, knew any face so benignant, or any word so comforting as hers. No wilful child, in hot rebellion against rebuke and chastening, sought any other one's arms. Her life was a sweetsmelling savour. Her secret was that life grew love, and, therefore, was loveliness—with its sweetsmelling savour—unto God.

¹ *Character Sketches*, pp. 72, 73.

XXIV

A SONG OF THE UPPER ROOM

‘And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.’—MARK xiv. 26.

EVERY feast of the Upper Room ends with a song. This psalm, whose passion music stilled and troubled the goodman of the house, as its trembling notes fell upon his ear, was the forerunner of a long succession. We read of these songs at the love feasts of the primitive believers. Their solemn cadences were echoed in the ‘plain song’ of the Eastern Church. The Western communion caught up their rapture and poured it out in their chants of sonorous Latin. The Reformation sundered the singers from each other, but both served themselves heirs to the common song. Lutheran and Calvinist, Anglican and Puritan differed in their polity and their worship, but their voices blended in a single melody when they sang the hymn of the Upper Room.

One of the most sustained, both in its thought and desire, is the hymn of Bernard of Clairvaux. It is a Latin chant of over two hundred lines, in which the emotion of the full surrender is expressed again and again. Some of its verses have been selected and have been translated into expressive English. Three of these selections are to be found in our modern

hymnbooks. One of these, 'Jesus, the very thought of Thee,' begins with the first quatrain of Bernard's hymn—*Jesu, dulcis memoria*. The second opens with another ascription — *Jesu, Rex admirabilis*, finely rendered—'O Jesus, King most wonderful.' The third is a freer selection, opening with the more tender line of adoration—*Jesu, dulcedo cordium*, rendered by Ray Palmer, who has caught the keynote of the whole hymn, and interpreted its passion with a wiser insight than any other:—

' Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, Thou light of men.'

Millions of humble worshippers who have never heard of Bernard's name lift up their hearts in Bernard's song.

I

Bernard of Clairvaux was born in 1091 near Dijon in Burgundy. The Middle Ages were declining to their darkest hour. The popedom had reached the summit level of its supremacy. The liberty of the conscience and the holiness of the common joys of life withered under the shadow of the priesthood. But Bernard was born in a home of devoted sanctity. In his unstained youth he was moved by spiritual desire, and before his manhood was reached, he had yielded himself to the service of Christ. To an ardent young spirit in those days the monastic life seemed to be the noblest chivalry. He presented himself in his twenty-second year at the gates of the Cistercian Monastery of Citeaux. He was above the

middle height, of slender figure, and his clear pale face, crowned by its wealth of fair hair, was worn to extreme thinness by his austerities. When he spoke in glowing eloquence his eyes shone and his face flushed with the fire of his spiritual passion. Young as he was, he aroused the dormant energies of the decaying monastery, and soon its cloisters were filled. In his twenty-fifth year he led a band of like-minded young men to found another community who should practise a severer regime. He chose their home in a narrow, rough-scarred valley overgrown with tangled underbrush, a well-known haunt of robbers. It was known as the Valley of Wormwood. He re-named it Clairvaux—Brightdale. In a few years the patient toil of the simple brotherhood transformed it into a garden of the Lord.

There Bernard wrote his hymn. Its history is inscribed on its face. It was born in an hour of absorbed communion as he was given the bread and the wine of the Supper. The presence of Jesus covered him like a cloud. The remembrance of what Jesus had been to him rose in entrancing vision. The assurance of what Jesus would be in time to come strengthened his hope in God. Then the psalm of devotion leaped up in his heart. Only a few jets of its liquid music were syllabled on his lips. But again and again as he shared in the feast the tide of emotion swelled to its flood. As Tennyson wrote his *In Memoriam*, adding stanza to stanza as he dwelt in tender meditation on Arthur Hallam, so Bernard added quatrain to quatrain, until he had poured forth his passion for Jesus.

An analysis of Bernard's hymn displays it as a variation on a single theme. Its motive recurs again and again. Its three chief notes are finely expressed in the selection made by Ray Palmer. It begins with the undertone of *a confession*; it rises to the passion of *a message*; and it consummates in *a prayer*.

II

FIRST: *Bernard's Confession.*

' From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to Thee again.'

That is Bernard's disclosure of the unsatisfied heart. Yet he might well have been sated with the bliss that earth can give. His sanctity, his eloquence, his zeal, his mastery of affairs filled all Europe with his fame. By the time he had reached middle life he was the most commanding personality in Christendom. When rival popes contested the papal chair Bernard was made the arbiter of their claims. When Abelard was playing the part of the destructive critic in Paris, Bernard was brought to refute him, and Abelard, although the finest intellect of the time, fled from the encounter. When the Second Crusade was mooted Bernard became its apostle, and roused the people to its support. As he grew in years men paid him an increasing reverence, and mothers hid their sons from his face lest he should draw them to his side. If ever any man might have been intoxicated with the bliss that earth can give, that man was the monk of Clair-

vaux. Yet from it all he turned unfilled to Christ again.

