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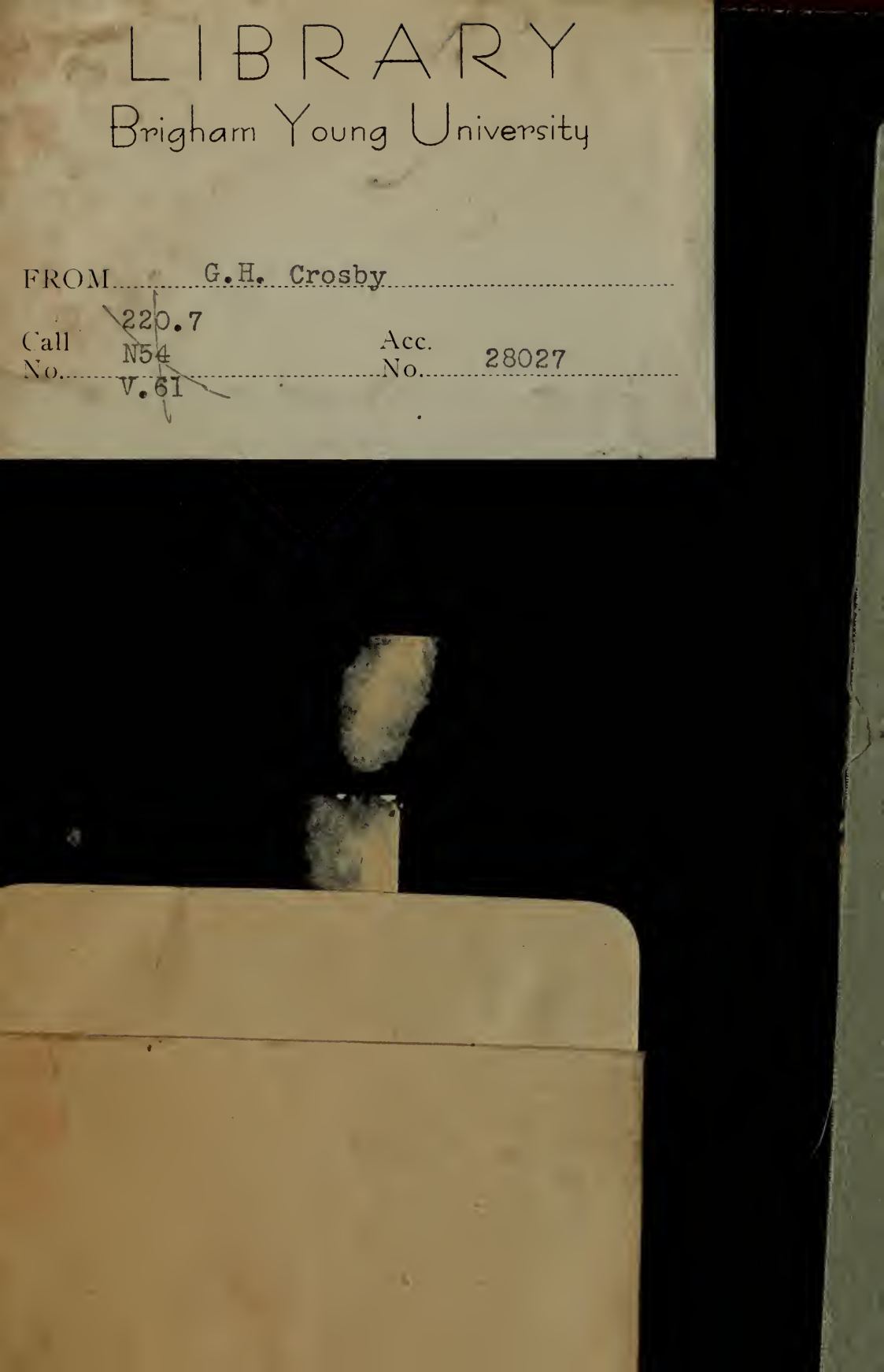

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

Editor of "The Expositor," etc.

THE EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS

BY THE REV.

JAMES DENNEY, D.D.

NEW YORK

A. C. ARMSTRONG AND SON

3 AND 5 WEST EIGHTEENTH STREET

LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON

1906

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LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON
1906

Printed by Hazell, Watson, & Viney, Ld., London and Aylesbury, England.

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I.

THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS.

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his custom was, went in unto them, and for three sabbath days reasoned with them from the scriptures, opening and alleging, that it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom, *said he*, I proclaim unto you, is the Christ. And some of them were persuaded, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews, being moved with jealousy, took unto them certain vile fellows of the rabble, and gathering a crowd, set the city on an uproar; and assaulting the house of Jason, they sought to bring them forth to the people. And when they found them not, they dragged Jason and certain brethren before the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all act contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, *one* Jesus. And they troubled the multitude and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go."—Acts xvii. 1-9 (R.V.).

I.

THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace."—1 THESS. i. 1 (R.V.).

THESSALONICA, now called Saloniki, was in the first century of our era a large and flourishing city. It was situated at the north-eastern corner of the Thermaic gulf, on the line of the great Egnatian road, which formed the main connection by land between Italy and the East. It was an important commercial centre, with a mixed population of Greeks, Romans, and Jews. The Jews, who at the present day amount to some twenty thousand, were numerous enough to have a synagogue of their own; and we can infer from the Book of Acts (xvii. 4) that it was frequented by many of the better spirits among the Gentiles also. Unconsciously, and as the event too often proved, unwillingly, the Dispersion was preparing the way of the Lord.

To this city the Apostle Paul came, attended by Silas and Timothy, in the course of his second

missionary journey. He had just left Philippi, dearest to his heart of all his churches; for there, more than anywhere else, the sufferings of Christ had abounded in him, and his consolations also had been abundant in Christ. He came to Thessalonica with the marks of the lictors' rods upon his body; but to him they were the marks of Jesus; not warnings to change his path, but tokens that the Lord was taking him into fellowship with Himself, and binding him more strictly to His service. He came with the memory of his converts' kindness warm upon his heart; conscious that, amid whatever disappointments, a welcome awaited the gospel, which admitted its messenger into the joy of his Lord. We need not wonder, then, that the Apostle kept to his custom, and in spite of the malignity of the Jews, made his way, when Sabbath came, to the synagogue of Thessalonica.

His evangelistic ministry is very briefly described by St. Luke. For three Sabbath days he addressed himself to his fellow-countrymen. He took the Scriptures into his hand,—that is, of course, the Old Testament Scriptures,—and opening the mysterious casket, as the picturesque words in Acts describe his method, he brought out and set before his auditors, as its inmost and essential secret, the wonderful idea that the Christ whom they all expected, the Messiah of God, must die and rise again from the dead. That was not

what ordinary Jewish readers found in the law, the prophets, or the psalms; but, once persuaded that this interpretation was true, it was not difficult to believe that the Jesus whom Paul preached was the Christ for whom they all hoped. Luke tells us that some were persuaded; but they cannot have been many: his account agrees with the representation of the Epistle (i. 9) that the church at Thessalonica was mainly Gentile. Of the "chief women not a few," who were among the first converts, we know nothing; the exhortations in both Epistles make it plain that what Paul left at Thessalonica was what we should call a working-class congregation. The jealousy of the Jews, who resorted to the device which had already proved successful at Philippi, compelled Paul and his friends to leave the city prematurely. The mission, indeed, had probably lasted longer than most readers infer from Acts xvii. Paul had had time to make his character and conduct impressive to the church, and to deal with each one of them as a father with his own children (ii. 11); he had wrought night and day with his own hands for a livelihood (2 Thess. iii. 8); he had twice received help from the Philippians (Phil. iv. 15, 16). But although this implies a stay of some duration, much remained to be done; and the natural anxiety of the Apostle, as he thought of his inexperienced disciples, was intensified by the reflection that he had left them exposed to the

malignity of his and their enemies. What means that malignity employed—what violence and what calumny—the Epistle itself enables us to see; meantime, it is sufficient to say that the pressure of these things upon the Apostle's spirit was the occasion of his writing this letter. He had tried in vain to get back to Thessalonica; he had condemned himself to solitude in a strange city that he might send Timothy to them; he must hear whether they stand fast in their Christian calling. On his return from this mission Timothy joined Paul in Corinth with a report, cheering on the whole, yet not without its graver side, concerning the Thessalonian believers; and the first Epistle is the apostolic message in these circumstances. It is, in all probability, the earliest of the New Testament writings; it is certainly the earliest extant of Paul's; if we except the decree in Acts xv., it is the earliest piece of Christian writing in existence.[1]

The names mentioned in the address are all well known—Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. The three are united in the greeting, and are sometimes, apparently, included in the "we" or "us" of the Epistle; but they are not joint authors of it. It is the Epistle of Paul, who includes them in the salutation out of courtesy, as

[1] The date cannot be precisely assigned, but it is not later than 54 A.D., and cannot be so early as 52. Most scholars say 54. It was written in Corinth.

in the First to the Corinthians he includes Sosthenes, and in Galatians "all the brethren that are with me"; a courtesy the more binding on this occasion that Silas and Timothy had shared with him his missionary work in Thessalonica. In First and Second Thessalonians only, of all his letters, the Apostle adds nothing to his name to indicate the character in which he writes; he neither calls himself an apostle, nor a servant of Jesus Christ. The Thessalonians knew him simply for what he was; his apostolic dignity was yet unassailed by false brethren; the simple name was enough. Silas comes before Timothy as an older man, and a fellow-labourer of longer standing. In the Book of Acts he is described as a prophet, and as one of the chief men among the brethren; he had been associated with Paul all through this journey; and though we know very little of him, the fact that he was chosen one of the bearers of the apostolic decree, and that he afterwards attached himself to Paul, justifies the inference that he heartily sympathised with the evangelising of the heathen. Timothy was apparently one of Paul's own converts. Carefully instructed in childhood by a pious mother and grandmother, he had been won to the faith of Christ during the first tour of the Apostle in Asia Minor. He was naturally timid, but kept the faith in spite of the persecutions which then awaited it; and when Paul returned, he found that the steadfastness and

other graces of his spiritual son had won an honourable name in the local churches. He determined to take him with him, apparently in the character of an evangelist; but before he was ordained by the presbyters, Paul circumcised him, remembering his Jewish descent on the mother's side, and desirous of facilitating his access to the synagogue, in which the work of gospel preaching usually began. Of all the Apostle's assistants he was the most faithful and affectionate. He had the true pastoral spirit, devoid of selfishness, and caring naturally and unfeignedly for the souls of men (Phil. ii. 20 f.). Such were the three who sent their Christian greetings in this Epistle.

The greetings are addressed "to the church of (the) Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." No such address had ever been written or read before, for the community to which it was directed was a new thing in the world. The word translated "church" was certainly familiar enough to all who knew Greek: it was the name given to the citizens of a Greek town assembled for public business; it is the name given in the Greek Bible either to the children of Israel as the congregation of Jehovah, or to any gathering of them for a special purpose; but here it obtains a new significance. The church of the Thessalonians is a church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the common relation of its members

to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ which constitutes them a church in the sense of the Apostle: in contradistinction from all other associations or societies, they form a Christian community. The Jews who met from Sabbath to Sabbath in the synagogue were a church; they were one in the acknowledgment of the Living God, and in their observance of His law; God, as revealed in the Old Testament and in the polity of Israel, was the element or atmosphere of their spiritual life. The citizens of Thessalonica, who met in the theatre to discuss their political interests, were a "church"; they were one in recognising the same constitution and the same ends of civic life; it was in that constitution, in the pursuit of those ends, that they found the atmosphere in which they lived. Paul in this Epistle greets a community distinct from either of these. It is not civic, but religious; though religious, it is neither pagan nor Jewish; it is an original creation, new in its bond of union, in the law by which it lives, in the objects at which it aims; a church in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This newness and originality of Christianity could not fail to impress those who first received it. The gospel made an immeasurable difference to them, a difference almost equally great whether they had been Jews or heathen before; and they were intensely

conscious of the gulf which separated their new life from the old. In another epistle Paul describes the condition of Gentiles not yet evangelised. Once, he says, you were apart from Christ, without God, in the world. The world—the great system of things and interests separated from God—was the sphere and element of their life. The gospel found them there, and translated them. When they received it, they ceased to be in the world; they were no longer apart from Christ, and without God: they were in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing could be more revolutionary in those days than to become a Christian: old things passed away; all things became new; all things were determined by the new relation to God and His Son. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian was as unmistakable and as clear to the Christian mind as the difference between the shipwrecked sailor who has reached the shore and him who is still fighting a hopeless fight with wind and waves. In a country which has long been Christian, that difference tends, to sense at least, and to imagination, to disappear. We are not vividly impressed with the distinction between those who claim to be Christians and those who do not; we do not see a radical unlikeness, and we are sometimes disposed to deny it. We may even feel that we are bound to deny it, were it only in justice to God. He

has made all men for Himself; He is the Father of all; He is near to all, even when they are blind to Him; the pressure of His hand is felt and in a measure responded to by all, even when they do not recognise it; to say that any one is ἄθεος, or χωρὶς Χριστοῦ, or that he is *not* in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ, seems really to deny both God and man.

Yet what is at issue here is really a question of fact; and among those who have been in contact with the facts, among those, above all, who have had experience of the critical fact—who once were not Christians and now are—there will not be two opinions about it. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, though historical accidents have made it less visible, or rather, less conspicuous than it once was, is still as real and as vast as ever. The higher nature of man, intellectual and spiritual, must always have an element in which it lives, an atmosphere surrounding it, principles to guide it, ends to stimulate its action; and it may find all these in either of two places. It may find them in the world—that is, in that sphere of things from which God, so far as man's will and intent goes, is excluded; or it may find them in God Himself and in His Son. It is no objection to this division to say that God cannot be excluded from His own world, that He is always at work there whether acknowledged or not; for the acknowledgment is the

essential point; without it, though God is near to man, man is still far from God. Nothing could be a more hopeless symptom in character than the benevolent neutrality which evades this truth; it takes away every motive to evangelise the non-Christian, or to work out the originality and distinctiveness of the Christian life itself. Now, as in the apostolic age, there are persons who are Christians and persons who are not; and, however alike their lives may be on the surface, they are radically apart. Their centre is different; the element in which they move is different; the nutriment of thought, the fountain of motives, the standard of purity are different; they are related to each other as life in God, and life without God; life in Christ, and life apart from Christ; and in proportion to their sincerity is their mutual antagonism.

In Thessalonica the Christian life was original enough to have formed a new society. In those days, and in the Roman Empire, there was not much room for the social instincts to expand. Unions of all kinds were suspected by the governments, and discouraged, as probable centres of political disaffection. Local self-government ceased to be interesting when all important interests were withdrawn from its control; and even had it been otherwise, there was no part in it possible for that great mass of population from which the Church was so largely recruited, namely, the slaves. Any

power that could bring men together, that could touch them deeply, and give them a common interest that engaged their hearts and bound them to each other, met the greatest want of the time, and was sure of a welcome. Such a power was the gospel preached by Paul. It formed little communities of men and women wherever it was proclaimed; communities in which there was no law but that of love, in which heart opened to heart as nowhere else in all the world, in which there was fervour and hope and freedom and brotherly kindness, and all that makes life good and dear. We feel this very strongly in reading the New Testament, and it is one of the points on which, unhappily, we have drifted away from the primitive model. The Christian congregation is not now, in point of fact, the type of a sociable community. Too often it is oppressed with constraint and formality. Take any particular member of any particular congregation; and his social circle, the company of friends in which he expands most freely and happily, will possibly have no connection with those he sits beside in the church. The power of the faith to bring men into real unity with each other is not lessened; we see this wherever the gospel breaks ground in a heathen country, or wherever the frigidity of the church drives two or three fervent souls to form a secret society of their own, but the temperature of faith itself is lowered; we are

not really living, with any intensity of life, in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we were, we would be drawn closer to each other; our hearts would touch and overflow; the place where we meet in the name of Jesus would be the most radiant and sociable place we know.

Nothing could better illustrate the reality of that new character which Christianity confers than the fact that men can be addressed as Christians. Nothing, either, could better illustrate the confusion of mind that exists in this matter, or the insincerity of much profession, than the fact that so many members of churches would hesitate before taking the liberty so to address a brother. We have all written letters, and on all sorts of occasions; we have addressed men as lawyers, or doctors, or men of business; we have sent or accepted invitations to gatherings where nothing would have astonished us more than the unaffected naming of the name of God; did we ever write to anybody because he was a Christian, and because we were Christians? Of all the relations in which we stand to others, is that which is established by "our common Christianity," by our common life in Jesus Christ, the only one which is so crazy and precarious that it can never be really used for anything? Here we see the Apostle look back from Corinth to Thessalonica, and his one interest in the poor people whom he remembers so affection-

ately is that they are Christians. The one thing in which he wishes to help them is their Christian life. He does not care much whether they are well or ill off in respect of this world's goods; but he is anxious to supply what is lacking in their faith (iii. 10). How real a thing the Christian life was to him! what a substantial interest, whether in himself or in others, engrossing all his thought, absorbing all his love and devotion. To many of us it is the one topic for silence; to him it was the one theme of thought and speech. He wrote about it, as he spoke about it, as though there were no other interest for man; and letters like those of Thomas Erskine show that still, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. The full soul overflows, unaffected, unforced; Christian fellowship, as soon as Christian life is real, is restored to its true place.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy wish the church of the Thessalonians grace and peace. This is the greeting in all the Apostle's letters; it is not varied except by the addition of "mercy" in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus. In form it seems to combine the salutations current among the Greeks and the Jews (*χαίρειν* and שָׁלוֹם), but in import it has all the originality of the Christian faith. In the second Epistle it runs, "Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is the love of God, spontaneous, beautiful,

unearned, at work in Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinful men; peace is the effect and fruit in man of the reception of grace. It is easy to narrow unduly the significance of peace; those expositors do so who suppose in this passage a reference to the persecution which the Thessalonian Christians had to bear, and understand the Apostle to wish them deliverance from it. The Apostle has something far more comprehensive in his mind. The peace, which Christ is; the peace with God which we have when we are reconciled to Him by the death of His Son; the soul-health which comes when grace makes our hearts to their very depths right with God, and frightens away care and fear; this "perfect soundness" spiritually is all summed up in the word. It carries in it the fulness of the blessing of Christ. The order of the words is significant; there is no peace without grace; and there is no grace apart from fellowship with God in Christ. The history of the Church has been written by some who practically put Paul in Christ's place; and by others who imagine that the doctrine of the person of Christ only attained by slow degrees, and in the post-apostolic age, its traditional importance; but here, in the oldest extant monument of the Christian faith, and in the very first line of it, the Church is defined as existing in the Lord Jesus Christ; and in that single expression, in which the Son stands side by side with the Father, as the life of all

believing souls, we have the final refutation of such perverse thoughts. By the grace of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Christian is what he is; he lives and moves and has his being there; apart from Christ, he is not. Here, then, is our hope. Conscious of our own sins, and of the shortcomings of the Christian community of which we are members, let us have recourse to Him whose grace is sufficient for us. Let us abide in Christ, and in all things grow up into Him. God alone is good; Christ alone is the Pattern and the Inspiration of the Christian character; only in the Father and the Son can the new life and the new fellowship come to their perfection.

II.

THE THANKSGIVING.

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father; knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election."—1 THESS. i. 2-4 (R.V.).

II.

THE THANKSGIVING.

THE salutation in St. Paul's epistles is regularly followed by the thanksgiving. Once only, in the Epistle to the Galatians, is it omitted; the amazement and indignation with which the Apostle has heard that his converts are forsaking his gospel for another which is not a gospel at all, carries him out of himself for a moment. But in his earliest letter it stands in its proper place; before he thinks of congratulating, teaching, exhorting, admonishing, he gives God thanks for the tokens of His grace in the Thessalonians. He would not be writing to these people at all if they were not Christians; they would never have been Christians but for the free goodness of God; and before he says one word directly to them, he acknowledges that goodness with a grateful heart.

In this case the thanksgiving is particularly fervent. It has no drawback. There is no profane person at Thessalonica, like him who defiled the church at Corinth at a later period; we give thanks, says the Apostle, for you all. It is, as far as the nature of the

case permits, uninterrupted. As often as Paul prays, he makes mention of them and gives thanks; he remembers without ceasing their new-born graces. We ought not to extenuate the force of such words, as if they were mere exaggerations, the idle extravagances of a man who habitually said more than he meant. Paul's life was concentrated and intense, to a degree of which we have probably little conception. He lived for Christ, and for the churches of Christ; it was literal truth, not extravagance, when he said, "This one thing I do": the life of these churches, their interests, their necessities, their dangers, God's goodness to them, his own duty to serve them, all these constituted together the one dear concernment of his life; they were ever with him in God's sight, and therefore in his intercessions and thanksgivings to God. Other men's minds might surge with various interests; new ambitions or affections might displace old ones; fickleness or disappointments might change their whole career; but it was not so with him. His thoughts and affections never changed their object, for the same conditions appealed constantly to the same susceptibility; if he grieved over the unbelief of the Jews, he had unceasing (*ἀδιάλειπτον*) pain in his heart; if he gave thanks for the Thessalonians, he remembered without ceasing (*ἀδιαλείπτως*) the graces with which they had been adorned by God.

Nor were these continual thanksgivings vague or formal; the Apostle recalls, in each particular case, the special manifestations of Christian character which inspire his gratitude. Sometimes, as in 1st Corinthians, they are less spiritual—gifts, rather than graces; utterance and knowledge, without charity; sometimes, as here, they are eminently spiritual—faith, love, and hope. The conjunction of these three in the earliest of Paul's letters is worthy of remark. They occur again in the well-known passage in 1 Cor. xiii., where, though they share in the distinction of being eternal, and not, like knowledge and eloquence, transitory in their nature, love is exalted to an eminence above the other two. They occur a third time in one of the later epistles—that to the Colossians—and in the same order as here. That, says Lightfoot on the passage, is the natural order. "Faith rests on the past; love works in the present; hope looks to the future." Whether this distribution of the graces is accurate or not, it suggests the truth that they cover and fill up the whole Christian life. They are the sum and substance of it, whether it looks back, or looks round, or looks forward. The germ of all perfection is implanted in the soul which is the dwelling-place of "these three."

Though none of them can really exist, in its Christian quality, without the others, any of them may preponderate at a given time. It is not quite fanciful to

point out that each in its turn seems to have bulked most largely in the experience of the Apostle himself. His earliest epistles—the two to the Thessalonians—are pre-eminently epistles of hope. They look to the future; the doctrinal interest uppermost in them is that of the second coming of the Lord, and the final rest of the Church. The epistles of the next period—Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians—are as distinctly epistles of faith. They deal largely with faith as the power which unites the soul to God in Christ, and brings into it the virtue of the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus. Later still, there are the epistles of which Colossians and Ephesians are the type. The great thought in these is that of the unity wrought by love; Christ is the head of the Church; the Church is the body of Christ; the building up of the body in love, by the mutual help of the members, and their common dependence on the Head, preoccupies the apostolic writer. All this may have been more or less accidental, due to circumstances which had nothing to do with the spiritual life of Paul; but it has the look of being natural too. Hope prevails first—the new world of things unseen and eternal outweighs the old; it is the stage at which religion is least free from the influence of sense and imagination. Then comes the reign of faith; the inward gains upon the outward; the mystical union of the soul to Christ, in which His spiritual life is appropriated, is

more or less sufficient to itself; it is the stage, if it be a stage at all, at which religion becomes independent of imagination and sense. Finally, love reigns. The solidarity of all Christian interests is strongly felt; the life flows out again, in all manner of Christian service, on those by whom it is surrounded; the Christian moves and has his being in the body of which he is a member. All this, I repeat, can be only comparatively true; but the character and sequence of the Apostle's writings speak for its truth so far.

But it is not simply faith, love, and hope that are in question here: "we remember," says the Apostle, "your *work* of faith and *labour* of love and *patience* of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." We call faith, love, and hope the Christian graces; and we are apt to forget that the associations of heathen mythology, thus introduced, are disturbing rather than enlightening. The three Graces of the Greeks are ideally beautiful figures; but their beauty is æsthetic, not spiritual. They are lovely as a group of statuary is lovely; but though "by (their) gift come unto men all pleasant things and sweet, and the wisdom of a man and his beauty, and the splendour of his fame," their nature is utterly unlike that of the three powers of the Christian character; no one would dream of ascribing to them work, and labour and patience. Yet the mere fact that "Graces" has been used as a common name for both has diffused the

idea that the Christian graces also are to be viewed mainly as the adornments of character, its unsought, unstudied beauties, set on it by God to subdue and charm the world. That is quite wrong; the *Greek* Graces are essentially beauties; they confer on men all that wins admiration—personal comeliness, victory in the games, a happy mood; but the *Christian* graces are essentially powers; they are new virtues and forces which God has implanted in the soul that it may be able to do His work in the world. The heathen Graces are lovely to look at, and that is all; but the Christian graces are not subjects for æsthetic contemplation; they are here to work, to toil, to endure. If they have a beauty of their own—and surely they have—it is a beauty not in form or colour, not appealing to the eye or the imagination, but only to the spirit which has seen and loved Christ, and loves His likeness in whatever guise.

Let us look at the Apostle's words more closely: he speaks of a work of faith; to take it exactly, of something which faith has done. Faith is a conviction with regard to things unseen, that makes them present and real. Faith in God as revealed in Christ, and in His death for sin, makes reconciliation real; it gives the believer peace with God. But it is not shut up in the realm of things inward and unseen. If it were, a man might say what he pleased about it, and there would

be no check upon his words. Wherever it exists, it works; he who is interested can see what it has done. Apparently the Apostle has some particular work of faith in his mind in this passage; some thing which the Thessalonians had actually done, because they believed but what it is we cannot tell. Certainly not faith itself; certainly not love, as some think, referring to Gal. v. 6; if a conjecture may be hazarded, possibly some act of courage or fidelity under persecution, similar to those adduced in Heb. xi. That famous chapter contains a catalogue of the works which faith wrought; and serves as a commentary, therefore, on this expression. Surely we ought to notice that the great Apostle, whose name has been the strength and shield of all who preach justification by faith alone, the very first time he mentions this grace in his epistles, mentions it as a power which leaves its witness in work.

It is so, also, with love: "we remember," he writes, "your labour of love." The difference between ἔργον (work) and κόπος (labour) is that between effect and effort. The Apostle recalls something which the faith of the Thessalonians did; he recalls also the wearisome toil in which their love spent itself. Love is not so capable of abuse in religion, or, at least, it has not been so rankly abused, as faith. Men are much more apt to demand the proof of it. It has an inward side as much as faith, but it is not an emotion which

exhausts itself in its own transports. Merely as emotion, indeed, it is apt to be undervalued. In the Church of to-day emotion needs rather to be stimulated than repressed. The passion of the New Testament startles us when we chance to feel it. For one man among us who is using up the powers of his soul in barren ecstasies, there are thousands who have never been moved by Christ's love to a single tear or a single heart throb. They must learn to love before they can labour. They must be kindled by that fire which burned in Christ's heart, and which He came to cast upon the earth, before they can do anything in His service. But if the love of Christ has really met that answer in love for which it waits, the time for service has come. Love in the Christian will attest itself as it attested itself in Christ. It will prescribe and point out the path of labour. The word employed in this passage is one often used by the Apostle to describe his own laborious life. Love set him, and will set every one in whose heart it truly burns, upon incessant, unwearied efforts for others' good. Paul was ready to spend and be spent at its bidding, however small the result might be. He toiled with his hands, he toiled with his brain, he toiled with his ardent, eager, passionate heart, he toiled in his continual intercessions with God, and all these toils made up his *labour* of love. "A labour of love," in current language,

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is a piece of work done so willingly that no payment is expected for it. But *a* labour of love is not what the Apostle is speaking of; it is *laboriousness*, as love's characteristic. Let Christian men and women ask themselves whether their love can be so characterised. We have all been tired in our time, one may presume; we have toiled in business, or in some ambitious course, or in the perfecting of some accomplishment, or even in the mastery of some game or the pursuit of some amusement, till we were utterly wearied: how many of us have so toiled in love? How many of us have been wearied and worn with some labour to which we set ourselves for God's sake? This is what the Apostle has in view in this passage; and, strange as it may appear, it is one of the things for which he gives God thanks. But is he not right? Is it not a thing to evoke gratitude and joy, that God counts us worthy to be fellow-labourers with Him in the manifold works which love imposes?

The church at Thessalonica was not old; its first members could only count their Christian age by months. Yet love is so native to the Christian life, that they found at once a career for it; demands were made upon their sympathy and their strength which were met at once, though never suspected before. "What are we to do," we sometimes ask, "if we would work the works of God?" If we have love enough in

our hearts, it will answer all its own questions. It is the fulfilling of the law just because it shows us plainly where service is needed, and puts us upon rendering it at any cost of pain or toil. It is not too much to say that the very word chosen by the Apostle to characterise love—this word κόπος—is peculiarly appropriate, because it brings out, not the issue, but only the cost, of work. With the result desired, or without it; with faint hope, or with hope most sure, love labours, toils, spends and is spent over its task: this is the very seal of its genuine Christian character.

The third grace remains: "your patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." The second coming of Christ was an element in apostolic teaching which, whether exceptionally prominent or not, had made an exceptional impression at Thessalonica. It will more naturally be studied at another place; here it is sufficient to say that it was the great object of Christian hope. Christians not only believed Christ would come again; they not only expected Him to come; they were eager for His coming. "How long, O Lord?" they cried in their distress. "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," was their prayer.

It is matter of notoriety that hope in this sense does not hold its ancient place in the heart of the Church. It holds a much lower place. Christian men hope for this or that; they hope that threatening symptoms in

the Church or in society may pass away, and better things appear; they hope that when the worst comes to the worst, it will not be so bad as the pessimists anticipate. Such impotent and ineffective hope is of no kindred to the hope of the gospel. So far from being a power of God in the soul, a victorious grace, it is a sure token that God is absent. Instead of inspiring, it discourages; it leads to numberless self-deceptions; men *hope* their lives are right with God, when they ought to search them and see; they *hope* things will turn out well, when they ought to be taking security of them. All this, where our relations to God are concerned, is a degradation of the very word. The Christian hope is laid up in heaven. The object of it is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not precarious, but certain; it is not ineffective, but a great and energetic power. Anything else is not hope at all.

The operation of the true hope is manifold. It is a sanctifying grace, as appears from 1 John iii. 3: "Every one that hath this hope set on Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure." But here the Apostle characterises it by its patience. The two virtues are so inseparable that Paul sometimes uses them as equivalent; twice in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, he says faith, love, and patience, instead of faith, love, and hope. But what is patience? The word is one of the great words of the New Testament. The corre-

sponding verb is usually rendered endurance, as in Christ's saying, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." Patience is more than resignation or meek submission; it is hope in the shade, but hope nevertheless; the brave steadfastness which bears up under all burdens because the Lord is at hand. The Thessalonians had much affliction in their early days as Christians; they were tried, too, as we all are, by inward discouragements—that persistence and vitality of sin that break the spirit and beget despair; but they saw close at hand the glory of the Lord; and in the patience of hope they held out, and fought the good fight to the last. It is truly significant that in the Pastoral Epistles patience has taken the place of hope in the trinity of graces. It is as if Paul had discovered, by prolonged experience, that it was in the form of patience that hope was to be mainly effective in the Christian life. The Thessalonians, some of them, were abusing the great hope; it was working mischief in their lives, because it was misapplied; in this single word Paul hints at the truth which abundant experience had taught him, that all the energy of hope must be transformed into brave patience if we would stand in our place at the last. Remembering their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, in the presence of our God and Father, the Apostle gives thanks to God always for them all. Happy is the man

whose joys are such that he can gratefully dwell on them in that presence: happy are those also who give others cause to thank God on their behalf.

The ground of the thanksgiving is finally comprehended in one short and striking phrase: "Knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election." The doctrine of election has often been taught as if the one thing that could never be known about anybody was whether he was or was not elect. The assumed impossibility does not square with New Testament ways of speaking. Paul knew the elect, he says here; at least he knew the Thessalonians were elect. In the same way he writes to the Ephesians: "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world; . . . in love He foreordained us to adoption as sons." Chose whom before the foundation of the world? Foreordained whom? Himself, and those whom he addressed. If the Church has learned the doctrine of election from anybody, it has been from Paul; but to him it had a basis in experience, and apparently he felt differently about it from many theologians. He knew when the people he spoke to were elect; how, he tells in what follows.

III.

THE SIGNS OF ELECTION.

" How that our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and *in* much assurance; even as ye know what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sake. And ye became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost; so that ye became an ensample to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith to God-ward is gone forth; so that we need not to speak anything."—1 THESS. i. 5-8 (R.V.).

III.

THE SIGNS OF ELECTION.

THE Revised Version renders the ὅτι, with which ver. 5 begins, "how that," the Authorised Version, "for." In the first case, the Apostle is made to explain in what election consists; in the other, he explains how it is that he knows the Thessalonians to be among the elect. There is hardly room to doubt that it is this last which he intends to do. Election does not consist in the things which he proceeds to enlarge upon, though these may be in some sense its effects or tokens; and there is something like unanimity among scholars in favour of the rendering "for," or "because." What, then, are the grounds of the statement, that Paul knows the election of the Thessalonians? They are twofold; lying partly in his own experience, and that of his fellow-labourers, while they preached the gospel in Thessalonica; and partly in the reception which the Thessalonians gave to their message.

I. The tokens in the preacher that his hearers are

elect: "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." That was the consciousness of the preachers themselves, but they could appeal to those who had heard them: "even as ye know what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sake."

The self-consciousness of the preacher, we see from these words, is a legitimate though a perilous study. Every one has been told that there is no relation whatever between his own consciousness when preaching, and the effect of what is preached; but has anybody ever quite believed this? If there were no relation whatever between the preacher's consciousness and his conscience; if he did not know that many a time neglect of prayer or duty had separated him from God, and made him useless as an evangelist, it would be easier to believe it; but as our life is, the preacher may know quite well that it is no proof of God's good will to men that *he* is sent to preach to them; or, on the other hand, he may have a humble but sure trust that when he stands up to speak, God is with him for good to his hearers. Thus it was with Paul at Thessalonica.

The heartiness with which he speaks here justifies the inference that he had had experiences of an opposite and disappointing kind. Twice in Asia (Acts xvi. 6 f.) he had been forbidden by the Spirit to preach at all;

he could not argue that the people so passed by were specially favoured of God. Often, especially in his intercourse with the Jews, he must have spoken, like Isaiah, with the depressing consciousness that it was all in vain; that the sole issue would be to blind their eyes and harden their hearts and seal them up in impenitence. In Corinth, just before writing this letter, he had come forward with unusual trepidation—in weakness and fear and much trembling; and though there also the Holy Spirit and a divine power brought home the gospel to men's hearts, he seems to have been so far from that inward assurance which he enjoyed at Thessalonica, that the Lord appeared to him in a vision by night to reveal the existence of an election of grace even in Corinth. "Fear not: I have much people in this city." In Thessalonica he had no such sinking of heart. He came thither, as he hoped to go to Rome, in the fulness of the blessing of Christ (Rom. xv. 29). He knew in himself that God had given it to him to be a true minister of His grace; he was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord. That is why he says so confidently, "Knowing your election."

The Apostle explains himself more precisely when he writes, "not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." The gospel must come in word at least; but what a profanation it is to

preach it only in word. Not preachers only, but all Christians, have to be on their guard, lest familiarity rob the great words of the gospel of their reality, and they themselves sink into that worst atheism which is for ever handling holy things without feeling them. How easy is it to speak of God, Christ, redemption, atonement, sanctification, heaven, hell, and to be less impressed and less impressive than if we were speaking of the merest trivialities of every-day life. It is hard to believe that an apostle could have seen such a possibility even from afar; yet the contrast of "word" and "power" leaves no room to doubt that such is his meaning. Words alone are worthless. No matter how brilliant, how eloquent, how imposing they may be, they cannot do the work of an evangelist. The call to this requires "power."

No definition of power is given; we can only see that it is that which achieves spiritual results, and that the preacher is conscious of possessing it. It is not his own, certainly: it works through the very consciousness of his own want of power; "when I am weak, then am I strong." But it gives him hope and confidence in his work. Paul knew that it needed a stupendous force to make bad men good; the forces to be overcome were so enormous. All the sin of the world was arrayed against the gospel; all the dead weight of men's indifference, all their pride, all their

shame, all their self-satisfaction, all their cherished wisdom. But he came to Thessalonica *strong* in the Lord, confident that his message would subdue those who listened to it; and therefore, he argued, the Thessalonians were the objects of God's electing grace.

"Power" stands side by side with the "Holy Ghost." In a sense, the Holy Ghost is the source of all spiritual virtues, and therefore of the very power of which we have been speaking; but the words are probably used here with some narrower meaning. The predominant use of the name in the New Testament bids us think of that divine fervour which the spirit kindles in the soul—that ardour of the new life which Christ Himself speaks of as fire. Paul came to Thessalonica aglow with Christian passion. He took that as a good omen in his work, a sign that God meant well to the Thessalonians. By nature men do not care passionately for each other as he cared for those to whom he preached in that city. They are not on fire with love, seeking each other's good in spiritual things; consumed with fervent longing that the bad should cease from their badness, and come to enjoy the pardon, the purity, and the company of Christ. Even in the heart of apostles—for though they were apostles they were men—the fire may sometimes have burned low, and a mission have been, by comparison, languid and spiritless; but at least on this occasion the evangelists were all on fire; and it assured

them that God had a people waiting for them in the unknown city.

If "power" and the "Holy Ghost" are in some degree to be judged only by their effects, there can be no question that "much assurance," on the other hand, is an inner experience, belonging strictly to the self-consciousness of the preacher. It means a full and strong conviction of the truth of the gospel. We can only understand this by contrast with its opposite; "much assurance" is the counterpart of misgiving or doubt. We can hardly imagine an apostle in doubt about the gospel—not quite certain that Christ had risen from the dead; wondering whether, after all, His death had abolished sin. Yet these truths, which are the sum and substance of the gospel, seem, at times, too great for belief; they do not coalesce with the other contents of our mind; they do not weave easily into one piece with the warp and woof of our common thoughts; there is no common measure for them and the rest of our experience, and the shadow of unreality falls upon them. They are so great that it needs a certain greatness to answer to them, a certain boldness of faith to which even a true Christian may feel momentarily unequal; and while he is unequal, he cannot do the work of an evangelist. Doubt paralyses; God cannot work through a man in whose soul there are misgivings about the truth. At least, His working

will be limited to the sphere of what is certain for him through whom He works; and if we would be effective ministers of the word, we must speak only what we are sure of, and seek the full assurance of the whole truth. No doubt such assurance has conditions. Unfaithfulness of one kind or another is, as our Lord teaches (John vii. 17), the source of uncertainty as to the truth of His word; and prayer, repentance, and obedience due, the way to certainty again. But Paul had never been more confident of the truth and power of his gospel than when he came to Thessalonica. He had seen it proved in Philippi, in conversions so dissimilar as those of Lydia and the jailor. He had felt it in his own heart, in the songs which God had given him in the night while he suffered for Christ's sake. He came among those whom he addresses confident that it was God's instrument to save all who believed. This is his last personal reason for believing the Thessalonians to be elect.

Strictly speaking, all this refers rather to the delivery of the message than to the messengers, to the preaching than to the preachers; but the Apostle applies it to the latter also. "Ye know," he writes, "what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sakes." I venture to think [1] that the word rendered "we showed

[1] With Godet and P. Schmidt; against Ellicott.

ourselves" has really the passive sense—"what God enabled us to be"; it is God's good will to the Thessalonians which is in view, and the Apostle infers that good will from the character which God enabled him and his friends to sustain for their sakes. Who could deny that God had chosen them, when He had sent them Paul and Silas and Timothy; not mere talkers, cold and spiritless, and dubious of their message; but men strong in spiritual force, in holy fervour, and in their grasp of the gospel? If that did not go to show that the Thessalonians were elect, what could?

II. The self-consciousness of the preachers, however, significant as it was, was no conclusive evidence. It only became such when their inspiration was caught by those who listened to them; and this was the case at Thessalonica. "Ye became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." This peculiar expression implies that the signs of God's election were to be seen in the evangelists, and eminently in the Lord. Paul shrinks from making himself and his companions types of the elect, without more ado; they are such only because they are like Him, of whom it is written "Behold my servant whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth." He speaks here in the same strain as in 1 Cor. xi. 1: "Brethren, be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ." They who have

become like the Lord are marked out as the chosen of God.

But the Apostle does not rest in this generality. The imitation in question consisted in this—that the Thessalonians received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. It is, of course, in the last part of the sentence that the point of comparison is found. In a sense it is true that the Lord Himself received the word which He spoke to men. "I do nothing of Myself," He says; "but as the Father hath taught Me, I speak these things" (John viii. 28). But such a reference is irrelevant here. The significant point is that the acceptance of the gospel by the Thessalonians brought them into fellowship with the Lord, and with those who continued His work, in that which is the distinction and criterion of the new Christian life —much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. That is a summary of the life of Christ, the Apostle of the Father (John xvii. 18). It is more obviously a summary of the life of Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. The acceptance of the gospel meant much affliction for him: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." It meant also a new and supernatural joy, a joy arising from, and sustained by, the Holy Spirit, a joy triumphant in and over all sufferings. This combination of affliction and spiritual joy, this original, paradoxical experience, is the token of election.

Where the children of God live, as Christ and His apostles lived, in the midst of a world at war with God and His cause, they will suffer; but suffering will not break their spirit, or embitter them, or lead them to desert God; it will be accompanied with spiritual exaltation, keeping them sweet, and humble, and joyful, through it all. Paul knew the Thessalonians were elect, because he saw that new power in them, to rejoice in tribulations, which can only be seen in those who have the spirit of God.

This test, obviously, can only be applied when the gospel is a suffering cause. But if the profession of the Christian faith, and the leading of a Christian life entail no affliction, what shall we say? If we read the New Testament aright, we shall say that there is a mistake somewhere. There is always a cross; there is always something to bear or to overcome for righteousness' sake; and the spirit in which it is met tells whether God is with us or not. Not every age is, like the apostolic, an age of open persecution, of spoiling of goods, of bonds, and scourging, and death; but the imitation of Christ in His truth and faithfulness will surely be resented somehow; and it is the seal of election when men rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Only the true children of God can do that. Their joy is in some sense a present recompense for their sufferings; but for suffer-

ing they could not know it. "I never knew," said Rutherford, "by my nine years' preaching, so much of Christ's love as He hath taught me in Aberdeen, by six months' imprisonment." It is a joy that never fails those who face affliction that they may be true to Christ. Think of the Christian boys in Uganda, in 1885, who were bound alive to a scaffolding and slowly burned to death. "The spirit of the martyrs at once entered into these lads, and together they raised their voices and praised Jesus in the fire, singing till their shrivelled tongues refused to form the sound:—

"'Daily, daily, sing to Jesus,
Sing, my soul, His praises due;
All He does deserves our praises,
And our deep devotion too.

"'For in deep humiliation,
He for us did live below;
Died on Calvary's cross of torture,
Rose to save our souls from woe.'"[1]

Who can doubt that these three are among the chosen of God? And who can think of such scenes, and such a spirit, and recall without misgiving the querulous, fretful, aggrieved tone of his own life, when things have not gone with him exactly as he could have wished?

The Thessalonians were so conspicuously Christian, so unmistakably exhibited the new Divine type of

[1] *Life of Bishop Hannington.*

character, that they became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Their conversion called the attention of all men to the gospel, like a clear and far-resounding trumpet blast. Thessalonica was a place of much coming and going on all sides; and the success of the evangelists there, being carried abroad in various ways, advertised their work, and so far prepared for their coming. Paul would naturally have spoken of it when he went to a new city, but found it unnecessary; the news had preceded him; in every place their faith to God-ward had gone forth. So far as we learn, it was the most impressive incident which had yet occurred in the progress of the gospel. A work of grace so characteristic, so thorough, and so unmistakable, was a token of God's goodness, not only to those who were immediately the subjects of it, but to all who heard, and by hearing had their interest awakened in the evangelists and their message.

This whole subject has a side for preachers, and a side for hearers of the gospel. The preacher's peril is the peril of coming to men in word only; saying things which he does not feel, and which others, therefore, will not feel; uttering truths, it may be, but truths which have never done anything for him—enlightened, quickened, or sanctified him—and which he cannot hope, as they come from his lips, will do anything for others; or worse still, uttering things of which he

cannot even be confident that they are true. Nothing could be less a sign of God's grace to men than to abandon them to such a preacher, instead of sending them one full of power, and of the Holy Ghost, and of assurance. But whatever the preacher may be, there is something left to the hearer. There were people with whom even Paul, full of power and of the Holy Ghost, could not prevail. There were people who hardened their hearts against Christ; and let the preacher be ever so unworthy of the gospel, the virtue is in it, and not in him. He may not do anything to commend it to men; but does it need his commendation? Can we make bad preaching an excuse for refusing to become imitators of the Lord? It may condemn the preacher, but it can never excuse us Look steadily at the seal which God sets upon His own—the union of affliction with spiritual joy—and follow Christ in the life which is marked by this character as not human only, but Divine. That is the way prescribed to us here to make our election sure.

IV.

CONVERSION.

"For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come."—1 THESS. i. 9, 10 (R.V.).

IV.

CONVERSION.

THESE verses show what an impression had been made in other places by the success of the gospel at Thessalonica. Wherever Paul went, he heard it spoken about. In every place men were familiar with all its circumstances; they had heard of the power and assurance of the missionaries, and of the conversion of their hearers from heathenism to Christianity. It is this conversion which is the subject before us. It has two parts or stages. There is first, the conversion from idols to the one living and true God; and then the distinctively Christian stage of waiting for the Son of God from heaven. Let us look at these in order.

The Apostle, so far as we can make out, judged the religions of heathenism with great severity. He knew that God never left Himself without a witness in the world, but God's testimony to Himself had been perverted or ignored. Ever since the creation of the world, His everlasting power and divinity might be seen by the things He had made; His law was written on con-

science; rain from heaven and fruitful seasons proved His good and faithful providence; yet men were practically ignorant of Him. They were not willing, in fact, to retain Him in their knowledge; they were not obedient; they were not thankful; when they professed religion at all, they made gods after their own image, and worshipped them. They bowed before idols; and an idol, says Paul, is nothing in the world. In the whole system of pagan religion the Apostle saw nothing but ignorance and sin; it was the outcome, in part, of man's enmity to God; in part, of God's judicial abandonment of men; in part, of the activity of evil spirits; it was a path on which no progress could be made; instead of pursuing it farther, those who wished really to make spiritual advance must abandon it altogether.

It is possible to state a better case than this for the religion of the ancient world; but the Apostle was in close and continuous contact with the facts, and it will take a great deal of theorising to reverse the verdict of a conscience like his on the whole question. Those who wish to put the best face upon the matter, and to rate the spiritual worth of paganism as high as may be, lay stress on the ideal character of the so-called idols, and ask whether the mere conception of Zeus, or Apollo, or Athene, is not a spiritual achievement of a high order. Let it be ever so high, and still, from the Apostle's ground, Zeus, Apollo, and Athene are dead

idols. They have no life but that which is conferred upon them by their worshippers. They can never assert themselves in action, bestowing life or salvation on those who honour them. They can never be what the Living God was to every man of Jewish birth—Creator, Judge, King, and Saviour; a personal and moral power to whom men are accountable at every moment, for every free act.

"Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God." We cannot overestimate the greatness of this change. Until we understand the unity of God, we can have no true idea of His character, and therefore no true idea of our own relation to Him. It was the plurality of deities, as much as anything, which made heathenism morally worthless. Where there is a multitude of gods, the real power in the world, the final reality, is not found in any of them; but in a fate of some sort which lies behind them all. There can be no moral relation of man to this blank necessity; nor, while it exists, any stable relation of man to his so-called gods. No Greek or Roman could take in the idea of "serving" a God. The attendants or priests in a temple were in an official sense the deity's ministers; but the thought which is expressed in this passage, of serving a living and true God by a life of obedience to His will, a thought which is so natural and inevitable to

either a Jew or a Christian, that without it we could not so much as conceive religion—that thought was quite beyond a pagan's comprehension. There was no room for it in his religion; his conception of the gods did not admit of it. If life was to be a moral service rendered to God, it must be to a God quite different from any to whom he was introduced by his ancestral worship. That is the final condemnation of heathenism; the final proof of its falsehood as a religion.

There is something as deep and strong as it is simple in the words, to serve the living and true God. Philosophers have defined God as the *ens realissimum*, the most real of beings, the absolute reality; and it is this, with the added idea of personality, that is conveyed by the description "living and true." But does God sustain this character in the minds even of those who habitually worship Him? Is it not the case that the things which are nearest to our hand seem to be possessed of most life and reality, while God is by comparison very unreal, a remote inference from something which is immediately certain? If that is so, it will be very difficult for us to serve Him. The law of our life will not be found in His will, but in our own desires, or in the customs of our society; our motive will not be His praise, but some end which is fully attained apart from Him. "My meat," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His

work"; and He could say so because God who sent Him was to Him the living and true God, the first and last and sole reality, whose will embraced and covered all His life. Do we think of God so? Are the existence of God and the claim of God upon our obedience the permanent element in our minds, the unchanging background of all our thoughts and purposes? This is the fundamental thing in a truly religious life.

But the Apostle goes on from what is merely theistic, to what is distinctively Christian. "Ye turned to God from idols . . . to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead."

This is a very summary description of the issue of Christian conversion. Judging by the analogy of other places, especially in St. Paul, we should have expected some mention of faith. In Acts xx., *e.g.*, where he characterises his preaching, he names as its main elements, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. But here faith has been displaced by hope; the Thessalonians are represented not as trusting in Christ, but as waiting for Him. Of course, such hope implies faith. They only waited for Him because they believed He had redeemed them, and would save them at the great day. If faith and hope differ in that the one seems to look mainly to the past and the other to the future, they agree in that both are concerned with the revelation of the unseen.

Everything in this revelation goes back to the resurrection and rests upon it. It is mentioned here, in the first instance, exactly as in Rom. i. 4, as the *argumentum palmarium* for the Divine Sonship of Jesus. There are many proofs of that essential doctrine, but not all can be brought forward in all circumstances. Perhaps the most convincing at the present time is that which is drawn from the solitary perfection of Christ's character; the more truly and fully we get the impression of that character, as it is reflected in the Gospels, the surer we are that it is not a fancy picture, but drawn from life; and that He whose likeness it is, stands alone among the sons of men. But this kind of argument it takes years, not perhaps of study, but of obedience and devotion, to appreciate; and when the apostles went forth to preach the gospel they needed a more summary process of conviction. This they found in Christ's resurrection; that was an event standing alone in the world's history. There had been nothing like it before; there has been nothing like it since. But the men who were assured of it by many infallible proofs, did not presume to disbelieve it because of its singularity; amazing as it was, they could not but feel that it became one so unique in goodness and greatness as Jesus; it was not possible, they saw after the event, that He should be holden by the power of death; the resurrection only exhibited Him

in His true dignity; it declared Him the Son of God, and set Him on His throne. Accordingly in all their preaching they put the resurrection in the forefront. It was a revelation of life. It extended the horizon of man's existence. It brought into view realms of being that had hitherto been hidden in darkness. It magnified to infinity the significance of everything in our short life in this world, because it connected everything immediately with an endless life beyond. And as this life in the unseen had been revealed in Christ, all the apostles had to tell about it centred in Him. The risen Christ was King, Judge, and Saviour; the Christian's present duty was to love, trust, obey, and wait for Him.

This waiting includes everything. "Ye come behind in no gift," Paul says to the Corinthians, "waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." That attitude of expectation is the bloom, as it were, of the Christian character. Without it, there is something lacking; the Christian who does not look upward and onward wants one mark of perfection. This is, in all probability, the point on which we should find ourselves most from home, in the atmosphere of the primitive Church. Not unbelievers only, but disciples as well, have practically ceased to think of the Second Advent. The society which devotes itself to reviving interest in the truth uses Scripture in a fashion which makes it impossible

to take much interest in its proceedings; yet a truth so clearly a part of Scripture teaching cannot be neglected without loss. The door of the unseen world closed behind Christ as He ascended from Olivet, but not for ever. It will open again; and this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as the apostles beheld Him go. He has gone to prepare a place for those who love Him and keep His word; but "if I go," He says, "and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and take you to Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." That is the final hope of the Christian faith. It is for the fulfilment of this promise that the Church waits. The Second Coming of Christ and His Resurrection stand and fall together; and it will not long be possible for those who look askance at His return to receive in all its fulness the revelation of life which He made when He rose again from the dead. This world is too much with us; and it needs not languor, but strenuous effort on the part of faith and hope, to make the unseen world as real. Let us see that we come not behind in a grace so essential to the very being of Christianity.

The last words of the verse describe the character in which the Son of God is expected by Christians to appear—Jesus, our deliverer[1] from the wrath to come (*τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης*). There is, then, according

[1] The present participle here is simply equivalent to a substantive.

to apostolic teaching, a coming wrath—a wrath impending over the world, and actually on its way towards it. It is called the wrath to come, in distinction from anything of the same nature of which we have experience here. We all know the penal consequences which sin brings in its train even in this world. Remorse, unavailing sorrow, shame, fear, the sight of injury which we have done to those we love and which we cannot undo, incapacity for service,—all these are part and parcel of the fruit which sin bears. But they are not the wrath to come. They do not exhaust the judgment of God upon evil. Instead of discrediting it, they bear witness to it; they are, so to speak, its forerunners; the lurid clouds that appear here and there in the sky, but are finally lost in the dense mass of the thunderstorm. When the Apostle preached the gospel, he preached the wrath to come; without it, there would have been a missing link in the circle of Christian ideas. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," he says. Why? Because in it the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness which is God's gift and acceptable in God's sight. But why is such a revelation of righteousness necessary? Because the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. The gospel is a revelation made to the world in view of a given situation, and the most prominent and threatening

element in that situation is the impending wrath of God. The apostles do not prove it; they declare it. The proof of it is left to conscience, and to the Spirit of God reinforcing and quickening conscience; if anything can be added to this, it is the gospel itself; for if there were no such thing as the wrath of God, the gospel would be gratuitous. We may, if we please, evade the truth; we may pick and choose for ourselves among the elements of New Testament teaching, and reject all that is distasteful; we may take our stand upon pride, and decline to be threatened even by God; but we cannot be honest, and at the same time deny that Christ and His apostles warn us of wrath to come.

Of course we must not misconceive the character of this wrath. We must not import into our thoughts of it all that we can borrow from our experience of man's anger—hastiness, unreason, intemperate rage. The wrath of God is no arbitrary, passionate outburst; it is not, as wrath so often is with us, a fury of selfish resentment. "Evil shall not dwell with Thee," says the Psalmist; and in that simple word we have the root of the matter. The wrath of God is, as it were, the instinct of self-preservation in the Divine nature; it is the eternal repulsion, by the Holy One, of all evil. Evil shall *not* dwell with Him. That may be doubted or denied while the day of grace lasts, and God's forbearance is giving space to the sinful for repentance;

but a day is coming when it will no more be possible to doubt it—the day which the Apostle calls the day of wrath. It will then be plain to all the world that God's wrath is no empty name, but the most terrible of all powers—a consuming fire in which everything opposed to His holiness is burnt up. And while we take care not to think of this wrath after the pattern of our own sinful passions, let us take care, on the other hand, not to make it an unreal thing, without analogy in human life. If we go upon the ground of Scripture and of our own experience, it has the same degree and the same kind of reality as the love of God, or His compassion, or His forbearance. In whatever way we lawfully think of one side of the Divine nature, we must at the same time think of the other. If there is a passion of Divine love, there is a passion of Divine wrath as well. Nothing is meant in either case unworthy of the Divine nature; what is conveyed by the word passion is the truth that God's repulsion of evil is as intense as the ardour with which He delights in good. To deny that is to deny that He is good.

The apostolic preacher, who had announced the wrath to come, and awakened guilty consciences to see their danger, preached Jesus as the deliverer from it. This is the real meaning of the words in the text; and neither "Jesus which delivered," as in the Authorised Version, nor, in any rigorous sense, "Jesus which

delivereth," as in the Revised. It is the character of Jesus that is in view, and neither the past nor the present of His action. Every one who reads the words must feel, How brief! how much remains to be explained! how much Paul must have had to say about how the deliverance is effected! As the passage stands, it recalls vividly the end of the second Psalm: "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish in the way, for His wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." To have the Son a friend, to be identified with Jesus—so much we see at once—secures deliverance in the day of wrath. Other Scriptures supply the missing links. The atonement for sin made by Christ's death; faith which unites the soul to the Saviour, and brings into it the virtue of His cross and resurrection; the Holy Spirit who dwells in believers, sanctifying them, and making them fit to dwell with God in the light,—all these come into view elsewhere, and in spite of the brevity of this notice had their place, beyond doubt, in Paul's teaching at Thessalonica.[1] Not that all could be explained at

[1] Much has been made, by writers who wish to trace the spiritual development of St. Paul, of the absence from his earliest epistles of explicit teaching on the atonement and on justification by faith. But we have to remember that the Epistles to the Thessalonians, like most of his writings, were incidental; their topics were provided, and limited, by special circumstances. The doctrinal matter in 1 Thessalonians was not even the principal thing; the λοιπὸν in iv. 1 shows that by

once: that was unnecessary. But from imminent danger there must be an instantaneous escape; and it is sufficient to say that it is found in Jesus Christ. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." The risen Son is enthroned in power; He is Judge of all; He died for all; He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. To commit everything definitely to Him; to leave Him to undertake for us; to put on Him the responsibility of our past and our future, as He invites us to do; to put ourselves for good and all at His side,—this is to find deliverance from the wrath to come. It leaves much unexplained that we may come to understand afterwards, and much, perhaps, that we shall never understand; but it guarantees itself, adventure though it be; Christ never disappoints any who thus put their trust in Him.

This description in outline of conversion from paganism to the gospel should revive the elementary Christian virtues in our hearts. Have we seen how

the end of chapter iii. the Apostle has done what he intended to do when he began; even the paragraphs on the Parousia are casual and supplementary. But if we consider that Paul had now been preaching for perhaps seventeen years, and that within a few months he delivered to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xv. 1-4) the one gospel known alike to him and to the twelve,—the gospel which had for its fundamental article "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,"—we shall see how unreal it is to exclude this doctrine from his evangelistic work at Thessalonica. No doubt there, as at Corinth, he delivered this "first of all."—See also chap. v. 10.

high a thing it is to serve a living and true God? Or is it not so, that even among Christians, a *godly* man—one who lives in the presence of God, and is conscious of his responsibility to Him—is the rarest of all types? Are we waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead? Or are there not many who hardly so much as form the idea of His return, and to whom the attitude of waiting for Him would seem strained and unnatural? In plain words, what the New Testament calls Hope is in many Christians dead: the world to come and all that is involved in it—the searching judgment, the impending wrath, the glory of Christ—have slipped from our grasp. Yet it was this hope which more than anything gave its peculiar colour to the primitive Christianity, its unworldliness, its moral intensity, its command of the future even in this life. If there were nothing else to establish it, would not its spiritual fruits be sufficient?

V.

APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA.

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entering in unto you, that it hath not been found vain: but having suffered before, and been shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we waxed bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation *is* not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but even as we have been approved of God to be intrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God which proveth our hearts. For neither at any time were we found using words of flattery, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness, God is witness; nor seeking glory of men, neither from you, nor from others, when we might have been burdensome, as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children: even so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were become very dear to us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: working night and day, that we might not burden any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God *also*, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe: as ye know how we *dealt with* each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging *you*, and testifying, to the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calleth you into His own kingdom and glory."—1 THESS. ii. 1-12 (R.V.).

V.

APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA.

OUR first impression, as we read these verses, is that they contain little that is new. They simply expand the statement of ch. i., ver. 5: "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; even as ye know what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sake." But if their substance is the same, their tone is very different. It is obvious at a glance that the Apostle has a definite purpose in view in appealing so pointedly as he does here to facts with which his readers were familiar. The truth is, he is standing upon his defence. Unless it were so, he would not think of writing, as he does in ver. 5, that he had never had recourse to flattery, nor sought to make gain out of his apostleship; nor as he does in ver. 10, that God knows the entire purity of his life among them. Although he does not name them, it is quite plain that he was already suffering from those enemies who never ceased to vex him while he lived. As we

learn afterwards, these enemies were the Jews. When they had opportunity, they used open violence; they roused the Gentile mob against him; they had him scourged and stoned. When his body was out of their reach, they assailed him through his character and affections. They crept into the churches which his love and zeal had gathered here and there, and scattered injurious suspicions against him among his disciples. He was not, they hinted, all that he seemed to be. They could tell stories about his early days, and advised those who did not know him so well to be on their guard. Evangelising paid him quite as well as harder work, and his paltry ambition was gratified by lording it over his ignorant converts. Such messengers of Satan had apparently made their appearance in Thessalonica since Paul left, and this chapter is his reply to their insinuations.

There is something exquisitely painful in the situation thus created. It would have been like a sword piercing the Apostle's heart, had his enemies succeeded in their attempt to breed distrust in the Thessalonians toward him. He could not have borne to think that those whom he loved so utterly should entertain the faintest suspicion of the integrity of his love. But happily he is spared that pain. He writes, indeed, as one who has felt the indignity of the charges brought against him, but with the frankness and heartiness of a man

who is confident that his defence will be well received. From baseless insinuations he can appeal to facts which are well known to all. From the false character in which he has been dressed by his adversaries he can appeal to the true, in which he lived and moved familiarly among them.

The first point in his favour is found in the circumstances under which he had preached the gospel in Thessalonica. Had he been an insincere man, with bye ends of his own to serve, he would never have faced the career of an apostle. He had been scourged and put in the stocks at Philippi; and when he left that city for Thessalonica, he brought his troubles with him. Here also he had much conflict; he was beset on every hand with difficulties; it was only in the strength of God that he had courage to preach at all. You yourselves, he says, know that; and how, in spite of that, our coming to you was not vain, but full of power; surely it needs no more to prove the disinterestedness of our mission.

From this point onward, the apology falls into two parts, a negative and a positive: the Apostle tells us what his gospel and the proclamation of it are not; and then he tells us what, at Thessalonica, it had been.

In the first place, it is not of error. It does not rest on mistakes, or imaginations, or cunningly devised fables; in the fullest sense it is the truth. It would

have taken the heart out of the Apostle, and made him incapable of braving anything for its sake, had he been in doubt of this. If the gospel were a device of man, then men might take liberties with it, handle it deceitfully, make their own account out of it; but resting as it does on facts and truth, it demands honest dealing in all its ministers. Paul claims here a character in agreement with the dispensation which he serves: can a minister of the truth, he asks, be other than a true man?

In the next place, it is not of uncleanness; that is, it is not prompted by any impure motive. The force of the word here must be determined by the context; and we see that the impure motives specially laid to the charge of Paul were avarice and ambition; or, to use the words of the Apostle himself, covetousness, and the seeking of honour from men. The first of these is so manifestly inconsistent with any degree of spirituality that Paul writes instinctively "*a cloke* of covetousness"; he did not make his apostolic labour a veil, under cover of which he could gratify his love of gain. It is impossible to exaggerate the subtle and clinging character of this vice. It owes its strength to the fact that it can be so easily cloked. We seek money, so we tell ourselves, not because we are covetous, but because it is a power for all good purposes. Piety, charity, humanity, refinement, art, science—it can minister to them all; but when we obtain it, it is too easily hoarded, or spent

in indulgence, display, and conformity to the world. The pursuit of wealth, except in an utterly materialised society, is always cloked by some ideal end to which it is to minister; but how few there are in whose hands wealth is merely an instrument for the furtherance of such ends. In many men the desire for it is naked selfishness, an idolatry as undisguised as that of Israel at Sinai. Yet all men feel how bad and mean it is to have the heart set on money. All men see how base and incongruous it is to make godliness a source of gain. All men see the peculiar ugliness of a character which associates piety and avarice—of a Balaam, for instance, a Gehazi, or an Ananias. It is not ministers of the gospel only, but all to whom the credit of the gospel is entrusted, who have to be on their guard here. Our enemies are entitled to question our sincerity when we can be shown to be lovers of money. At Thessalonica, as elsewhere, Paul had been at pains to make such calumny impossible. Although entitled to claim support from the Church in accordance with the law of Christ that they who preach the gospel should live by the gospel, he had wrought night and day with his own hands that he might not burden any of them. As a precaution, this self-denial was vain; there can be no security against malice; but it gave him a triumphant vindication when the charge of covetousness was actually made.

The other impure motive contemplated is ambition. Some modern students of Paul's character—devil's advocates, no doubt—hint at this as his most obvious fault. It was necessary for him, we are told, to be first; to be the leader of a party; to have a following of his own. But he disclaims ambition as explicitly as avarice. He never sought glory from men, at Thessalonica or elsewhere. He used none of the arts which obtain it. As apostles of Christ—he includes his friends—they had, indeed, a rank of their own; the greatness of the Prince whom they represented was reflected on them as His ambassadors; they might have "stood upon their dignity,"[1] had they chosen to do so. Their very self-denial in the matter of money formed a new temptation for them here. They might well feel that their disinterested service of the Thessalonians entitled them to a spiritual pre-eminence; and indeed there is no pride like that which bases on ascetic austerities the claim to direct with authority the life and conduct of others. Paul escaped this snare. He did not compensate himself for renouncing gain, with any lordship over souls. In all things he was the servant of those to whom he preached.

And as his motives were pure, so were the means he used. His exhortation was not in guile. He did

[1] So Alford renders *δυνάμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι.*

not manipulate his message; he was never found using words of flattery. The gospel was not his own to do what he pleased with: it was God's; God had approved him so far as to entrust it to him; yet every moment, in the discharge of his trust, that same God was proving his heart still, so that false dealing was impossible. He did not make his message other than it was; he did not hide any part of the counsel of God; he did not inveigle the Thessalonians by any false pretences into responsibilities which would not have been accepted could they have been foreseen.

All these denials—not of error, not of uncleanness, not of guile; not pleasing men, not using words of flattery, not cloking over covetousness—all these denials presuppose the contrary affirmations. Paul does not indulge in boasting but on compulsion; he would never have sought to justify himself, unless he had first been accused. And now, over against this picture, drawn by his enemies, let us look at the true likeness which is held up before God and man.

Instead of selfishness there is love, and nothing but love. We are all familiar with the great passage in the epistle to the Philippians where the Apostle depicts the mind which was in Christ Jesus. The contrast in that passage between the disposition which grasps at eminence and that which makes itself of no reputation, between *ἁρπαγμὸς* and *κένωσις*, is reproduced here.

Paul had learned of Christ; and instead of seeking in his apostolic work opportunities for self-exaltation, he shrank from no service imposed by love. "We were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children." "Her own" is to be emphasised. The tenderness of the Apostle was that of a mother warming her babe at her breast. Most of the ancient authorities, the R. V. tells us in the margin, read "We were *babes* (*νήπιοι*) in the midst of you." If this were correct, the thought would be that Paul stooped to the level of these infant disciples, speaking to them, as it were, in the language of childhood, and accommodating himself to their immaturity. But though this is appropriate enough, the word *νήπιοι* is not proper to express it.[1] Gentleness is really what is meant. But his love went further than this in its yearning over the Thessalonians. He had been accused of seeking gain and glory when he came among them; but his sole desire had been not to get but to give. As his stay was prolonged, the disciples became very dear to their teachers; "we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls." That is the true standard of pastoral care. The Apostle lived up to it always. "*Now* we *live*," he writes in the next chapter, "if ye stand fast in the Lord." "Ye are in our hearts,"

[1] *νήπιος* always includes the idea of being undeveloped, unripe, and has often a shade of censure in Paul.

he cries to the Corinthians, "to live together and to die together." He not only kept back from them nothing of the whole purpose of God; he kept back no part of himself. His daily toil, his toil by night, his prayers, his preaching, his spiritual ardour, his very soul, were theirs. They knew his labour and travail; they were witnesses, and God also, how holily and righteously and unblamably he had behaved toward them.

As the Apostle recalls these recent memories, he dwells for a moment on another aspect of his love. It had not only the tender fondness of a mother's, but the educative wisdom of a father's. One by one he dealt with the disciples—which is not the way to gain glory—exhorting, encouraging, bearing solemn testimony to the truth of God. And his end in all this, as they knew, was ideal and spiritual, an end as remote as possible from any worldly interest of his own; that they might walk worthily of God who was calling them into His own kingdom and glory. How far from the rewards and distinctions of the present must that man's mind be who sees, as Paul saw steadily, the things that are invisible. If he who is blind to the golden crown above his head grasps the muck rake tightly and clutches eagerly all it brings within his reach, surely he whose eye is set upon the crown must be superior alike to the gain and the glory of the

world. That, at least, is the claim which the Apostle makes here. Nothing could be more incongruous than that a man to whom the visible world was transitory and unreal, and the invisible kingdom of God real and eternal, should be eager for money and applause, and forget the high calling with which he himself was calling men in Christ. So far the apology of the Apostle.

The practical application of this passage is different, according as we look at it in detail, or as a whole. It exhibits to us, in the charges brought against Paul, those vices which even bad men can see to be rankly inconsistent with the Christian character. Covetousness is the foremost. No matter how we cloke it—and we always cloke it somehow—it is incurably unchristian. Christ had no money. He never wished to have any. The one perfect life that has been lived in this world is the life of Him who owned nothing, and who left nothing but the clothes he wore. Whoever names the name of Christ, and professes to follow Him, must learn of Him indifference to gain. The mere suspicion of avarice will discredit, and ought to discredit, the most pious pretensions. The second vice I have spoken of as ambition. It is the desire to use others for one's own exaltation, to make them the stepping stones on which we rise to eminence, the ministers of our vanity, the sphere for the display

of our own abilities as leaders, masters, organisers, preachers. To put ourselves in that relation to others is to do an essentially unchristian thing. A minister whose congregation is the theatre on which he displays his talents or his eloquence is not a Christian. A clever man, to whom the men and women with whom he meets in society are merely specimens of human nature on whom he can make shrewd observations, sharpening his wits on them as on a grindstone, is not a Christian. A man of business, who looks at the labourers whom he employs as only so many instruments for rearing the fabric of his prosperity, is not a Christian. Everybody in the world knows that; and such men, if they profess Christianity, give a handle to slander, and bring disgrace on the religion which they wear merely as a blind. True Christianity is love, and the nature of love is not to take but to give. There is no limit to the Christian's beneficence; he counts nothing his own; he gives his very soul with every separate gift. He is as tender as the mother to her infant; as wise, as manly, as earnest as the father with his growing boy.

Looked at as a whole this passage warns us against slander. It must needs be that slander is spoken and believed; but woe to the man or woman by whom it is either believed or spoken! None are good enough to escape it. Christ was slandered; they called Him a

glutton and a drunkard, and said He was in league with the devil. Paul was slandered; they said he was a very smart man, who looked well to his own interest, and made dupes of simple people. The deliberate wickedness of such falsehoods is diabolical, but it is not so very rare. Numbers of people who would not invent such stories are glad to hear them. They are not very particular whether they are true or false; it pleases them to think that an evangelist, eminent in profession, gets a royalty on hymn-books; or that a priest, famous for devotion, was really no better than he should have been; or that a preacher, whose words regenerated a whole church, sometimes despised his audience, and talked nonsense impromptu. To sympathise with detraction is to have the spirit of the devil, not of Christ. Be on your guard against such sympathy; you are human, and therefore need to. Never give utterance to a suspicious thought. Never repeat what would discredit a man, if you have only heard it and are not sure it is true; even if you are sure of its truth, be afraid of yourself if it gives you any pleasure to think of it. Love thinketh no evil; love rejoiceth not in iniquity.

VI.

IMPEACHMENT OF THE JEWS.

"And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, *even the word* of God, ye accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe. For ye, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judæa in Christ Jesus; for ye also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews; who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drave out us, and please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to fill up their sins alway: but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."--1 THESS. ii. 13-16 (R.V.).

VI.

IMPEACHMENT OF THE JEWS.

THESE verses complete the treatment of the subject with which this chapter opens. The Apostle has drawn a moving picture of his life and labours in Thessalonica; he has pointed to it as his sufficient vindication from all the charges laid against him. Before carrying the war into the enemies' camp, and depicting the traditions and the spirit of his traducers, he lingers again for a moment on the happy results of his work. In spite of persecution and calumny, he has cause to thank God without ceasing when he remembers the reception of the gospel by the Thessalonians.

When the message was brought to them, they accepted it, he says, not as the word of men, but as what it was in truth, the word of God. It is in this character that the gospel always presents itself. A word of men cannot address men with authority; it must submit itself to criticism; it must vindicate itself on grounds which man's understanding approves. Now, the gospel is not irrational; it is its own demand that the Christian

shall be ready to answer every one who demands a rational account of the hope that is in him. But neither does it, on the other hand, come to us soliciting our approval; submitting itself, as a system of ideas, to our scrutiny, and courting approbation. It speaks with authority. It *commands* repentance; it preaches forgiveness on the ground of Christ's death—a supreme gift of God which may be accepted or rejected, but is not proposed for discussion; it exhibits the law of Christ's life as the law which is binding upon every human being, and calls upon all men to follow him. Its decisive appeal is made to the conscience and the will; and to respond to it is to give up will and conscience to God. When the Apostle says, "Ye received it as, what it is in truth, the word of God," he betrays, if one may use the word, the consciousness of his own inspiration. Nothing is commoner now than to speak of the theology of Paul as if it were a private possession of the Apostle, a scheme of thought that he had framed for himself, to explain his own experience. Such a scheme of thought, we are told, has no right whatever to impose itself on us; it has only a historical and biographical interest; it has no necessary connexion with truth. The first result of this line of thought, in almost every case, is the rejection of the very heart of the apostolic gospel; the doctrine of the atonement is no longer the greatest truth of revelation, but a rickety

bridge on which Paul imagined he had crossed from Pharisaism to Christianity. Certainly this modern analysis of the epistles does not reflect the Apostle's own way of looking at what he called "My gospel." To him it was no device of man, but unequivocally Divine; in very truth, the word of God. His theology certainly came to him in the way of his experience; his mind had been engaged with it, and was engaged with it continually; but he was conscious that, with all this freedom, it rested at bottom on the truth of God; and when he preached it—for his theology was the sum of the Divine truth he held, and he *did* preach it—he did not submit it to men as a theme for discussion. He put it above discussion. He pronounced a solemn and reiterated anathema on either man or angel who should put anything else in its stead. He published it, not for criticism, as though it had been his own device; but, as the word of God, for the obedience of faith. The tone of this passage recalls the word of our Lord, "Whoso shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." There are difficulties enough connected with the gospel, but they are not of a kind that disappear while we stand and look at them, or even stand and think about them; unquestioning surrender solves many, and introduces us to experiences which enable us to bear the rest with patience.

The word of God, in other words the gospel, proved its Divine character in the Thessalonians *after* it was received. "It also worketh," says Paul, "in you that believe." The last words are not superfluous. The word preached, we read of an earlier generation, did not profit, not being mixed with faith in them that heard. Faith conditions its efficacy. Gospel truth is an active force when it is within the heart; but it can do nothing for us while doubt, pride, or unacknowledged reserve, keep it outside. If we have really welcomed the Divine message, it will not be inoperative; it will work within us all that is characteristic of New Testament life—love, joy, peace, hope, patience. These are the proofs of its truth. Here, then, is the source of all graces: if the word of Christ dwell in us richly; if the truth of the gospel, deep, manifold, inexhaustible, yet ever the same, possess our hearts,—the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

The particular gospel grace which the Apostle has here in view is patience. He proves that the word of God is at work in the Thessalonians by pointing to the fact that they have suffered for His sake. "Had you been still of the world, the world would have loved its own; but as it is, you have become imitators of the Christian churches in Judæa, and have suffered the same things at the hands of your countrymen as they from theirs." Of all places in the world, Judæa was that in which

the gospel and its adherents had suffered most severely. Jerusalem itself was the focus of hostility. No one knew better than Paul, the zealous persecutor of heresy, what it had cost from the very beginning to be true to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Scourging, imprisonment, exile, death by the sword or by stoning, had rewarded such fidelity. We do not know to what extremity the enemies of the gospel had gone in Thessalonica; but the distress of the Christians must have been great when the Apostle could make this comparison even in passing. He has already told them (ch. i. 6) that much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost, is the very badge of God's elect; and here he combines the same stern necessity with the operation of the Divine word in their hearts. Do not let us overlook this. The work of God's word (or if you prefer it, the effect of receiving the gospel), is in the first instance to produce a new character, a character not only distinct from that of the unconverted, but antagonistic to it, and more directly and inevitably antagonistic, the more thoroughly it is wrought out; so that in proportion as God's word is operative in us, we come into collision with the world which rejects it. To suffer, therefore, is to the Apostle the seal of faith; it warrants the genuineness of a Christian profession. It is not a sign that God has forgotten His people, but a sign that He is with them; and that they are being

brought by Him into fellowship with primitive churches, with apostles and prophets, with the Incarnate Son Himself. And hence the whole situation of the Thessalonians, suffering included, comes under that heartfelt expression of thanks to God with which the passage opens. It is not a subject for condolence, but for gratitude, that they have been counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name.