That is the universal confession. Sakya Muni awakes in the morning after the feast, in which all that earth could give had ministered to his senses, only to escape unsatisfied to his solitude. The preacher of the book of Ecclesiastes describes the man who had glutted himself with riches and honour and power, only to cry, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' The Roman noble of that age, which Gibbon declares to have been the most felicitous of all time, turned from the pleasures which the resources of the whole world supplied, in a deeper discontent.

' He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his hair with flowers ;
No easier and no quicker passed
The impracticable hours.'

To-day we hear the same sad music of humanity. It is not that the world lies wholly in sombre shadow. It is not that earth has not its bliss to give. It is not that life has not its high hours, its ennobling chivalries, its tender joys. Despite its mystery, its pain and sorrow, its defeats and mortifications, its unspoken fears and silent anguish, life has its own delight. The world is very beautiful. Youth has its throbbing heart, and manhood its sober achievements. 'The earth is God's footstool,' said Jesus, in His illuminating word. But its best bliss does not, and cannot, satisfy the infinite spirit of man. Speak to the youth who seems to have more than heart can wish, with fair promises leading him on ; or to the man who is

passing through the hour of his triumph ; or to the woman whose whole nature is responding to the love which has begun to reverence her ; and they will all confess that a strange distemper afflicts the soul, and a shadow falls across the gladdest hour, and they hunger still. Test the man who has grown old and wise and reached a grave and sweet serenity, and he will softly repeat :—

‘Calm is not life’s crown, tho’ calm is well.’

That is what Bernard saw in the kings and nobles, the popes and priests, the statesmen and soldiers of his time. That is what Bernard found in his own heart. No rank, no power, no fame could satisfy. Therefore again and again he makes the confession :—

‘From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to Thee again.’

III

SECOND : *Bernard’s Message.*

To humanity with this unsatisfied hunger he brought his message :—

‘Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of Life, Thou Light of men.’

The supreme *fact* of the Christian faith, said Bernard, is that Jesus was made flesh and dwelt among us, and that He died and rose again, to be the lover of His people. Its central *truth* is that in Jesus the passion and sacrifice of God for men were wrought out to a full salvation. Its vital and determining *experience* is to come into touch with Jesus, as spirit with spirit, in a

trust which surrenders all to Him, and a love which fills the heart with an unflawed joy.

These are the three certainties which we continually forget and ignore. Yet it is only when we return to them that we find our hunger satisfied and our thirst quenched. Every Reformation has been a return to the living and loving and redeeming Jesus. Every revival of religion has sprung from a fresh vision of Him who loves the souls of men, and loosed them from their sins in His own blood. Every quickening of the individual soul has had its potency in a deepened consciousness of the longing of Jesus, and the grace He bestows. Sometimes men so exalt the Church and its order and offices and testimony, that it becomes a walled city outside whose gates men find a wiser liberty and a nobler peace. Others emphasise the creed, and call for the acceptance of its articles, until they make it no longer the comely habit of a living faith, but the enswathing grave-clothes of a dead assent. Others exalt the written word to a position of absolute rule, until they are so glamoured by the lamp that they fail to rejoice in the light. Others condense the message into a few principles and laws. But ever and again, like Bernard, in his priest-ridden days, men find their way back to Jesus, and His joy is born within.

This message Bernard illustrates and enriches in many verses of his hymn. In the rendering here the three vital experiences of the soul have been disclosed. The first is the disclosure of *the hour in which he found Christ*. Like all young, sensitive, questioning hearts Bernard was assailed by life's

mysteries, bewildered by its problems, imperilled by its corruption, and often helpless before the onset of its temptations. Such an eager, impassioned, ardent heart knew well those hours when the surge of hot desires almost swept him from his moorings. But he came to that night when he heard the voice saying, in what is his favourite Scripture, 'I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' As he knelt in his first surrender he found his perplexities resolved, his frailty made strong, and, above all, his whole being satisfied with the love and fellowship of Jesus. And so he sings:—

‘Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
 Thou savest those that on Thee call:
 To them that seek Thee Thou art good,
 To them that find Thee, all in all.’

The second is the disclosure of *the hour of conscious communion*. All men who find Christ pass on to a more intimate touch with Him. Sometimes they enter into this door as they spend a long and lonely day among the hills. Again, they read in the word, and the sentence which arrests them seems to be spoken in the outer ear by One who has drawn near to them unaware. Others realise His presence when they have shut their door to find that Another has silently crossed its threshold with them. Others have sat in some cherished fellowship, and felt the contagion of its faith and joy, and in a moment of stillness the familiar benediction of Peace was spoken, and they knew that the Master was one of the com-

pany. Others have been conscious, with a start of surprise, that they were not alone when they made a fresh and more costly renunciation. But for all believers, and to all time, there is one hour in which we enter most easily into this intimate personal communion. That is the hour of the Supper in the Upper Room. All believers, by whatever sign or name they are known, bear witness to this uplifting certainty.

Francis of Assisi, a century after Bernard's time, sets it on record that it was not at his first surrender to Christ, nor even when he stooped to kiss the leper by the roadside, but when he knelt before the altar and saw the living bread he became fully conscious of the presence of the living Lord.¹ We travel a long way to James Masson, the hunted and persecuted Covenanter, whose sanctuary was the open moor, whose sacramental table was built with sods in a hollow of the hillside, and yet he bears the same testimony with a rapture which is as full of ecstasy as Francis knew: 'O the joyful seasons I have sometimes had sitting under Christ's shadow in His banqueting house of wine, feeding and feasting my soul upon the hidden royal rarities of heaven.'² And humble folk gathering around the table as they have come up out of the world's toil, burdened by its cares, shadowed by its troubles, abased by their own sin, distrustful of their own penitence, have been met with a kiss of welcome, as they took their seats, and, as they ate and drank,

¹ Paul Sabatier, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 55.

² Burton, *History of Scotland from the Revolution Settlement to the end of the Jacobite Rebellion*, vol. i. p. 253.

have been sure of the real presence of Jesus. Then they could take up Bernard's message with a new certainty:—

‘ We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still ;
We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.’

The third disclosure of Bernard's message deals with Jesus *in the stress and strain of life*. It is not difficult to be assured of the living Lord when we make our first covenant with Him. It is easier to realise His mystic presence at the feast. But when the sea within our restless spirits is troubled again, as we face the turmoil and tumult of the world, when unexpected change or humbling vicissitude alters our lot, when we are assailed by the strife of tongues, and vexed and chafed by failure and mortification, then the pathway of the pilgrimage is travelled alone. Even God seems afar off, and our past assurances become unreal. But if, in a moment of pause and recollection, we can give an upward glance, or if in some quiet hour there upwells within us the line of a simple hymn, or the cry of one who kept his watch with fear, then we are conscious that Jesus walks with us and we catch His look of recognition and of cheer. Then we understand Bernard's call:—

‘ Our restless spirits yearn for Thee,
Where'er our changeful lot is cast,—
Glad when Thy gracious smile we see,
Blest when our faith can hold Thee fast.’

IV

THIRD : *Bernard's Prayer.*

To most men this is Bernard's most human and most tender verse. It brings him near to the life and experience of common men. We have all marvelled and been troubled in spirit as we have read the lives of the great believers. We have been discouraged as we have spent a quiet hour with the diaries of the men whose names we reverence. Such hours of prevailing prayer, such depths of anguished penitence, such self-denying vows, such amazing faith and hope, as we find in *Brainerd's Journal*, or in *Wesley's Letters*, or in the meditations of Fraser of Brea, or in *McCheyne's Diary*, daunt and terrify us. Their self-examination is so scrupulous, their desires are so heavenly, their sins are so excusable, and their faith is so victorious, that we set down the book in dismay. But Bernard's prayer with its appealing note comforts and stimulates. He had seen Jesus in the hour of rapture. He had been assured by His gracious smile. But Christ's presence was not the constant and unbroken certainty of his days. The mists came down upon his soul, the shadow fell upon his spirit. Even 'the dark night of sin' covered him with its abhorred blackness. Unholy desires, a wanton temper, rash and unguarded words, a mutinous will, broke the calm of his peace and eclipsed the brightness of his joy. Then he prays:—

' O Jesus, ever with us stay ;
 Make all our moments calm and bright ;
 Chase the dark night of sin away ;
 Shed o'er the world Thy holy light.'

There is the secret of our security and peace, as it will be of the world's salvation. There is no truth of which we are more sure. The presence of Jesus is the antiseptic to contagion, the instant healing of the plague of our hearts. An unjust gain has tempted our indwelling covetousness; a tumult of anger has rioted in our hearts; a secular doubt has blinded our vision and chilled our prayers; a gust of appetite has polluted our desires; an evil passion has coursed in our veins. But Jesus, whose we are and whom we serve, has stood beside us. In the instant, the lust, and greed, and ill-will, and proud mood of unbelief, and cowardly yielding to evil, were shrivelled. The dark night of sin was chased away. The sky over our heads was clear. Our hearts were tranquil and at peace. No doubt, no fear, no impure desire, no base purpose can abide in the conscious presence of Jesus.

XXV

THE CITY OF DESIRE

‘In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord.’—ZECH. xiv. 20-21.

THE desire for a city of ordered wellbeing, secure peace, and gladdening beauty, has haunted the heart of all generations. Empire builders have striven to realise their conceptions in cities built beside pleasant waters, whose stately buildings, wide streets, and lovely gardens would shelter a people dwelling in felicity. Nineveh and Babylon, Athens and Rome, with many another city of the past, were founded to embody these high ideals. Yet they all failed. From their failure daring thinkers turned to describe their conceptions of a city yet to be. From Pythagoras and Plato to Sir Thomas More and William Morris they have imagined their Utopias from which poverty and pain should be banished, and sorrow and sighing should flee away. All these dreams have been nothing but dreams. The problem of the city of desire is with us still.

To the Hebrew prophets there came also this vision and passion of desire for a city of order and beauty. They discerned the fatal flaw in all past endeavours, and the blot on every fair dream. They knew that no city of enduring loveliness could be

built upon a secular order and a material basis. They realised the truth that in all such cities there are inherent causes of corruption and decay. Neither conquest, nor a proud dominion, nor the regimen of iron laws can build and maintain a city of strength and peace. The Hebrew prophets struck a new note in their ideal—the note of holiness. The city yet to be must be a city of God. When holiness is the supreme passion of the people, so that there shall be nothing secular, nothing unclean, nothing profane, in their thought and life, the city of secure peace and ordered wellbeing shall be built. That is the note which can be heard, clear and dominant, in every prophet. Here, in rhythmic and insistent sentences, one of these prophets has set the truth in vivid and homely images. ‘In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord ; and the pots in the Lord’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts : and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see the therein : and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.’