And now the Apostle turns from the persecuted to the persecutors. There is nothing in his epistles elsewhere that can be compared with this passionate outburst. Paul was proud with no common pride of his Jewish descent; it was better in his eyes than any patent of nobility. His heart swelled as he thought of the nation to which the adoption pertained, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose were the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. Apostle of the Gentiles though he was, he had great sorrow and unceasing pain in his heart, when he remembered the antagonism of the Jews to the gospel; he could have wished himself anathema from Christ for their sakes. He was confident, too, that in some glorious future they would yet submit to the Messiah, so that all Israel should be saved. The turning of the heathen to God would provoke them to jealousy; and the Divine calling with which the nation had been

called in Abraham would reach its predestined goal. Such is the tone, and such the anticipation, with which, not very long afterwards, Paul writes in the epistle to the Romans. Here he looks at his countrymen with other eyes. They are identified, in his experience, with a fierce resistance to the gospel, and with cruel persecutions of the Church of Christ. Only in the character of bitter enemies has he been in contact with them in recent years. They have hunted him from city to city in Asia and in Europe; they have raised the populace against his converts; they have sought to poison the minds of his disciples against him. He knows that this policy is that with which his countrymen as a whole have identified themselves; and as he looks steadily at it, he sees that in doing so they have only acted in consistency with all their past history. The messengers whom God sends to demand the fruit of His vineyard have always been treated with violence and despite. The crowning sin of the race is put in the forefront; they slew the Lord, Jesus; but before the Lord came, they had slain His prophets; and after He had gone, they expelled His apostles. God had put them in a position of privilege, but only for a time; they were the depositaries, or trustees, of the knowledge of God as the Saviour of men; and now, when the time had come for that knowledge to be diffused throughout all the world, they clung proudly and stub-

bornly to the old position. They pleased not God and were contrary to all men, in forbidding the apostles to preach salvation to the heathen. There is an echo, all through this passage, of the words of Stephen: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." There are sentences in heathen authors, who repaid the contempt and hatred of the Jews with haughty disdain, that have been compared with this terrible impeachment by the Apostle; but in reality, they are quite unlike. What we have here is not a burst of temper, though there is undoubtedly strong feeling in it; it is the vehement condemnation, by a man in thorough sympathy with the mind and spirit of God, of the principles on which the Jews as a nation had acted at every period of their history.

What is the relation of God to such a situation as is here described? The Jews, Paul says, did all this "to fill up their sins at all times." He does not mean that that was their intention; neither does he speak ironically; but speaking as he often does from that Divine standpoint at which all results are intended and purposed results, not outside of, but within, the counsel of God, he signifies that this Divine end was being secured by their wickedness. The cup of their iniquity was filling all the time. Every generation did something to raise the level within. The men who bade

Amos begone, and eat his bread at home, raised it a little; the men who sought Hosea's life in the sanctuary, raised it further; so did those who put Jeremiah in the dungeon, and those who murdered Zechariah between the temple and the altar. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, the cup was full to the brim. When those whom He left behind to be His witnesses, and to preach repentance and remission of sins to all men, beginning at Jerusalem, were expelled or put to death, it ran over. God could bear no more. Side by side with the cup of iniquity the cup of judgment had been filling also; and they overflowed together. Even when Paul wrote he could say, "The wrath is come upon them to the very end."[1]

It is not easy to explain the precise force of these words. They seem to point definitely[2] to some event, or some act of God, in which His wrath had been unmistakably made manifest. To suppose that the fall of Jerusalem is meant is to deny that Paul wrote the words. All that is certain is that the Apostle saw in the signs of the times some infallible token that the nation's day of grace had come to an end. Perhaps some excess of a Roman procurator, now forgotten; perhaps one of those famines that desolated Judæa in that unhappy age; perhaps the recent edict of Claudius,

[1] Weiss renders εἰς τέλος "im höchsten Masse."

[2] Observe the aorist ἔφθασεν.

expelling all Jews from Rome, and betraying the temper of the supreme power; perhaps the coming shadow of an awful doom, obscure in outline, but none the less inevitable, gave shape to the expression. The Jews had failed, in their day, to recognise the things that belonged to their peace; and now they were hid from their eyes. They had disregarded every presage of the coming storm; and at length the clouds that could not be charmed away had accumulated over their heads, and the fire of God was ready to leap out.

This striking passage embodies certain truths to which we do well to give heed. It shows us that there is such a thing as a national character. In the providential government of God a nation is not an aggregate of individuals, each one of whom stands apart from the rest; it is a corporation with a unity, life and spirit of its own. Within that unity there may be a conflict of forces, a struggle of good with evil, of higher with lower tendencies, just as there is in the individual soul; but there will be a preponderance on one side or the other; and that side to which the balance leans will prevail more and more. In the vast spirit of the nation, as in the spirit of each man or woman, through the slow succession of generations as in the swift succession of years, character gradually assumes more fixed and definite form. There is a process of development, interrupted perhaps and retarded by such conflicts as

I have referred to, but bringing out all the more decisively and irreversibly the inmost spirit of the whole. There is nothing which the proud and the weak more dread than inconsistency; there is nothing, therefore, which is so fatally certain to happen as what has happened already. The Jews resented from the first the intrusion of God's word into their lives; they had ambitions and ideas of their own, and in its corporate action the nation was uniformly hostile to the prophets. It beat one and killed another and stoned a third; it was of a different spirit from them, and from Him who sent them; and the longer it lived, the more like itself, the more unlike God, it became. It was the climax of its sin, yet only the climax—for it had previously taken every step that led to that eminence in evil—when it slew the Lord Jesus. And when it was ripe for judgment, judgment fell upon it as a whole.

It is not easy to speak impartially about our own country and its character; yet such a character there undoubtedly is, just as there is such a unity as the British nation. Many observers tell us that the character has degenerated into a mere instinct for trade; and that it has begotten a vast unscrupulousness in dealing with the weak. Nobody will deny that there is a protesting conscience in the nation, a voice which pleads in God's name for justice, as the prophets pled in Israel; but the question is not whether such a voice

is audible, but whether in the corporate acts of the nation it is obeyed. The state ought to be a Christian state. The nation ought to be conscious of a spiritual vocation, and to be animated with the spirit of Christ. In its dealings with other powers, in its relations to savage or half-civilised peoples, in its care for the weak among its own citizens, it should acknowledge the laws of justice and of mercy. We have reason to thank God that in all these matters Christian sentiment is beginning to tell. The opium trade with China, the liquor trade with the natives of Africa, the labour trade in the South Seas, the dwellings of the poor, the public-house system with its deliberate fostering of drunkenness, all these are matters in regard to which the nation was in danger of settling into permanent hostility to God, and in which there is now hope of better things. The wrath which is the due and inevitable accompaniment of such hostility, when persisted in, has not come on us to the very end; God has given us opportunity to rectify what is amiss, and to deal with all our interests in the spirit of the New Testament. Let no one be backward or indifferent when so great a work is in hand. The heritage of sin accumulates if it is not put away by well doing; and with sin, judgment. It is for us to learn by the word of God and the examples of history that the nation and kingdom that will not serve Him shall perish.

Finally, this passage shows us the last and worst form which sin can assume, in the words "forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they should be saved." Nothing is so completely ungodly, so utterly unlike God and opposed to Him, as that spirit which grudges others the good things which it prizes for itself. When the Jewish nation set itself relentlessly to prohibit the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles—when the word was passed round the synagogues from head quarters that this renegade Paul, who was summoning the pagans to become the people of God, was to be thwarted by fraud or violence—God's patience was exhausted. Such selfish pride was the very negation of His love; the *ne plus ultra* of evil. Yet nothing is more easy and natural than for men who have occupied a position of privilege to indulge this temper. An imperial nation, which boasts of its freedom, grudges such freedom to others; it seems to lose the very consciousness of being free, unless there is a subject people over which it can tyrannise. In many relations of minor consequence, political and social, we have cause to make this reflection. Do not think that what is good for you, is anything else than good for your neighbour. If you are a better man because you have a comfortable home, leisure, education, interest in public affairs, a place in the church, so would he be. Above all, if the gospel of

Christ is to you the pearl above all price, take care how you grudge that to any human soul. This is not an unnecessary caution. The criticism of missionary methods, which may be legitimate enough, is interrupted too often by the suggestion that such and such a race is not fit for the gospel. Nobody who knows what the gospel is will ever make such a suggestion; but we have all heard it made, and we see from this passage what it means. It is the mark of a heart which is deeply estranged from God, and ignorant of the Golden Rule which embodies both gospel and law. Let us rather be imitators of the great man who first entered into the spirit of Christ, and discovered the open secret of His life and death,—the mystery of redemption—that the heathen should be heirs with God's ancient people, and of the same body, and partakers of the same promises. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them."

VII.

ABSENCE AND LONGING.

"But we, brethren, being bereaved of you for a short season, in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more exceedingly to see your face with great desire: because we would fain have come unto you, I Paul once and again; and Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at His coming? For ye are our glory and our joy. Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left behind at Athens alone; and sent Timothy, our brother and God's minister in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith; that no man be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that hereunto we are appointed. For verily, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction; even as it came to pass, and ye know. For this cause I also, when I could no longer forbear, sent that I might know your faith, lest by any means the tempter had tempted you, and our labour should be in vain."—1 THESS. ii. 17-iii. 5 (R.V.).

VII.

ABSENCE AND LONGING.

THE Apostle has said all that he means to say of the opposition of the Jews to the gospel, and in the verses before us turns to his own relations to the Thessalonians. He had been compelled to leave their city against his will; they themselves had escorted him by night to Berœa. He cannot find words strong enough to describe the pain of separation. It was a bereavement, although he hoped it would only last for a short time. His heart was with them as truly as if he were still bodily present in Thessalonica. His strongest desire was to look upon their faces once more.

Here we ought to notice again the power of the gospel to create new relations and the corresponding affections. A few months before Paul had not known a single soul in Thessalonica; if he had been only a travelling tent-maker, he might have stayed there as long as he did, and then moved on with as little emotion as troubles a modern gipsy when he shifts his

camp; but coming as a Christian evangelist, he finds or rather makes brothers, and feels his enforced parting from them like a bereavement. Months after, his heart is sore for those whom he has left behind. This is one of the ways in which the gospel enriches life, hearts that would otherwise be empty and isolated are brought by it into living contact with a great circle whose nature and needs are like their own; and capacities, that would otherwise have been unsuspected, have free course for development. No one knows what is in him; and, in particular, no one knows of what love, of what expansion of heart he is capable, till Christ has made real to him those relations to others by which his duties are determined, and all his powers of thought and feeling called forth. Only the Christian man can ever tell what it is to love with all his heart and soul and strength and mind.

Such an experience as shines through the words of the Apostle in this passage furnishes the key to one of the best known but least understood words of our Saviour. "Verily I say unto you," said Jesus to the twelve, "there is no man that hath left house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the Kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life." These words might almost stand for a description of Paul. He had given up everything for Christ's sake.

He had no home, no wife, no child; as far as we can see, no brother or friend among all his old acquaintances. Yet we may be sure that not one of those who were most richly blessed with all these natural relations and natural affections knew better than he what love is. No father ever loved his children more tenderly, fervently, austerely and unchangeably than Paul loved those whom he had begotten in the gospel. No father was ever rewarded with affection more genuine, obedience more loyal, than many of his converts rendered to him. Even in the trials of love, which search it, and strain it, and bring out its virtues to perfection—in misunderstandings, ingratitude, wilfulness, suspicion—he had an experience with blessings of its own in which he surpassed them all. If love is the true wealth and blessedness of our life, surely none was richer or more blessed than this man, who had given up for Christ's sake all those relations and connections through which love naturally comes. Christ had fulfilled to him the promise just quoted; He had given him a hundredfold in this life, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children. It would have been nothing but loss to cling to the natural affections and decline the lonely apostolic career.

There is something wonderfully vivid in the idea which Paul gives of his love for the Thessalonians.

His mind is full of them; he imagines all the circumstances of trial and danger in which they may be placed; if he could only be with them at need! He seems to follow them as a woman follows with her thoughts the son who has gone alone to a distant town; she remembers him when he goes out in the morning, pities him if there are any circumstances of hardship in his work, pictures him busy in shop or office or street, looks at the clock when he ought to be home for the day; wonders where he is, and with what companions, in the evening; and counts the days till she will see him again. The Christian love of the Apostle, which had no basis at all in nature, was as real as this; and it is a pattern for all those who try to serve others in the gospel. The power of the truth, as far as its ministers are concerned, depends on its being spoken in love; unless the heart of the preacher or teacher is really pledged to those to whom he speaks, he cannot expect but to labour in vain.

Paul is anxious that the Thessalonians should understand the strength of his feeling. It was no passing fancy. On two separate occasions he had determined to revisit them, and had felt, apparently, some peculiar malignity in the circumstances which foiled him. "Satan," he says, "hindered us."

This is one of the expressions which strike us as remote from our present modes of thought. Yet it is

not false or unnatural. It belongs to that profound biblical view of life, according to which all the opposing forces in our experience have at bottom a personal character. We speak of the conflict of good and evil, as if good and evil were powers with an existence of their own but the moment we think of it we see that the only good force in the world is the force of a good will, and the only bad force the force of a bad will; in other words, we see that the conflict of good and evil is essentially a conflict of persons. Good persons are in conflict with bad persons; and so far as the antagonism comes to a head, Christ, the New Testament teaches, is in conflict with Satan. These persons are the centres of force on one side and on the other; and the Apostle discerns, in incidents of his life which have now been lost to us, the presence and working now of this, and now of that. An instructive illustration is really furnished by a passage in Acts which seems at the first glance of a very different purport. It is in the 16th chap., vv. 6—10, in which the historian describes the route of the Apostle from the East to Europe. "They were *forbidden of the Holy Ghost* to speak the word in Asia" . . . . "they assayed to go into Bithynia; and *the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not*" . . . . Paul saw a vision, after which they "sought to go forth into Macedonia, *concluding that God had called them* to preach the gospel unto them." Here,

we might almost say, the three Divine Persons are referred to as the source of intimations directing and controlling the course of the gospel; yet it is evident, from the last mentioned, that such intimations might come in the shape of any event providentially ordered, and that the interpretation of them depended on those to whom they came. The obstacles which checked Paul's impulse to preach in Asia and in Bithynia he recognised to be of Divine appointment; those which prevented him from returning to Thessalonica were of Satanic origin. We do not know what they were; perhaps a plot against his life, which made the journey dangerous; perhaps some sin or scandal that detained him in Corinth. At all events it was the doing of the enemy, who in this world, of which Paul does not hesitate to call him the god, has means enough at his disposal to foil, though he cannot overcome, the saints.

It is a delicate operation, in many cases, to interpret outward events, and say what is the source and what the purpose of this or that. Moral indifference may blind us; but those who are in the thick of the moral conflict have a swift and sure instinct for what is against them or on their side; they can tell at once what is Satanic and what is Divine. As a rule, the two forces will show in their strength at the same time; "a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and

there are many adversaries:" each is a foil to the other. What we ought to remark in this connection is the fundamental character of all moral action. It is not a figure of speech to say that the world is the scene of incessant spiritual conflict; it is the literal truth. And spiritual conflict is not simply an interaction of forces; it is the deliberate antagonism of persons to each other. When we do what is right, we take Christ's side in a real struggle; when we do what is wrong, we side with Satan. It is a question of personal relations; to whose will do I add my own? to whose will do I oppose my own? And the struggle approaches its close for each of us as our will is more thoroughly assimilated to that of one or other of the two leaders. Do not let us dwell in generalities which disguise from us the seriousness of the issue. There is a place in one of his epistles in which Paul uses just such abstract terms as we do in speaking of this matter. "What fellowship," he asks, "have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness?" But he clinches the truth by bringing out the personal relations involved, when he goes on, "And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?" These are the real quantities concerned—all persons: Christ and Belial, believers and unbelievers; all that happens is at bottom Christian or Satanic; all that we do is on

the side of Christ or on the side of the great enemy of our Lord.

The recollection of the Satanic hindrances to his visit does not detain the Apostle more than a moment; his heart overflows them to those whom he describes as his hope and joy and crown of glorying in the day of the Lord Jesus. The form of words[1] implies that these titles are not the property of the Thessalonians only; yet at the same time, that if they belong to anybody, they belong to them.

It is almost a pity to analyse words which are spoken out of the abundance of the heart; yet we pass over the surface, and lose the sense of their truth, unless we do so. What then does Paul mean when he calls the Thessalonians his hope? Every one looks at least a certain distance into the future, and projects something into it to give it reality and interest to himself. That is his hope. It may be the returns he expects from investments of money; it may be the expansion of some scheme he has set on foot for the common good; it may be his children, on whose love and reverence, or on whose advancement in life, he counts for the happiness of his declining years. Paul, we know, had none of these hopes; when he looked down into the future he saw no fortune growing secretly, no peaceful retirement in which the love of

[1] Τίς γὰρ . . . ἢ οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς;

sons and daughters would surround him and call him blessed. Yet his future was not dreary or desolate; it was bright with a great light; he had a hope that made life abundantly worth living, and that hope was the Thessalonians. He saw them in his mind's eye grow daily out of the lingering taint of heathenism into the purity and love of Christ. He saw them, as the discipline of God's providence had its perfect work in them, escape from the immaturity of babes in Christ, and grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour to the measure of the stature of perfect men. He saw them presented faultless in the presence of the Lord's glory in the great day. That was something to live for. To witness that spiritual transformation which he had inaugurated carried on to completion gave the future a greatness and a worth which made the Apostle's heart leap for joy. He is glad when he thinks of his children walking in the truth. They are "a chaplet of victory of which he may justly make his boast"; he is prouder of them than a king of his crown, or a champion in the games of his wreath.

Such words might well be charged with extravagance if we omitted to look at the connection in which they stand. "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at His coming?" *Before our Lord Jesus at His coming:* this

is the presence, this the occasion, with which Paul confronts, in imagination, his hope and joy and triumph. They are such as give him confidence and exultation even as he thinks of the great event which will try all common hopes and put them to shame.

None of us, it may be presumed, is without hope when he looks into the future; but how far does our future extend? For what situation is provision made by the hope that we actually cherish? The one certain event of the future is that we shall stand before our Lord Jesus, at His coming; can we acknowledge there with joy and boasting the hope on which our heart is at present set? Can we carry into that presence the expectation which at this moment gives us courage to look down the years to come? Not every one can. There are multitudes of human hopes which terminate on material things, and expire with Christ's coming; it is not these that can give us joy at last. The only hope whose light is not dimmed by the brightness of Christ's appearing is the disinterested spiritual hope of one who has made himself the servant of others for Jesus' sake, and has lived to see and aid their growth in the Lord. The fire which tries every man's work of what sort it is, brings out the imperishable worth of this. The Old Testament as well as the New tells us that souls saved and sanctified are the one hope and glory of men in

the great day. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." It is a favourite thought of the Apostle himself: "appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, *that I may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ.*" Even the Lord Himself, as he looks at the men whom He has gathered out of the world, can say, *I am glorified* in them. It is His glory, as the Father's servant, that He has sought and found and sanctified His Church.

We ought not to pass by such fervent utterances as if they must mean less than they say. We ought not, because our own hold on the circle of Christian facts is weak, to glide over the qualification, "before our Lord Jesus at His coming," as if it were without any solid meanlng. The Bible is verbally inspired at least in the sense that nothing in it is otiose; every word is meant. And we miss the main lesson of this passage, if we do not ask ourselves whether we have any hope which is valid on the grand occasion in question. Your future may be secured as far as this world is concerned. Your investments may be as safe as the National debt; the loyalty and virtue of your children all that heart could wish; you are not afraid of poverty, loneliness, age. But what of our Lord Jesus, and His coming? Will your hope be worth

anything before Him, at that day? You do not know how near it is. For some it may be very near. There are people in every congregation who know they cannot live ten years. No one knows that he will live so long. And all are summoned to take that great event into their view of the future, and to make ready for it. Is it not a fine thing to think that, if we do so, we can look forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus with hope and joy and triumph?

The intensity of Paul's love for the Thessalonians made his longing to see them intolerable; and after being twice baffled in his attempts to revisit them he sent Timothy in his stead. Rather than be without news of them he was content to be left in Athens alone. He mentions this as if it had been a great sacrifice, and probably it was so for him. He seems to have been in many ways dependent on the sympathy and assistance of others; and, of all places he ever visited, Athens was the most trying to his ardent temperament. It was covered with idols and exceedingly religious; yet it seemed to him more hopelessly away from God than any city in the world. Never had he been left alone in a place so unsympathetic; never had he felt so great a gulf fixed between others' minds and his own; and Timothy had no sooner gone than he made his way to Corinth, where his messenger found him on his return.

The object of this mission is sufficiently plain from what has been already said. The Apostle knew the troubles that had beset the Thessalonians; and it was Timothy's function to establish them and to comfort them concerning their faith, that no man should be moved by these afflictions. The word translated "moved" occurs only this once in the New Testament, and the meaning is not quite certain. It may be quite as general as our version represents it; but it may also have a more definite sense, viz., that of allowing oneself to be befooled, or flattered out of one's faith, in the midst of tribulations. Besides the vehement enemies who pursued Paul with open violence, there may have been others who spoke of him to the Thessalonians as a mere enthusiast, the victim in his own person of delusions about a resurrection and a life to come, which he sought to impose upon others; and who, when affliction came on the Church, tried by appeals of this sort to wheedle the Thessalonians out of their faith. Such a situation would answer very exactly to the peculiar word here used. But however this may be, the general situation was plain. The Church was suffering; suffering is a trial which not every one can bear; and Paul was anxious to have some one with them who had learned the elementary Christian lesson, that it is inevitable. The disciples had not, indeed, been taken by surprise. The Apostle had told

them before that to this lot Christians were appointed; we are destined, he says, to suffer affliction. Nevertheless, it is one thing to know this by being told, and another to know it, as the Thessalonians now did, by experience. The two things are as different as reading a book about a trade, and serving an apprenticeship to it.

The suffering of the good because they are good is mysterious, in part because it has the two aspects here made so manifest. On the one hand, it comes by Divine appointment; it is the law under which the Son of God Himself and all His followers live. But on the other hand, it is capable of a double issue. It may perfect those who endure it as ordained by God; it may bring out the solidity of their character, and redound to the glory of their Saviour; or it may give an opening to the tempter to seduce them from a path so full of pain. The one thing of which Paul is certain is, that the salvation of Christ is cheaply purchased at any price of affliction. Christ's life here and hereafter is the supreme good; the one thing needful, for which all else may be counted loss.

This possible double issue of suffering—in higher goodness, or in the abandonment of the narrow way—explains the difference of tone with which Scripture speaks of it in different places. With the happy issue in view, it bids us count it all joy when we fall into

divers temptations; blessed, it exclaims, is the man who endures; for when he is found proof, he shall receive the crown of life. But with human weakness in view, and the terrible consequences of failure, it bids us pray, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. The true Christian will seek, in all the afflictions of life, to combine the courage and hope of the one view with the humility and fear of the other.

VIII.

LOVE AND PRAYERS.

"But when Timothy came even now unto us from you, and brought us glad tidings of your faith and love, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, even as we also *to see* you; for this cause, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our distress and affliction through your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we render again unto God for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face, and may perfect that which is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way unto you: and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we also *do* toward you; to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."—1 THESS. iii. 6-13 (R.V.).

VIII.

LOVE AND PRAYERS.

THESE verses present no peculiar difficulty to the expositor. They illustrate the remark of Bengel that the First Epistle to the Thessalonians is characterised by a kind of unmixed sweetness,—a quality which is insipid to those who are indifferent to the relations in which it is displayed, but which can never lose its charm for simple, kindly, Christian hearts.

It is worth observing that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians the moment Timothy returned.[1] Such promptitude has not only a business value, but a moral and Christian worth as well. It not only prevents arrears from accumulating; it gives those to whom we write the first and freshest feelings of the heart. Of course one may write hastily, as well as speak hastily; a living critic has had the audacity to say that if Paul had kept the Epistle to the Galatians long enough to read it over, he would have thrown it into the fire; but most of our faults as correspondents arise, not from

[1] Αρτι is naturally taken with ἐλθόντος: as by Ellicott.

precipitation, but from undue delay. Where our hearts prompt us to speak or to write, let us dread procrastination as a sin. The letter of congratulation or condolence is natural and in place, and it will be inspired by true feeling, if it is written when the sad or joyful news has touched the heart with genuine sympathy; but if it is put off till a more convenient season, it will never be done as it ought to be. How fervent and hearty is the language in which Paul here expresses himself. The news that Timothy has brought from Thessalonica is a veritable gospel to him. It has comforted him in all his necessities and distresses; it has brought him new life; it has been an indescribable joy. If he had not written for a fortnight, we should have missed this rebound of gladness; and what is more serious, the Thessalonians would have missed it. Cold-hearted people may think they would have survived the loss; but it is a loss which the cold hearted cannot estimate. Who can doubt that, when this letter was read in the little congregation at Thessalonica, the hearts of the disciples warmed again to the great teacher who had been among them, and to the message of love which he had preached? The gospel is wonderfully commended by the manifestation of its own spirit in its ministers, and the love of Paul to the Thessalonians no doubt made it easier for them to believe in the love of God, and to love one another.

For good, as well as for evil, a little spark can kindle a great fire; and it would only be natural if the burning words of this letter kindled the flame of love anew in hearts in which it was beginning to die.

There were two causes for Paul's joy,—one larger and more public; the other, proper to himself. The first was the faith and love of the Thessalonians, or, as he calls it further on, their standing fast in the Lord; the other was their affectionate and faithful remembrance of him, their desire, earnestly reciprocated on his part, to see his face once more.

The visitation of a Christian congregation by a deputy from Synod or Assembly is sometimes embarrassing: no one knows exactly what is wanted; a schedule of queries, filled up by the minister or the office-bearers, is a painfully formal affair, which gives little real knowledge of the health and spirit of the Church. But Timothy was one of the founders of the church at Thessalonica; he had an affectionate and natural interest in it; he came at once into close contact with its real condition, and found the disciples full of faith and love. Faith and love are not easily calculated and registered; but where they exist in any power, they are easily felt by a Christian man. They determine the temperature of the congregation; and a very short experience enables a true disciple to tell whether it is high or low. To the great joy of

Timothy, he found the Thessalonians unmistakably Christian. They were standing fast in the Lord. Christ was the basis, the centre, the soul of their life. Their faith is mentioned twice, because that is the most comprehensive word to describe the new life in its root; they still kept their hold of the Word of God in the gospel; no one could live among them and not feel that unseen things were real to their souls; God and Christ, the resurrection and the coming judgment, the atonement and the final salvation, were the great forces which ruled their thoughts and lives. Faith in these distinguished them from their Pagan neighbours. It made them a Christian congregation, in which an Evangelist like Timothy at once found himself at home. The common faith had its most signal exhibition in love; if it separated the brethren from the rest of the world, it united them more closely to each other. Every one knows what love is in a family, and how different the spiritual atmosphere is, according as love reigns or is disregarded in the relations of the household. In some homes, love does reign: parents and children, brothers and sisters, masters and servants, bear themselves beautifully to each other; it is a delight to visit them; there is openness and simplicity, sweetness of temper, a willingness to deny self, a readiness to be interested in others, no suspicion, reserve, or gloom; there is one mind and one heart

in old and young, and a brightness like the sunshine. In others, again, we see the very opposite: friction, self-will, captiousness, mutual distrust, readiness to suspect or to sneer, a painful separation of hearts that should be one. And the same holds good of churches, which are in reality large families, united not by natural but by spiritual bonds. We ought all to be friends. There ought to be a spirit of love shed abroad in our hearts, drawing us to each other in spite of natural differences, giving us an unaffected interest in each other, making us frank, sincere, cordial, self-denying, eager to help where help is needed and it is in our power to render it, ready to resign our own liking, and our own judgment even, to the common mind and purpose of the Church. These two graces of faith and love are the very soul of the Christian life. It is good news to a good man to hear that they exist in any church. It is good news to Christ.

But besides this more public cause for joy, which Paul shared to some extent with all Christian men, there was another more private to himself,—their good remembrance of him, and their earnest desire to see him. Paul wrought for nothing but love. He did not care for money or for fame; but a place in the hearts of his disciples was dear to him above everything else in the world. He did not always get it. Sometimes those who had just heard the gospel from his lips, and

welcomed its glad tidings, were prejudiced against him; they deserted him for more attractive preachers; they forgot, amid the multitude of their Christian instructors, the father who had begotten them in the gospel. Such occurrences, of which we read in the Epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians, were a deep grief to Paul; and though he says to one of these thankless churches, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved," he says also, "Brethren, receive us; make room for us in your hearts; *our* heart has been opened wide to *you*." He hungered and thirsted for an answer of love to all the love which he lavished on his converts; and his heart leapt up when Timothy returned from Thessalonica, and told him that the disciples there had good remembrance of him, that is, spoke of him with love, and longed to see him once more. Nobody is fit to be a servant of Christ in any degree, as parent, or teacher, or elder, or pastor, who does not know what this craving for love is. It is not selfishness: it is itself one side of love. Not to care for a place in the hearts of others; not to wish for love, not to need it, not to miss it if it is wanting, does not signify that we are free from selfishness or vanity: it is the mark of a cold and narrow heart, shut up in itself, and disqualified for any service the very essence of which is love. The thanklessness or indifference of

others is not a reason why we should cease to serve them; yet it is apt to make the attempt at service heartless; and if you would encourage any who have ever helped you in your spiritual life, do not forget them, but esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake.

When Timothy returned from Thessalonica, he found Paul sorely in need of good news. He was beset by distress and affliction; not inward or spiritual troubles, but persecutions and sufferings, which befell him from the enemies of the gospel. So extreme was his distress that he even speaks of it by implication as death. But the glad tidings of Thessalonian faith and love swept it at once away. They brought comfort, joy, thanksgiving, life from the dead. How intensely, we are compelled to say, did this man live his apostolic life! What depths and heights are in it; what depression, not stopping short of despair; what hope, not falling short of triumph. There are Christian workers in multitudes whose experience, it is to be feared, gives them no key to what we read here. There is less passion in their life in a year than there was in Paul's in a day; they know nothing of these transitions from distress and affliction to unspeakable joy and praise. Of course all men are not alike; all natures are not equally impressible; but surely all who are engaged in work which asks the heart or nothing should suspect

themselves if they go on from week to week and year to year with heart unmoved? It is a great thing to have part in a work which deals with men for their spiritual interests—which has in view life and death, God and Christ, salvation and judgment. Who can think of failures and discouragements without pain and fear? who can hear the glad tidings of victory without heartfelt joy? Is it not those only who have neither part nor lot in the matter?

The Apostle in the fulness of his joy turns with devout gratitude toward God. It is He who has kept the Thessalonians from falling, and the only return the Apostle can make is to express his thankfulness. He feels how unworthy words are of God's kindness; how unequal even to his own feelings; but they are the first recompense to be made, and he does not withhold them. There is no surer mark of a truly pious spirit than this grateful mood. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above; most directly and immediately are all gifts like love and faith to be referred to God as their source, and to call forth the thanks and praise of those who are interested in them. If God does little for us, giving us few signs of His presence and help, may it not be because we have refused to acknowledge His kindness when He has interposed on our behalf? "Whoso offereth praise," He says, "glorifieth Me.' "In everything give thanks."

Paul's love for the Thessalonians did not blind him to their imperfections. It was their faith which comforted him in all his distress, yet he speaks of the deficiencies of their faith as something he sought to remedy. In one sense, faith is a very simple thing, the setting of the heart right with God in Christ Jesus. In another, it is very comprehensive. It has to lay hold on the whole revelation which God has made in His Son, and it has to pass into action through love in every department of life. It is related on the one side to knowledge, and on the other to conduct. Now Timothy saw that while the Thessalonians had the root of the matter in them, and had set themselves right with God, they were far from perfect. They were ignorant of much which it concerned Christians to know; they had false ideas on many points in regard to which God had given light. They had much to do before they could be said to have escaped from the prejudices, the instincts, and the habits of heathenism, and to have entered completely into the mind of Christ. In later chapters we shall find the Apostle rectifying what was amiss in their notions both of truth and duty; and, in doing so, opening up to us the lines on which defective faith needs to be corrected and supplemented.

But we should not pass by this notice of the deficiencies of faith without asking ourselves whether our

own faith is alive and progressive. It may be quite true and sound in itself; but what if it never gets any further on? It is in its nature an engrafting into Christ, a setting of the soul into a vital connection with Him; and if it is what it should be, there will be a transfusion, by means of it, of Christ into us. We shall get a larger and surer possession of the mind of Christ, which is the standard both of spiritual truth and of spiritual life. His thoughts will be our thoughts; His judgment, our judgment; His estimates of life and the various elements in it, our estimates; His disposition and conduct, the pattern and the inspiration of ours. Faith is a little thing in itself, the smallest of small beginnings; in its earliest stage it is compatible with a high degree of ignorance, of foolishness, of insensibility in the conscience; and hence the believer must not forget that he is a disciple; and that though he has entered the school of Christ, he has only entered it, and has many classes to pass through, and much to learn and unlearn, before he can become a credit to his Teacher. An Apostle coming among us would in all likelihood be struck with manifest deficiencies in our faith. This aspect of the truth, he would say, is overlooked; this vital doctrine is not really a vital piece of your minds; in your estimate of such and such a thing you are betrayed by worldly prejudices that have survived your conversion; in your

conduct in such and such a situation you are utterly at variance with Christ. He would have much to teach us, no doubt, of truth, of right and wrong, and of our Christian calling; and if we wish to remedy the defects of our faith, we must give heed to the words of Christ and His Apostles, so that we may not only be engrafted into Him, but grow up into Him in all things, and become perfect men in Christ Jesus.

In view of their deficiencies, Paul prayed exceedingly that he might see the Thessalonians again; and conscious of his own inability to overcome the hindrances raised in his path by Satan, he refers the whole matter to God. "May our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you." Certainly in that prayer the person directly addressed is our God and Father Himself; our Lord Jesus Christ is introduced in subordination to Him; yet what a dignity is implied in this juxtaposition of God and Christ! Surely the name of a merely human creature, even if such could be exalted to share the throne of God, could not possibly appear in this connexion. It is not to be overlooked that both in this and in the similar passage in 2 Thess. ii. 16 f., where God and Christ are named side by side, the verb is in the singular number. It is an involuntary assent of the Apostle to the word of the Lord, "I and My Father are one." We

can understand why He added in this place "our Lord Jesus Christ" to "our God and Father." It was not only that all power was given to the Son in heaven and on earth; but that, as Paul well knew from that day on which the Lord arrested him by Damascus, the Saviour's heart beat in sympathy with His suffering Church, and would surely respond to any prayer on its behalf. Nevertheless, he leaves the result to God; and even if he is not permitted to come to them, he can still pray for them, as he does in the closing verses of the chapter: "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we also do toward you; to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."

Here it is distinctly Christ who is addressed in prayer; and what the Apostle asks is that He may make the Thessalonians increase and abound in love. Love, he seems to say, is the one grace in which all others are comprehended; we can never have too much of it; we can never have enough. The strong words of the prayer really ask that the Thessalonians may be loving in a superlative degree, overflowing with love. And notice the aspect in which love is here presented to us: it is a power and an exercise of our own souls certainly, yet we are not the fountain of it; it is

the Lord who is to make us rich in love. The best commentary on this prayer is the word of the Apostle in another letter: "The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost which was given unto us." "We love, because He first loved us." In whatever degree love exists in us, God is its source; it is like a faint pulse, every separate beat of which tells of the throbbing of the heart; and it is only as God imparts His Spirit to us more fully that our capacity for loving deepens and expands. When that Spirit springs up within us, an inexhaustible fountain, then rivers of living water, streams of love, will overflow on all around. For God is love, and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.

Paul seeks love for his converts as the means by which their hearts may be established unblameable in holiness. That is a notable direction for those in search of holiness. A selfish, loveless heart can never succeed in this quest. A cold heart is not unblameable, and never will be; it is either pharisaical or foul, or both. But love sanctifies. Often we only escape from our sins by escaping from ourselves; by a hearty, self-denying, self-forgetting interest in others. It is quite possible to think so much about holiness as to put holiness out of our reach: it does not come with concentrating thought upon ourselves at all; it is the child of love, which kindles a fire in

the heart in which faults are burnt up. Love is the fulfilling of the law; the sum of the ten commandments; the end of all perfection. Do not let us imagine that there is any other holiness than that which is thus created. There is an ugly kind of faultlessness which is always raising its head anew in the Church; a holiness which knows nothing of love, but consists in a sort of spiritual isolation, in censoriousness, in holding up one's head and shaking off the dust of one's feet against brethren, in conceit, in condescension, in sanctimonious separateness from the freedom of common life, as though one were too good for the company which God has given him: all this is as common in the Church as it is plainly condemned in the New Testament. It is an abomination in God's sight. Except your righteousness, says Christ, exceed this, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Love exceeds it infinitely, and opens the door which is closed to every other claim.

The kingdom of heaven comes before the Apostle's mind as he writes. The Thessalonians are to be blameless in holiness, not in the judgment of any human tribunal, but before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. At the end of each of these three chapters this great event has risen into view. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is a scene of judgment for some; of joy

and glory for others; of imposing splendour for all. Many think that the last words here, "with all His saints," refer to the angels, and Zech. xiv. 5,—"The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with Thee,"—in which angels are undoubtedly meant, has been quoted in support of this view; but such a use of "saints" would be unexampled in the New Testament.[1] The Apostle means the dead in Christ, who, as he explains in a later chapter, will swell the Lord's train at His coming. The instinctiveness with which Paul recurs to this great event shows how large a place it filled in his creed and in his heart. His hope was a hope of Christ's second coming; his joy was a joy which would not pale in that awful presence; his holiness was a holiness to stand the test of those searching eyes. Where has this supreme motive gone in the modern Church? Is not this one point in which the apostolic word bids us perfect that which is lacking in our faith?

[1] Yet see Jude 14, quoting from Enoch.

IX.

PERSONAL PURITY.

"Finally then, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as ye received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, even as ye do walk,—that ye abound more and more. For ye know what charge we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles which know not God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in the matter: because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified. For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God, who giveth His Holy Spirit unto you."—1 THESS. iv. 1-8 (R.V.).

IX.

PERSONAL PURITY.

THE "finally" with which this chapter opens is the beginning of the end of the Epistle. The personal matter which has hitherto occupied us was the immediate cause of the Apostle's writing; he wished to open his heart to the Thessalonians, and to vindicate his conduct against the insidious accusations of his enemies; and having done so, his main purpose is fulfilled. For what remains—this is the meaning of "finally"—he has a few words to say suggested by Timothy's report upon their state.

The previous chapter closed with a prayer for their growth in love, with a view to their establishment in holiness. The prayer of a good man avails much in its working; but his prayer of intercession cannot secure the result it seeks without the co-operation of those for whom it is made. Paul, who has besought the Lord on their behalf, now beseeches the Thessalonians themselves, and exhorts them in the Lord Jesus, to walk as they had been taught by him. The

gospel, we see from this passage, contains a new law; the preacher must not only do the work of an evangelist, proclaiming the glad tidings of reconciliation to God, but the work of a catechist also, enforcing on those who receive the glad tidings the new law of Christ. This is in accordance with the final charge of the Saviour: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The Apostle had followed this Divine order; he had made disciples in Thessalonica, and then he had taught them how to walk and to please God. We who have been born in a Christian country, and bred on the New Testament, are apt to think that we know all these things; our conscience seems to us a sufficient light. We ought to know that, though conscience is universal in the human race, and everywhere distinguishes between a right and a wrong, there is not one of our faculties which is more in need of enlightenment. No one doubts that men who have been converted from heathenism, like the Thessalonians, or the fruits of modern missions in Nyassaland or Madagascar, need to be *taught* what kind of life pleases God; but in some measure we all need such teaching. We have not been true to conscience; it is set in our human nature like the unprotected compass in the early

iron ships: it is exposed to influences from other parts of our nature which bias and deflect it without our knowledge. It needs to be adjusted to the holy will of God, the unchangeable standard of right, and protected against disturbing forces. In Thessalonica Paul had laid down the new law, he says, *through the Lord Jesus.* If it had not been for Him, we should have been without the knowledge of it altogether; we should have had no adequate conception of the life with which God is well pleased. But such a life is exhibited to us in the Gospels; its spirit and requirements can be deduced from Christ's example, and are explicitly set forth in His words. He left us an example, that we should follow in His steps. "Follow Me," is the sum of His commandments; the one all-embracing law of the Christian life.

One of the subjects of which we should gladly know more is the use of the Gospels in the early Church; and this passage gives us one of the earliest glimpses of it. The peculiar mention of the Lord Jesus in the second verse shows that the Apostle used the words and example of the Master as the basis of his moral teaching; the mind of Christ is the norm for the Christian conscience. And if it be true that we still need enlightenment as to the claims of God and the law of life, it is here we must seek it. The words of Jesus have still their old authority. They

still search our hearts, and show us all things that ever we did, and their moral worth or worthlessness. They still reveal to us unsuspected ranges of life and action in which God is not yet acknowledged. They still open to us gates of righteousness, and call on us to enter in, and subdue new territories to God. The man who is most advanced in the life which pleases God, and whose conscience is most nearly identical with the mind of Christ, will be the first to confess his constant need of, and his constant dependence upon, the word and example of the Lord Jesus.

In addressing the Thessalonians, Paul is careful to recognise their actual obedience. Ye do walk, he writes, according to this rule. In spite of sins and imperfections, the church, as a whole, had a Christian character; it was exhibiting human life in Thessalonica on the new model; and while he hints that there is room for indefinite progress, he does not fail to notice their present attainments. That is a rule of wisdom, not only for those who have to censure or to teach, but for all who wish to judge soberly the state and prospects of the Church. We know the necessity there is for abounding more and more in Christian obedience; we can see in how many directions, doctrinal and practical, that which is lacking in faith requires to be perfected; but we need not therefore be blind to the fact that it is in the Church that the Christian standard

is held up, and that continuous, and not quite unsuccessful efforts, are made to reach it. The best men in a community, those whose lives come nearest to pleasing God, are to be found among those who are identified with the gospel; and if the worst men in the community are also found in the Church at times, that is because the corruption of the best is worst. If God has not cast off His Church altogether, He is teaching her to do His will.

"For this," the Apostle proceeds, "is the will of God, even your sanctification." It is assumed here that the will of God is the law, and ought to be the inspiration, of the Christian. God has taken him out of the world that he may be His, and live in Him and for Him. He is not his own any longer; even his will is not his own; it is to be caught up and made one with the will of God; and that is sanctification. No human will works apart from God to this end of holiness. The other influences which reach it, and bend it into accord with them, are from beneath, not from above; as long as it does not recognise the will of God as its rule and support, it is a carnal, worldly, sinful will. But the will of God, to which it is called to submit, is the saving of the human will from this degradation. For the will of God is not only a law to which we are required to conform, it is the one great and effective moral power in the universe, and it summons us to

enter into alliance and co-operation with itself. It is not a dead thing; it is God Himself working in us in furtherance of His good pleasure. To tell us what the will of God is, is not to tell us what is against us, but what is on our side; not the force which we have to encounter, but that on which we can depend. If we set out on an un-Christian life, on a career of falsehood, sensuality, worldliness, God is against us; if we go to perdition, we go breaking violently through the safeguards with which He has surrounded us, overpowering the forces by which He seeks to keep us in check; but if we set ourselves to the work of sanctification, He is on our side. He works in us and with us, because our sanctification is His will. Paul does not mention it here to dishearten the Thessalonians, but to stimulate them. Sanctification is the one task which we can face confident that we are not left to our own resources. God is not the taskmaster we have to satisfy out of our own poor efforts, but the holy and loving Father who inspires and sustains us from first to last. To fall in with His will is to enlist all the spiritual forces of the world in our aid; it is to pull with, instead of against, the spiritual tide.

In the passage before us the Apostle contrasts our sanctification with the cardinal vice of heathenism, impurity. Above all other sins, this was characteristic of the Gentiles *who knew not God.* There is some-

thing striking in that description of the pagan world in this connection: ignorance of God was at once the cause and the effect of their vileness; had they retained God in their knowledge, they could never have sunk to such depths of shame; had they shrunk from pollution with instinctive horror, they would never have been abandoned to such ignorance of God. No one who is not familiar with ancient literature can have the faintest idea of the depth and breadth of the corruption. Not only in writers avowedly immoral, but in the most magnificent works of a genius as lofty and pure as Plato, there are pages that would stun with horror the most hardened profligate in Christendom. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that on the whole matter in question the heathen world was without conscience: it had sinned away its sense of the difference between right and wrong; to use the words of the Apostle in another passage, being past feeling men had given themselves up to work all manner of uncleanness. They gloried in their shame. Frequently, in his epistles, Paul combines this vice with covetousness,—the two together representing the great interests of life to the ungodly, the flesh and the world. Those who do not know God and live for Him, live, as he saw with fearful plainness, to indulge the flesh and to heap up gain. Some think that in the passage before us this combination is made, and that ver. 6—

"that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in *any* matter"—is a prohibition of dishonesty in business; but that is almost certainly[1] a mistake. As the Revised Version shows, the Apostle is speaking of the matter in hand; in the Church especially, among brethren in Christ, in the Christian home, the uncleanness of heathenism can have no place. Marriage is to be sanctified. Every Christian, marrying in the Lord, is to exhibit in his home-life the Christian law of sanctification and noble self-respect.

The Apostle adds to his warning against sensuality the terrible sanction, "The Lord is an avenger in all these things." The want of conscience in the heathen world generated a vast indifference on this point. If impurity was a sin, it was certainly not a crime. The laws did not interfere with it; public opinion was at best neutral; the unclean person might presume upon impunity. To a certain extent this is the case still. The laws are silent, and treat the deepest guilt as a civil offence. Public opinion is indeed stronger and

[1] Still I do not feel quite certain (in spite of 2 Cor. ii. 11) that πλεονεκτεῖν and πλεονεξία in St. Paul can refer to anything but covetousness. This is the view taken by Schmidt, who refers to the combination, in 1 Cor. v. 10, vi. 10, of πλεονέκτης with ἅρπαξ and κλέπτης. If it is correct, ἐν τῷ πράγματι must be translated "in business"; "*dass in geschäftlichen Dingen Keiner ausschreite und seinen Bruder ausbeute.*" Certainly the combination of sensuality and avarice as the cardinal vices of heathendom is characteristic of the Apostle.

more hostile than it once was, for the leaven of Christ's kingdom is actively at work in society; but public opinion can only touch open and notorious offenders, those who have been guilty of scandal as well as of sin; and secrecy is still tempted to count upon impunity. But here we are solemnly warned that the Divine law of purity has sanctions of its own above any cognisance taken of offences by man. "The Lord is an avenger in all these things." "Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience."

Is it not true? They are avenged on the bodies of the sinful. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The holy law of God, wrought into the very constitution of our bodies, takes care that we do not violate it without paying the penalty. If it is not at the moment, it is in the future, and with interest,—in premature old age; in the torpor which succeeds all spendthrift feats, excesses of man's prime; in the sudden break-down under any strain put on either physical or moral courage. They are avenged in the soul. Sensual indulgence extinguishes the capacity for feeling: the profligate man would love, but cannot; all that is inspiring, elevating, redeeming in the passions is lost to him; all that remains is the dull sense of that incalculable loss. Were there ever sadder lines written than those in which Burns, with

his life ruined by this very thing, writes to a young friend and warns him against it?

> "I wave the quantum o' the sin,
> The hazard o' concealing;
> But Och! it hardens a' within,
> And petrifies the feeling."

This inward deadening is one of the most terrible consequences of immorality; it is so unexpected, so unlike the anticipations of youthful passion, so stealthy in its approach, so inevitable, so irreparable. All these sins are avenged also in the will and in the spiritual nature. Most men repent of their early excesses; some never cease to repent. Repentance, at least, is what it is habitually called; but that is not really repentance which does not separate the soul from sin. That access of weakness which comes upon the back of indulgence, that break-down of the soul in impotent self-pity, is no saving grace. It is a counterfeit of repentance unto life, which deludes those whom sin has blinded, and which, when often enough repeated, exhausts the soul and leaves it in despair. Is there any vengeance more terrible than that? When *Christian* was about to leave the Interpreter's house, "Stay," said the Interpreter, "till I have showed thee a little more, and after that thou shalt go on thy way." What was the sight without which Christian was not allowed to start upon his journey? It was the Man of Despair,

sitting in the iron cage,—the man who, when Christian asked him "How camest thou in this condition?" made answer: "I left off to watch and be sober; I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the word and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit, and He is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to me; I have provoked God to anger, and He has left me; I have so hardened my heart that I cannot repent." This is no fancy picture: it is drawn to the life; it is drawn from the life; it is the very voice and tone in which many a man has spoken who has lived an unclean life under the cloak of a Christian profession. They who do such things do not escape the avenging holiness of God. Even death, the refuge to which despair so often drives, holds out no hope to them. There remaineth no more a sacrifice for sin, but a fearful expectation of judgment.

The Apostle dwells upon God's interest in purity. He is the avenger of all offences against it; but vengeance is His strange work. He has called us with a calling utterly alien to it,—not based on uncleanness or contemplating it, like some of the religions in Corinth, where Paul wrote this letter; but having sanctification, purity in body and in spirit, for its very element. The idea of "calling" is one which has been much degraded and impoverished in modern times. By a man's calling we usually understand his trade,

profession, or business, whatever it may be; but our calling in Scripture is something quite different from this. It is our life considered, not as filling a certain place in the economy of society, but as satisfying a certain purpose in the mind and will of God. It is a calling *in Christ Jesus*; apart from Him it could not have existed. The Incarnation of the Son of God; His holy life upon the earth; His victory over all our temptations; His consecration of our weak flesh to God; His sanctification, by His own sinless experience, of our childhood, youth, and manhood, with all their unconsciousness, their bold anticipations, their sense of power, their bent to lawlessness and pride; His agony and His death upon the Cross; His glorious resurrection and ascension,—all these were necessary before we could be called with a Christian calling. Can any one imagine that the vices of heathenism, lust or covetousness, are compatible with a calling like this? Are they not excluded by the very idea of it? It would repay us, I think, to lift that noble word "calling" from the base uses to which it has descended; and to give it in our minds the place it has in the New Testament. It is God who has called us, and He has called us in Christ Jesus, and therefore called us to be saints. Flee, therefore, all that is unholy and unclean.

In the last verse of the paragraph the Apostle urges

both his appeals once more: he recalls the severity and the goodness of God.

"Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God." "Rejecteth" is a contemptuous word; in the margin of the Authorised Version it is rendered, as in some other places in Scripture, "despiseth." There are such things as sins of ignorance; there are cases in which the conscience is bewildered; even in a Christian community the vitality of conscience may be low, and sins, therefore, be prevalent, without being so deadly to the individual soul; but that is never true of the sin before us. To commit this sin is to sin against the light. It is to do what every one in contact with the Church knows, and from the beginning has known, to be wrong. It is to be guilty of deliberate, wilful, high-handed contempt of God. It is little to be warned by an apostle or a preacher; it is little to despise him: but behind all human warnings is the voice of God; behind all human sanctions of the law is God's inevitable vengeance; and it is that which is braved by the impure. "He that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God."

But God, we are reminded again in the last words, is not against us, but on our side. He is the Holy One, and an avenger in all these things; but He is also the God of Salvation, our deliverer from them all, who *gives His Holy Spirit unto us.* The words put in the strongest light God's interest in us and in our

sanctification. It is our sanctification He desires ; to this He calls us ; for this He works in us. Instead of shrinking from us, because we are so unlike Him, He puts His Holy Spirit into our impure hearts, He puts His own strength within our reach that we may lay hold upon it, He offers us His hand to grasp. It is this searching, condescending, patient, omnipotent love, which is rejected by those who are immoral. They grieve the Holy Spirit of God, that Spirit which Christ won for us by His atoning death, and which is able to make us clean. There is no power which can sanctify us but this ; nor is there any sin which is too deep or too black for the Holy Spirit to overcome. Hearken to the words of the Apostle in another place : "Be not deceived : neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you : but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

X.

CHARITY AND INDEPENDENCE.

"But concerning love of the brethren ye have no need that one write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another; for indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, that ye abound more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands, even as we charged you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing."—1 THESS. iv. 9-12 (R.V.).

X.

CHARITY AND INDEPENDENCE.

WHEN the gospel first came abroad in the world, two characteristics of its adherents attracted general attention, namely, personal purity and brotherly love. Amid the gross sensuality of heathenism, the Christian stood out untainted by indulgence of the flesh; amid the utter heartlessness of pagan society, which made no provision for the poor, the sick, or the aged, the Church was conspicuous for the close union of its members and their brotherly kindness to each other. Personal purity and brotherly love were the notes of the Christian and of the Christian community in the early days; they were the new and regenerating virtues which the Spirit of Christ had called into existence in the heart of a dying world. The opening verses of this chapter enforce the first; those at present before us treat of the second.

"Concerning love of the brethren ye have no need that one write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." The principle, that is, of

brotherly love is of the very essence of Christianity; it is not a remote consequence of it which might easily be overlooked unless it were pointed out. Every believer is taught of God to love the brother who shares his faith; such love is the best and only guarantee of his own salvation; as the Apostle John writes, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." It is perhaps not unnecessary to remark that, in the New Testament, brethren means fellow-Christians, and not fellow-men. We *have* duties to all men, which the Bible does not fail to recognise and enforce; we are one with them in the nature God has given us, and the great alternatives life sets before us; and that natural unity is the basis of duties which all owe to each other. Honour *all* men. But the Church of Christ creates new relations between its members, and with these new relations mutual obligations still more strong and binding. God Himself is the Saviour of all, specially of them that believe; and Christians in like manner are bound, as they have opportunity, to do good unto all men, but specially to those who are of the household of faith. This is not sufficiently considered by most Christian people; who, if they looked into the matter, might find that few of their strongest affections were determined by the common faith. Is not love a strong and peculiar word to describe the feeling you cherish toward some

members of the Church, brethren to you in Christ Jesus? yet love to the brethren is the very token of our right to a place in the Church for ourselves. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

These words of John give us the key to the expression "taught of God to love one another." It is not likely that they refer to anything so external as the words of Scripture, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Even in the Old Testament, to be taught of God was something more spiritual than this; it was the same thing as to have the law written on the heart. That is what the Apostle has in view here. The Christian has been born again, born of God; he has a new nature, with new instincts, a new law, a new spontaneity; it is now native to him to love. Until the Spirit of God enters into men's hearts and recreates them, life is a war of all against all; man is a wolf to man; but in the Church that internecine strife has ended, for its members are the children of God, and "every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him." The selfishness of man's nature is veiled, and to some extent repressed, in other societies; but it is not, as a principle, exterminated except in the Church and by the Spirit of Christ. A family ought to be an unselfish place, ruled only by love, and fostering the spirit of love; yet if Christ be not there, what selfish passions assert themselves in

spite of all restraint. Any association working for the common good—a town council even—ought to be an unselfish body; yet how often, in such places, is rivalry conspicuous, and self-seeking, and envy, and detraction, and all that is unlike Christ. In the Church which has been taught of God, or, in other words, which has learned of Christ, we find at least some manifestations of a better spirit. It does contain people who love one another because they are Christians; who are unselfish, giving way to each other, esteeming each other, helping each other; if it contained none such, it would not be a Church at all.

The brotherly love of the early Church was not only visible to the world; it was its great recommendation in the world's eyes. It had brought a new thing into being, a thing for which the world was pining, namely, vital society. The poor people in the cities of Asia and Europe saw with wonder, joy, and hope, men and women united to one another in a spiritual union, which gave scope to all their gifts for society, and satisfied all their desires for it. The early Christian churches were little companies of people where love was at a high temperature, where outward pressure very often tightened the inward bonds, and where mutual confidence diffused continual joy. Men were drawn to them irresistibly by the desire to share this life of love. It is the very same force which at this moment draws

those who are outcasts from society into the Salvation Army. Whatever the failings of that organisation may be, its members are as brothers; the sense of union, of mutual obligation, of mutual confidence, in one word, of brotherly love, is very strong; and souls that pine for that atmosphere are drawn to it with overpowering force. It is not good for man to be alone; it is vain for him to seek the satisfaction of his social instincts in any of the casual, selfish, or sinful associations by which he is often betrayed: even the natural affection of the family, pure and strong as it may be, does not answer to the width of his spiritual nature; his heart cries out for that society founded on brotherly love which only the Church of Christ provides. If there is one thing more than another which explains the Church's failure in missionary work, it is the absence of this spirit of love among her members. If men were compelled to cry still, as in the early days of the gospel, "Behold these Christians, how they love one another," they would not be able to remain outside. Their hearts would kindle at the glow, and all that hindered their incorporation would be burned up.

The Apostle acknowledges the progress of the Thessalonians. They show this brotherly love to all the brethren that are in all Macedonia; but he beseeches them to abound more and more. Nothing is more inconsistent with the gospel than narrowness of mind

or heart, however often Christians may belie their profession by such vices. Perhaps of all churches in the world, the church of our own country is as much in need of this admonition as any, and more than most. Would it not be higher praise than some of us deserve, to say that we loved with brotherly cordiality all the Christian churches in Britain, and wished them God speed in their Christian work? And as for churches outside our native land, who knows anything about them? There was a time when all the Protestant churches in Europe were one, and lived on terms of brotherly intimacy; we sent ministers and professors to congregations and colleges in France, Germany, and Holland, and took ministers and professors from the Continent ourselves; the heart of the Church was enlarged towards brethren whom it has now completely forgotten. This change has been to the loss of all concerned; and if we would follow the Apostle's advice, and abound more and more in this supreme grace, we must wake up to take an interest in brethren beyond the British Isles. The Kingdom of Heaven has no boundaries that could be laid down on a map, and the brotherly love of the Christian is wider than all patriotism. But this truth has a special side connected with the situation of the Apostle. Paul wrote these words from Corinth, where he was busily engaged in planting a new church, and they virtually bespeak

the interest of the Thessalonians in that enterprise. Christian brotherly love is the love which God Himself implants in the heart; and the love of God has no limitations. It goes out into all the earth, even to the end of the world. It is an ever advancing, ever victorious force; the territory in which it reigns becomes continually wider and wider. If that love abounds in us more and more, we shall follow with live and growing interest the work of Christian missions. Few of us have any idea of the dimensions of that work, and of the nature of its successes. Few of us have any enthusiasm for it. Few of us do anything worth mentioning to help it on. Not very long ago the whole nation was shocked by the disclosures about the Stanley expedition; and the newspapers were filled with the doings of a few profligate ruffians, who, whatever they failed to do, succeeded in covering themselves, and the country they belong to, with infamy. One would fain hope that this exhibition of inhumanity would turn men's thoughts by contrast to those who are doing the work of Christ in Africa. The national execration of fiendish wickedness is nothing unless it passes into deep and strong sympathy with those who are working among the Africans in brotherly love. What is the merit of Stanley or his associates, that their story should excite the interest of those who know nothing of Comber and Hannington and Mackay,

and all the other brave men who loved not their lives to the death for Christ's sake and Africa's? Is it not a shame to some of us that we know the horrible story so much better than the gracious one? Let brotherly love abound more and more; let Christian sympathy go out with our brethren and sisters in Christ who go out themselves to dark places; let us keep ourselves instructed in the progress of their work; let us support it with prayer and liberality at home; and our minds and hearts alike will grow in the greatness of our Lord and Saviour.

Brotherly love in the early Church, within the limits of a small congregation, often took the special form of charity. Those who were able helped the poor. A special care was taken, as we see from the Book of Acts, of widows, and no doubt of orphans. In a later epistle Paul mentions with praise a family which devoted itself to ministering to the saints. To do good and to communicate, that is, to impart of one's goods to those who had need, is the sacrifice of praise which all Christians are charged not to forget. To see a brother or a sister destitute, and to shut up the heart against them, is taken as proof positive that we have not the love of God dwelling in us. It would be difficult, one might think, to exaggerate the emphasis which the New Testament lays on the duty and the merit of charity. "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the

poor," Christ said to the rich young man, "and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." "Give alms," He cried to the Pharisees, "of such things as ye have; and behold, all things are clean unto you." Charity sanctifies. Nor have these strong sayings been without their due effect. Charity, both organised and private, is characteristic of Christendom, and of Christendom only. The pagan world made no provision for the destitute, the sick, the aged. It had no almshouses, no infirmaries, no orphanages, no convalescent homes. The mighty impulse of the love of Christ has created all these, and to this hour it sustains them all. Acknowledged or unacknowledged, it is the force which lies behind every effort made by man for the good of his fellows; wherever this disinterested love burns in a human bosom, it is the fire which Christ cast upon the earth, and He rejoices at its kindling. As a recent example, look at the great scheme of General Booth: it is the love of Christ which has inspired it; it is the love of Christ that must provide all the subordinate agents by whom it is to be administered, if it is ever carried into effect; it is on the public conviction that he is animated by the love of Christ, and has no by-ends of his own to secure, that General Booth depends for his funds. It is only this Christ-enkindled love which gives charity its real worth, and furnishes any sort of guarantee that it will confer

a double blessing, material and spiritual, on those who receive it.

For charity is not without its dangers, and the first and greatest of these is that men learn to depend upon it. When Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica, he spoke a great deal about the Second Advent. It was an exciting subject, and some at least of those who received his message were troubled by "ill-defined or mistaken expectations," which led to moral disorder in their lives. They were so anxious to be ready for the Lord when He came, that they neglected their ordinary duties, and became dependent upon the brethren. They ceased working themselves, and so became a burden upon those who continued to work. Here we have, in a nutshell, the argument against a monastic life of idleness, against the life of the begging friar. All men must live by labour, their own or some other's; and he who chooses a life without labour, as the more holy, really condemns some brother to a double share of that labouring life to which, as he fancies, the highest holiness is denied. That is rank selfishness; only a man without brotherly love could be guilty of it for an hour.

Now in opposition to this selfishness,—unconscious at first, let us hope,—and in opposition to the unsettled, flighty, restless expectations of these early disciples, the Apostle propounds a very sober and

humble plan of life. Make it your ambition, he says, to be quiet, and to busy yourselves with your own affairs, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you. There is a grave irony in the first words—make it your ambition to be quiet; set your honour in that. The ordinary ambition seeks to make a noise in the world, to make itself visible and audible; and ambition of that type is not unknown even in the Church. But it is out of place there. No Christian ought to be ambitious of anything but to fill as unobtrusively as possible the place in life which God has given him. The less notorious we are, the better for us. The necessities of our situation, necessities imposed by God, require most of us to spend so many hours a day in making our daily bread. The bulk of most men's strength, by an ordinance of God that we cannot interfere with, is given to that humble but inevitable task. If we cannot be holy at our work, it is not worth taking any trouble to be holy at other times. If we cannot be Christians and please God in those common activities which must always absorb so much of our time and strength, the balance of life is not worth thinking about. Perhaps some of us crave leisure, that we may be more free for spiritual work; and think that if we had more time at our disposal, we should be able to render many services to Christ and His cause which are out of our power at present. But

that is extremely doubtful. If experience proves anything, it proves that nothing is worse for most people than to have nothing to do but be religious. Religion is not controlled in their life by any contact with realities; in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they do not know how to be quiet, but are vain, meddlesome, impracticable, and senseless. The man who has his trade or his profession to work at, and the woman who has her household and social duties to attend to, are not to be condoled with; they are in the very place in which religion is at once necessary and possible; they can study to be quiet, and to mind their own business, and to work with their own hands, and in all this to serve and please God. But those who get up in the morning with nothing to do but to be pious, or to engage in Christian works, are in a position of enormous difficulty, which very few can fill. The daily life of toil, at the bench or the desk, in the shop, the study, or the street, does not rob us of the Christian life; it really puts it within our reach. If we keep our eyes open, it is easy to see that this is so.

There are two reasons assigned by the Apostle for this life of quiet industry, both of which are noticeable. First, "That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without." Honestly is too colourless a word in modern English; the corresponding adjective in different

places is translated honourable and comely.[1] What the Apostle signifies is, that the Church has a great character to sustain in the world, and that the individual Christian has that character, to some extent, in his charge. Idleness, fussiness, excitability, want of common sense, these are discreditable qualities, inconsistent with the dignity of Christianity, and to be guarded against by the believer. The Church is really a spectacle to the world; those who are without have their eye upon it; and the Apostle would have it a worthy and impressive spectacle. But what is there so undignified as an idle busybody, a man or woman neglecting duty on the pretence of piety, so excited by an uncertain future as to disregard the most crying necessities of the present? Perhaps there is none of us who does anything so bad as this; but there are some in every church who are not careful of Christian dignity. Remember that there is something great in true Christianity, something which should command the veneration of those who are without; and do nothing inconsistent with that. As the sun breaks through the darkest cloud, so honour peereth in the meanest habit; and the lowliest occupation, discharged with diligence, earnestness, and fidelity, gives scope enough for the exhibition of true Christian

[1] See 1 Cor. xii. 24; vii. 35; Acts xiii. 50; xvii. 12.

dignity. The man who does his common duties as they ought to be done will never lose his self-respect, and will never discredit the Church of Christ.

The second reason for the life of quiet industry is, "That ye may have lack of nothing." Probably the truer interpretation would be, That ye may have lack of no one. In other words, independence is a Christian duty. This is not inconsistent with what has been said of charity, but is its necessary supplement. Christ commands us to be charitable; He tells us plainly that the need for charity will not disappear; but He tells us as plainly that to count upon charity, except in the case of necessity, is both sinful and shameful. This contains, of course, a warning to the charitable. Those of us who wish to help the poor, and who try to do so, must take care to do it in such a way as not to teach them to depend on help; that is to do them a serious wrong. We are all familiar with the charges brought against charity; it demoralises, it fosters idleness and improvidence, it robs those who receive it of self-respect. These charges have been current from the beginning; they were freely brought against the Church in the days of the Roman Empire. If they could be made good, they would condemn what passes for charity as unchristian. The one-sided enforcement of charity, in the sense of almsgiving, in the Romish Church, has occasionally

led to something like a glorification of pauperism; the saint is usually a beggar. One would hope that in our own country, where the independence of the national character has been reinforced by the most pronounced types of Protestant religion, such a deformed conception of Christianity would be impossible; yet even among us the caution of this verse may not be unnecessary. It *is* a sign of grace to be charitable; but though one would not speak an unkind word of those in need, it is *not* a sign of grace to require charity. The gospel bids us aim not only at brotherly love, but at independence. Remember the poor, it says; but it says also, Work with your hands, that you may preserve a Christian dignity in relation to the world, and have need of no one.

XI.

THE DEAD IN CHRIST.

"But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."—1 THESS. iv. 13-18 (R.V.).

XI.

THE DEAD IN CHRIST.

THE restlessness of the Thessalonians, which caused some of them to neglect their daily work, was the result of strained expectations of Christ's second coming. The Apostle had taught them that the Saviour and Judge of all might appear no one knew when; and they were consumed with a feverish anxiety to be found ready when He came. How terrible it would be to be found unready, and to lose one's place in the heavenly kingdom! The Thessalonians were dominated by such thoughts as these when death visited the church, and gave rise to new perplexities. What of the brethren who had been taken away so soon, and of their part in the glory to be revealed? Had they been robbed, by death, of the Christian hope? Had the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and imperishable, passed for ever beyond their grasp, because they had died before Christ came to take His people to Himself?

This was what some of the survivors feared; and

it is to correct their mistaken ideas, and to comfort them in their sorrow, that the Apostle writes the words we are now to study. "We would not have you ignorant," he says, "concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, which have no hope." The last words refer to those who are away from Christ, and without God in the world. It is a frightful thing to say of any man, and still more of the mass of men, that they have no hope; yet it is not only the Apostle who says it; it is the confession, by a thousand voices, of the heathen world itself. To that world the future was a blank, or a place of unreality and shades. If there were great exceptions, men who, like Plato, could not give up faith in immortality and in the righteousness of God, even in the face of death, these were no more than exceptions; and even for them the future had no substance compared with the present. Life was here, and not there. Wherever we can hear the pagan soul speak of the future, it is in this blank, heartless tone. "Do not," says Achilles in the Odyssey, "make light of death to me. Rather would I on earth be a serf to another, a man of little land and little substance, than be prince over all the dead that have come to nought." "Suns," says Catullus, "may set and rise again. When once our brief light has set, one unbroken night of sleep remains." These are fair specimens of the pagan outlook; are they not fair enough specimens of the

non-Christian outlook at the present day? The secular life is quite avowedly a life without hope. It resolutely fixes its attention on the present, and avoids the distraction of the future. But there are few whom death does not compel, at some time or other, to deal seriously with the questions the future involves. If we love the departed, our hearts cannot but go with them to the unseen; and there are few who can assure themselves that death ends all. For those who can, what a sorrow remains! Their loved ones have lost everything. All that makes life is here, and *they* have gone. How miserable is their lot, to have been deprived, by cruel and untimely death, of all the blessings man can ever enjoy! How hopelessly must those who are left behind lament them!

This is exactly the situation with which the Apostle deals. The Christians in Thessalonica feared that their brethren who had died would be shut out of the Messiah's kingdom; they mourned for them as those mourn who have no hope. The Apostle corrects their error, and comforts them. His words do not mean that the Christian may lawfully sorrow for his dead, provided he does not go to a pagan extreme; they mean that the hopeless pagan sorrow is not to be indulged by the Christian at all. We give their proper force if we imagine him saying: "Weep for yourselves, if you will; that is natural, and God

does not wish us to be insensible to the losses and sorrows which are part of His providential government of our lives; but do not weep for *them*; the believer who has fallen asleep in Christ is not to be lamented; he has lost nothing; the hope of immortality is as sure for him as for those who may live to welcome the Lord at His coming; *he* has gone to be with Christ, which is *far*, far better."

The 14th verse gives the Christian proof of this consoling doctrine. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."[1] It is quite plain that something is wanting here to complete the argument. Jesus did die and rise again, there is no dispute about that; but how is the Apostle justified in inferring from this that God will bring the Christian dead again to meet the living? What is the missing link in this reasoning? Clearly it is the truth, so characteristic of the New Testament, that there is a union between Christ and those who trust Him so close that their destiny can be read in His. All that He has experienced will be experienced by them. They are united to Him as indissolubly as the members of the body to the

[1] There is a certain difficulty about the connection of the words in the last clause; it would probably be more correct to render them: Even so them also that are fallen asleep will God through Jesus bring with Him.

head; and being planted together in the likeness of His death, they shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Death, the Apostle would have us understand, does not break the bond between the believing soul and the Saviour. Even human love is stronger than the grave; it goes beyond it with the departed; it follows them with strong yearnings, with wistful hopes, sometimes with earnest prayers. But there *is* an impotence, at which death mocks, in earthly love; the last enemy does put a great gulf between souls, which cannot be bridged over; and there is no such impotence in the love of Christ. He is never separated from those who love Him. He is one with them in death, and in the life to come, as in this life. Through Him God will bring the departed again to meet their friends. There is something very expressive in the word "bring." "Sweet word," says Bengel: "it is spoken of living persons." The dead for whom we mourn are not dead; they all live to God; and when the great day comes, God will bring those who have gone before, and unite them to those who have been left behind. When we see Christ at His coming, we shall see also those that have fallen asleep in Him.

This argument, drawn from the relation of the Christian to the Saviour, is confirmed by an appeal to the authority of the Saviour Himself. "For this we

say unto you by the word of the Lord:" as if he said, "It is not merely a conclusion of our own; it is supported by the express word of Christ." Many have tried to find in the Gospels the word of the Lord referred to, but, as I think, without success. The passage usually quoted (Matt. xxiv. 31: "He shall send forth His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"), though it covers generally the subject with which the Apostle is dealing, does not touch upon the essential point, the equality of those who die before the Second Advent with those who live to see it. We must suppose that the word of the Lord referred to was one which failed to find a place in the written Gospels, like that other which the Apostle preserved, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; or that it was a word which Christ spoke to him in one of the many revelations which he received in his apostolic work. In any case, what the Apostle is going to say is not his own word, but the word of Christ, and as such its authority is final for all Christians. What, then, does Christ say on this great concern?

He says that "we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep." The natural impression one takes from these words is that Paul expected himself to be

alive when Christ came; but whether that impression is justifiable or not,[1] it is no part of the truth which can claim the authority of the Lord. Christ's word only assures us that those who are alive at that day shall have no precedency over those that have fallen asleep; it does not tell us who shall be in the one class, and who in the other. Paul did not know when the day of the Lord would be; but as it was the duty of all Christians to look for and hasten it, he naturally included himself among those who would live to see it. Later in life, the hope of surviving till the Lord came alternated in his mind with the expectation of death. In one and the same epistle, the Epistle to the Philippians, we find him writing (iv. 5), "The Lord is at hand"; and only a little earlier (i. 23), "I have the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better." Better, certainly, than a life of toil and suffering; but not better than the Lord's coming. Paul could not but shrink with a natural horror from death and its nakedness; he would have preferred to escape that dread necessity, the putting off of the body; not to be unclothed, was his desire, but to be clothed upon, and to have mortality swallowed up of life.

[1] It is easy to state the inference too strongly. Paul tells us expressly that he did not know when Christ would come; he could not therefore know that he himself would have died long before the Advent; and it was inevitable, therefore, that he should include himself here in the category of such as might live to see it.

When he wrote this letter to the Thessalonians, I do not doubt that this was his hope; and it does not impugn his authority in the least that it was a hope destined not to be fulfilled. With the Lord, a thousand years are as one day; and even those who are partakers in the kingdom seldom partake to an eminent degree in the patience of Jesus Christ. Only in the teaching of the Lord Himself does the New Testament put strongly before us the duration of the Christian era, and the delays of the Second Advent. How many of His parables, *e.g.*, represent the kingdom as subject to the law of growth—the Sower, the Wheat and the Tares which have both to ripen, the Mustard Seed, and the Seed Growing Gradually. All these imply a natural law and goal of progress, not to be interrupted at random. How many, again, like the parable of the Unjust Judge, or the Ten Virgins, imply that the delay will be so great as to beget utter disbelief or forgetfulness of His coming. Even the expression, "The times of the Gentiles," suggests epochs which must intervene before men see Him again.[1] But over against this deep insight and wondrous patience of Christ, we must not be surprised to find something of impatient ardour in the Apostles. The world was so cruel to them, their love to Christ was so fervent, their desire for re-union so

[1] On this subject see Bruce's *Kingdom of God*, chap. xii.

strong, that they could not but hope and pray, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." Is it not better to recognise the obvious fact that Paul was mistaken as to the nearness of the Second Advent, than to torture his words to secure his infallibility? Two great commentators—the Roman Catholic Cornelius à Lapide, and the Protestant John Calvin—save Paul's infallibility at a greater cost than violating the rules of grammar. They admit that his words mean that he expected to survive till Christ came again; but, they say, an infallible apostle could not really have had such an expectation; and therefore we must believe that Paul practised a pious fraud in writing as he did, a fraud with the good intention of keeping the Thessalonians on the alert. But I hope, if we had the choice, we would all choose rather to tell the truth, and be mistaken, than to be infallible, and tell lies.

After the general statement, on Christ's authority, that the living shall have no precedency of the departed, Paul goes on to explain the circumstances of the Advent by which it is justified. "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven." In that emphatic *Himself* we have the argument of ver. 14 practically repeated: the Lord, it signifies, who knows *all* that are His. Who can look at Christ as He comes again in glory, and not remember His words in the Gospel, "Because I live, ye shall live also;" "where I am, there

shall also My servant be"? It is not another who comes, but He to whom all Christian souls have been united for ever. "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." The last two of these expressions are in all probability the explanation of the first; the voice of the archangel, or the trumpet of God, is the signal-shout, or as the hymn expresses it, "the great commanding word," with which the drama of the last things is ushered in. The archangel is the herald of the Messianic King. We cannot tell how much is figure in these expressions, which all rest on Old Testament associations, and on popular beliefs amongst the Jews of the time; neither can we tell what precisely underlies the figure. But this much is clearly meant, that a Divine summons, audible and effective everywhere, goes forth from Christ's presence; that ancient utterance, of hope or of despair, is fulfilled: "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee." When the signal is given, the dead in Christ rise first. Paul says nothing here of the resurrection body, spiritual and incorruptible; but when Christ comes, the Christian dead are raised in that body, prepared for eternal blessedness, before anything else is done. That is the meaning of "the dead in Christ shall rise *first*." It does not contrast the resurrection of the Christian dead with a second

resurrection of all men, either immediately afterwards, or after a thousand years; it contrasts it as the first scene in this drama with the second, namely, the rapture of the living. The first thing will be that the dead rise; the next, that those that are alive, that are left, shall at the same time, and in company with them, be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. The Apostle does not look beyond this; so, he says, shall we—that is, we all, those that live and those that are fallen asleep—be ever with the Lord.

A thousand questions rise to our lips as we look at this wonderful picture; but the closer we look, the more plainly do we see the parsimony of the revelation, and the strictness with which it is measured out to meet the necessities of the case. There is nothing in it, for instance, about the non-Christian. It tells us the blessed destiny of those who have fallen asleep in Christ, and of those who wait for Christ's appearing. Much of the curiosity about those who die without Christ is not disinterested. People would like to know what *their* destiny is, because they would like to know whether there is not a tolerable alternative to accepting the gospel. But the Bible does not encourage us to look for such an alternative. "Blessed," it says, "are the dead who die in the Lord"; and blessed also are the living who live in the Lord; if there are those who reject this blessedness, and raise questions about what

a life without Christ may lead to, they do it at their peril.

There is nothing, again, about the nature of the life beyond the Advent, except this, that it is a life in which the Christian is in close and unbroken union with Christ—ever with the Lord. Some have been very anxious to answer the question, Where? but the revelation gives us no help. It does not say that those who meet the Lord in the air ascend with Him to heaven, or descend, as some have supposed, to reign with Him on earth. There is absolutely nothing in it for curiosity, though everything that is necessary for comfort. For men who had conceived the terrible thought that the Christian dead had lost the Christian hope, the veil was withdrawn from the future, and living and dead alike revealed united, in eternal life, to Christ. That is all, but surely it is enough. That is the hope which the gospel puts before us, and no accident of time, like death, can rob us of it. Jesus died and rose again; He is Lord both of the dead and the living; and all will, at the great day, be gathered together to Him. Are *they* to be lamented, who have this future to look forward to? Are we to sorrow over those who pass into the world unseen, as if they had no hope, or as if we had none? No; in the sorrow of death itself, we may comfort one another with these words.