That is the vision of the city of desire. When we analyse it we find it presents three pictures. It displays holiness in three chief spheres of human energy. The first is *the sphere of work* ; the second is *the sphere of worship* ; and the third is *the sphere of the home*. In the concluding sentence the prophet discloses the secret which lies behind the realisation of this holiness.

I

FIRST: *In the sphere of work.* 'In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord.'

Jerusalem was built on an out-jutting spur of the central range of Palestine. It stands on a rocky bluff, bare, barren, on three sides almost inaccessible. Its people were crowded together in closely packed dwellings through which there ran its narrow streets. A garden was almost unknown within the walls. It was dependent for its daily bread upon the supplies brought into it every morning. Across the brook Kedron, along the high road that ran north from Hebron and Bethlehem, up from the great plain, there came the caravans bearing the produce of the peasants who kept the city in food. As these beasts of burden made their way through the gates the bells on their bridles made music on the morning air. Now this trade of the carrier was, as it still is, one of the most perilous to a wisely ordered life. Then, as now, the men who conducted this traffic were often rude in their manners and ungentle in their speech. But the prophet sees them when holiness shall have become the dominant note of the city. He sees upon the bells of the horses the inscription which was engraved only on the High Priest's mitre, 'Holiness unto the Lord.' What is the meaning of that declaration? The prophet is affirming that a consecration rests upon this humble toil, and that the carrier has become a priest. The same inspiring conception of the priestliness of his service, the same

sure sense of the presence of God which lifted up the High Priest's heart, as he ministered in the Temple, were quick and living within the breast of the man who was busy in the meanest toil of the city.

That is where holiness must always be seen. The simplest of all sanctities is the sanctity of labour. If the men and women who carry on the city's industries are dishonest in their dealing, and unjust in their weight and balance, the city cannot endure in peace. Holiness must be engraved on the bells of the horses—on the least detail of every man's toil. The manufacturer must put his conscience into his product. He must put his heart into his dealing with his employés. The merchant must be a man of unfaltering uprightness with a spirit too high for greed, and too honourable to take any man at a disadvantage. The workman must be noble in his ideal, and be inspired by a sense of honour in all his service. Any sloth or shirking, any mere eye-service or lip-service, any craving for a wage he has not earned, should be scorned by him as the breach of a solemn obligation. Holiness should be the mark of every turn of the hand. When this spirit of entire consecration rests upon men in the daily tasks of their common toil, the city of desire shall arise in peace and splendour. But whatever may have been the hopes of those who founded it, and the prayers of those who love it, the city which loses this note of sanctity in its labour, shall pass into dust and bear the reproach of its shame.

Ruskin has set this truth in one of his prophet-like histories. It is the message he has enshrined in

The Stones of Venice. He describes the high ideals, the self-denying industry, and the unfailing integrity of those who founded that ancient city. He records the poverty of their beginning and the sternness of their toil as they built their homes amidst the marshes of the northern Adriatic. He ascribes the solemn thoughts which inspired their leaders and took shape alike in the ordered wellbeing of the people, and in the noble artistry of their buildings. He traces these back to that consecration to God which lifted up the heart of the humblest craftsmen, as well as the heart of the rulers. But the years came when a mean covetousness held the people in its sway. Venice became unfaithful to its ideal. Gross passions desecrated their hearts. Then Venice, once so powerful, still so fair, fell from her high dominion. One more city of desire broke the promise of its early nobility, because the note of holiness was not heard amidst the sounds of its common toil.

II

SECOND: *In the sphere of worship.* 'And the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.'

The prophet passes from the highway into the Temple. He stands before the altar. He sees the bowls of costly beauty in which the sacrifices were seethed. These bowls were kept with peculiar care. But he remembered the pots, the common pots used in the menial offices of the Temple. These often lay in neglected corners, uncleansed and uncared for.

But in that day when holiness shall be the dominant note, and there shall be nothing secular, nothing common, nothing profane, the very pots shall be as fit for sacrifice as the bowls of the priest's office. 'The pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.'

It may seem strange that the prophet should insist on this note of holiness in worship. There at least it might be thought that holiness would be both the law and the attainment. But there is no place where it is so easy to be unreal as in the place of prayer, and there is no hour where we are so tempted to be insincere as the hour of worship. There may be a worship which is an idle show, a mere ceremonial, a sensuous delight. When the prophet condemned the vain oblations of the Hebrew people, and when Jesus rebuked the Pharisaic fastings and washings, they were uttering their reproach against an easy hypocrisy in worship. The supreme grace of worship is 'to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.' The supreme temptation is to be careful of the form, and heedless of the spirit; to be scrupulous that the outside is fair, and yet unmindful though the inward be foul; to give time and thought to the public observances, and neglect the hidden devotion of the private hour. We are all tempted to have regard to the bowls before the altar, and to neglect the pots of the Lord's house. It is well, it is altogether well, to care for the costly beauty of the house of prayer, the comely order of its services, and the melody of its music. Yet it is too easy to make our vows in sentences of chastened beauty, to offer our prayers in

words of selected charm, to make our confessions in tones of pathetic cadences, yet to nurse our pride and our envy and our self-will, to have no care for the poor and castaway, and no zeal for the coming of the kingdom of God. We bow our heads in the house of prayer, but we fail to bow our hearts. We care for the bowls of the altar. We are heedless of the pots. Yet only when these searching realities and inward purities are regarded, and the spirit of truth shall pervade and penetrate every act of our worship, shall this dominant note of holiness become the inspiring music of every man who bows in the house of prayer.

Carlyle has set this truth in one of his touching reminiscences. He recalls the humble place of prayer in which his first worshipping hours were spent. He describes the peasant folk who gathered for worship, their little heath-thatched building, and the simple evangelist who was their teacher and guide. Then he is stirred to his tribute. 'That poor temple of my childhood is more sacred to me than the biggest cathedral then extant could have been; rude, rustic, bare, no temple in the world was more so. But there were sacred lambencies, tongues of authentic flame, which kindled what was best in one, what has not yet gone out.'¹ There is the note of holiness in worship, and there is the testimony to its power. When these sacred lambencies shine upon the path of life, when these tongues of authentic flame fall upon those who pray, and enkindle their spiritual passion for holiness, they pass out of the house of God

¹ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, vol. i. p. 12.

to build and to maintain, with pure hearts and honest hands, the city of desire. From the worship which has been a ceremonial and a sensuous delight men pass out to that life of self-pleasing, self-will, and self-indulgence which corrupts the thoughts of the people, and fills even the streets with the signs of moral decay.

III

THIRD: *In the sphere of the home.* 'Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts; and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them and seethe therein.'

The prophet passes from the Temple into the home. The home must ever be the true holy of holies. Whenever the chancel of the place of worship is holier in men's regard than the shrine within the home the religion of the spirit is in peril. This prophet realises that the home is the innermost sanctuary. He is drawing a picture of the housewife in her daily service. He marks the vessels of her simple and homely labour. He sees this woman of the holy city keep these common pots in which she cooks her children's food clean and sweet with sedulous care. He points out the significance of the clean dish. For, mark it well, the care and the cleansing of the common utensil is always the sure mark of the conscientious and scrupulous conduct of the whole life of the home. Such is the keeping of her common vessels by this woman busy in the simple tasks of her life, that when the pilgrims crowd the streets, at the time of the Passover, they can take these pots and

use them as bowls for the sacrifices. 'All they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see the therein.'

That homely parable needs no exposition. The sanctity of labour and the sanctity of worship cannot be attained without the sanctity of the home. The holiness which does not consecrate the lowliest tasks of the household life is not the holiness of Christ. The fulfilment of the daily duties, the wearing drudgeries, and the constant sacrifices of the home constitutes a true priesthood to God. When the unfailing loyalties, the tender patiences, the pure affections, and above all the solemn and devout recollection of God and of His will, are cherished within the home, the men and women who build the city of desire will be found coming forth in the strength of the enduement of the Spirit of God.

How clear and how universal is the testimony to this truth! It can be found on the lips of men in all ranks of life. Take up Matthew Arnold's record of the life and intercourse of his father's household, and you will understand not only the tradition of Rugby School, but the wistful and eager devotion that never died out of the heart of his son. Read the witness to the prayerfulness of the father of John G. Paton, and mark the atmosphere of a home maintained amidst the demands of a constant frugality which was nevertheless potent with the power of God's Spirit. Acquaint yourself with the story of the home out of which John Cairns came, bearing the stamp of its tender and unfaltering goodness, so that men marked its impress in his humility of bearing, and heard the

echoes of its counsels in his prayers. Remember the picture by our Scottish national poet, the most beautiful among all the transcripts of gleaming beauty that Robert Burns has written, of that home where 'the priest and father' made his fireside the shrine of the fellowship with God. Better still, recall that home in Nazareth where Joseph and Mary lifted up the eyes of the infant Jesus until He knew it to be the place of the presence of God. There is no holier memory that any man here can recall than the home in whose atmosphere he inbreathed the Spirit of God. There is no higher social service for every man and woman than to build and maintain a home in which young hearts shall be brought up in the faith and fear of God, and young hands guided into an obedience to His will. The kingdom of God comes out of homes which are holy as the home of Nazareth, and without these it will never come at all. When we have attained the sanctity of the home the city of desire will arise around us.

IV

The prophet, as he concludes, touches *the secret of it all*. 'And in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.'

The word Canaanite stands here for all that is alien to God, hostile to His will, defiling to His people. The Canaanite within the house of the Lord was the open mark of degradation. The city that could receive and permit the Canaanite within its holy place was no longer loyal to God. In its heart it

was a rebel to His commandments. Recall the arresting proof of that truth in the story of the cleansing of the Temple by Jesus. He had come up to Jerusalem at the beginning of His ministry. He made His way to the house of the Lord. It was a place not only of peculiar sanctity, but of special delight to Him. He had called it, in His youth, 'My Father's house.' At a glance the disloyalty of the people and the corruption of their faith broke upon Him. He found the Canaanite in the house of the Lord. The traders had edged in from without the gate and set up their bargaining within the sanctuary. In an act prophetic of His ministry, He made His scourge of small cords. He overthrew the tables of the money-changers, drove out the polluting cattle, and scourged these desecrating traffickers out of the Temple. With the Canaanite in the holy place there could be no city of God.