Is it not a striking proof of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we have, on the express authority of His word, a special revelation, the exclusive aim of which is to comfort? Jesus knew the terrible sorrow of bereavement; He had stood by the bedside of Jairus' daughter, by the young man's bier at Nain, by Lazarus' tomb. He knew how inconsolable it was, how subtle, how passionate; He knew the dead weight at the heart which never passes away, and the sudden rush of feeling which overpowers the strongest. And that all this sorrow might not rest upon His Church unrelieved, He lifted the curtain that we might see with our eyes the strong consolation beyond. I have spoken of it as if it consisted simply in union to Christ; but it is as much a part of the revelation that Christians whom death has separated are re-united to each other. The Thessalonians feared they would never see their departed friends again; but the word of the Lord says, You will be caught up, in company with them, to meet Me; and you and they shall dwell with Me for ever. What congregation is there in which there is not need of this consolation? Comfort one another, the Apostle says. One needs the comfort to-day, and another to-morrow; in proportion as we bear each other's burdens, we all need it continually. The unseen world is perpetually opening to receive those whom we love; but though they pass out of

sight and out of reach, it is not for ever. They are still united to Christ; and when He comes in His glory He will bring them to us again. Is it not strange to balance the greatest sorrow of life against words? Words, we often feel, are vain and worthless; they do not lift the burden from the heart; they make no difference to the pressure of grief. Of our own words that is true; but what we have been considering are not our own words, but the word of the Lord. His words are alive and powerful: heaven and earth may pass away, but they cannot pass; let us comfort one another with that.

XII.

THE DAY OF THE LORD.

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that aught be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief: for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Wherefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as also ye do."—1 THESS. v. 1-11 (R.V.).

XII.

THE DAY OF THE LORD.

THE last verses of the fourth chapter perfect that which is lacking, on one side, in the faith of the Thessalonians. The Apostle addresses himself to the ignorance of his readers: he instructs them more fully on the circumstances of Christ's second coming; and he bids them comfort one another with the sure hope that they and their departed friends shall meet, never to part, in the kingdom of the Saviour. In the passage before us he perfects what is lacking to their faith on another side. He addresses himself, not to their ignorance, but to their knowledge; and he instructs them how to improve, instead of abusing, both what they knew and what they were ignorant of, in regard to the last Advent. It had led, in some, to curious inquiries; in others, to a moral restlessness which could not bind itself patiently to duty; yet its true fruit, the Apostle tells them, ought to be hope, watchfulness, and sobriety.

"The day of the Lord" is a famous expression in the

Old Testament; it runs through all prophecy, and is one of its most characteristic ideas. It means a day which belongs in a peculiar sense to God: a day which He has chosen for the perfect manifestation of Himself, for the thorough working out of His work among men. It is impossible to combine in one picture all the traits which prophets of different ages, from Amos downward, embody in their representations of this great day. It is heralded, as a rule, by terrific phenomena in nature: the sun is turned into darkness and the moon into blood, and the stars withdraw their light; we read of earthquake and tempest, of blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The great day ushers in the deliverance of God's people from all their enemies; and it is accompanied by a terrible sifting process, which separates the sinners and hypocrites among the holy people from those who are truly the Lord's. Wherever it appears, the day of the Lord has the character of finality. It is a supreme manifestation of judgment, in which the wicked perish for ever; it is a supreme manifestation of grace, in which a new and unchangeable life of blessedness is opened to the righteous. Sometimes it seemed near to the prophet, and sometimes far off; but near or far, it bounded his horizon; he saw nothing beyond. It was the end of one era, and the beginning of another which should have no end.

This great conception is carried over by the Apostle from the Old Testament to the New. The day of the Lord is identified with the Return of Christ. All the contents of that old conception are carried over along with it. Christ's return bounds the Apostle's horizon; it is the final revelation of the mercy and judgment of God. There is sudden destruction in it for some, a darkness in which there is no light at all; and for others, eternal salvation, a light in which there is no darkness at all. It is the end of the present order of things, and the beginning of a new and eternal order. All this the Thessalonians knew; they had been carefully taught it by the Apostle. He did not need to write such elementary truths, nor did he need to say anything about the times and seasons[1] which the Father had kept in His own power. They knew perfectly all that had been revealed on this matter, viz., that the day of the Lord comes exactly as a thief in the night. Suddenly, unexpectedly, giving a shock

[1] "*The times* (χρόνοι) are, in Augustine's words, 'ipsa spatia temporum,' and these contemplated merely under the aspect of their duration, over which the Church's history should extend; but *the seasons* (καιροί) are the joints or articulations in these times, the critical epoch-making periods foreordained of God (καιροὶ προτεταγμένοι, Acts xvii. 26; cf. Augustine, *Conf.*, xi., 13: 'Deus operator temporum'); when all that has been slowly, and often without observation, ripening through long ages is mature and comes to the birth in grand decisive events, which constitute at once the close of one period and the commencement of another."—Trench, *Synonyms*, p. 211.

of alarm and terror to those whom it finds unprepared,—in such wise it breaks upon the world. The telling image, so frequent with the Apostles, was derived from the Master Himself; we can imagine the solemnity with which Christ said, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."[1] The New Testament tells us everywhere that men will be taken at unawares by the final revelation of Christ as Judge and Saviour; and in so doing, it enforces with all possible earnestness the duty of watching. False security is so easy, so natural,—looking to the general attitude, even of Christian men, to this truth, one is tempted to say, so inevitable,—that it may well seem vain to urge the duty of watchfulness more. As it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Lot, as it was when Jerusalem fell, as it is at this moment, so shall it be at the day of the Lord. Men will say, Peace and safety, though every sign of the times says, Judgment. They will eat and drink, plant and build, marry and be given in marriage, with their whole heart concentrated and absorbed in these transient interests, till in a moment suddenly, like the lightning which flashes from east to west, the sign of the Son of Man is seen in heaven. Instead of peace

[1] Rev. xvi. 15.

and safety, sudden destruction surprises them; all that they have lived for passes away; they awake, as from deep sleep, to discover that their soul has no part with God. It is too late then to think of preparing for the end: the end has come; and it is with solemn emphasis the Apostle adds, "They shall in no wise escape."

A doom so awful, a life so evil, cannot be the destiny or the duty of any Christian man. "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." Darkness, in that saying of the Apostle, has a double weight of meaning. The Christian is not in ignorance of what is impending, and forewarned is forearmed. Neither is he any longer in moral darkness, plunged in vice, living a life the first necessity of which is to keep out of God's sight. Once the Thessalonians had been in such darkness; their souls had had their part in a world sunk in sin, on which the day-spring from on high had not risen; but now that time was past. God had shined into their hearts; He who is Himself light had poured the radiance of His own love and truth into them till ignorance, vice, and wickedness had passed away, and they had become light in the Lord. How intimate is the relation between the Christian and God, how complete the regeneration, expressed in the words, "Ye are all *sons* of light, and *sons* of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness"! There *are* shady things

in the world, and shady persons, but they are not in Christianity, nor among Christians. The true Christian takes his nature, all that characterises and distinguishes him, from light. There is no darkness in him, nothing to hide, no guilty secret, no corner of his being into which the light of God has not penetrated, nothing that makes him dread exposure. His whole nature is full of light, transparently luminous, so that it is impossible to surprise him or take him at a disadvantage. This, at least, is his ideal character; to this he is called, and this he makes his aim. There are those, the Apostle implies, who take their character from night and darkness,—men with souls that hide from God, that love secrecy, that have much to remember they dare not speak of, that turn with instinctive aversion from the light which the gospel brings, and the sincerity and openness which it claims; men, in short, who have come to love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. The day of the Lord will certainly be a surprise to them; it will smite them with sudden terror, as the midnight thief, breaking unseen through door or window, terrifies the defenceless householder; it will overwhelm them with despair, because it will come as a great and searching light,—a day on which God will bring every hidden thing to view, and judge the secrets of men's hearts by Christ Jesus. For those who have lived in darkness

the surprise will be inevitable; but what surprise can there be for the children of the light? They are partakers of the Divine nature; there is nothing in their souls which they would not have God know; the light that shines from the great white throne will discover nothing in them to which its searching brightness is unwelcome; Christ's coming is so far from disconcerting them that it is really the crowning of their hopes.

The Apostle demands of his disciples conduct answering to this ideal. Walk worthy, he says, of your privileges and of your calling. "Let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober." "Sleep" is certainly a strange word to describe the life of the worldly man. He probably thinks himself very wide awake, and as far as a certain circle of interests is concerned, probably is so. The children of this world, Jesus tells us, are wonderfully wise for their generation. They are more shrewd and more enterprising than the children of light. But what a stupor falls upon them, what a lethargy, what a deep unconscious slumber, when the interests in view are spiritual. The claims of God, the future of the soul, the coming of Christ, our manifestation at His judgment seat, they are not awake to any concern in these. They live on as if these were not realities at all; if they pass through their minds on occasion, as they look at the Bible or listen to a sermon, it is as

dreams pass through the mind of one asleep; they go out and shake themselves, and all is over; earth has recovered its solidity, and the airy unrealities have passed away. Philosophers have amused themselves with the difficulty of finding a scientific criterion between the experiences of the sleeping and the waking state, *i.e.*, a means of distinguishing between the kind of reality which belongs to each; it is at least one element of sanity to be able to make the distinction. If we may enlarge the ideas of sleep and waking, as they are enlarged by the Apostle in this passage, it is a distinction which many fail to make. When they have the ideas which make up the staple of revelation presented to them, they feel as if they were in dreamland; there is no substance to them in a page of St. Paul; they cannot grasp the realities that underlie his words, any more than they can grasp the forms which swept before their minds in last night's sleep. But when they go out to their work in the world, to deal in commodities, to handle money, then they are in the sphere of real things, and wide awake enough. Yet the sound mind will reverse their decisions. It is the visible things that are unreal and that ultimately pass away; the spiritual things—God, Christ, the human soul, faith, love, hope—that abide. Let us not face our life in that sleepy mood to which the spiritual is but a dream; on

the contrary, as we are of the day, let us be wide awake and sober. The world is full of illusions, of shadows which impose themselves as substances upon the heedless, of gilded trifles which the man whose eyes are heavy with sleep accepts as gold; but the Christian ought not to be thus deceived. Look to the coming of the Lord, Paul says, and do not sleep through your days, like the heathen, making your life one long delusion; taking the transitory for the eternal, and regarding the eternal as a dream; that is the way to be surprised with sudden destruction at the last; watch and be sober; and you will not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

It may not be out of place to insist on the fact that "sober" in this passage means sober as opposed to drunk. No one would wish to be overtaken drunk by any great occasion; yet the day of the Lord is associated in at least three passages of Scripture with a warning against this gross sin. "Take heed to yourselves," the Master says, "lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare." "The night is far spent," says the Apostle, "the day is at hand. . . Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in revelling and drunkenness." And in this passage: "Let us, since we are of the day, be sober; they that be drunken are drunken in the night." The

conscience of men is awakening to the sin of excess, but it has much to do before it comes to the New Testament standard. Does it not help us to see it in its true light when it is thus confronted with the day of the Lord? What horror could be more awful than to be overtaken in this state? What death is more terrible to contemplate than one which is not so very rare—death in drink?

Wakefulness and sobriety do not exhaust the demands made upon the Christian. He is also to be on his guard. "Put on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation." While waiting for the Lord's coming, the Christian waits in a hostile world. He is exposed to assault from spiritual enemies who aim at nothing less than his life, and he needs to be protected against them. In the very beginning of this letter we came upon the three Christian graces; the Thessalonians were commended for their work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. There they were represented as active powers in the Christian life, each manifesting its presence by some appropriate work, or some notable fruit of character; here they constitute a defensive armour by which the Christian is shielded against any mortal assault. We cannot press the figure further than this. If we keep our faith in Jesus Christ, if we love one another, if our

hearts are set with confident hope on that salvation which is to be brought to us at Christ's appearing, we need fear no evil; no foe can touch our life. It is remarkable, I think, that both here and in the famous passage in Ephesians, as well as in the original of both in Isaiah lix. 17, salvation, or, to be more precise, the hope of salvation, is made the helmet. The Apostle is very free in his comparisons; faith is now a shield, and now a breastplate; the breastplate in one passage is faith and love, and in another righteousness; but the helmet is always the same. Without hope, he would say to us, no man can hold up his head in the battle; and the Christian hope is always Christ's second coming. If He is not to come again, the very word hope may be blotted out of the New Testament. This assured grasp on the coming salvation—a salvation ready to be revealed in the last times—is what gives the spirit of victory to the Christian even in the darkest hour.

The mention of salvation brings the Apostle back to his principal subject. It is as if he wrote, "for a helmet the hope of salvation; salvation, I say; for God did not appoint us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." The day of the Lord is indeed a day of wrath,—a day when men will cry to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth

upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath is come. The Apostle cannot remember it for any purpose without getting a glimpse of those terrors; but it is not for these he recalls it at this time. God did not appoint Christians to the wrath of that day, but to its salvation,—a salvation the hope of which is to cover their heads in the day of battle.

The next verse—the tenth—has the peculiar interest of containing the only hint to be found in this early Epistle of Paul's teaching as to the mode of salvation. We obtain it through Jesus Christ, who died for us. It is not who died instead of us, nor even on our behalf (ὑπέρ), but, according to the true reading, who died a death in which we are concerned. It is the most vague expression that could have been used to signify that Christ's death had something to do with our salvation. Of course it does not follow that Paul had said no more to the Thessalonians than he indicates here; judging from the account he gives in 1st Corinthians of his preaching immediately after he left Thessalonica, one would suppose he had been much more explicit; certainly no church ever existed that was not based on the Atonement and the Resurrection. In point of fact, however, what is here made prominent is not the mode of salvation, but one special result of salvation as accomplished by Christ's death, a result contemplated

by Christ, and pertinent to the purpose of this letter; He died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should together live with Him. The same conception precisely is found in Rom. xiv. 9: "To this end Christ died, and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living." This was His aim in redeeming us by passing through all modes of human existence, seen and unseen. It made Him Lord of all. He filled all things. He claims all modes of existence as His own. Nothing separates from Him. Whether we sleep or wake, whether we live or die, we shall alike live with Him. The strong consolation, to impart which was the Apostle's original motive in approaching this subject, has thus come uppermost again; in the circumstances of the church, it is this which lies nearest to his heart.

He ends, therefore, with the old exhortation: "Comfort one another, and build each other up, as also ye do." The knowledge of the truth is one thing; the Christian use of it is another: if we cannot help one another very much with the first, there is more in our power with regard to the last. We are not ignorant of Christ's second coming; of its awful and consoling circumstances; of its final judgment and final mercy; of its final separations and final unions. Why have these things been revealed to us? What influence are they meant to have in our lives? They ought

to be consoling and strengthening. They ought to banish hopeless sorrow. They ought to generate and sustain an earnest, sober, watchful spirit; strong patience; a complete independence of this world. It is left to us as Christian men to assist each other in the appropriation and application of these great truths. Let us fix our minds upon them. Our salvation is nearer than when we believed. Christ *is* coming. There *will be* a gathering together of all His people unto Him. The living and the dead shall be for ever with the Lord. Of the times and the seasons we can say no more than could be said at the beginning; the Father has kept them in His own power; it remains with us to watch and be sober; to arm ourselves with faith, love, and hope; to set our mind on the things that are above, where our true country is, whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

XIII.

RULERS AND RULED.

"But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all. See that none render unto any one evil for evil; but alway follow after that which is good, one toward another, and toward all."—1 THESS. v. 12-15 (R.V.).

XIII.

RULERS AND RULED.

AT the present moment, one great cause of division among Christian churches is the existence of different forms of Church government. Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians are separated from each other much more decidedly by difference of organisation than by difference of creed. By some of them, if not by all, a certain form of Church order is identified with the existence of the Church itself. Thus the English-speaking bishops of the world, who met some time ago in conference at Lambeth, adopted as a basis, on which they could treat for union with other Churches, the acceptance of Holy Scripture, of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, of the Apostles' and Nicene creeds, and of the Historic Episcopate. In other words, diocesan bishops are as essential to the constitution of the Church as the preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the Sacraments. That is an opinion which one may say, without offence, has neither history nor reason on

its side. Part of the interest of this Epistle to the Thessalonians lies in the glimpses it gives of the early state of the Church, when such questions would simply have been unintelligible. The little community at Thessalonica was not quite without a constitution—no society could exist on that footing—but its constitution, as we see from this passage, was of the most elementary kind; and it certainly contained nothing like a modern bishop.

"We beseech you," says the Apostle, "to know them that labour among you." "To labour"[1] is the ordinary expression of Paul for such Christian work as he himself did. Perhaps it refers mainly to the work of catechising, to the giving of that regular and connected instruction in Christian truth which followed conversion and baptism. It covers everything that could be of service to the Church or any of its members. It would include even works of charity. There is a passage very like this in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, (xvi. 15 f.), where the two things are closely connected: "Now I beseech you, brethren (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that

[1] Those "who toil among you and preside over you and admonish you" are identified by Wright (*Composition of the Four Gospels*, p. 12) as "the catechists, the presbyters, and evangelists." The third case is certainly doubtful; and the fact that the article is used only once makes the whole attempt at such a discrimination of officials illegitimate.

they have set themselves to minister unto the saints), that ye also be in subjection unto such, and to every one that helpeth in the work and laboureth." In both passages there is a certain indefiniteness. Those who labour are not necessarily official persons, elders, or, as they are often called in the New Testament, bishops, and deacons; they may have given themselves to the work without any election or ordination at all. We know that this is often the case still. The best workers in a church are not always or necessarily found among those who have official functions to perform. Especially is it so in churches which provide no recognition for women, yet depend for their efficiency as religious agencies even more on women than on men. What would become of our Sunday Schools, of our Home Missions, of our charities, of our visitation of the sick, the aged, and the poor, but for the labour of Christian women? Now what the Apostle tells us here is, that it is *labour* which, in the first instance, is entitled to respect. "Know them that labour among you," means "Know them for what they are"; recognise with all due reverence their self-denial, their faithfulness, the services they render to you, their claim upon your regard. The Christian labourer does not labour for praise or flattery; but those who take the burden of the church upon them in any way, as pastors or teachers or visitors, as choir or collectors as managers

of the church property, or however else, are entitled to our acknowledgment, and ought not to be left without it. There is no doubt a great deal of unknown, unheeded, unrequited labour in every church. That is inevitable, and probably good; but it should make us the more anxious to acknowledge what we see, and to esteem the workers very highly in love because of it. How unseemly it is, and how unworthy of the Christian name, when those who do not work busy themselves with criticising those who do,—inventing objections, deriding honest effort, anticipating failure, pouring cold water upon zeal. That is bad for all, but bad especially for those who practise it. The ungenerous soul, which grudges recognition to others, and though it never labours itself has always wisdom to spare for those who do, is in a hopeless state; there is no growth for it in anything noble and good. Let us open our eyes on those who labour among us, men or women, and recognise them as they deserve.

There are two special forms of labour to which the Apostle gives prominence: he mentions as among those that labour "them that are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." The first of the words here employed, the one translated "them that are over" you, is the only hint the Epistle contains of Church government. Wherever there is a society, there must be order. There must be those through whom the society acts,

those who represent it officially by words or deeds. At Thessalonica there was not a single president, a minister in our sense, possessing to a certain extent an exclusive responsibility; the presidency was in the hands of a plurality of men, what Presbyterians would call a Kirk Session. This body, as far as we can make out from the few surviving indications of their duties, would direct, but not conduct, the public worship, and would manage the financial affairs, and especially the charity, of the church. They would as a rule be elderly men; and were called by the official name, borrowed from the Jews, of elders. They did not, in the earliest times, preach or teach; they were too old to learn that new profession; but what may be called the administration was in their hands; they were the governing committee of the new Christian community. The limits of their authority are indicated by the words "in the Lord." They are over the members of the church in their characters and relations as church members; but they have nothing to do with other departments of life, so far as these relations are unaffected by them.

Side by side with those who preside over the church, Paul mentions those "who admonish you." Admonish is a somewhat severe word; it means to speak to one about his conduct, reminding him of what he seems to have forgotten, and of what is rightly expected from

him. It gives us a glimpse of discipline in the early Church, that is, of the care which was taken that those who had named the Christian name should lead a truly Christian life. There is nothing expressly said in this passage about doctrines. Purity of doctrine is certainly essential to the health of the Church, but rightness of life comes before it. There is nothing expressly said about teaching the truth; that work belonged to apostles, prophets, and evangelists, who were ministers of the Church at large, and not fixed to a single congregation; the only exercise of Christian speech proper to the congregation is its use in admonition, *i.e.*, for practical moral purposes. The moral ideal of the gospel must be clearly before the mind of the Church, and all who deviate from it must be admonished of their danger. "It is difficult for us in modern times," says Dr. Hatch, "with the widely different views which we have come to hold as to the relation of Church government to social life, to understand how large a part discipline filled in the communities of primitive times. These communities were what they were mainly by the strictness of their discipline. . . . In the midst of 'a crooked and perverse nation' they could only hold their own by the extreme of circumspection. Moral purity was not so much a virtue at which they were bound to aim as the very condition of their existence. If the salt of the earth should lose its

savour, wherewith should it be salted? If the lights of the world were dimmed, who should rekindle their flame? And of this moral purity the officers of each community were the custodians. 'They watched for souls as those that must give account.'" This vivid picture should provoke us to reflection. Our minds are not set sufficiently on the practical duty of keeping up the Christian standard. The moral originality of the gospel drops too easily out of sight. Is it not the case that we are much more expert at vindicating the approach of the Church to the standard of the non-Christian world, than at maintaining the necessary distinction between the two? We are certain to bring a good deal of the world into the Church without knowing it; we are certain to have instincts, habits, dispositions, associates perhaps, and likings, which are hostile to the Christian type of character; and it is this which makes admonition indispensable. Far worse than any aberration in thought is an irregularity in conduct which threatens the Christian ideal. When you are warned of such a thing in your conduct by your minister or elder, or by any Christian, do not resent the warning. Take it seriously and kindly; thank God that He has not allowed you to go on unadmonished; and esteem very highly in love the brother or sister who has been so true to you. Nothing is more un-Christian than fault-findng, nothing

is more truly Christian than frank and affectionate admonishing of those who are going astray. This may be especially commended to the young. In youth we are apt to be proud and wilful; we are confident that we can keep ourselves safe in what the old and timid consider dangerous situations; we do not fear temptation, nor think that this or that little fall is more than an indiscretion; and, in any case, we have a determined dislike to being interfered with. All this is very natural; but we should remember that, as Christians, we are pledged to a course of life which is not in all ways natural; to a spirit and conduct which are incompatible with pride; to a seriousness of purpose, to a loftiness and purity of aim, which may all be lost through wilfulness; and we should love and honour those who put their experience at our service, and warn us when, in lightness of heart, we are on the way to make shipwreck of our life. They do not admonish us because they like it, but because they love us and would save us from harm; and love is the only recompense for such a service.

How little there is of an official spirit in what the Apostle has been saying, we see clearly from what follows. In one way it is specially the duty of the elders or pastors in the Church to exercise rule and discipline; but it is not so exclusively their duty as

to exempt the members of the Church at large from responsibility. The Apostle addresses the whole congregation when he goes on, "Be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all." Let us look more closely at these simple exhortations.

"Admonish," he says, "the disorderly." Who are they? The word is a military one, and means properly those who leave their place in the ranks. In the Epistle to the Colossians (ii. 5) Paul rejoices over what he calls the solid front presented by their faith in Christ. The solid front is broken, and great advantage given to the enemy, when there are disorderly persons in a church,—men or women who fall short of the Christian standard, or who violate, by irregularities of any kind, the law of Christ. Such are to be admonished by their brethren. Any Christian who sees the disorder has a right to admonish them; nay, it is laid upon his conscience as a sacred duty tenderly and earnestly to do so. We are too much afraid of giving offence, and too little afraid of allowing sin to run its course. Which is better—to speak to the brother who has been disorderly, whether by neglecting work, neglecting worship, or openly falling into sin: which is better, to speak to such a one as a brother, privately, earnestly, lovingly; or to say nothing at all

to him, but talk about what we find to censure in him to everybody else, dealing freely behind his back with things we dare not speak of to his face? Surely admonition is better than gossip; if it is more difficult, it is more Christlike too. It may be that our own conduct shuts our mouth, or at least exposes us to a rude retort; but unaffected humility can overcome even that.

But it is not always admonition that is needed. Sometimes the very opposite is in place; and so Paul writes, "Encourage the fainthearted." Put heart into them. The word rendered "fainthearted" is only used in this single passage; yet every one knows what it means. It includes those for whose benefit the Apostle wrote in chap. iv. the description of Christ's second coming,—those whose hearts sunk within them as they thought they might never see their departed friends again. It includes those who shrink from persecution, from the smiles or the frowns of the unchristian, and who fear they may deny the Lord. It includes those who have fallen before temptation, and are sitting despondent and fearful, not able to lift up so much as their eyes to heaven and pray the publican's prayer. All such timid souls need to be heartened; and those who have learned of Jesus, who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, will know how to speak a word in

season to them. The whole life of the Lord is an encouragement to the fainthearted; He who welcomed the penitent, who comforted the mourners, who restored Peter after his triple denial, is able to lift up the most timid and to make them stand. Nor is there any work more Christlike than this. The fainthearted get no quarter from the world; bad men delight to trample on the timid; but Christ bids them hope in Him, and strengthen themselves for battle and for victory.

Akin to this exhortation is the one which follows, "Support the weak." That does not mean, Provide for those who are unable to work; but, Lay hold of those who are weak in the faith, and keep them up. There are people in every congregation whose connection with Christ and the gospel is very slight; and if some one does not take hold of them, they will drift away altogether. Sometimes such weakness is due to ignorance: the people in question know little about the gospel; it fills no space in their minds; it does not awe their weakness, or fascinate their trust. Sometimes, again, it is due to an unsteadiness of mind or character; they are easily led away by new ideas or by new companions. Sometimes, without any tendency to lapsing, there is a weakness due to a false reverence for the past, and for the traditions and opinions of men, by which the mind and conscience

are enslaved. What is to be done with such weak Christians? They are to be supported. Some one is to lay hands upon them, and uphold them till their weakness is outgrown. If they are ignorant, they must be taught. If they are easily carried away by new ideas, they must be shown the incalculable weight of evidence which from every side establishes the unchangeable truth of the gospel. If they are prejudiced and bigoted, or full of irrational scruples, and blind reverence for dead customs, they must be constrained to look the imaginary terrors of liberty in the face, till the truth makes them free. Let us lay this exhortation to heart. Men and women slip away and are lost to the Church and to Christ, because they were weak, and no one supported them. Your word or your influence, spoken or used at the right time, might have saved them. What is the use of strength if not to lay hold of the weak?

It is an apt climax when the Apostle adds, "Be longsuffering toward all." He who tries to keep these commandments—"Admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak"—will have need of patience. If we are absolutely indifferent to each other, it does not matter; we can do without it. But if we seek to be of use to each other, our moral infirmities are very trying. We summon up all our love and all our courage, and venture to hint to a brother that

something in his conduct has been amiss; and he flies into a passion, and tells us to mind our own business. Or we undertake some trying task of teaching, and after years of pains and patience some guileless question is asked which shows that our labour has been in vain; or we sacrifice our own leisure and recreation to lay hold on some weak one, and discover that the first approach of temptation has been too strong for him after all. How slow, we are tempted to cry, men are to respond to efforts made for their good! Yet we are men who so cry,—men who have wearied God by their own slowness, and who must constantly appeal to His forbearance. Surely it is not too much for us to be longsuffering toward all.

This little section closes with a warning against revenge, the vice directly opposed to forbearance. "See that none render unto any one evil for evil; but alway follow after that which is good, one toward another, and toward all." Who are addressed in this verse? No doubt, I should say, all the members of the Church; they have a common interest in seeing that it is not disgraced by revenge. If forgiveness is the original and characteristic virtue of Christianity, it is because revenge is the most natural and instinctive of vices. It is a kind of wild justice, as Bacon says, and men will hardly be persuaded that it is not just. It is the vice which can most easily pass itself off as

a virtue; but in the Church it is to have no opportunity of doing so. Christian men are to have their eyes about them; and where a wrong has been done, they are to guard against the possibility of revenge by acting as mediators between the severed brethren. Is it not written in the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God?" We are not only to refrain from vengeance ourselves, but we are to see to it, as Christian men, that it has no place among us. And here, again, we sometimes have a thankless task, and need to be longsuffering. Angry men are unreasonable; and he who seeks the blessing of the peacemaker sometimes earns only the ill name of a busybody in other men's matters. Nevertheless, wisdom is justified of all her children; and no man who wars against revenge, out of a heart loyal to Christ, can ever be made to look foolish. If that which is good is our constant aim, one toward another, and toward all, we shall gain the confidence even of angry men, and have the joy of seeing evil passions banished from the Church. For revenge is the last stronghold of the natural man; it is the last fort which he holds against the spirit of the gospel; and when it is stormed, Christ reigns indeed.

XIV.

THE STANDING ORDERS OF THE GOSPEL.

"Rejoice alway; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you-ward."—1 THESS. v 16-18 (R.V.).

XIV.

THE STANDING ORDERS OF THE GOSPEL.

THE three precepts of these three verses may be called the standing orders of the Christian Church. However various the circumstances in which Christians may find themselves, the duties here prescribed are always binding upon them. We are to rejoice alway, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks. We may live in peaceful or in troubled times; we may be encompassed with friends or beset by foes; we may see the path we have chosen for ourselves open easily before us, or find our inclination thwarted at every step; but we must always have the music of the gospel in our hearts in its own proper key. Let us look at these rules in order.

"Rejoice alway." There are circumstances in which it is natural for us to rejoice; whether we are Christians or not, joy fills the heart till it overflows. Youth, health, hope, love, these richest and best possessions, give almost every man and woman at least a term of unmixed gladness; some months, or years perhaps, of

pure light-heartedness, when they feel like singing all the time. But that natural joy can hardly be kept up. It would not be good for us if it could; for it really means that we are for the time absorbed in ourselves, and having found our own satisfaction decline to look beyond. It is quite another situation to which the Apostle addresses himself. He knows that the persons who receive his letter have had to suffer cruelly for their faith in Christ; he knows that some of them have quite lately stood beside the graves of their dead. Must not a man be very sure of himself, very confident of the truth on which he stands, when he ventures to say to people so situated, "Rejoice alway"?

But these people, we must remember, were Christians; they had received the gospel from the Apostle; and, in the gospel, the supreme assurance of the love of God. We need to remind ourselves occasionally that the gospel is good news, glad tidings of great joy. Wherever it comes, it is a joyful sound; it puts a gladness into the heart which no change of circumstances can abate or take away. There is a great deal in the Old Testament which may fairly be described as doubt of God's love. Even the saints sometimes wondered whether God was good to Israel; they became impatient, unbelieving, bitter, foolish; the outpourings of their hearts in some of the psalms show how far they were from being able to rejoice evermore. But there

is nothing the least like this in the New Testament. The New Testament is the work of Christian men, of men who had stood quite close to the supreme manifestation of God's love in Jesus Christ. Some of them had been in Christ's company for years. They knew that every word He spoke and every deed He wrought declared His love; they knew that it was revealed, above all, by the death which He died; they knew that it was made almighty, immortal, and ever-present, by His resurrection from the dead. The sublime revelation of Divine love dominated everything else in their experience. It was impossible for them, for a single moment, to forget it or to escape from it. It drew and fixed their hearts as irresistibly as a mountain peak draws and holds the eyes of the traveller. They never lost sight of the love of God in Christ Jesus, that sight so new, so stupendous, so irresistible, so joyful. And because they did not, they were able to rejoice evermore; and the New Testament, which reflects the life of the first believers, does not contain a querulous word from beginning to end. It is the book of infinite joy.

We see, then, that this command, unreasonable as it appears, is not impracticable. If we are truly Christians, if we have seen and received the love of God, if we see and receive it continually, it will enable us, like those who wrote the New Testament, to rejoice

evermore. There are places on our coast where a spring of fresh water gushes up through the sand among the salt waves of the sea; and just such a fountain of joy is the love of God in the Christian soul, even when the waters close over it. "As sorrowful," says the Apostle, "yet alway rejoicing."

Most churches and Christians need to lay this exhortation to heart. It contains a plain direction for our common worship. The house of God is the place where we come to make united and adoring confession of His name. If we think only of ourselves, as we enter, we may be despondent and low spirited enough; but surely we ought to think, in the first instance, of Him. Let God be great in the assembly of His people; let Him be lifted up as He is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and joy will fill our hearts. If the services of the Church are dull, it is because He has been left outside; because the glad tidings of redemption, holiness, and life everlasting are still waiting for admission to our hearts. Do not let us belie the gospel by dreary, joyless worship: it is not so that it is endeared to ourselves or commended to others.

The Apostle's exhortation contains a hint also for Christian temper. Not only our united worship, but the habitual disposition of each of us, is to be joyful. It would not be easy to measure the loss the cause of Christ has sustained through the neglect of this rule.

A conception of Christianity has been set before men, and especially before the young, which could not fail to repel; the typical Christian has been presented, austere and pure perhaps, or lifted high above the world, but rigid, cold, and self-contained. That is not the Christian as the New Testament conceives him. He is cheerful, sunny, joyous; and there is nothing so charming as joy. There is nothing so contagious, because there is nothing in which all men are so willing to partake; and hence there is nothing so powerful in evangelistic work. The joy of the Lord is the strength of the preacher of the gospel. There is an interesting passage in 1 Cor. ix., where Paul enlarges on a certain relation between the evangelist and the evangel. The gospel, he tells us, is God's free gift to the world; and he who would become a fellow-worker with the gospel must enter into the spirit of it, and make his preaching also a free gift. So here, one may say, the gospel is conceived as glad tidings; and whoever would open his lips for Christ must enter into the spirit of his message, and stand up to speak clothed in joy. Our looks and tones must not belie our words. Languor, dulness, dreariness, a melancholy visage, are a libel upon the gospel. If the knowledge of the love of God does not make us glad, what does it do for us? If it does not make a difference to our spirits and our temper, do we really know it? Christ compares its

influence to that of new wine; it is nothing if not exhilarating; if it does not make our faces shine, it is because we have not tasted it. I do not overlook, any more than St. Paul did, the causes for sorrow; but the causes for sorrow are transient; they are like the dark clouds which overshadow the sky for a time and then pass away; while the cause of joy—the redeeming love of God in Christ Jesus—is permanent; it is like the unchanging blue behind the clouds, ever-present, ever-radiant, overarching and encompassing all our passing woes. Let us remember it, and see it through the darkest clouds, and it will not be impossible for us to rejoice evermore.

It may seem strange that one difficult thing should be made easy when it is combined with another; but this is what is suggested by the second exhortation of the Apostle, "Pray without ceasing." It is not easy to rejoice alway, but our one hope of doing so is to pray constantly. How are we to understand so singular a precept?

Prayer, we know, when we take it in the widest sense, is the primary mark of the Christian. "Behold, he prayeth," the Lord said of Saul, when He wished to convince Ananias that there was no mistake about his conversion. He who does not pray at all—and is it too much to suppose that some come to churches who never do?—is no Christian. Prayer is the converse

of the soul with God; it is that exercise in which we hold up our hearts to Him, that they may be filled with His fulness, and changed into His likeness. The more we pray, and the more we are in contact with Him, the greater is our assurance of His love, the firmer our confidence that He is with us to help and save. If we once think of it, we shall see that our very life as Christians depends on our being in perpetual contact and perpetual fellowship with God. If He does not breathe into us the breath of life, we have no life. If He does not hour by hour send our help from above, we face our spiritual foes without resources.

It is with such thoughts present to the mind that some would interpret the command, "Pray without ceasing." "Cherish a spirit of prayer," they would render it, "and make devotion the true business of life. Cultivate the sense of dependence on God; let it be part of the very structure of your thoughts that without Him you can do nothing, but through His strength all things." But this is, in truth, to put the effect where the cause should be. This spirit of devotion is itself the fruit of ceaseless prayers; this strong consciousness of dependence on God becomes an ever-present and abiding thing only when in all our necessities we betake ourselves to Him. Occasions, we must rather say, if we would follow the Apostle's thought, are never wanting, and will never be wanting, which call

for the help of God; therefore, pray without ceasing. It is useless to say that the thing cannot be done, before the experiment has been made. There are few works that cannot be accompanied with prayer; there are few indeed that cannot be preceded by prayer; there are none at all that would not profit by prayer. Take the very first work to which you must set your mind and your hand, and you know it will be better done if, as you turn to it, you look up to God and ask His help to do it well and faithfully, as a Christian ought to do it for the Master above. It is not in any vague, indefinite fashion, but by taking prayer with us wherever we go, by consciously, deliberately, and persistently lifting our hearts to God as each emergency in life, great or small, makes its new demand upon us, that the apostolic exhortation is to be obeyed. If prayer is thus combined with all our works, we shall find that it wastes no time, though it fills all. Certainly it is not an easy practice to begin, that of praying without ceasing. It is so natural for us not to pray, that we perpetually forget, and undertake this or that without God. But surely we get reminders enough that this omission of prayer is a mistake. Failure, loss of temper, absence of joy, weariness, and discouragement are its fruits; while prayer brings us without fail the joy and strength of God. The Apostle himself knew that to pray without ceasing

requires an extraordinary effort; and in the only passages in which he urges it, he combines with it the duties of watchfulness and persistence (Eph. vi. 15; Col. iv. 2; Rom. xii. 12). We must be on our guard that the occasion for prayer does not escape us, and we must take care not to be wearied with this incessant reference of everything to God.

The third of the standing orders of the Church is, from one point of view, a combination of the first and second; for thanksgiving is a kind of joyful prayer. As a duty, it is recognised by every one within limits; the difficulty of it is only seen when it is claimed, as here, without limits: "In everything give thanks." That this is no accidental extravagance is shown by its recurrence in other places. To mention only one: in Phil. iv. 6 the Apostle writes, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Is it really possible to do this thing?

There are times, we all know, at which thanksgiving is natural and easy. When our life has taken the course which we ourselves had purposed, and the result seems to justify our foresight; when those whom we love are prosperous and happy; when we have escaped a great danger, or recovered from a severe illness, we feel, or say we feel, so thankful. Even in such circumstances we are possibly not so

thankful as we ought to be. Perhaps if we were our lives would be a great deal happier. But at all events we frankly admit that we have cause for thanksgiving; God has been good to us, even in our own estimate of goodness; and we ought to cherish and express our grateful love toward Him. Let us not forget to do so. It has been said that an unblessed sorrow is the saddest thing in life; but perhaps as sad a thing is an unblessed joy. And every joy is unblessed for which we do not give God thanks. "Unhallowed pleasures" is a strong expression, which seems proper only to describe gross wickedness; yet it is the very name which describes any pleasure in our life of which we do not recognise God as the Giver, and for which we do not offer Him our humble and hearty thanks. We would not be so apt to protest against the idea of giving thanks in everything, if it had ever been our habit to give thanks in anything. Think of what you call, with thorough conviction, your blessings and your mercies,—your bodily health, your soundness of mind, your calling in this world, the faith which you repose in others and which others repose in you; think of the love of your husband or wife, of all those sweet and tender ties that bind our lives into one; think of the success with which you have wrought out your own purposes, and laboured at your own ideal; and with all this multitude of mercies before your face, ask

whether even for these you have given God thanks. Have they been hallowed and made means of grace to you by your grateful acknowledgment that He is the Giver of them all? If not, it is plain that you have lost much joy, and have to begin the duty of thanksgiving in the easiest and lowest place.

But the Apostle rises high above this when he says, "In everything give thanks." He knew, as I have remarked already, that the Thessalonians had been visited by suffering and death: is there a place for thanksgiving there? Yes, he says; for the Christian does not look on sorrow with the eyes of another man. When sickness comes to him or to his home; when there is loss to be borne, or disappointment, or bereavement; when his plans are frustrated, his hopes deferred, and the whole conduct of his life simply taken out of his hands, he is still called to give thanks to God. For he knows that God is love. He knows that God has a purpose of His own in his life,—a purpose which at the moment he may not discern, but which he is bound to believe wiser and larger than any he could purpose for himself. Every one who has eyes to see must have seen, in the lives of Christian men and women, fruits of sorrow and of suffering which were conspicuously their best possessions, the things for which the whole Church was under obligation to give thanks to God on their behalf. It is not

easy at the moment to see what underlies sorrow; it is not possible to grasp by anticipation the beautiful fruits which it yields in the long run to those who accept it without murmuring: but every Christian knows that all things work together for good to them that love God; and in the strength of that knowledge he is able to keep a thankful heart, however mysterious and trying the providence of God may be. That sorrow, even the deepest and most hopeless, has been blessed, no one can deny. It has taught many a deeper thoughtfulness, a truer estimate of the world and its interests, a more simple trust in God. It has opened the eyes of many to the sufferings of others, and changed boisterous rudeness into tender and delicate sympathy. It has given many weak ones the opportunity of demonstrating the nearness and the strength of Christ, as out of weakness they have been made strong. Often the sufferer in a home is the most thankful member of it. Often the bedside is the sunniest spot in the house, though the bedridden one knows that he or she will never be free again. It is not impossible for a Christian in everything to give thanks.

But it is only a Christian who can do it, as the last words of the Apostle intimate: "This is the will of God *in Christ Jesus* to you-ward." These words may refer to all that has preceded: "Rejoice alway; pray

without ceasing; in everything give thanks"; or they may refer to the last clause only. Whichever be the case, the Apostle tells us that the ideal in question has only been revealed in Christ, and hence is only within reach of those who know Christ. Till Christ came, no man ever dreamt of rejoicing alway, praying without ceasing, and giving thanks in everything. There were noble ideals in the world, high, severe, and pure; but nothing so lofty, buoyant, and exhilarating as this. Men did not know God well enough to know what His will for them was; they thought He demanded integrity, probably, and beyond that, silent and passive submission at the most; no one had conceived that God's will for man was that his life should be made up of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. But he who has seen Jesus Christ, and has discovered the meaning of His life, knows that this is the true ideal. For Jesus came into our world, and lived among us, that we might know God; He manifested the name of God that we might put our trust in it; and that name is Love; it is Father. If we know the Father, it is possible for us, in the spirit of children, to aim at this lofty Christian ideal; if we do not, it will seem to us utterly unreal. The will of God in Christ Jesus means the will of the Father; it is only for children that His will exists. Do not put aside the apostolic exhortation as paradox or extravagance; to Christian hearts, to the children

of God, he speaks words of truth and soberness when he says, "Rejoice alway; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks." Has not Christ Jesus given us peace with God, and made us friends instead of enemies? Is not that a fountain of joy too deep for sorrow to touch? Has He not assured us that He is with us all the days, even to the end of the world? Is not that a ground upon which we can look up in prayer all the day long? Has He not told us that all things work together for good to them that love God? Of course we cannot trace His operation always; but when we remember the seal with which Christ sealed that great truth; when we remember that in order to fulfil the purpose of God in each of us He laid down His life on our behalf, can we hesitate to trust His word? And if we do not hesitate, but welcome it gladly as our hope in the darkest hour, shall we not try even in everything to give thanks?

XV.

THE SPIRIT.

"Quench not the Spirit; despise not prophesyings; (but) prove all things; hold fast that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.' 1 THESS. v. 20-22 (R.V.).

XV.

THE SPIRIT.

THESE verses are abruptly introduced, but are not unconnected with what precedes. The Apostle has spoken of order and discipline, and of the joyful and devout temper which should characterise the Christian Church; and here he comes to speak of that Spirit in which the Church lives, and moves, and has her being. The presence of the Spirit is, of course, presupposed in all that he has said already: how could men, except by His help, "rejoice alway, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks"? But there are other manifestations of the Spirit's power, of a more precise and definite character, and it is with these we have here to do.

Spiritus ubi est, ardet. When the Holy Spirit descended on the Church at Pentecost, "there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them"; and their lips were opened to declare the mighty works of God. A man who has received this great gift is described as fervent,

literally, boiling (ζέων), with the Spirit. The new birth in those early days *was* a new birth; it kindled in the soul thoughts and feelings to which it had hitherto been strange; it brought with it the consciousness of new powers; a new vision of God; a new love of holiness; a new insight into the Holy Scriptures, and into the meaning of man's life; often a new power of ardent, passionate speech. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians Paul describes a primitive Christian congregation. There was not one silent among them. When they came together every one had a psalm, a revelation, a prophecy, an interpretation. The manifestation of the Spirit had been given to each one to profit withal; and on all hands the spiritual fire was ready to flame forth. Conversion to the Christian faith, the acceptance of the apostolic gospel, was not a thing which made little difference to men: it convulsed their whole nature to its depths; they were never the same again; they were new creatures, with a new life in them, all fervour and flame.

A state so unlike nature, in the ordinary sense of the term, was sure to have its inconveniences. The Christian, even when he had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, was still a man; and as likely as not a man who had to struggle against vanity, folly, ambition, and selfishness of all kinds. His enthusiasm might even seem, in the first instance, to aggravate, instead

of removing, his natural faults. It might drive him to speak—for in a primitive church anybody who pleased might speak—when it would have been better for him to be silent. It might lead him to break out in prayer or praise or exhortation, in a style which made the wise sigh. And for those reasons the wise, and such as thought themselves wise, would be apt to discourage the exercise of spiritual gifts altogether. "Contain yourself," they would say to the man whose heart burned within him, and who was restless till the flame could leap out; "contain yourself; exercise a little self-control; it is unworthy of a rational being to be carried away in this fashion."

No doubt situations like this were common in the church at Thessalonica. They are produced inevitably by differences of age and of temperament. The old and the phlegmatic are a natural, and, doubtless, a providential, counterweight to the young and sanguine. But the wisdom which comes of experience and of temperament has its disadvantages as compared with fervour of spirit. It is cold and unenthusiastic; it cannot propagate itself; it cannot set fire to anything and spread. And because it is under this incapacity of kindling the souls of men into enthusiasm, it is forbidden to pour cold water on such enthusiasm when it breaks forth in words of fire. That is the meaning of "Quench not the Spirit." The commandment

presupposes that the Spirit can be quenched. Cold looks, contemptuous words, silence, studied disregard, go a long way to quench it. So does unsympathetic criticism.

Every one knows that a fire smokes most when it is newly kindled; but the way to get rid of the smoke is not to pour cold water on the fire, but to let it burn itself clear. If you are wise enough you may even help it to burn itself clear, by rearranging the materials, or securing a better draught; but the wisest thing most people can do when the fire has got hold is to let it alone; and that is also the wise course for most when they meet with a disciple whose zeal burns like fire. Very likely the smoke hurts their eyes; but the smoke will soon pass by; and it may well be tolerated in the meantime for the sake of the heat. For this apostolic precept takes for granted that fervour of spirit, a Christian enthusiasm for what is good, is the best thing in the world. It may be untaught and inexperienced; it may have all its mistakes to make; it may be wonderfully blind to the limitations which the stern necessities of life put upon the generous hopes of man: but it is of God; it is expansive; it is contagious; it is worth more as a spiritual force than all the wisdom in the world.

I have hinted at ways in which the Spirit is quenched; it is sad to reflect that from one point of

view the history of the Church is a long series of transgressions of this precept, checked by an equally long series of rebellions of the Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is," the Apostle tells us elsewhere, "there is liberty." But liberty in a society has its dangers; it is, to a certain extent, at war with order; and the guardians of order are not apt to be too considerate of it. Hence it came to pass that at a very early period, and in the interests of good order, the freedom of the Spirit was summarily suppressed in the Church. "The gift of ruling," it has been said, "like Aaron's rod, seemed to swallow up the other gifts." The rulers of the Church became a class entirely apart from its ordinary members, and all exercise of spiritual gifts for the building up of the Church was confined to them. Nay, the monstrous idea was originated, and taught as a dogma, that they alone were the depositaries, or, as it is sometimes said, the custodians, of the grace and truth of the gospel; only through them could men come into contact with the Holy Ghost. In plain English, the Spirit was quenched when Christians met for worship. One great extinguisher was placed over the flame that burned in the hearts of the brethren; it was not allowed to show itself; it must not disturb, by its eruption in praise or prayer or fiery exhortation, the decency and order of divine service. I say that was

the condition to which Christian worship was reduced at a very early period; and it is unhappily the condition in which, for the most part, it subsists at this moment. Do you think we are gainers by it? I do not believe it. It has always come from time to time to be intolerable. The Montanists of the second century, the heretical sects of the middle ages, the Independents and Quakers of the English Commonwealth, the lay preachers of Wesleyanism, the Salvationists, the Plymouthists, and the Evangelistic associations of our own day,—all these are in various degrees the protest of the Spirit, and its right and necessary protest, against the authority which would quench it, and by quenching it impoverish the Church. In many Nonconformist churches there is a movement just now in favour of a liturgy. A liturgy may indeed be a defence against the coldness and incompetence of the one man to whom the whole conduct of public worship is at present left; but our true refuge is not this mechanical one, but the opening of the mouths of all Christian people. A liturgy, however beautiful, is a melancholy witness to the quenching of the Spirit: it may be better or worse than the prayers of one man; but it could never compare for fervour with the spontaneous prayers of a living Church.

Among the gifts of the Spirit, that which the Apostle valued most highly was prophecy. We read in the

Book of Acts of prophets, like Agabus, who foretold future events affecting the fortunes of the gospel, and possibly at Thessalonica the minds of those who were spiritually gifted were pre-occupied with thoughts of the Lord's coming, and made it the subject of their discourses in the church; but there is no necessary limitation of this sort in the idea of prophesying. The prophet was a man whose rational and moral nature had been quickened by the Spirit of Christ, and who possessed in an uncommon degree the power of speaking edification, exhortation, and comfort. In other words, he was a Christian preacher,[1] endued with wisdom, fervour, and tenderness; and his spiritual addresses were among the Lord's best gifts to the Church. Such addresses, or prophesyings, Paul tells us, we are not to despise.

Now despise is a strong word; it is, literally, to set utterly at naught, as Herod set at naught Jesus, when he clothed Him in purple, or as the Pharisees set at

[1] The contrast drawn by Dr. Hatch in his Hibbert Lectures between the early Christian prophet and the modern Christian preacher—the "rhetorical religionist," as he calls him—is, like every other contrast in that notable book, strained till it becomes utterly false. It would not be true to say that there was no difference between the prophet and the preacher; but it would be far truer than to say that there was no likeness. The prophet was one who spoke, as Paul tells us, edification, exhortation, and comfort; and as that, we may hope, is what most preachers try to do, the ideal of the callings is identical. And it is only by their ideals that they ought to be compared or criticised.

naught the publicans, even when they came into the Temple to pray. Of course, prophecy, or, to speak in the language of our own time, the preacher's calling, may be abused: a man may preach without a message, without sincerity without reverence for God or respect for those to whom he speaks; he may make a mystery, a professional secret, of the truth of God, instead of declaring it even to little children; he may seek, as some who called themselves prophets in early times sought, to make the profession of godliness a source of gain; and under such circumstances no respect is due. But such circumstances are not to be assumed without cause. We are rather to assume that he who stands up in the Church to speak in God's name has had a word of God entrusted to him; it is not wise to despise it before it is heard. It may be because we have been so often disappointed that we pitch our hopes so low; but to expect nothing is to be guilty of a sort of contempt by anticipation. To despise not prophesyings requires us to look for something from the preacher, some word of God that will build us up in godliness, or bring us encouragement or consolation; it requires us to listen as those who have a precious opportunity given them of being strengthened by Divine grace and truth. We ought not to lounge or fidget while the word of God is spoken, or to turn over the leaves of the Bible at random, or to look at the

clock; we ought to hearken for that word which God has put into the preacher's mouth for us; and it will be a very exceptional prophesying in which there is not a single thought that it would repay us to consider.

When the Apostle claimed respect for the Christian preacher, he did not claim infallibility. That is plain from what follows; for all the words are connected. Despise not prophesyings, but put all things to the test, that is, all the contents of the prophesying, all the utterances of the Christian man whose spiritual ardour has urged him to speak. We may remark in passing that this injunction prohibits all passive listening to the word. Many people prefer this. They come to church, not to be taught, not to exercise any faculty of discernment or testing at all, but to be impressed. They like to be played upon, and to have their feelings moved by a tender or vehement address; it is an easy way of coming into apparent contact with good. But the Apostle here counsels a different attitude. We are to put to the proof all that the preacher says.

This is a favourite text with Protestants, and especially with Protestants of an extreme type. It has been called "a piece of most rationalistic advice"; it has been said to imply "that every man has a verifying faculty, whereby to judge of facts and doctrines, and to decide between right and wrong, truth and falsehood." But this is a most unconsidered

extension to give to the Apostle's words. He does not say a word about every man; he is speaking expressly to the Thessalonians, who were Christian men. He would not have admitted that any man who came in from the street, and constituted himself a judge, was competent to pronounce upon the contents of the prophesyings, and to say which of the burning words were spiritually sound, and which were not. On the contrary, he tells us very plainly that some men have no capacity for this task—"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit"; and that even in the Christian Church, where all are to some extent spiritual, some have this faculty of discernment in a much higher degree than others. In 1 Cor. xii. 10, "discernment of spirits," this power of distinguishing in spiritual discourse between the gold and that which merely glitters, is itself represented as a distinct spiritual gift; and in a later chapter he says (xiv. 29), "Let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others" (that is, in all probability, the other prophets) "discern." I do not say this to deprecate the judgment of the wise, but to deprecate rash and hasty judgment. A heathen man is no judge of Christian truth; neither is a man with a bad conscience, and an unrepented sin in his heart; neither is a flippant man, who has never been awed by the majestic holiness and love of Jesus Christ,—all these are simply out of court. But the

Christian preacher who stands up in the presence of his brethren knows, and rejoices, that he is in the presence of those who can put what he says to the proof. They *are* his brethren; they are in the same communion of all the saints with Christ Jesus; the same Christian tradition has formed, and the same Christian spirit animates, their conscience; their power to prove his words is a safeguard both to them and to him.

And it is necessary that they should prove them. No man is perfect, not the most devout and enthusiastic of Christians. In his most spiritual utterances something of himself will very naturally mingle; there will be chaff among the wheat; wood, hay, and stubble in the material he brings to build up the Church, as well as gold, silver, and precious stones. That is not a reason for refusing to listen; it is a reason for listening earnestly, conscientiously, and with much forbearance. There is a responsibility laid upon each of us, a responsibility laid upon the Christian conscience of every congregation and of the Church at large, to put prophesyings to the proof. Words that are spiritually unsound, that are out of tune with the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, ought to be discovered when they are spoken in the Church. No man with any idea of modesty, to say nothing of humility, could wish it otherwise. And here, again,

we have to regret the quenching of the Spirit. We have all heard the sermon criticised when the preacher could not get the benefit; but have we often heard it spiritually judged, so that he, as well as those who listened to him, is edified, comforted, and encouraged? The preacher has as much need of the word as his hearers; if there is a service which God enables him to do for them, in enlightening their minds or fortifying their wills, there is a corresponding service which they can do for him. An open meeting, a liberty of prophesying, a gathering in which any one could speak as the Spirit gave him utterance, is one of the crying needs of the modern Church.

Let us notice, however, the purpose of this testing of prophecy. Despise not such utterances, the Apostle says, but prove all: hold fast that which is good, and hold off from every evil kind. There is a curious circumstance connected with these short verses. Many of the fathers of the Church connect them with what they consider a saying of Jesus, one of the few which is reasonably attested, though it has failed to find a place in the written gospels. The saying is, "Show yourselves approved money-changers." The fathers believed, and on such a point they were likely to be better judges than we, that in the verses before us the Apostle uses a metaphor from coinage. To prove is really to assay, to put to the test as a banker tests a

piece of money ; the word rendered "good" is often the equivalent of our sterling ; "evil," of our base or forged ; and the word which in our old Bibles is rendered "appearance"—"Abstain from all appearance of evil" —and in the Revised Version "form"—"Abstain from every form of evil"—has, at least in some connections, the signification of mint or die. If we bring out this faded metaphor in its original freshness, it will run something like this : Show yourselves skilful money-changers ; do not accept in blind trust all the spiritual currency which you find in circulation ; put it all to the test ; rub it on the touchstone ; keep hold of what is genuine and of sterling value, but every spurious coin decline. Whether the metaphor is in the text or not,—and in spite of a great preponderance of learned names against it, I feel almost certain it is,—it will help to fix the Apostle's exhortation in our memories. There is no scarcity, at this moment, of spiritual currency. We are deluged with books and spoken words about Christ and the gospel. It is idle and unprofitable, nay, it is positively pernicious, to open our minds promiscuously to them ; to give equal and impartial lodgment to them all. There is a distinction to be made between the true and the false, between the sterling and the spurious ; and till we put ourselves to the trouble to make that distinction, we are not likely to advance very far. How would a man get on

in business who could not tell good money from bad? And how is any one to grow in the Christian life whose mind and conscience are not earnestly put to it to distinguish between what is in reality Christian and what is not, and to hold to the one and reject the other? A critic of sermons is apt to forget the practical purpose of the discernment here spoken of. He is apt to think it his function to pick holes. "Oh," he says, "such and such a statement is utterly misleading: the preacher was simply in the air; he did not know what he was talking about." Very possibly; and if you have found out such an unsound idea in the sermon, be brotherly, and let the preacher know. But do not forget the first and main purpose of spiritual judgment—hold fast that which is good. God forbid that you should have no gain out of the sermon except to discover the preacher going astray. Who would think to make his fortune only by detecting base coin?

In conclusion, let us recall to our minds the touchstone which the Apostle himself supplies for this spiritual assaying. "No one," he writes to the Corinthians, "can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Ghost." In other words, whatever is spoken in the Holy Ghost, and is therefore spiritual and true, has this characteristic, this purpose and result, that it exalts Jesus. The Christian Church, that community which embodies spiritual life, has this watchword on

its banner, "Jesus is Lord." That presupposes, in the New Testament sense of it, the Resurrection and the Ascension; it signifies the sovereignty of the Son of Man. Everything is genuine in the Church which bears on it the stamp of Christ's exaltation; everything is spurious and to be rejected which calls that in question. It is the practical recognition of that sovereignty—the surrender of thought, heart, will, and life to Jesus—which constitutes the spiritual man, and gives competence to judge of spiritual things. He in whom Christ reigns judges in all spiritual things, and is judged by no man; but he who is a rebel to Christ, who does not wear His yoke, who has not learned of Him by obedience, who assumes the attitude of equality, and thinks himself at liberty to negotiate and treat with Christ, *he* has no competence, and no right to judge at all. "Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood; . . . to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

XVI.

CONCLUSION.

"And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who will also do it. Brethren, pray for us. Salute all the brethren with a holy kiss. I adjure you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."—1 THESS. v. 23-28 (R.V.).

XVI.

CONCLUSION.

THESE verses open with a contrast to what precedes, which is more strongly brought out in the original than in the translation. The Apostle has drawn the likeness of a Christian church, as a Christian church ought to be, waiting for the coming of the Lord; he has appealed to the Thessalonians to make this picture their standard, and to aim at Christian holiness; and conscious of the futility of such advice, as long as it stands alone and addresses itself to man's unaided efforts, he turns here instinctively to prayer: "The God of peace Himself"—working in independence of your exertions and my exhortations—"sanctify you wholly."

The solemn fulness of this title forbids us to pass it by. Why does Paul describe God in this particular place as the God of peace? Is it not because peace is the only possible basis on which the work of sanctification can proceed? I do not think it is forced to render the words literally, the God of the peace, *i.e.*, the

peace with which all believers are familiar, the Christian peace, the primary blessing of the gospel. The God of peace is the God of the gospel, the God who has come preaching peace in Jesus Christ, proclaiming reconciliation to those who are far off and to those who are near. No one can ever be sanctified who does not first accept the message of reconciliation. It is not possible to become holy as God is holy, until, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is God's way of holiness; and this is why the Apostle presents his prayer for the sanctification of the Thessalonians to the God of peace. We are so slow to learn this, in spite of the countless ways in which it is forced upon us, that one is tempted to call it a secret; yet no secret, surely, could be more open. Who has not tried to overcome a fault, to work off a vicious temper, to break for good with an evil habit, or in some other direction to sanctify himself, and withal to keep out of God's sight till the work was done? It is of no use. Only the God of Christian peace, the God of the gospel, can sanctify us; or to look at the same thing from our own side, we cannot be sanctified until we are at peace with God. Confess your sins with a humble and penitent heart; accept the forgiveness and friendship of God in Christ Jesus; and then He will work in you both will and deed to further His good pleasure.

Notice the comprehensiveness of the Apostle's prayer in this place. It is conveyed in three separate words—wholly (ὁλοτελεῖς), entire (ὁλόκληρον), and without blame (ἀμέμπτως). It is intensified by what has, at least, the look of an enumeration of the parts or elements of which man's nature consists—"your spirit and soul and body." It is raised to its highest power when the sanctity for which he prays is set in the searching light of the Last Judgment—in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all feel how great a thing it is which the Apostle here asks of God: can we bring its details more nearly home to ourselves? Can we tell, in particular, what he means by spirit and soul and body?

The learned and philosophical have found in these three words a magnificent field for the display of philosophy and learning; but unhappily for plain people, it is not very easy to follow them. As the words stand before us in the text, they have a friendly Biblical look; we get a fair impression of the Apostle's intention in using them; but as they come out in treatises on Biblical Psychology, though they are much more imposing, it would be rash to say they are more strictly scientific, and they are certainly much less apprehensible than they are here. To begin with the easiest one, everybody knows what is meant by the body. What the Apostle prays for in this place

is that God would make the body in its entirety—every organ and every function of it—holy. God made the body at the beginning; He made it for Himself; and it is His. To begin with, it is neither holy nor unholy; it has no character of its own at all; but it may be profaned or it may be sanctified; it may be made the servant of God or the servant of sin, consecrated or prostituted. Everybody knows whether his body is being sanctified or not. Everybody knows "the inconceivable evil of sensuality." Everybody knows that pampering of the body, excess in eating and drinking, sloth and dirt, are incompatible with bodily sanctification. It is not a survival of Judaism when the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us to draw near to God "in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." But sanctification, even of the body, really comes only by employment in God's service; charity, the service of others for Jesus' sake, is that which makes the body truly His. Holy are the feet which move incessantly on His errands; holy are the hands which, like His, are continually doing good; holy are the lips which plead His cause or speak comfort in His Name. The Apostle himself points the moral of this prayer for the consecration of the body when he says to the Romans, "Present your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification."

But let us look, now, at the other two terms—spirit and soul. Sometimes one of these is used in contrast with body, sometimes the other. Thus Paul says that the unmarried Christian woman cares for the things of the Lord, seeking only how she may be holy in body and in spirit,—the two together constituting the whole person. Jesus, again, warns His disciples not to fear man, but to fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell; where the person is made to consist, not of body and spirit, but of body and soul. These passages certainly lead us to think that soul and spirit must be very near akin to each other; and that impression is strengthened when we remember such a passage as is found in Mary's song: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour"; where, according to the laws of Hebrew poetry, soul and spirit must mean practically the same thing. But granting that they do so, when we find two words used for the same thing, the natural inference is that they give us each a different look at it. One of them shows it in one aspect; the other in another. Can we apply that distinction here? I think the use of the words in the Bible enables us to do it quite decidedly; but it is unnecessary to go into the details. The soul means the life which is in man, taken simply as it is, with all its powers; the spirit means that very same life, taken in its relation to God.

This relation may be of various kinds: for the life that is in us is derived from God; it is akin to the life of God Himself; it is created with a view to fellowship with God; in the Christian it is actually redeemed and admitted to that fellowship; and in all those aspects it is spiritual life. But we may look at it without thinking of God at all; and then, in Bible language, we are looking, not at man's spirit, but at his soul.

This inward life, in all its aspects, is to be sanctified through and through. All our powers of thought and imagination are to be consecrated; unholy thoughts are to be banished; lawless, roving imaginings, suppressed. All our inventiveness is to be used in God's service. All our affections are to be holy. Our heart's desire is not to settle on anything from which it would shrink in the day of the Lord Jesus. The fire which He came to cast on the earth must be kindled in our souls, and blaze there till it has burned up all that is unworthy of His love. Our consciences must be disciplined by His word and Spirit, till all the aberrations due to pride and passion and the law of the world have been reduced to nothing, and as face answers face in the glass, so our judgment and our will answer His. Paul prays for this when he says, May your whole soul be preserved blameless. But what is the special point of the sanctification of the spirit? It is probably narrowing it a little, but it points us in the

right direction, if we say that it has regard to worship and devotion. The spirit of man is his life in its relation to God. Holiness belongs to the very idea of this ; but who has not heard of sins in holy things ? Which of us ever prays as he ought to pray ? Which of us is not weak, distrustful, incoherent, divided in heart, wandering in desire, even when he approaches God ? Which of us does not at times forget God altogether ? Which of us has really worthy thoughts of God, worthy conceptions of His holiness and of His love, worthy reverence, a worthy trust ? Is there not an element in our devotions even, in the life of our spirits at their best and highest, which is worldly and unhallowed, and for which we need the pardoning and sanctifying love of God ? The more we reflect upon it, the more comprehensive will this prayer of the Apostle appear, and the more vast and far-reaching the work of sanctification. He seems himself to have felt, as man's complex nature passed before his mind, with all its elements, all its activities, all its bearings, all its possible and actual profanation, how great a task its complete purification and consecration to God must be. It is a task infinitely beyond man's power to accomplish. Unless he is prompted and supported from above, it is more than he can hope for, more than he can ask or think. When the Apostle adds to his prayer, as if to justify his boldness, " Faithful is

He that calleth you, who will also do it," is it not a New Testament echo of David's cry, "Thou, O Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, hast revealed to Thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee"?

Theologians have tried in various ways to find a scientific expression for the Christian conviction implied in such words as these, but with imperfect success. Calvinism is one of these expressions: its doctrines of a Divine decree, and of the perseverance of the saints, really rest upon the truth of this 24th verse,—that salvation is of God to begin with; and that God, who has begun the good work, is in earnest with it, and will not fail nor be discouraged until He has carried it through. Every Christian depends upon these truths, whatever he may think of Calvinistic inferences from them, or of the forms in which theologians have embodied them. When we pray to God to sanctify us wholly; to make us His in body, soul, and spirit; to preserve our whole nature in all its parts and functions blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus, is not our confidence this, that God has called us to this life of entire consecration, that He has opened the door for us to enter upon it by sending His Son to be a propitiation for our sins, that He has actually begun it by inclining our hearts to receive the gospel, and that He may be depended upon to persevere in it till

it is thoroughly accomplished? What would all our good resolutions amount to, if they were not backed by the unchanging purpose of God's love? What would be the worth of all our efforts and of all our hopes, if behind them, and behind our despondency and our failures too, there did not stand the unwearying faithfulness of God? This is the rock which is higher than we; our refuge; our stronghold; our stay in the time of trouble. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. We may change, but not He.

What follows is the affectionate desultory close of the letter. Paul has prayed for the Thessalonians; he begs their prayers for himself. This request is made no less than seven times in his Epistles—including the one before us: a fact which shows how priceless to the Apostle was the intercession of others on his behalf. So it is always; there is nothing which so directly and powerfully helps a minister of the gospel as the prayers of his congregation. They are the channels of all possible blessing both for him and those to whom he ministers. But prayer for him is to be combined with love to one another: "Salute all the brethren with a holy kiss."[1] The kiss was the ordinary greeting among members of a family; brothers and

[1] Is it a fair inference from these words that the Epistle was to be delivered to the elders or ruling body in the church? In other places the Apostle writes, "Greet one another"

sisters kissed each other when they met, especially after long separation; even among those who were no kin to each other, but only on friendly terms, it was common enough, and answered to our shaking of hands. In the Church the kiss was the pledge of brotherhood; those who exchanged it declared themselves members of one family. When the Apostle says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss," he means, as holy always does in the New Testament, a Christian kiss; a greeting not of natural affection, nor of social courtesy merely, but recognising the unity of all members of the Church in Christ Jesus, and expressing pure Christian love. The history of the kiss of charity is rather curious, and not without its moral. Of course, its only value was as the natural expression of brotherly love; where the natural expression of such love was not kissing, but the grasping of the hand, or the friendly inclination of the head, the Christian kiss ought to have died a natural death. So, on the whole, it did; but with some partial survivals in ritual, which in the Greek and Romish Churches are not yet extinct. It became a custom in the Church to give the kiss of brotherhood to a member newly admitted by baptism; that practice still survives in some quarters, even when children only are baptized. The great celebrations at Easter, when no element of ritual was omitted, retained the kiss of peace long after it had fallen out of the

other services. At Solemn Mass in the Church of Rome the kiss is ceremonially exchanged between the celebrant and the assistant ministers. At Low Mass it is omitted, or given with what is called an osculatory or Pax. The priest kisses the altar; then he kisses the osculatory, which is a small metal plate; then he hands this to the server, and the server hands it to the people, who pass it from one to another, kissing it as it goes. This cold survival of the cordial greeting of the Apostolic Church warns us to distinguish spirit from letter. "Greet one another with a holy kiss" means, Show your Christian love one to another, frankly and heartily, in the way which comes natural to you. Do not be afraid to break the ice when you come into the church. There should be no ice there to break. Greet your brother or your sister cordially and like a Christian; assume and create the atmosphere of home.

Perhaps the very strong language which follows may point to some lack of good feeling in the church at Thessalonica: "I adjure you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto *all* the brethren." Why should he need to adjure them by the Lord? Could there be any doubt that everybody in the church would hear his Epistle? It is not easy to say. Perhaps the elders who received it might have thought it wiser *not* to tell all that it contained to everybody; we know

how instinctive it is for men in office—whether they be ministers of the church or ministers of state—to make a mystery out of their business, and, by keeping something always in reserve, to provide a basis for a despotic and uncontrolled authority. But whether for this or some other purpose, consciously or unconsciously influencing them, Paul seems to have thought the suppression of his letter possible; and gives this strong charge that it be read to all. It is interesting to notice the beginnings of the New Testament. This is its earliest book, and here we see its place in the Church vindicated by the Apostle himself. Of course when he commands it to be read, he does not mean that it is to be read repeatedly; the idea of a New Testament, of a collection of Christian books to stand side by side with the books of the earlier revelation, and to be used like them in public worship, could not enter men's minds as long as the apostles were with them; but a direction like this manifestly gives the Apostle's pen the authority of his voice, and makes the writing for us what his personal presence was in his lifetime. The apostolic word is the primary document of the Christian faith; no Christianity has ever existed in the world but that which has drawn its contents and its quality from this; and nothing which departs from this rule is entitled to be called Christian.

The charge to read the letter to *all* the brethren is one of the many indications in the New Testament that, though the gospel is a *mysterion*, as it is called in Greek, there is no mystery about it in the modern sense. It is all open and aboveboard. There is not something on the surface, which the simple are to be allowed to believe; and something quite different underneath, into which the wise and prudent are to be initiated. The whole thing has been revealed unto babes. He who makes a mystery out of it, a professional secret which it needs a special education to understand, is not only guilty of a great sin, but proves that he knows nothing about it. Paul knew its length and breadth and depth and height better than any man; and though he had to accommodate himself to human weakness, distinguishing between babes in Christ and such as were able to bear strong meat, he put the highest things within reach of all; "Him we preach," he exclaims to the Colossians, "warning every man, and teaching every man in every wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ." There is no attainment in wisdom or in goodness which is barred against any man by the gospel; and there is no surer mark of faithlessness and treachery in a church than this, that it keeps its members in a perpetual pupilage or minority, discouraging the free use of Holy Scripture, and taking care that all that it

contains is not read to all the brethren. Among the many tokens which mark the Church of Rome as faithless to the true conception of the gospel, which proclaims the end of man's minority in religion, and the coming to age of the true children of God, her treatment of Scripture is the most conspicuous. Let us who have the Book in our hands, and the Spirit to guide us, prize at its true worth this unspeakable gift.

This last caution is followed by the benediction with which in one form or another the Apostle concludes his letters. Here it is very brief: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." He ends with practically the same prayer as that with which he began: "Grace to you and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." And what is true of this Epistle is true of all the rest: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is their *A* and their *Ω*, their first word and their last. Whatever God has to say to us—and in all the New Testament letters there are things that search the heart and make it quake—begins and ends with grace. It has its fountain in the love of God; it is working out, as its end, the purpose of that love. I have known people take a violent dislike to the word grace, probably because they had often heard it used without meaning; but surely it is the sweetest and most constraining even of Bible words. All that God has been to man in Jesus Christ is

summed up in it: all His gentleness and beauty, all His tenderness and patience, all the holy passion of His love, is gathered up in grace. What more could one soul wish for another than that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ should be with it?

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS.

I.

SALUTATION AND THANKSGIVING.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"We are bound to give thanks to God alway for you, brethren, even as it is meet, for that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which ye endure." —2 THESS. i. 1-4 (R.V.).

I.

SALUTATION AND THANKSGIVING.

IN beginning to expound the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, it is necessary to say a few words by way of introduction to the book as a whole. Certain questions occur to the mind whenever such a document as this is presented to it; and it will put us in a better position for understanding details if we first answer these. How do we know, for instance, that this Epistle is really the *second* to the Thessalonians? It has been maintained that it is the earlier of the two. Can we justify its appearance in the place which it usually occupies? I think we can. The tradition of the church itself counts for something. It is quite unmistakable, in other cases in which there are two letters addressed to the same people,—*e.g.*, the Epistles to the Corinthians and to Timothy,—that they stand in the canon in the order of time. Presumably the same is the case here. Of course a tradition like this is not infallible, and if it can be proved false must be abandoned; but at the present moment, the tendency

in most minds is to underestimate the historical value of such traditions; and, in the instance before us, tradition is supported by various indications in the Epistle itself. For example, in the other letter, Paul congratulates the Thessalonians on their reception of the gospel, and the characteristic experiences attendant upon it; here it is the wonderful growth of their faith, and the abounding of their love, which calls forth his thanksgiving,—surely a more advanced stage of Christian life being in view. Again, in the other Epistle there are slight hints of moral disorder, due to misapprehension of the Lord's Second Coming; but in this Epistle such disorder is broadly exposed and denounced; the Apostle has heard of unruly busybodies, who do no work at all; he charges them in the name of the Lord Jesus to change their conduct, and bids the brethren avoid them, that they may be put to shame. Plainly the faults as well as the graces of the church are seen here at a higher growth. Once more, in chap. ii. 15 of this letter, there is reference to instruction which the Thessalonians have already received from Paul in a letter; and though he may quite conceivably have written them letters which no longer exist, still the natural reference of these words is to what we call the First Epistle. If anything else were needed to prove that the letter we are about to study stands in its right place, it might be found in the appeal of chap. ii. 1.

"Our gathering together unto Him" is the characteristic revelation of the other, and therefore the earlier letter.

But though this Epistle is certainly later than the other, it is not much later. The Apostle has still the same companions—Silas and Timothy—to join in his Christian greeting. He is still in Corinth or its neighbourhood; for we never find these two along with him but there. The gospel, however, has spread beyond the great city, and taken root in other places, for he boasts of the Thessalonians and their graces in *the churches* of God. His work has so far progressed as to excite opposition; he is in personal peril, and asks the prayers of the Thessalonians, that he may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men. If we put all these things together, and remember the duration of Paul's stay in Corinth, we may suppose that some months separated the Second Epistle from the First.

What, now, was the main purpose of it? What had the Apostle in his mind when he sat down to write? To answer that, we must go back a little way.

A great subject of apostolic preaching at Thessalonica had been the Second Advent. So characteristic was it of the gospel message, that Christian converts from heathenism are defined as those who have turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. This waiting, or expectation, was the characteristically

Christian attitude; the Christian's hope was hidden in heaven, and he could not but look up and long for its appearing. But this attitude became strained, under various influences. The Apostle's teaching was pressed, as if he had said, not only that the day of the Lord was coming, but that it was actually here. Men, affecting to speak through the Spirit, patronised such fanaticism. We see from chap. ii. 2 that pretended words of Paul were put in circulation; and what was more deliberately wicked, a forged epistle was produced, in which his authority was claimed for this transformation of his doctrine. Weak-minded people were carried off their feet, and bad-hearted people feigned an exaltation they did not feel; and both together brought discredit on the church, and injured their own souls, by neglecting the commonest duties. Not only decorum and reputation were lost, but character itself was endangered. This was the situation to which Paul addressed himself.

We do not need to be fastidious in dealing with the Apostle's teaching on the Second Advent; our Saviour tells us that of the day and the hour no man knows, nor angel; nay, not even the Son, but the Father only. Certainly St. Paul did not know; and almost as certainly, in the ardour of his hope, he anticipated the end sooner than it was actually to arrive. He spoke of himself as one who might naturally enough

expect to see the Lord come again; and it was only as experience brought him new light that in his later years he began to speak of a desire to depart, and to be with Christ. Not to die, had been his earlier hope, but to have the mortal being swallowed up of life; and it was this earlier hope he had communicated to the Thessalonians. They also hoped not to die; as the sky grew darker over them with affliction and persecution, their heated imaginations saw the glory of Christ ready to break through for their final deliverance. The present Epistle puts this hope, if one may say so, to a certain remove. It does not fix the date of the Advent; it does not tell us when the day of the Lord shall come; but it tells us plainly that it is not here yet, and that it will not be here till certain things have first happened. What these things are is by no means obvious; but this is not the place to discuss the question. All we have to notice is this: that with a view to counteracting the excitement at Thessalonica, which was producing bad consequences, St. Paul points out that the Second Advent is the term of a moral process, and that the world must run through a spiritual development of a particular kind before Christ can come again. The first Advent was in the fulness of the times; so will the second be; and though he might not be able to interpret all the signs, or tell when the great day

would dawn, he could say to the Thessalonians, "The end is not yet."