We have no temple up to which men go for sacrifice. The day of the temple has passed away, for God's holy place is the house of the soul. 'Ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost.' But there the Canaanite can still be found. There, a defiant self-will, a merciless greed, a self-indulgence which descends to baser passions, and a constant rebellion against truth and purity, still carry on their commerce. We must cast out and cleanse the temple of the soul, before holiness can be the note of our work, and our worship, and our home, and the city of desire shall be built.

What we need is not a new special order and more drastic statutes of reform, although these may have their place. What we need is not increased wealth,

larger leisure, and more frequent pleasures. These may have their value. But all of these shall issue only in that corruption which has been the grave of every other civilisation, unless the temple of the soul shall be the shrine of the Spirit of God and the Canaanite cast out from it. Then there shall be no mean streets, no base trades, no defrauded labourers, no neglected poor, no heedless pride or pitiless apathy in the face of pain and weakness and sorrow.

In the last vision of the book of the Revelation we have another seer's dream of the city of desire. He chords in perfect harmony with the dominant note of this Old Testament prophet. We are sometimes caught by the glowing pictures and the poetic figures of his message until we forget and ignore his secret. But the truth he emphasises is this. Not by building men's homes amidst garden beauty, not by filling their mouths with bread, not by the stern rigour of laws, and not by an ascetic obedience, shall the city of God arise. The secret is set in the words, 'And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.' Only as a moral purity shall control all life, and the source and secret of every impulse shall be a faith in God, can the city of holiness be built. To men and cities alike there comes the appeal of the impassioned Psalmist, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in.' When the King of Glory comes into the temple of the soul, the city of desire will be built. Then and not till then.

XXVI

THE DOOM OF CORRUPTION

‘Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together.’—MATT. xxiv. 28.

JESUS was speaking of the doom of Jerusalem. His disciples had been pointing out the beauty of the Temple. Its massive walls, its polished columns, and its lofty pinnacles had often held the eyes of these simple Galileans. As they spoke Jesus looked into the future, and He saw these Temple buildings as they would be in the days to come when not one stone should be left upon another. ‘When shall these things be?’ was their astonished question. Jesus answered their question with a succession of signs and forecasts. Then He summed up His prophecies in a popular proverb, ‘Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together.’

That proverb enshrines a condensed picture. We are shown a wide, bare, sand-strewn desert. Across the sands a caravan of camels is making its way. One of the camels is spent to its dying. It has fallen behind the others, and the master of the caravan, with Oriental callousness, leaves it to its fate. The camel stumbles on, but its lowered head, glazing eyes, and sobbing breath are the signs of the end. Upon the horizon there is seen a speck, small, black, swiftly

growing larger. It is a vulture, soaring in the distant blue, speeding to the dying camel. It has been drawn from afar by the sight of coming death. Another, and another, and still another swiftly follow. From all quarters of the heaven they bend their flight, and whirl round the doomed camel. But they do not touch him. He has fallen, but death has not yet set the seal upon his life. His breathing is an agony; his movements are convulsions. But when the heart has ceased to beat, and the camel, which was a living and breathing creature, has become a carcase, the vultures swoop down and make him their prey. 'Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together.'

This proverb, with its vivid picture, states a law. It is a law both in the natural and the spiritual world. That law is that wherever there is death and its corruption, the offices of judgment and destruction find their opportunity. Corruption has only one doom, and that is to be destroyed. That law operates both on a larger and a smaller scale. It can be seen in the history of the centuries and in the events of a single life. Let us mark it working in three spheres. First: *in the life of the nation.* Second: *in the life of society.* Third: *in the life of the individual soul.*

I

FIRST: *The law of judgment in the life of the nation.*

The first instance we take is that to which Jesus applied it—the judgment of Israel. No city has had

a more checkered story than Jerusalem. Since David set up its walls it had seen a long succession of triumphs and tragedies. Siege and pestilence, famine and the sword had all threatened its life. With that life there was bound up the whole wellbeing of the nation. As a consequence no city had been loved more passionately by the people. 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning.' And no city was ever dearer to the heart of God. He rescued it from its foes, kept it from a final desolation, and reserved it for His sublime purpose. But now the day of its doom was drawing near. A moral corruption, hideous and deadly, had seized upon it. The Pharisee and Sadducee sat in Moses' seat. An ungodly mob, that could call for Barabbas and crucify Christ, walked its streets. The people were not yet given over entirely to evil. There were believing folk who worshipped in the Temple and waited for the consolation of Israel. It was, as Jesus said, the time of 'the green tree,' not yet the time of the dry. But Jesus foresaw the day when neither truth nor purity, faith nor love, would find a welcome within its walls. Then the city would become a moral carcase, and the vultures of judgment would be gathered together. In the year 70 A.D. Titus and his Roman legion gathered below the walls and battered them down. They despoiled the city. They did deeds of which it is a shame even to speak. They burned the Temple with fire, and left not one stone upon another. 'Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together.'