This, I say, is the great lesson of the Epistle, the main thing which the Apostle has to communicate to the Thessalonians. But it is preceded by what may be called, in a loose sense, a consolatory paragraph, and it is followed up by exhortations, the same in purport as those of the First Epistle, but more peremptory and emphatic. The true preparedness for the Lord's Second Coming is to be sought, he assures them, not in this irrational exaltation, which is morally empty and worthless, but in diligent, humble, faithful performance of duty; in love, faith, and patience.

The greeting with which the Epistle opens is almost word for word the same as that of the First Epistle. It is a church which is addressed; and a church subsisting in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle has no other interest in the Thessalonians than as they are Christian people. Their Christian character and their Christian interests are the only things he cares for. One could wish it were so among us. One could wish our relation to God and His Son were so real and so dominant, that it gave us an unmistakable character, in which we might naturally address each other, without any consciousness or suspicion of unreality. With every

desire to think well of the Church, when we look to the ordinary tone of conversation and of correspondence among Christians, we can hardly think that this is so. There is an aversion to such directness of speech as was alone natural to the Apostle. Even in church meetings, there is a disposition to let the Christian character fall into the background; it is a sensible relief to many to be able to think of those about them as ladies and gentlemen, rather than as brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet it is this last relation only in virtue of which we form a church; it is the interests of this relation that our intercourse with one another as Christians is designed to serve. We ought not to look in the Christian assembly for what it was never meant to be,—for a society to further the temporal interests of its members; for an educational institution, aiming at the general enlightenment of those who frequent its meetings; still less, as some seem to be inclined to do, for a purveyor of innocent amusements: all these are simply beside the mark; the Church is not called to any such functions; her whole life is in God and Christ; and she can *say* nothing and *do* nothing for any man until his life has been brought to this source and centre. An apostolic interest in the Church is the interest of one who cares only for the relation of the soul to Christ; and who can say no more to those he loves best than John

says to Gaius, "Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

It is in accordance with this Spirit that the Apostle wishes the Thessalonians not any outward advantages, but grace and peace. Grace and peace are related as cause and effect. Grace is God's unmerited love, His free and beautiful goodness to the sinful; and when men receive it, it bears the fruit of peace. Peace is a far bigger word in the Bible than in common usage; and it has its very largest sense in these salutations, where it represents the old Hebrew greeting *Shālōm*. Properly speaking, it means completeness, wholeness, health—the perfect soundness of the spiritual nature. This is what the Apostle wishes for the Thessalonians. Of course, there is a narrower sense of peace, in which it means the quieting of the perturbed conscience, the putting away of the alienation between the soul and God; but that is only the initial work of grace, the first degree of the great peace which is in view here. When grace has had its perfect work, it results in a more profound and steadfast peace,—a soundness of the whole nature, a restoration of the shattered spiritual health, which is the crown of all God's blessings. There is a vast difference in the degrees of bodily health between the man who is chronically ailing, always anxious, nervous about himself, and unable to

trust himself if any unexpected drain is made upon his strength, and the man who has solid, unimpaired health, whose heart is whole within him, and who is not shaken by the thought of what may be. It is this radical soundness which is really meant by peace; thorough spiritual health is the best of God's blessings in the Christian life, as thorough bodily health is the best in the natural life. Hence the Apostle wishes it for the Thessalonians before everything else; and wishes it, as alone it can come, in the train of grace. The free love of God is all our hope. Grace is love imparting itself, giving itself away, as it were, to others, for their good. Only as that love comes to us, and is received in its fulness of blessing into our hearts, can we attain that stable spiritual health which is the end of our calling.

The salutation is followed, as usual, by a thanksgiving, which at the first glance seems endless. One long sentence runs, apparently without interruption, from the third verse to the end of the tenth. But it is plain, on a more attentive glance, that the Apostle goes off at a tangent; and that his thanksgiving is properly contained in the third and fourth verses: "We are bound to give thanks to God alway for you, brethren, even as it is meet, for that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in

you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which ye endure." It is worthy of remark that the mere existence of faults in a church never blinded the Apostle to its graces. There was much in this congregation to rectify, and a good deal to censure; there were ignorance, fanaticism, falsehood, sloth, unruliness; but though he knew of them all, and would rebuke them all before he had done, he begins with this grateful acknowledgment of a Divine work among them. It is not merely that Paul was constitutionally of a bright temperament, and looked naturally on the promising side of things,—I hardly think he was,—but he must have felt it was undutiful and unbecoming to say anything at all to Christian people, who had once been pagans, without thanking God for what He had done for them. Some of us have this lesson to learn, especially in regard to missionary and evangelistic work and its results. We are too ready to see everything in it except what is of God,—the mistakes made by the worker, or the misconceptions in new disciples that the light has not cleared up, and the faults of character that the Spirit has not overcome; and when we fix our attention on these things, it is very natural for us to be censorious. The natural man loves to find fault; it gives him at the cheapest rate the comfortable feeling of superiority. But it is a malignant eye which

can see and delight in nothing but faults; before we comment on deficiencies or mistakes which have only become visible against the background of the new life, let us give thanks to God that the new life, in however lowly and imperfect a form, is there. It need not yet appear what it shall be. But we are bound, by duty, by truth, by all that is right and seemly, to say, Thanks be to God for what He has begun to do by His grace. There are some people who should never see half-done work; perhaps the same people should be forbidden to criticise missions either at home or abroad. The grace of God is not responsible for the faults of preachers or of converts; but it is the source of their virtues; it is the fountain of their new life; it is the hope of their future; and unless we welcome its workings with constant thanksgiving, we are in no spirit in which it can work through us.

But let us see for what fruit of grace the Apostle gives thanks here. It is because the faith of the Thessalonians grows exceedingly, and their mutual love abounds. In a word, it is for their progress in the Christian character. Here is a point of the first interest and importance. It is the very nature of life to grow; when growth is arrested, it is the beginning of decay. I would not like to fall into the very fault I have been exposing, and speak as if there were no

progress, among Christians in general, in faith and love; but one of the discouragements of the Christian ministry is undoubtedly the slowness, or it may be the invisibility, not to say the absence, of growth. At a certain stage in the physical life, we know, equilibrium is attained: we are at the maturity of our powers; our faces change little, our minds change little; the tones of our voices and the character of our handwriting are pretty constant; and when we get past that point, the progress is backward. But we can hardly say that this is an analogy by which we may judge the spiritual life. It does not run its full course here. It has not a birth, a maturity, and an inevitable decay, within the limits of our natural life. There is room for it to grow and grow unceasingly, because it is planned for eternity, and not for time. It should be in continual progress, ever improving, advancing from strength to strength. Day by day and year by year Christians should become better men and better women, stronger in faith, richer in love. The very steadiness and uniformity of our spiritual life has its disheartening side. Surely there is room, in a thing so great and expansive as life in Jesus Christ, for fresh developments, for new manifestations of trust in God, for new enterprises prompted and sustained by brotherly love. Let us ask whether we ourselves, each in his own place, face the trials of our life, its cares, its doubts, its terrible certainties,

with a more unwavering faith in God than we had five years ago? Have we *learned* in that interval, or in all the years of our Christian profession, to commit our life more unreservedly to Him, to trust Him to undertake for us, in our sins, in our weakness, in all our necessities, temporal and spiritual? Have we become more loving than we were? Have we overcome any of our irrational and unchristian dislikes? Have we made advances, for Christ's sake and His Church's, to persons with whom we were at variance, and sought in brotherly love to foster a warm and loyal Christian feeling in the whole body of believers? God be thanked, there are some who know what faith and love are better than they once did; who have learned—and it needs learning—what it is to confide in God, and to love others in Him; but could an Apostle thank God that this advance was universal, and that the charity of every one of us all was abundant to all the rest?

The apostolic thanksgiving is supplemented in this particular case by something, not indeed alien to it, yet on a quite different level—a glorying before men. Paul thanked God for the increase of faith and love at Thessalonica; and when he remembered that he himself had been the means of converting the Thessalonians, their progress made him fond and proud; he boasted of his spiritual children in the churches of

God. "Look at the Thessalonians," he said to the Christians in the south; "you know their persecutions, and the afflictions they endure; yet their faith and patience triumph over all; their sufferings only serve to bring their Christian goodness to perfection." That was a great thing to be able to say; it would be particularly telling in that old pagan world, which could meet suffering only with an inhuman defiance or a resigned indifference; it is a great thing to be able to say yet. It *is* a witness to the truth and power of the gospel, of which its humblest minister may feel justly proud, when the new spirit which it breathes into men gives them the victory over sorrow and pain. There is no persecution now to test the sincerity or the heroism of the Church as a whole; but there are afflictions still; and there must be few Christian ministers but thank God, and would do it always, as is meet, that He has allowed them to see the new life develop new energies under trial, and to see His children out of weakness made strong by faith and hope and love in Christ Jesus. These things are our true wealth and strength, and we are richer in them than some of us are aware. They are the mark of the gospel upon human nature; wherever it comes, it is to be identified by the combination of affliction and patience, of suffering and spiritual joy. That combination is peculiar to the kingdom of God: there

is not the like found in any other kingdom on earth. Blessed, let us say, be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us such proofs of His love and power among us; He only doeth such wondrous things; let the earth be filled with His glory.

II.

SUFFERING AND GLORY.

"A manifest token of the righteous judgment of God; to the end that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: if so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you, and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, *even* eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed (because our testimony unto you was believed [1]) in that day. To which end we also pray always for you, that our God may count *you* worthy of your calling, and fulfil every desire of goodness, and (every) work of faith, with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."—2 THESS. i. 5-12 (R.V.).

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[1] "It seems hopeless to find an intelligible meaning for ἐφ' ὑμᾶς in connection with ἐπιστεύθη. Apparently, as conjectured by Markland, ἐπιστεύθη is a primitive corruption of ἐπιστώθη, suggested by the preceding πιστεύσασιν, as well as by the familiarity of πιστεύω and its *prima-facie* appropriateness to μαρτύριον. The reference is probably to vv. 4, 5: the Christian testimony of suffering for the faith had been confirmed and sealed upon the Thessalonians. *Cf.* 1 Cor. i. 6: Καθὼς τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐβεβαιώθη ἐν ὑμῖν; also Ps. xciii. (xcii.) 4, 5: Θαυμαστὸς ἐν ὑψηλοῖς ὁ Κύριος· τὰ μαρτύριά σου ἐπιστώθησαν σφόδρα; and for an analogous use of πιστοῦσθαι followed by ἐπὶ with the accusative, 1 Chr. xvii. 23; 2 Chr. i. 9."—F. J. A. HORT.

II.

SUFFERING AND GLORY.

IN the preceding verses of this chapter, as in the opening of the First Epistle, the Apostle has spoken of the afflictions of the Thessalonians, and of the Christian graces which they have developed under them. To suffer for Christ's sake, he says, and at the same time to abound in faith and love and spiritual joy, is to have the mark of God's election on us. It is an experience so truly and characteristically Christian that the Apostle cannot think of it without gratitude and pride. He gives thanks to God on every remembrance of his converts. He boasts of their progress in all the churches of Achaia.

In the verses before us, another inference is drawn from the afflictions of the Thessalonians, and their gospel patience under them. The whole situation is a proof, or manifest token, of the righteous judgment of God. It has this in view, that the Thessalonians may be deemed worthy of the (heavenly) kingdom of God, on behalf of which they suffer. Here, we see,

the Apostle sanctions with his authority the argument from the injustices of this life to the coming of another life in which they will be rectified. God is just, he says; and therefore this state of affairs, in which bad men oppress the innocent, cannot last for ever. It calls aloud for judgment; it proclaims its approach; it is a prognostic, a manifest token of it. The suffering which is here in view cannot be an end in itself. Even the graces which come to perfection in maintaining themselves against it, do not explain the whole meaning of affliction; it would remain a blot upon God's justice if it were not counterbalanced by the joys of His kingdom. "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." This is the gracious side of the judgment. The suffering which is borne with joy and brave patience for Christ's sake proves how dear Christ is to the sufferer; and this love, tried with fire, is requited in due time with an answer in love that makes him forget it all.

This is one of the doctrines of Scripture that untroubled times find it easy to dispense with. There is even an affectation of superiority to what is called the moral vulgarity of being good for the sake of something beyond goodness. It is idle to enter on any

abstract discussion of such a question. We are called by the gospel to a new life under certain definite conditions, one of them being the condition of suffering for its sake. The more thoroughly that condition is accepted, the less disposition will there be to criticise the future blessedness which is its counterpoise and compensation. It is not the confessors and martyrs of the Christian faith—the men who die daily, like Paul, and share in the tribulations and patience of Jesus Christ, like John—who become weary of the glory which is to be revealed. And it is such only who are in a position to judge of the value of this hope. If it is dear to them, an inspiration and an encouragement, as it certainly is, it is surely worse than vain for those who are living an easier and a lower life to criticise it on abstract grounds. If we have no need of it, if we can dispense with any sight or grasp of a joy beyond the grave, let us take care that it is not owing to the absence from our life of that present suffering for Christ's sake, without which we cannot be His. "The connection," Bishop Ellicott says, "between holy suffering and future blessedness is mystically close and indissoluble"; we *must* through great tribulations enter into the kingdom of God; and all experience proves that, when such tribulation comes and is accepted, the recompense of reward here spoken of, and the Scriptures which give prominence

to it, rise to the highest credit in the mind of the Church. It is not a token of our enlightenment and moral superiority, if we undervalue them; it is an indication that we are not drinking of the Lord's cup, or being baptized with His baptism.

But the reward is only one side of the righteous judgment foretold by the suffering of the innocent. It includes punishment as well. "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you." We see here the very simplest conception of God's justice. It is a law of retribution, of vindication; it is the reaction, in this particular case, of man's sin against himself. The reaction is inevitable: if it does not come here, it comes in another world; if not now, in another life. The hope of the sinner is always that in some way or other this reaction may never take place, or that, when it does take place, it may be evaded; but that hope is doomed to perish. "If it were done when 'tis done," he says as he contemplates his sin in prospect; but it never *is* so done; it is exactly half done when he is finished with it; and the other half is taken in hand by God. Punishment is the other half of sin; as inseparable from it as heat from fire, as the inside of a vessel from the outside. "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you." "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

One of the favourite pastimes of some modern historians is the whitewashing of persecutors. A dispassionate interest in the facts shows, we are told, in many cases, that the persecutors were not so black as they have been painted, and that the martyrs and confessors were no better than they should have been. Where fault is found at all, it is laid rather at the door of systems than of individuals; judgment is passed on institutions and on centuries that persons and their actions may go free. Practically that comes to writing history, which is the story of man's moral life, without recognising the place of conscience; it may sometimes have the look of intelligence, but at bottom it is immoral and false. Men must answer for their actions. It is no excuse for murdering the saints that the murderers think they are doing God service; it is an aggravation of their guilt. Every man knows that it is wicked to afflict the good; if he does not, it is because he has quite corrupted his conscience, and therefore has the greater sin. Moral blindness may include and explain every sin, but it justifies none; it is itself the sin of sins. "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to those who afflict." If they cannot put themselves by sympathy into the place of others—which is the principle of all right conduct—God will put them in that place, and open their eyes. His righteous judgment is a day of grace

to the innocent sufferers; He rewards their trouble with rest; but to the persecutor it is a day of vengeance; he eats the fruit of his doings.

It is characteristic of this Epistle, and of the pre-occupation of the Apostle's mind when he wrote it, that he here expands his notice of the time when this judgment is to take place into a vivid statement of its circumstances and issues. The judgment is executed at the *revelation* of the Lord Jesus from heaven, with the angels of His power, in flaming fire. "At this moment," he would say, "Christ is unseen, and therefore by wicked men ignored, and sometimes by good men forgotten; but the day is coming when every eye shall see Him." The Apostle Peter, who had seen Christ in the flesh, as Paul had never done, and who probably felt His invisibility as few could feel it, is fond of this word "revelation" as a name for His reappearing. He speaks of faith which is to be found unto praise and honour and glory at the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. "Be sober," he says, "and hope to the end for the grace that is being brought to you at the *revelation* of Jesus Christ." And in another passage, much in keeping with this of St. Paul's, he says, "Inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the *revelation* of His glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy." It is one of the great words of the New Testament; and its greatness is

heightened in this place by the accompanying description. The Lord is revealed, attended by the angels of His power, in flaming fire. These accessories of the Advent are borrowed from the Old Testament; the Apostle clothes the Lord Jesus at His appearing in all the glory of the God of Israel.[1]

When Christ is thus revealed, it is in the character of a Judge: He renders vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Two classes of guilty men are quite plainly distinguished by these words; and as plainly, though the English alone would not enable us to lay stress upon it, those two classes are the heathen and the Jews. Ignorance of God is the characteristic of paganism; when Paul wishes to describe the Gentiles from the religious point of view, he speaks of them as the Gentiles which know not God. Now, with us, ignorance is usually regarded as an excuse for sin; it is an extenuating circumstance, which calls for compassion rather than condemnation; and we are almost astonished in reading the Bible to find it used as a summary of the whole guilt and offence of the heathen world. But we must remember what it is that men are said not to know. It is not theology; it is not the history of the Jews, or the special revelations

[1] For an excellent and instructive study of the relations of Jewish and Christian eschatology, see Stanton's *Jewish and Christian Messiah.*

it contains ; it is not any body of doctrines ; it is God. And God, who is the fountain of life, the only source of goodness, does not hide Himself from men. He has His witnesses everywhere. There is something in all men which is on His side, and which, if it be regarded, will bring their souls to Him. Those who know not God are those who have stifled this inner witness, and separated themselves in doing so from all that is good. Ignorance of God means ignorance of goodness ; for all goodness is from Him. It is not a lack of acquaintance with any system of ideas about God that is here exposed to the condemnation of Christ ; but the practical lack of acquaintance with love, purity, truth. If men are familiar with the opposites of all these ; if they have been selfish, vile, bad, false ; if they have said to God, "Depart from us ; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways ; we are content to have no acquaintance with Thee "—is it not inevitable that, when Christ is revealed as Judge of all, they should be excluded from His kingdom ? What could they do in it ? Where could they be less in place ?

The difficulty which some have felt about the ignorance of the Gentiles can hardly be raised about the disobedience of the Jews. The element of wilfulness, of deliberate antagonism to the good, to which we give such prominence in our idea of sin, is conspicuous here. The will of God for their salvation

had been fully made known to this stubborn race; but they disobeyed, and persisted in their disobedience. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck" —so ran their own proverb—"shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Such was the sentence to be executed on them in the day of Christ.

When it is said that ignorance of God and disobedience to the gospel are here presented as the characteristics respectively of Gentile and Jew, it is not said that the passage is without significance for us. There may be some of us who are sinking day by day into an ever deeper ignorance of God. Those who live a worldly and selfish life, whose interests and hopes are bounded by this material order, who never pray, who do nothing, give nothing, suffer nothing for others, they, whatever their knowledge of the Bible or the catechism may be, do not know God, and fall under this pagan condemnation. And what of disobedience to the gospel? Notice the word which is here used by the Apostle; it implies a conception of the gospel which we are apt, in magnifying the grace of God, to overlook. We speak of receiving the gospel, believing it, welcoming it, and so forth; it is equally needful to remember that it claims our obedience. God not only beseeches us to be reconciled, He commands us to repent. He makes a display of

His redeeming love in the gospel—a love which contains pardon, renewal, and immortality; and He calls on all men for a life in correspondence with that love. Salvation is not only a gift, but a vocation; we enter into it as we obey the voice of Jesus, "Follow Me"; and if we disobey, and choose our own way, and live a life in which there is nothing that answers to the manifestation of God as our Saviour, what can the end be? Can it be anything else than the judgment of which St. Paul here speaks? If we say, every day of our life, as the law of the gospel rings in our ears, "No: we will not have this Man to reign over us," can we expect anything else than that He will render vengeance? "Do we provoke the Lord to anger? Are we stronger than He?"

The ninth verse describes the terrible vengeance of the great day. "Such men," says the Apostle, "shall pay the penalty, everlasting destruction, away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might." These are awful words, and it is no wonder that attempts have been made to empty them of the meaning which they bear upon their face. But it would be false to sinful men, as well as to the Apostle, and to the whole of New Testament teaching, to say that any art or device could in the least degree lessen their terrors. It has been boldly asserted, indeed, that the word rendered everlasting does not mean everlasting, but

age-long; and that what is in view here is "an age-long destruction from the presence and glory of Christ, *i.e.*, the being shut out from all sight of and participation in the triumphs of Christ during *that* age" ["the age perhaps which immediately succeeds this present life"]. And this assertion is crowned by another, that those thus excluded nevertheless "abide in His presence and share His glory in the ages beyond."[1] Anything more gratuitous, anything less in keeping with the whole tone of the passage, anything more daring in its arbitrary additions to the text, it would be impossible even to imagine. If the gospel, as conceived in the New Testament, has any character at all, it has the character of finality. It is God's *last word* to men. And the consequences of accepting or rejecting it are final; it opens no prospect beyond the life on the one hand, and the death on the other, which are the results of obedience and disobedience. Obey, and you enter into a light in which there is no darkness at all: disobey, and you pass eventually into a darkness in

[1] The quotations are from Cox's *Salvator Mundi*, 13th Edition, pp. 128 9. When the time import of *αἰώνιος* is in view, many writers render it, like Dr. Cox, age-long, intending thereby to signify that æonian time has an end; its finitude, in fact, is the one thing of which Dr. Cox consents to think. But the very point of the meaning is that no end is visible. Æonian time is time that fills the mind and imagination to the furthest horizon and beyond it; there is no ulterior prospect.

which there is no light at all. What God says to us in all Scripture, from beginning to end, is not, Sooner or later? but, Life or death? These are the alternatives before us; they are absolutely separate; they do not run into one another at any time, the most remote. It is necessary to speak the more earnestly of this matter, because there is a disposition, on the plea that it is impossible for us to divide men into two classes, to blur or even to obliterate the distinction between Christian and non-christian. Many things prompt us to make the difference merely one of quantity—a more or less of conformity to some ideal standard—in which case, of course, a little more, or a little less, is of no great account. But that only means that we never take the distinction between being right with God, and being wrong with God, as seriously as God takes it; with Him it is simply infinite. The difference between those who obey, and those who do not obey, the gospel, is not the difference of a little better and a little worse; it is the difference of life and death. If there is any truth in Scripture at all, this is true—that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the gospel, and to love and obey Jesus Christ, incur at the Last Advent an infinite and irreparable loss. They pass into a night on which no morning dawns.

This final ruin is here described as separation from the face of the Lord and the glory of His might. In

both the Old Testament and the New, the vision of God is the consummation of blessedness. Thus we read in one psalm, "Before Thy face is fulness of joy"; in another, "As for me, I shall behold Thy face in uprightness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness." In one of the Gospels, our Saviour says that in heaven the angels of the little ones do always behold the face of their Father who is in heaven; and in the Book of Revelation it is the crown of joy that His servants shall serve Him and shall see His face. From all this joy and blessedness they condemn themselves to exclusion who know not God, and disobey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Far from the face of the Lord and the glory of His power, their portion is in the outer darkness.

But in vivid contrast with this—for the Apostle does not close with this terrible prospect—is the lot of those who have chosen the good part here. Christ is revealed taking vengeance on the wicked, as has just been described; but He comes also to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believed—including those Christians at Thessalonica. This is the Lord's and the Christian's interest in the great day. The glory that shines from Him is mirrored in and reflected from them. If there is a glory of the Christian even while he wears the body of his humiliation, it will be swallowed up in a glory more excellent when his

change comes. Yet that glory will not be his own: it will be the glory of Christ which has transfigured him; men and angels, as they look at the saints, will admire not them, but Him who has made them anew in the likeness of Himself. All this is to take place "on that day"—the great and terrible day of the Lord. The voice of the Apostle rests with emphasis upon it; let it fill our minds and hearts. It is a day of revelation, above all things: the day on which Christ comes, and declares which life is eternally of worth, and which for ever worthless; the day on which some are glorified, and some pass finally from our view. Do not let the difficulties and mysteries of this subject, the problems we cannot solve, the decisions we could not give, blind our eyes to what Scripture makes so plain: we are not the judges, but the judged, in this whole scene; and the judgment is of infinite consequence for us. It is *not* a question of less or more, of sooner or later, of better or worse; what is at stake in our attitude to the gospel is life or death, heaven or hell, the outer darkness or the glory of Christ.

III.

THE MAN OF SIN.

"Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is *now* present; let no man beguile you in any wise: for *it will not be*, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?"—2 THESS. ii. 1-5 (R.V.).

III.

THE MAN OF SIN.

IN the first chapter of this Epistle Paul depicted the righteous judgment of God which accompanies the advent of Christ. Its terrors and its glories blazed before his eyes as he prayed for those who were to read his letter. "With this in view," he says, "we also pray always for you, that our God would count *you* worthy of the calling." The emphatic word in the sentence is *you*. Among all believers in whom Christ was to be glorified, as they in Him, the Thessalonians were at this moment nearest to the Apostle's heart. Like others, they had been called to a place in the heavenly kingdom; and he is eager that they should prove worthy of it. They will be worthy only if God powerfully carries to perfection in them their delight in goodness, and the activities of their faith. That is the substance of his prayer. "The Lord enable you always to have unreserved pleasure in what is good, and to show the proof of faith in all you do. So you shall be worthy of the Christian calling, and the name of the Lord shall be glorified in you, and you in Him, in that day."

The second chapter seems, in our English Bibles, to open with an adjuration: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him." If that were right, we might suppose Paul's meaning to be: As you long for this great day, and anticipate its appearing as your dearest hope, let me conjure you not to entertain mischievous fancies about it; or, as you dread the day, and shrink from the terrible judgment which it brings, let me adjure you to think of it as you ought to think, and not discredit it by unspiritual excitement, bringing reproach on the Church in the eyes of the world. But this interpretation, though apt enough, is hardly justified by the use of the New Testament, and the Revised Version is nearer the truth when it gives the rendering "touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is of it the Apostle wishes to speak; and what he has to say is, that the true doctrine of it contains nothing which ought to produce unsettlement or vague alarms. In the First Epistle, especially in chap. v., he has enlarged on the moral attitude which is proper to those who cherish the Christian hope: they are to watch and be sober; they are to put off the works of darkness, and put on, as children of the day, the armour of light; they are to be ready and expectant always. Here he adds the negative counsel that they are not to be quickly shaken from their mind,

as a ship is driven from her moorings by a storm, nor yet upset or troubled, whether by spirit, or by word or letter purporting to be from him. These last expressions need a word of explanation. By "spirit" the Apostle no doubt means a Christian man speaking in the church under a spiritual impulse. Such speakers in Thessalonica would often take the Second Advent as their theme; but their utterances were open to criticism. It was of such utterances that the Apostle had said in his earlier letter, "Despise not prophesyings; but prove all that is said, and hold fast that which is good." The spirit in which a Christian spoke was not necessarily the spirit of God; even if it were, it was not necessarily unmixed with his own ideas, desires, or hopes. Hence discernment of spirits was a valued and needful gift, and it seems to have been wanted at Thessalonica. Besides misleading utterances of this kind in public worship, there were circulated words ascribed to Paul, and if not a forged letter, at all events a letter purporting to contain his opinion, none of which had his authority. These words and this letter had for their substance the idea that the day of the Lord was now present—or, as one might say in Scotch, just here. It was this which produced the unspiritual excitement at Thessalonica, and which the Apostle wished to contradict.

A great mystery has been made out of the paragraph

which follows, but without much reason. It certainly stands alone in St. Paul's writings, an Apocalypse on a small scale, reminding us in many respects of the great Apocalypse of John, but not necessarily to be judged by it, or brought into any kind of harmony with it. Its obscurity, so far as it is obscure, is due in part to the previous familiarity of the Thessalonians with the subject, which allowed the Apostle to take much for granted; and in part, no doubt, to the danger of being explicit in a matter which had political significance. But it is not really so obscure as it has been made out to be by some; and the reputation for humility which so many have sought, by adopting St. Augustine's confession that he had no idea what the Apostle meant, is too cheap to be coveted. We must suppose that St. Paul wrote to be understood, and was understood by those to whom he wrote; and if we follow him word by word, a sense will appear which is not really questionable except on extraneous grounds. What, then, does he say about the delaying of the Advent?

He says it will not come till the falling away, or apostasy, has come first. The Authorised Version says "*a*" falling away, but that is wrong. The falling away was something familiar to the Apostle and his readers; he was not introducing them to any new thought. But a falling away of whom? or from what? Some have suggested, of the members of the Christian

Church from Christ;[1] but it is quite plain from the whole passage, and especially from ver. 12 f., that the Apostle is contemplating a series of events in which the Church has no part but as a spectator. But the "apostasy" is clearly a religious defection; though the word itself does not necessarily imply as much, the description of the falling away does; and if it be not of Christians, it must be of the Jews; the Apostle could not conceive of the heathen "who know not God" as falling away from Him. This apostasy reaches its height, finds its representative and hero, in the man of sin, or, as some MSS. have it, the man of lawlessness. When the Apostle says *the man* of sin, he means the *man*,—not a principle, nor a system, nor a series of persons, but an individual human person who is identified with sin, an incarnation of evil as Christ

[1] There are indications of such a thing in various words of Jesus. Many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold." —Matt. xxiv. 11 f. "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."—Matt. xxiv. 24. "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"—Luke xviii. 8. What answers to these in St. Paul's writings we see in Acts xx. 29 f.; Eph. iv. 14; 1 Tim. iv. 1. But these passages belong to the very latest years in his life, and they are not connected with any such anticipations as are characteristic of the Thessalonian Apocalypse. The history of the Church, as Paul foresaw it, did not include in itself a phenomenon which could be described as ἡ ἀποστασία.

was of good, an Antichrist. The man of sin is also the son of perdition; this name expressing his fate —he is doomed to perish—as the other his nature. This person's portrait is then drawn by the Apostle. He is the adversary *par excellence*, he who sets himself in opposition, a human Satan, the enemy of Christ. The other features in the likeness are mainly borrowed from the description of the tyrant king Antiochus Epiphanes in the Book of Daniel: they may have gained fresh meaning to the Apostle from the recent revival of them in the insane Emperor Caligula. The man of sin is filled with demoniac pride; he lifts himself on high against the true God, and all gods, and all that men adore; he seats himself in the temple of God; he would like to be taken by all men *for* God. There has been much discussion over the temple of God in this passage. It is no doubt true that the Apostle sometimes uses the expression figuratively, of a church and its members—"The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are"—but it is surely inconceivable that a *man* should *take his seat* in *that* temple; when these words were fresh, no one could have put that meaning on them. The temple of God is, therefore, the temple at Jerusalem; it was standing when Paul wrote; and he expected it to stand till all this was fulfilled. When the Jews had crowned their guilt by falling away from God; in other words, when they had finally and as a

whole decided against the gospel, and God's purpose to save them by it; when the falling away had been crowned by the revelation of the man of sin, and the profanation of the temple by his impious pride, *then*, and not till then, would come the end. "Do you not remember," says the Apostle, "that when I was with you I used to tell you this?"

When Paul wrote this Epistle, the Jews were the great enemies of the gospel; it was they who persecuted him from city to city, and roused against him everywhere the malice of the heathen; hostility to God was incarnated, if anywhere, in them. They alone, because of their spiritual privileges, were capable of the deepest spiritual sin. Already in the First Epistle he has denounced them as the murderers of the Lord Jesus and of their own prophets, a race that please not God and are contrary to all men, sinners on whom the threatened wrath has come without reserve. In the passage before us the course is outlined of that wickedness against which the wrath was revealed. The people of God, as they called themselves, fall definitely away from God; the monster of lawlessness who rises from among them can only be pictured in the words in which prophets pourtrayed the impiety and presumption of a heathen king; he thrusts God aside, and claims to be God himself.

There is only one objection to this interpretation

of the Apostle's words, namely, that they have never been fulfilled. Some will think that objection final; and some will think it futile: I agree with the last. It proves too much; for it lies equally against every other interpretation of the words, however ingenious, as well as against the simple and natural one just given. It lies, in some degree, against almost every prophecy in the Bible. No matter what the apostasy, and the man of sin, are taken to be, nothing has ever appeared in history which answers exactly to Paul's description. The truth is that inspiration did not enable the apostles to write history before it happened; and though this forecast of the Apostle's has a spiritual truth in it, resting as it does on a right perception of the law of moral development, the precise anticipation which it embodies was not destined to be realised. Further, it must have changed its place in Paul's own mind within the next ten years; for, as Dr. Farrar has observed, he barely alludes again to the Messianic surroundings (or antecedents) of a second personal advent. "He dwells more and more on the mystic oneness with Christ, less and less on His personal return. He speaks repeatedly of the indwelling presence of Christ, and the believer's incorporation with Him, and hardly at all of that visible meeting in the air which at this epoch was most prominent in his thoughts."

But, it may be said, if this anticipation was not to be fulfilled, is it not altogether deceptive? is it not utterly misleading that a prophecy should stand in Holy Scripture which history was to falsify? I think the right answer to that question is that there is hardly any prophecy in Holy Scripture which has not been in a similar way falsified, while nevertheless in its spiritual import true. The details of this prophecy of St. Paul were not verified as he anticipated, yet the soul of it was. The Advent was *not* just then; it was delayed till a certain moral process should be accomplished; and this was what the Apostle wished the Thessalonians to understand. He did not know when it would be; but he could see so far into the law of God's working as to know that it would not come till the fulness of time; and he could understand that, where a final judgment was concerned, the fulness of time would not arrive till evil had had every opportunity, either to turn and repent, or to develop itself in the most utterly evil forms, and lie ripe for vengeance.

This is the ethical law which underlies the Apostle's prophecy; it is a law confirmed by the teaching of Jesus Himself, and illustrated by the whole course of history. The question is sometimes discussed whether the world gets better or worse as it grows older, and optimists and pessimists take opposite sides

upon it. Both, this law informs us, are wrong. It does not get better only, nor worse only, but both. Its progress is not simply a progress in good, evil being gradually driven from the field; nor is it simply a progress in evil, before which good continually disappears: it is a progress in which good and evil alike come to maturity, bearing their ripest fruit, showing all that they can do, proving their strength to the utmost against each other; the progress is not in good in itself, nor in evil in itself, but in the antagonism of the one to the other. This is the same truth which we are taught by our Lord in the parable of the wheat and the tares: "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares," etc. *In the time of harvest:* not till all is ripe for judgment, not till the wheat and the tares alike have shown all that is in them, will the judgment come. This is what St. Paul understood, and what the Thessalonians did not understand; and if his ignorance of the scale of the world, and the scale of God's purposes, made him apply this law to the riddle of history hastily, with a result which the event has not justified, that is nothing to the prejudice of the law itself, which was true when he applied it with his imperfect knowledge, and is true for application still.

One other remark is suggested by the description

of the character in which sin culminates, viz., that as evil approaches its height it assumes ever more spiritual forms. There are some sins which betray man on the lower side of his nature, through the perversion of the appetites which he has in common with the brutes: the dominance of these is in some sense natural; they are not radically and essentially evil. The man who is the victim of lust or drunkenness may lose his soul by his sin, but he is its *victim*; there is not in his guilt that malignant hatred of good which is here ascribed to the man of sin. The crowning wickedness is this demoniac pride: the temper of one who lifts himself on high above God, owning no superior, nay, claiming for himself the highest place of all. This is rather spiritual than sensual: it may be quite free from the gross vices of the flesh, though the connection between pride and sensuality is closer than is sometimes imagined; but it is more conscious, deliberate, malignant, and damnable than any brutality could be. When we look at the world in any given age—our own or another—and make inquiry into its moral condition, this is a consideration which we are apt to lose sight of, but which is entitled to the utmost weight. The collector of moral statistics examines the records of criminal courts; he investigates the standard of honesty in commerce; he balances the evidences of peace, truth, purity, against those of violence, fraud,

and immorality, and works out a rough conclusion. But that material morality leaves out of sight what is most significant of all—the spiritual forms of good and of evil in which the opposing forces show their inmost nature, and in which the world ripens for God's judgment. The man of sin is not described as a sensualist or a murderer; he is an apostate, a rebel against God, a usurper who claims not the palace but the temple for his own. This God-dethroning pride is the utmost length to which sin can go. The judgment will not come till it has fully developed; can any one see tokens of its presence?

In asking such a question we pass from the interpretation of the Apostle's words to their application. Much of the difficulty and bewilderment that have gathered about this passage are due to the confusion of these two quite different things.[1] The interpretation gives us the meaning of the very words the Apostle used. We have seen what that is, and that in its precise detail it was not destined to be fulfilled. But when we have passed behind the surface meaning, and laid hold on the law which the Apostle was applying in this passage, then we can apply it ourselves. We

[1] A conspectus of the historical interpretations, most of which are really applications, of this passage, is given in most commentaries. The fullest is Lünemann's, which is followed by Alford. Farrar's Appendix is briefer.

can use it to read the signs of the times in our own or in any other age. We may see developments of evil, resembling in their main features the man of sin here depicted, in one quarter or another, and in one person or another; and if we do, we are bound to see in them tokens that a judgment of God is at hand; but we must not imagine that in so applying the passage we are finding out what St. Paul meant. That lies far, far behind us; and our application of his words can only claim our own authority, not the authority of Holy Scripture.

Of the multitude of applications which have been made of this passage since the Apostle wrote it, one only has had historical importance enough to be of interest to us—I mean that which is found in several Protestant confessions, including the Westminster Confession of Faith, and which declares the Pope of Rome, in the words of this last, to be "that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God." As an interpretation, of course, that is impossible; the man of sin is one man, and not a series, like the Popes; the temple of God in which a man sits is a temple made with hands, and not the Church; but when we ask whether or not it is a fair *application* of the Apostle's words, the question is altered. Dr. Farrar, whom no one will suspect of sympathy

with the Papacy, is indignant that such an uncharitable idea should ever have crossed the mind of man. Many in the churches which hold by the Westminster Confession would agree with him. Of course it is a matter on which every one is entitled to judge for himself, and, whether right or wrong, ought not to be in a confession; but for my own part I have little scruple in the matter. There have been Popes who could have sat for Paul's picture of the man of sin better than any characters known to history—proud, apostate, atheist priests, sitting in the seat of Christ, blasphemously claiming His authority, and exercising His functions. And individuals apart—for there have been saintly and heroic Popes as well, true servants of the servants of God—the hierarchical system of the Papacy, with the monarchical priest at its head, incarnates and fosters that very spiritual pride of which the man of sin is the final embodiment; it is a seed-bed and nursery of precisely such characters as are here described. There is not in the world, nor has ever been, a system in which there is less that recalls Christ, and more that anticipates Antichrist, than the Papal system. And one may say so while acknowledging the debt that all Christians owe to the Romish Church, and while hoping that it may somehow in God's grace repent and reform.