That law can be seen at work in the history of

every city, every nation, every empire. Consider it in the two most outstanding and dramatic instances in secular history. Think of Rome, with her imperial dominion, her splendour of temple, and senate house, and amphitheatre, the rule and sway of a people who made the earth to tremble with their tread. But despite the moral elevation of many of her teachers, a decline set in. It began, as all moral decay begins, at the heart. It continued in an increasing apathy and a baser degradation through slow centuries. It was manifested in luxury and profligacy, in arrogance and cruelty. Rome became the city of a nation whose life centred in the Colosseum and its games, from whose broad gateways an idle people passed out to scramble for the bread they had not earned. At last Rome passed into moral death. Its government was a tyranny ; its religion an hypocrisy ; its common life so base that the record of it pollutes the mind. The people had become corrupt, and Goth and Hun and Vandal swooped down upon the city, scattered the stones of her palaces, looted her treasures, and took her dominion out of her hand.

Think of it in a more modern instance, that of Paris, into whose life France had poured her strength for generations. What a brilliant, joyous, resourceful people dwelt in Paris towards the close of the eighteenth century ! How noble in learning, how adept in science, how skilled in art were the people of that beautiful city ! But how blasphemous, how pitiless, how foul, was the life lived in her picturesque streets ! Honour became a mere etiquette, truth a jest, chastity a byword. All history knows the

issue. The vultures bred in her own bosom gathered around her, and in the hour of her death, they swept down upon her. The streets of Paris ran blood. The sky of history is still red with her burning. Those who held their heads high and mocked at God and His commandments were brought low. 'Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together.'

That is the inescapable law of God's moral government. Corruption has a doom that is inevitable. As soon as the symptoms of moral death can be marked in a nation, or an empire, the vultures of its destruction begin to gather round it. They may circle long around their prey. There may be elements in the national life which resist and retard the progress of moral degradation. Yea, God suffers long and is kind, and uses His chastening discipline and his moral surgery, because He is not willing that nations should perish. But let no man think that unscrupulous greed, envious arrogance, pitiless cruelty, blasphemy in word and deed, shall escape God's judgment. As the degradation passes on to rottenness, the law of judgment and cleansing comes into force. When the nation becomes a carcase, the vultures of destruction are gathered together.

II

SECOND : *The law of judgment in the life of society.*

We are looking at it now as it operates on a smaller scale and in a narrower sphere. We are considering it as it can be observed working within the circle of

our own life and experience. Here is a commercial company, or a financial enterprise, such as that of a business firm, an industrial organisation, or a bank, into whose management crafty and dishonourable methods have crept. Through the sharp practice of those who manage its affairs, through the rash speculation of one of its partners, through the unscrupulous conduct of its ruling mind, or through the immoral and profligate life of its members, the business has become unsound. It may still keep a bold front to the public, but the quality of its work is impaired, its agents are not welcomed, its credit is not secure. Shrewd observers mark these signs of decline, and forecast the issue, but its hour has not yet come. It is the time of the green tree, not of the dry. No man speaks openly of its unsound condition, but they whisper to each other in confidence. The moral blight goes on, the unscrupulous management continues. At last, fraud has become the habit of the business, and the end is reached, in that most ominous and dreaded word—bankruptcy—and the law of judgment is seen. The firm has become a carcase, and the vultures which have been gathering together swoop down upon what is left, and they pick the bones white.

Look at this truth in the more intimate relationships of life and in the social intercourse of society. Think of the man whose moral life has been descending to the way whose steps take hold on hell. He has been tampering with honesty and trifling with purity. He has been yielding to temptation and giving way to self-indulgence. He has been visiting

scenes which no clean-minded man will look upon. Discerning eyes see the marks and signs of his moral decline in his features. They hear the echo of his evil associations in his words. Yet no man speaks openly. Only a whisper passes between men who trust each other. But as the moral degradation goes on, the day of exposure is reached, the double life is discovered, and the rottenness of the man's soul is laid bare. Then the vultures of society gather together. They swoop down, and all the baseness of his deceit, all the meanness of his hypocrisy, and all the nastiness of his life are exposed and detailed. 'Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together.'

This is a disheartening and terrifying truth. But it is under a solemn law of God's ordering, for judgment, even at the hands of man, is God's strange work. Yet let none of us needlessly play the vulture. Let none of us be the scandal-monger, the eager gossip, the whisperer behind a man's back of things he will not say to his face. We are not called upon to fulfil this office of the vulture of society. The man or woman who gloats over another's fall, and revels in the details of his vices, is doing the work of hell. There are public journals, and there are reckless books with large issues, in which the swoop of the vulture can be heard. There is a better part to play. There is a better time to step in than when moral corruption is complete. There is that grace which hushes its speech about the man who is down, even when he has wilfully dug the pit for his own feet. But there is a still nobler service. That is to be pitiful, and in

due season, speak the brave word of counsel and stretch forth the hand of help.

Few things are more honourable in the life of Thackeray than his silent, resourceful efforts to help the unfortunate. When editing the *Cornhill Magazine*, he was appealed to by a constant succession of men who had failed in life, and were in the direst straits of poverty. They knew the largeness of his heart and the grace of his generosity. He was aware that too often they had come to their state of destitution by their own wastefulness and folly. Yet he never uttered a single word of condemnation. He stepped in not only to relieve in the last extremity, but to help and to send a message of cheer, long before the lowest depth had been reached. 'No day passes,' he writes, 'but that word *miserordiam* is used. Day and night that sad voice is crying for help.' Then there comes the outburst of his compassion as he sends his gift, 'God help us! how am I to answer this perpetual cry of our brethren in distress?'¹ Time and time again the message and the gift were repeated, and when at last the man sank altogether, Thackeray's voice was silent. Did more men play the part of Thackeray, the vultures would never be gathered together.

III

THIRD: *The law of judgment in the individual soul.*

There is a decline and fall in the history of the soul, as well as in that of an empire or a society. There is a course of moral degradation which may begin in a

¹ Introduction to *The Adventures of Philip*, pp. xxxi, xxxiii.

wilful desire, or in a secret mutiny against truth and honour. It may be marked merely in a single infirmity, or manifested in an unusual and ashaming frailty. But it may pass on to repeated and more daring wrongdoing. It does pass on too often, through many stages, to a wanton and callous iniquity. There may be no marked outward sign for years. There is only a lessened interest in the things of the spirit, a neglect of public worship and of private prayer, a lowering of the habits of the home, a delight in pleasures which are perilous to purity, the hardening of the heart in the pursuit of a worldly ambition. But no moral life ever stands still. Surely and inevitably, if sometimes slowly, its path slopes down to darker evil. Habits which are yielded to become a chain. Passions acquire strength and become a torture while they degrade. The imagination riots in pictures of shame. Then the vultures begin to gather. But it is not until a lower level is reached, and until a moral apathy has set in, and the man is, as Paul says, 'past feeling, given over to work all lasciviousness with greediness,' that moral death takes place, and then the vultures swoop down upon their prey.

Recall the record of Heine, the apostate Jew, dying for eight years on his 'mattress grave,' in Paris. How splendid was his genius! How singular and how fascinating was every word he wrote! How clear to the end was his intellectual insight! In those last years, when he lay in a helpless paralysis, his powers put on their completest strength. Yet all who dared to visit him marked his callous moral

degradation. They were sometimes roused to a moral shame at his unscrupulous passion, his attacks on his enemies and on his friends, his sensuality, his bitter mockery of all things pure, his savage irony, his cruel laugh of satiated revenge, his wit, so often blasphemous, at times obscene. One who loved him and served him wrote, 'Imagine the smile of Mephistopheles passing over the face of Christ—Christ draining the dregs of the chalice.'¹ As he reached the end some who stood beside him were driven to the conception that his revolting outbursts were simply the echoes of the tearing of the vultures of remorse within his ignoble soul.

IV

This may seem a sombre message. But it is a message with a twofold and most moving appeal. No nation, no community, no society, no undertaking, no individual soul need pass down the way that leads to destruction and the coming of the vulture. The meaning of the Gospel, the reason of the coming of the Word, and the purpose of the grace of God in Christ, is to lay an arrest upon those who have entered in at the wide gate, and are walking in the broad way, and to call them back to the gate of life. That was the message Jesus brought to Jerusalem in the time of 'the green tree.' 'When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy

¹ Camille Selden, *Last Days of Heine*, Preface. Cf. Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, pp. 233-234.

peace.' That is the truth repeated by all the prophets of the Old Testament. They proclaim the doctrine of God's remnant. That truth is, that so long as there is the capacity for the slightest pure and tender feeling, a core of moral vitality and a power of response to goodness, a remnant of spiritual energy left, there may be a recovery from degradation, and a final victory over iniquity. That is the truth which every historian recognises in the large sphere of historic action. The physician depends upon it as he deals with those stricken by sickness. The preacher bases his whole appeal on this susceptibility. Had the remnant in Israel, or in Rome, in Venice, or in Paris, only responded to the call of God, or taken heed to His judgments they would not have passed to their doom. So there comes the message to those whose faith has been declining, whose life has been slipping down to lower levels, whose will is under the mastery of evil. If they will yield themselves afresh unto God, they will check, in the moment, the spread of the moral corruption. A new life with cleansing power will be born within the soul, a new energy will shoot through all their moral, intellectual, and even physical being, and a new grace adorn their character. If not, there will be the sound of tears as of one crying, 'How often would I have gathered thy children together . . . and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate.'

The other aspect of this appeal moves us almost to terror. 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate,' said Jesus, on one of the occasions when He used this parable, 'for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter

in, and shall not be able.' Then He adds to this warning His picture of the man standing without, knocking at the door, which is now not merely strait, but shut. We dare not say that any man will ever lift his hands in entreaty to God and not be heard in his cry. But the facts of life, under a law which runs through all living and sentient beings, tell us that there is a time when it is too late to be and to do what once we might have been and done with ease. Jesus says it is the master of the house that shuts to the door. The meaning of that phrase is simply that under the inevitable laws of God's moral government opportunities refused again and again do not return. All the more should we feel the urgency of entering in at the strait gate now, in this day of grace, lest we shall come to the hour when wisdom—not God—will mock at our calamity and laugh when our fear cometh. 'Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.'



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