It would ill become us, however, to close the study

of so serious a subject with the censure of others. The mere discovery that we have here to do with a law of moral development, and with a supreme and final type of evil, should put us rather upon self-scrutiny. The character of our Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme and final type of good; it shows us the end to which the Christian life conducts those who follow it. The character of the man of sin shows the end of those who obey not His gospel. They become, in their resistance to Him, more and more identified with sin; their antagonism to God settles into antipathy, presumption, defiance; they become gods to themselves, and their doom is sealed. This picture is set here for our warning. We cannot of ourselves see the end of evil from the beginning; we cannot tell what selfishness and wilfulness come to, when they have had their perfect work; but God sees, and it is written in this place to startle us, and fright us from sin. "Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God: but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

IV.

THE RESTRAINT AND ITS REMOVAL.

"And now ye know that which restraineth to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work : only *there is* one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming ; *even he*, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie : that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."—2 THESS. ii. 6-12 (R.V.).

IV.

THE RESTRAINT AND ITS REMOVAL.

CHRIST cannot come, the Apostle has told us, until the falling away has first come, and the man of sin been revealed. In the verses before us, we are told that the man of sin himself cannot come, in the full sense of the word, he cannot be revealed in his true character of the counter-Christ, till a restraining force, known to the Thessalonians, but only obscurely alluded to by the Apostle, is taken out of the way. The Last Advent is thus at two removes from the present. First, there must be the removal of the power which holds the man of sin in check; then the culmination of evil in that great adversary of God; and not till then the return of the Lord in glory as Saviour and Judge.

We might think that this put the Advent to such a distance as practically to disconnect it from the present, and make it a matter of little interest to the Christian. But, as we have seen already, what is significant in this whole passage is the spiritual law

which governs the future of the world, the law, that good and evil must ripen together, and in conflict with each other; and it is involved in that law that the final state of the world, which brings on the Advent, is latent, in all its principles and spiritual features, in the present. That day is indissolubly connected with this. The life that we now live has all the importance, and ought to have all the intensity, which comes from its bearing the future in its bosom. Through the eyes of this New Testament prophet we can see the end from the beginning; and the day on which we happen to read his words is as critical, in its own nature, as the great day of the Lord.

The end, the Apostle tells us, is at some distance, but it is preparing. "The mystery of lawlessness doth already work." The forces which are hostile to God, and which are to break out in the great apostasy, and the insane presumption of the man of sin, are even now in operation, but secretly. They are not visible to the careless, or to the infatuated, or to the spiritually blind; but the Apostle can discern them. Taught by the Spirit to read the signs of the times, he sees in the world around him symptoms of forces, secret, unorganised, to some extent inscrutable, yet unmistakable in their character. They are the beginnings of the apostasy, the first workings, fettered as yet and baffled, of the power which is to set itself in the place of God.

He sees also, and has already told the Thessalonians, of another power of an opposite character. "Ye know," he says, "that which restraineth . . . only *there is* one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way." This restraining power is spoken of both in the neuter and the masculine, both as a principle or institution, and as a person; and there is no reason to doubt that those fathers of the Church are right who identified it with the Empire of Rome and its sovereign head. The apostasy was to take place among the Jews; and the Apostle saw that Rome and its Emperor were the grand restraint upon the violence of that stubborn race. The Jews had been his worst enemies, ever since he had embraced the cause of the Nazarene Messiah Jesus; and all that time the Romans had been his best friends. If injustice had been done him in their name, as at Philippi, atonement had been made; and, on the whole, he had owed to them his protection against Jewish persecution. He felt sure that his own experience was typical; the final development of hatred to God and all that was on God's side could not but be restrained so long as the power of Rome stood firm. That power was a sufficient check upon anarchic violence. While it held its ground, the powers of evil could not organise themselves and work openly; they constituted a mystery of iniquity, working, as it were, underground. But when this great restraint was

removed, all that had been labouring so long in secret would come suddenly to view, in its full dimensions; the lawless one would stand revealed.

But, it may be asked, could Paul imagine that the Roman power, as represented by the Emperor, was likely to be removed within any measurable time? Was it not the very type and symbol of all that was stable and perpetual in man's life? In one way, it was; and as at least a temporary check on the final eruption of wickedness, it is here recognised to have a degree of stability; but it was certainly not eternal. Paul may have seen plainly enough in such careers as those of Caligula and Claudius the impending collapse of the Julian dynasty; and the very obscurity and reserve with which he expresses himself amount to a distinct proof that he has something in his mind which it was not safe to describe more plainly. Dr. Farrar has pointed to the remarkable correspondence between this passage, interpreted of the Roman Empire, and a paragraph in Josephus, in which that historian explains the visions of Daniel to his pagan readers. Josephus shows that the image with the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, and the ankles and feet of iron, represents a succession of four empires. He names the Babylonian as the first, and indicates plainly that the Medo-Persian and the Greek are the second and third; but when he comes

to the fourth, which is destroyed by the stone cut out without hands, he does not venture, as all his countrymen did, to identify it with the Roman. That would have been disloyal in a courtier, and dangerous as well; so he remarks, when he comes to the point, that he thinks it proper to say nothing about the stone and the kingdom it destroys, his duty as a historian being to record what is past and gone, and not what is yet to come. In a precisely similar way does St. Paul here hint at an event which it would have been perilous to name. But what he means is: When the Roman power has been removed, the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord will come to destroy him.

What was said of the man of sin in the last lecture has again its application here. The Roman Empire did *not* fall within any such period as Paul anticipated; nor, when it did, was there any such crisis as he describes. The man of sin was not revealed, and the Lord did not come. But these are the human elements in the prophecy; and its interest and meaning for us lie in the description which an inspired writer gives of the final forms of wickedness, and their connection with principles which were at work around him, and are at work among us. He does not, indeed, come to these at once. He passes over them, and anticipates the final victory, when the Lord shall destroy the man

of sin with the breath of His mouth, and bring him to nought by the appearance of His coming; he would not have Christian men face the terrible picture of the last workings of evil until they have braced and comforted their hearts with the prospect of a crowning victory. There *is* a great battle to be fought; there *are* great perils to be encountered; there is a prospect with something in it appalling to the bravest heart; but there is light beyond. It needs but the breath of the Lord Jesus; it needs but the first ray of His glorious appearing to brighten the sky, and all the power of evil is at an end. Only after he has fixed the mind on this does St. Paul describe the supreme efforts of the enemy.

His coming, he says—and he uses the word applied to Christ's advent, as though to teach us that the event in question is as significant for evil as the other for good—his coming is according to the working of Satan. When Christ was in the world, His presence with men was according to the working of God; the works that the Father gave Him to do, the same He did, and nothing else. His life was the life of God entering into our ordinary human life, and drawing into its own mighty and eternal current all who gave themselves up to Him. It was the supreme form of goodness, absolutely tender and faithful; using all the power of the Highest in pure unselfishness and truth. When sin

has reached its height, we shall see a character in whom all this is reversed. Its presence with men will be according to the working of Satan; not an ineffective thing, but very potent; carrying in its train vast effects and consequences; so vast and so influential, in spite of its utter badness, that it is no exaggeration to describe its "coming" (*παρουσία*), its "appearing" (*ἐπιφάνεια*), and its "revelation" (*ἀποκάλυψις*), by the very same words which are applied to Christ Himself. If there is one word which can characterise this whole phenomenon, both in its principle and in its consummation, it is falsehood. The devil is a liar from the beginning, and the father of lies; and where things go on according to the working of Satan, there is sure to be a vast development of falsehood and delusion. This is a prospect which very few fear. Most of us are confident enough of the soundness of our minds, of the solidity of our principles, of the justice of our consciences. It is very difficult for us to understand that we can be mistaken, quite as confident about falsehood as about truth, unsuspecting victims of pure delusion. We can see that some men are in this wretched plight, but that very fact seems to give us immunity. Yet the falsehoods of the last days, St. Paul tells us, will be marvellously imposing and successful. Men will be dazzled by them, and unable to

resist. Satan will support his representative by power and signs and wonders of every description, agreeing in nothing but in the characteristic quality of falsehood. They will be lying miracles. Yet those who are of the truth will not be left without a safeguard against them, a safeguard found in this, that the manifold deceit of every kind which the devil and his agents employ, is deceit of unrighteousness. It furthers unrighteousness; it has evil as its end. By this it is betrayed to the good; its moral quality enables them to penetrate the lie, and to make their escape from it. However plausible it may seem on other grounds, its true character comes out under the touchstone of conscience, and it stands finally condemned.

This is a point for consideration in our own time. There is a great deal of falsehood in circulation—partly superstitious, partly quasi-scientific—which is not judged with the decision and severity that would be becoming in wise and good men. Some of it is more or less latent, working as a mystery of iniquity; influencing men's souls and consciences rather than their thoughts; disinclining them to prayer, suggesting difficulties about believing in God, giving the material nature the primacy over the spiritual, ignoring immortality and the judgment to come. The man knows very little, who does not know that there is a plausible case to be stated for atheism, for materialism, for

fatalism, for the rejection of all belief in the life beyond the grave, and its connection with our present life; but however powerful and plausible the argument may be, *he* has been very careless of his spiritual nature, who does not see that it is a deceit of unrighteousness. I do not say that only a bad man could accept it; but certainly all that is bad in any man, and nothing that is good, will incline him to accept it. Everything in our nature that is unspiritual, slothful, earthly, at variance with God; everything that wishes to be let alone, to forget what is high, to make the actual and not the ideal its portion; everything that recalls responsibilities of which such a system would discharge us for ever, is on the side of its doctrines. But is not that itself a conclusive argument against the system? Are not all these most suspicious allies? Are they not, beyond dispute, our very worst enemies? and can it be possible that a way of thinking is true, which gives them undisputed authority over us? Do not believe it. Do not let any plausibility of argument impose upon you; but when the moral issue of a theory is plainly immoral, when by its working it is betrayed to be the leaven of the Sadducees, reject it as a diabolical deceit. Trust your conscience, that is, your whole nature, with its instinct for what is good, rather than any dialectic; it contains far more of what you are; and it is the whole man, and not the most

unstable and self-confident of his faculties, that must judge. If there is nothing against a spiritual truth but the difficulty of conceiving how it can be, do not let that mental incapacity weigh against the evidence of its fruits.

The Apostle points to this line of thought, and to this safeguard of the good, when he says that those who come under the power of this vast working of falsehood are those who are perishing, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. But for this clause we might have said, Why expose men, defenceless, to such a terrific trial as is here depicted? Why expect weak, bewildered, unstable creatures to keep their feet, when falsehood comes in like a flood? But such queries would show that we mistook the facts. None are carried away by the prevailing falsehood but those who received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. It is a question, we see, not of the intelligence simply, but of the whole man. He does not say, They received not the truth; that might have been due to some cause over which they had no control. They might never have had so much as a good look at the truth; they might have got an incurable twist in their education, a flaw in their minds like a flaw in a mirror, that prevented them from ever seeing what the truth was like. These would be cases to stand apart. But he

says, "They received not the love of the truth." That truth which is presented for our acceptance in the gospel is not merely a thing to scrutinise, to weigh, to judge by the rules of the bench or the jury box: it is a truth which appeals to the heart; from cultured and uncultured, from the clear-headed and the puzzle-headed, from the philosopher and the message boy, it demands the answer of love. It is this which is the true test of character—the answer which is given, not by the brain, disciplined or undisciplined, but by the whole man, to the revelation of the truth in Jesus Christ. Intelligence, by itself, may be a very little matter; all that some men have is but a tool in the hands of their passions; but the love of the truth, or its opposite, shows truly what we are. Those who love it are safe. They cannot love falsehood at the same time; all the lies of the devil and his agents are powerless to do them any harm. Satan, we see here, has no advantage over us that we do not first give him. The absence of *liking* for the truth, want of sympathy with Christ, a disposition to find less exacting ways than His, a *resolution* to find them or to *make* them, ending in a positive antipathy to Christ and to all the truth which He teaches and embodies,—these give the enemy his opportunity and his advantage over us. Put it to yourself in this light if you wish to discern your true attitude to the

gospel. You may have difficulties and perplexities about it on one side or another; it runs out into mystery on every hand; but these will not expose you to the danger of being deceived, as long as you receive the love of it in your heart. It *is* a thing to command love; the truth as truth is in Jesus. All that is good in us is enlisted in its favour; not to love it is to be a bad man. A recent Unitarian lecturer has said that to love Jesus is not a religious duty; but that is certainly not a New Testament doctrine. It is not only a religious duty, but the sum of all such duties; to do it, or not to do it, is the decisive test of character, and the arbiter of fate. Does not He Himself say—He who is the Truth—"He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me"? Does not His Apostle say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema"? Depend upon it, love to Him is all our goodness, and all our defence against the powers of evil. To grow cold and indifferent is to give the enemy of our souls an opening against us.

The last two verses in this passage are very striking. We have seen already two agents in the destruction of men's souls. They perish by their own agency, in that they do not welcome and love the truth; and they perish by the malevolence of the devil, who avails himself of this dislike to the truth to

befool them by falsehood, and lead them ever further and further astray. But here we have a third agent, most surprising of all, God Himself. "For this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Is God, then, the author of falsehood? Do the delusions that possess the minds of men, and lead them to eternal ruin, owe their strength to Him? Can He intend anybody to believe a lie, and especially a lie with such terrific consequences as are here in view? The opening words—"for this cause"—supply the answer to these questions. For this cause, *i.e.*, because they have not loved the truth, but in their liking for evil have turned their backs upon it, for this cause God's judgment comes upon them, binding them to their guilt. Nothing is more certain, however we may choose to express it, than the word of the wise man: "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin." He chooses his own way, and he gets his fill of it. He loves the deceit of unrighteousness, the falsehood which delivers him from God and from His law; and by God's righteous judgment, acting through the constitution of our nature, he comes continually more and more under its power. He believes the lie, just as a good man believes the truth; he becomes every day more hope-

lessly beclouded in error; and the end is that he is judged. The judgment is based, not on his intellectual, but on his *moral* state. It is true he has been deluded, but his delusion is due to this, that he had pleasure in unrighteousness. It was this evil in him which gave weight to the sophistries of Satan.

Again and again in Scripture this is represented as the punishment of the wicked, that God gives them their own way, and infatuates them in it. The error works with ever greater power in their souls, till they cannot imagine that it is an error; none can deliver himself, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? "My people would not hearken to My voice, and Israel would none of Me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels." "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; . . . wherefore God gave them up to uncleanness." "They changed the truth of God into a lie; . . . for this cause God gave them up unto vile affections." "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge. . . . God gave them over to a reprobate mind." "They received not the love of the truth: and for this cause God sendeth unto them a working of error." Sin bears its punishment in itself; when it has had its perfect work, we see that it has been executing a judgment of God more awful than anything we could conceive. If you would have Him on your

side, your ally and not your adversary, receive the love of the truth.

This is the final lesson of the passage. We do not know all the forces that are at work in the world in the interest of error; but we know there are many. We know that the mystery of iniquity is already in operation. We know that falsehood, in this spiritual sense, has much in man which is its natural ally; and that we need to be steadily on our guard against the wiles of the devil. We know that passion is sophistical, and reason often weak, and that we see our true selves in the action of heart and conscience. Be faithful, therefore, to God at the core of your nature. Love the truth that you may be saved. This alone is salvation. This alone is a safeguard against all the delusions of Satan; it was one who knew God, who lived in God, who did always the works of God, who loved God as the only begotten Son the Father, who could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me."

V.

THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL.

"But we are bound to give thanks to God alway for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father which loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish them in every good work and word."
—2 THESS. ii. 13-17 (R.V.).

V.

THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL.

THE first part of this chapter is mysterious, awful, and oppressive. It deals with the principle of evil in the world, its secret working, its amazing power, its final embodiment in the man of sin, and its decisive overthrow at the Second Advent. The characteristic action of this evil principle is deceit. It deludes men, and they become its victims. True, it can only delude those who lay themselves open to its approach by an aversion to the truth, and by delight in unrighteousness; but when we look round us, and see the multitude of its victims, we might easily be tempted to despair of our race. The Apostle does not do so. He turns away from that gloomy prospect, and fixes his eyes upon another, serene, bright, and joyful. There *is* a son of perdition, a person doomed to destruction, who will carry many to ruin in his train; but there is a work of God going on in the world as well as a work of evil; and it also has its triumphs. Let the mystery of iniquity work as it will, "*we* are

bound to give thanks alway to God for *you*, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning *unto salvation*."

The thirteenth and fourteenth verses of this chapter are a system of theology in miniature. The Apostle's thanksgiving covers the whole work of salvation from the eternal choice of God to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world to come. Let us observe the several points which it brings out. As a thanksgiving, of course, God is the main subject in it. Every separate clause only serves to bring out another aspect of the fundamental truth that salvation is of the Lord. What aspects, then, of this truth are presented in turn?

(1) In the first place, the original idea of salvation is God's. He chose the Thessalonians to it from the beginning. There are really two assertions in this simple sentence—the one, that God chose them; the other, that His choice is eternal. The first of these is obviously a matter on which there is an appeal to experience. These Christian men, and all Christian men, could tell whether it was true or not that they owed their salvation to God. In point of fact, there has never been any doubt about that matter in any church, or, indeed, in any religion. All good men have always believed that salvation is of the Lord. It begins on God's side. It can most truly be described from His

side. Every Christian heart responds to the word of Jesus to the disciples: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." Every Christian heart feels the force of St. Paul's words to the Galatians: "After that ye have known God, or rather were known of God." It is His taking knowledge of us which is the original, fundamental, decisive thing in salvation. That is a matter of experience; and so far the Calvinist doctrine of election, which has sometimes an unsubstantial, metaphysical aspect, has an experimental basis. We are saved, because God in His love has saved us; that is the starting-point. That also gives character, in all the Epistles, to the New Testament doctrine of election. The Apostle never speaks of the elect as an unknown quantity, a favoured few, hidden in the Church, or in the world, unknown to others or to themselves: "God," he says, "chose *you*,"—the persons addressed in this letter,—"and you *know* that He did." So does every one who knows anything of God at all. Even when the Apostle says, "God chose you from the beginning," he does not leave the basis of experience. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." The purpose of God's love to save men, which comes home to them in their reception of the gospel, is not a thing of to-day or yesterday; they know it is not; it is the manifestation of His nature; it is as eternal as Himself; they can count on

it as securely as they can on the Divine character; if God has chosen them at all, He has chosen them from the beginning. The doctrine of election in Scripture is a religious doctrine, based upon experience; it is only when it is separated from experience, and becomes metaphysical, and prompts men to ask whether they who have heard and received the gospel are elect or not—an impossible question on New Testament ground—that it works for evil in the Church. If you have chosen God, you know it is because He first chose you; and His will revealed in that choice is the will of the Eternal.

(2) Further, the means of salvation for men are of God. "He chose you," says the Apostle, "in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Perhaps "means" is not the most precise word to use here; it might be better to say that sanctification wrought by the Spirit, and belief of the truth, are the state in which, rather than the means by which, salvation is realised. But what I wish to insist upon is, that both are included in the Divine choice; they are the instruments or the conditions of carrying it into effect. And here, when we come to the accomplishment of God's purpose, we see how it combines a Divine and a human side. There is a sanctification, or consecration, wrought by the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man, the sign and seal of which is baptism, the entrance of the natural

man into the new and higher life; and coincident with this, there is the belief of the truth, the acceptance of God's message of mercy, and the surrender of the soul to it. It is impossible to separate these two things, or to define their relation to each other. Sometimes the first seems to condition the second; sometimes the order is reversed. Now it is the Spirit which opens the mind to the truth; again it is the truth which exercises a sanctifying power like the Spirit. The two, as it were, interpenetrate each other. If the Spirit stood alone, man's mind would be baffled, his moral freedom would be taken away; if the reception of the truth were everything, a cold, rationalistic type of religion would supplant the ardour of the New Testament Christian. The eternal choice of God makes provision, in the combination of the Spirit and the truth, at once for Divine influence and for human freedom; for a baptism of fire and for the deliberate welcoming of revelation; and it is when the two are actually combined that the purpose of God to save is accomplished. What can we say here on the basis of experience? Have we believed the truth which God has declared to us in His Son? Has its belief been accompanied and made effectual by a sanctification wrought by His Spirit, a consecration which has made the truth live in us, and made us new creatures in Christ? God's choice does not become effective apart

from this; it comes out in this; it secures its own accomplishment in this. His chosen are not chosen to salvation irrespective of any experience; *none* are chosen except as they believe the truth and are sanctified by His Spirit.

(3) Once more, the execution of the plan of salvation in time is of God. To this salvation, says Paul, *He* called you by our gospel. The apostles and their companions were but messengers: the message they brought was God's. The new truths, the warnings, the summonses, the invitations, all were His. The spiritual constraint which they exercised was His also. In speaking thus, the Apostle magnifies his office, and magnifies at the same time the responsibility of all who heard him preach. It is a light thing to listen to a man speaking his own thoughts, giving his own counsel, inviting assent to his own proposals; it is a solemn thing to listen to a man speaking truly in the name of God. The gospel that we preach is ours, only because we preach it and because we receive it; but the true description of it is, the gospel of God. It is His voice which proclaims the coming judgment; it is His voice which tells of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, even the forgiveness of our trespasses; it is His voice which invites all who are exposed to wrath, all who are under the curse and power of sin, to come to the Saviour. Paul had thanked God in the

First Epistle that the Thessalonians had received his word, not as the word of man, but as what it was in truth, the word of the living God; and here he falls back again on the same thought in a new connection. It is too natural for us to put God as far as we can out of our minds, to keep Him for ever in the background, to have recourse to Him only in the last resort; but that easily becomes an evasion of the seriousness and the responsibilities of our life, a shutting of our eyes to its true significance, for which we may have to pay dear. *God* has spoken to us all in His word and by His Spirit,—God, and not only some human preacher: see that ye despise not Him that speaketh.

(4) Lastly, under this head, the end proposed to us in obeying the gospel call is of God. It is the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul became a Christian and an Apostle, because he saw the Lord of Glory on the way to Damascus; and his whole conception of salvation was shaped by that sight. To be saved meant to enter into that glory into which Christ had entered. It was a condition of perfect holiness, open only to those who were sanctified by Christ's Spirit; but perfect holiness did not exhaust it. Holiness was manifested in glory, in a light surpassing the brightness of the sun, in a strength superior to every weakness, in a life no longer assailable by death. Weak, suffering, destitute

—dying daily for Christ's sake—Paul saw salvation concentrated and summed up in the glory of Christ. To obtain this was to obtain salvation. "When Christ who is our life shall appear," he says elsewhere, "then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." If salvation were anything lower than this, there might be a plausible case to state for man as its author; but reaching as it does to this immeasurable height, who can accomplish it but God? It needs the operation of the might of His power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

One cannot read these two simple verses without wondering at the new world which the gospel created for the mind of man. What great thoughts are in them—thoughts that wander through eternity, thoughts based on the most sure and blessed of experiences, yet travelling back into an infinite past, and on into immortal glory; thoughts of the Divine presence and the Divine power interpenetrating and redeeming human life; thoughts addressed originally to a little company of working people, but unmatched for length and breadth and depth and height by all that pagan literature could offer to the wisest and the best. What a range and sweep there is in this brief summary of God's work in man's salvation. If the New

Testament is uninteresting, can it be for any other reason than that we arrest ourselves at the words, and never penetrate to the truth which lies beneath ?

On this review of the work of God the Apostle grounds an exhortation to the Thessalonians. "So then, brethren," he writes, "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours." The objection that is brought against Calvinism is that it destroys every motive for action on our part, by destroying all need of it. If salvation is of the Lord, what is there for us to do ? If God conceived it, planned it, executes it, and alone can perfect it, what room is left for the interference of man ? This is a species of objection which would have appeared extremely perverse to the Apostle. Why, he would have exclaimed, if God left it to us to do, we might well sit down in despair and do nothing, so infinitely would the task exceed our powers ; but since the work of salvation is the work of God, since He Himself is active on that side, there is reason, hope, motive, for activity on our part also. If we work in the same line with Him, toward the same end with Him, our labour will not be cast away ; it will be triumphantly successful. God *is* at work ; but so far from that furnishing a motive to non-exertion on our part, it is the strongest of all motives to action. Work out your own salvation, not because

it is left to you to do, but because it is God who is working in you both will and deed in furtherance of His good pleasure. Fall in, the Apostle virtually says in this place, with the purpose of God to save you; identify yourselves with it; stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught.

"Traditions" is an unpopular word in one section of the Church, because it has been so vastly abused in another. But it is not an illegitimate word in any church, and there is always a place for what it means. The generations are dependent on each other; each transmits to the future the inheritance it has received from the past; and that inheritance—embracing laws, arts, manners, morals, instincts, religion—can all be comprehended in the single word tradition. The gospel was handed over to the Thessalonians by St. Paul, partly in oral teaching, partly in writing; it was a complex of traditions in the simplest sense, and they were not to let any part of it go. Extreme Protestants are in the habit of opposing Scripture to tradition. The Bible alone, they say, is our religion; and we reject all unwritten authority. But, as a little reflection will show, the Bible itself is, in the first instance, a part of tradition; it is handed down to us from those who have gone before; it is delivered to us as a sacred deposit by the Church; and as such we at first regard it. There are good reasons, no doubt,

for giving Scripture a fundamental and critical place among traditions. When its claim to represent the Christianity of the apostles is once made out, it is fairly regarded as the criterion of everything else that appeals to their authority. The bulk of so-called traditions in the Church of Rome are to be rejected, not because they are traditions, but because they are *not* traditions, but have originated in later times, and are inconsistent with what is known to be truly apostolic. We ourselves are bound to keep fast hold of all that connects us historically with the apostolic age. We would not disinherit ourselves. We would not lose a single thought, a single like or dislike, a single conviction or instinct, of all that proves us the spiritual posterity of Peter and Paul and John. Sectarianism destroys the historical sense; it plays havoc with traditions; it weakens the feeling of spiritual affinity between the present and the past. The Reformers in the sixteenth century—the men like Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin—made a great point of what they called their catholicity, *i.e.*, their claim to represent the true Church of Christ, to be the lawful inheritors of apostolic tradition. They were right, both in their claim, and in their idea of its importance; and we will suffer for it, if, in our eagerness for independence, we disown the riches of the past.

The Apostle closes his exhortation with a prayer.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father which loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort[1] your hearts and stablish them in every good work and word." All human effort, he seems to say, must be not only anticipated and called forth, but supported, by God. He alone it is who can give steadfastness to our pursuit of good in word and deed.

In his prayer the Apostle goes back to great events in the past, and bases his request on the assurance which they yield: "God," he says, "who *loved* us and *gave* us eternal comfort and good hope through grace." When did God do these gracious things? It was when He sent His Son into the world for us. He does love us now; He will love us for ever; but we go back for the final proof, and for the first conviction of this, to the gift of Jesus Christ. There we see God who *loved* us. The death of the Lord Jesus is specially in view. "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The eternal consolation is connected in the closest possible way with this grand assurance of love. It is not merely an unending comfort, as opposed to the transitory and

[1] For the verb in the singular, and its import, compare 1st Epistle iii. 11.

uncertain joys of earth; it is the heart to exclaim with St. Paul, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Here, and now, this eternal consolation is given to the Christian heart; here, and now, rather, it is enjoyed; it *was* given, once for all, on the cross at Calvary. Stand there, and receive that awful pledge of the love of God, and see whether it does not, even now, go deeper than any sorrow.

But the eternal consolation does not exhaust God's gifts. He has also in His grace given us good hope. He has made provision, not only for the present trouble, but for the future uncertainty. All life needs an outlook; and those who have stood beside the empty grave in the garden know how wide and glorious is the outlook provided by God for the believer in Jesus Christ. In the very deepest darkness, a light is kindled for him; in the valley of the shadow of death, a window is opened to him in heaven. Surely God, who sent His Son to die for us upon the Cross; God, who raised Him again from the dead on our behalf, and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places,—surely He who has been at such cost for our salvation will not be slow to second all our efforts, and to establish our hearts in every good work and word.

How simply, one is tempted to say, it all ends—good works and good words; are these the whole fruits which God seeks in His great work of redemption? Does it need consolation so wonderful, hope so far-reaching, to secure patient continuance in well-doing? We know only too well that it does. We know that the comfort of God, the hope of God, prayer to God, are all needed; and that all we can make of all of them combined is not too much to make us steadily dutiful in word and deed. We know that it is not a disproportionate or unworthy moral, but one befitting the grandeur of his theme, when the Apostle concludes the fifteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians in a tone very similar to that which rules here. The infinite hope of the Resurrection is made the basis of the commonest duties. "Therefore, my beloved brethren," he says, "be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." That hope is to bear fruit on earth—in patience and loyalty, in humble and faithful service. It is to shed its radiance over the trivial round, the common task; and the Apostle does not think it wasted if it enables men and women to do well and not weary.

The difficulty of expounding this passage lies in the largeness of the thoughts; they include, in a manner, every part and aspect of the Christian life. Let each

of us try to bring them near to himself. God has called us by His gospel: He has declared to us that Jesus our Lord was delivered for our offences, and that He was raised again to open the gates of life to us. Have we believed the truth? That is where the gospel begins for us. Is the truth within us, written on hearts that God's Spirit has separated from the world, and devoted to a new life? or is it outside of us, a rumour, a hearsay, to which we have no vital relation? Happy are those who have believed, and taken Christ into their souls, Christ who died for us and rose again; they have the forgiveness of sins, a pledge of love that disarms and vanquishes sorrow, an infallible hope that outlives death. Happy are those to whom the cross and the empty tomb give that confidence in God's love which makes prayer natural, hopeful, joyful. Happy are those to whom all these gifts of grace bring the strength to continue patiently in well-doing, and to be steadfast in every good work and word. All things are theirs—the world, and life, and death; things present and things to come; everlasting consolation and good hope; prayer, patience, and victory: all are theirs, for they are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

VI.

MUTUAL INTERCESSION.

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as also *it is* with you; and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men; for all have not faith. But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and guard you from the evil *one*. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ.' —2 THESS. iii. 1-5 (R.V.).

VI.

MUTUAL INTERCESSION.

THE main part of this letter is now finished. The Apostle has completed his teaching about the Second Advent, and the events which precede and condition it; and nothing remains to dispose of but some minor matters of personal and practical interest.

He begins by asking again, as at the close of the First Epistle, the prayers of the Thessalonians for himself and his fellow-workers. It was a strength and comfort to him, as to every minister of Christ, to know that he was remembered by those who loved him in the presence of God. But it is no selfish or private interest that the Apostle has in view when he begs a place in their prayers; it is the interest of the work with which he has identified himself. "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified." This was the one business and concern of his life; if it went well, all his desires were satisfied.

Hardly anything in the New Testament gives us a more characteristic look of the Apostle's soul than his

desire that the word of the Lord should *run*. The word of the Lord is the gospel, of which he is the principal herald to the nations; and we see in his choice of this word his sense of its urgency. It was glad tidings to all mankind; and how sorely needed wherever he turned his eyes! The constraint of Christ's love was upon his heart, the constraint of men's sin and misery; and he could not pass swiftly enough from city to city, to proclaim the reconciling grace of God, and call men from darkness unto light. His eager heart fretted against barriers and restraints of every description; he saw in them the malice of the great enemy of Christ: "I was minded once and again to come unto you, but Satan hindered me." Hence it is that he asks the Thessalonians to pray for their removal, that the word of the Lord may run. The ardour of such a prayer, and of the heart which prompts it, is far enough removed from the common temper of the Church, especially where it has been long established. How many centuries there were during which Christendom, as it was called, was practically a fixed quantity, shut up within the limits of Western European civilisation, and not aspiring to advance a single step beyond it, fast or slow. It is one of the happy omens of our own time that the apostolic conception of the gospel as an ever-advancing, ever-victorious force, has begun again to take its place in the

Christian heart. If it is really to us what it was to St. Paul—a revelation of God's mercy and judgment which dwarfs everything else, a power omnipotent to save, an irresistible pressure of love on heart and will, glad tidings of great joy that the world is dying for—we shall share in this ardent, evangelical spirit, and pray for all preachers that the word of the Lord may run very swiftly. How it passed in apostolic times from land to land and from city to city—from Syria to Asia, from Asia to Macedonia, from Macedonia to Greece, from Greece to Italy, from Italy to Spain—till in one man's lifetime, and largely by one man's labour, it was known throughout the Roman world. It is easy, indeed, to over-estimate the number of the early Christians; but we can hardly over-estimate the fiery speed with which the Cross went forth conquering and to conquer. Missionary zeal is one note of the true Apostolic Church.

But Paul wishes the Thessalonians to pray that the word of the Lord may be glorified, as well as have free course. The word of the Lord is a glorious thing itself. As the Apostle calls it in another place, it is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. All that makes the spiritual glory of God—His holiness, His love, His wisdom—is concentrated and displayed in it. But its glory is acknowledged, and in that sense heightened, when its power is seen in the salvation of

men. A message from God that did nothing would not be glorified : it would be discredited and shamed. It is the glory of the gospel to lay hold of men, to transfigure them, to lift them out of evil into the company and the likeness of Christ. For anything else it does, it may not fill a great space in the world's eye; but when it actually brings the power of God to save those who receive it, it is clothed in glory. Paul did not wish to preach without seeing the fruits of his labour. He did the work of an evangelist; and he would have been ashamed of the evangel if it had not wielded a Divine power to overcome sin and bring the sinful to God. Pray that it may always have this power. Pray that when the word of the Lord is spoken it may not be an ineffective, fruitless word, but mighty through God.

There is an expression in Titus ii. 10 analogous to this : " Adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." That expression is less fervent, spoken at a lower level, than the one before us; but it more readily suggests, for that very reason, some duties of which we should be reminded here also. It comes home to all who try to bring their conduct into any kind of relation to the gospel of Christ. It is only too possible for us to disgrace the gospel; but it is in our power also, by every smallest action we do, to illustrate it, to set it off, to put its beauty in the true light before the eyes of

men. The gospel comes into the world, like everything else, to be judged on its merits; that is, by the effects which it produces in the lives of those who receive it. We are its witnesses; its character, in the general mind, is as good as our character; it is as lovely as we are lovely, as strong as we are strong, as glorious as we are glorious, and no more. Let us seek to bear it a truer and worthier witness than we have yet done. To adorn it is a calling far higher than most of us have aimed at; but if it comes into our prayers, if its swift diffusion and powerful operation are near our hearts in the sight of God, grace will be given us to do this also.

The next request of the Apostle has more of a personal aspect, yet it also has his work in view. He asks prayer that he and his friends may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men, he says, have not faith. The unreasonable and wicked men were no doubt the Jews in Corinth, from which place he wrote. Their malignant opposition was the great obstacle to the spread of the gospel; they were the representatives and instruments of the Satan who perpetually hindered him. The word here rendered unreasonable is a rare one in the New Testament. It occurs four times in all, and in each case is differently translated: once it is "amiss," once "harm," once "wickedness," and here "unreasonable." The margin

in this place renders it "absurd." What it literally means is, "out of place"; and the Apostle signifies by it, that in the opposition of these men to the gospel there was something preposterous, something that baffled explanation; there was no reason in it, and therefore it was hopeless to reason with it. That is a disposition largely represented both in the Old Testament and the New, and familiar to every one who in preaching the gospel has come into close contact with men. It was one of the great trials of Jesus that He had to endure the contradiction of those who were sinners against themselves; who rejected the counsel of God in their own despite; in other words, were unreasonable men. The gospel, we must remember, is good news; it is good news to all men. It tells of God's love to the sinful; it brings pardon, holiness, immortal hope, to every one. Why, then, should anybody have a quarrel with it? Is it not enough to drive reason to despair, that men should wantonly, stubbornly, malignantly, hate and resist such a message? Is there anything in the world more provoking than to offer a real and indispensable service, out of a true and disinterested love, and to have it contemptuously rejected? That is the fate of the gospel in many quarters; that was the constant experience of our Lord and of St. Paul. No wonder, in the interests of his mission, the Apostle prays to be delivered from unreasonable men. Are

there any of us who come under this condemnation? who are senselessly opposed to the gospel, enemies in intention of God, but in reality hurting no one so much as ourselves? The Apostle does not indicate in his prayer any mode of deliverance. He may have hoped that in God's providence his persecutors would have their attention distracted somehow; he may have hoped that by greater wisdom, greater love, greater power of adaptation, of becoming all things to all men, he might vanquish their unreason, and gain access to their souls for the truth. In any case, his request shows us that the gospel has a battle to fight that we should hardly have anticipated—a battle with sheer perversity, with blind, wilful absurdity—and that this is one of its most dangerous foes. "O that they were wise," God cries of His ancient people, "O that they understood." He has the same lament to utter still.

We ought to notice the reason appended to this description of Paul's enemies: absurd and evil men, he says; for all men have not faith. Faith, of course, means the Christian faith: all men are not believers in Christ and disciples of Christ; and therefore the moral unreason and perversity of which I have spoken actually exist. He who has the faith is morally sane; he has that in him which is inconsistent with such wickedness and irrationality. We can hardly suppose, however, that the Apostle meant to state such a superfluous

truism as that all men were not Christians. What he does mean is apparently that not all men have affinity for the faith, have aptitude or liking for it; as Christ said when He stood before Pilate, the voice of truth is only heard by those who are *of* the truth. So it was when the apostles preached. Among their hearers there were those who were *of* the truth, in whom there was, as it were, the instinct for the faith; they welcomed the message. Others, again, discovered no such natural relation to the truth; in spite of the adaptation of the message to human needs, they had no sympathy with it; there was no reaction in their hearts in its favour; it was unreasonable to them; and to God they were unreasonable. The Apostle does not explain this; he simply remarks it. It is one of the ultimate and inexplicable facts of human experience; one of the meeting-points of nature and freedom which defy our philosophies. Some *are* of kin to the gospel when they hear it; they have faith, and justify the counsel of God, and are saved: others are of *no* kin to the gospel; its wisdom and love wake no response in them; they have not faith; they reject the counsel of God to their own ruin; they are preposterous and evil men. It is from such, as hinderers of the gospel, that Paul prays to be delivered.

In the two verses which follow, he plays, as it were, with this word "faith." All men have not faith, he

writes; but *the Lord* is faithful, and *we* have *faith* in the Lord touching you. Often the Apostle goes off thus at a word. Often, especially, he contrasts the trustworthiness of God with the faithlessness of men. Men may not take the gospel seriously; but the Lord does. He is in indubitable earnest with it; He may be depended upon to do His part in carrying it into effect. See how unselfishly, at this point, the Apostle turns from his own situation to that of his readers. The Lord is faithful who will stablish *you*, and keep you from the evil one. Paul had left the Thessalonians exposed to very much the same trouble as beset himself wherever he went; but he had left them to One who, he well knew, was able to keep them from falling, and to preserve them against all that the devil and his agents could do.

And side by side with this confidence in God stood his confidence touching the Thessalonians themselves. He was sure in the Lord that they were doing, and would continue to do, the things which he commanded them; in other words, that they would lead a worthy and becoming Christian life. The point of this sentence lies in the words "in the Lord." Apart from the Lord, Paul could have had no such confidence as he here expresses. The standard of the Christian life is lofty and severe; its purity, its unworldliness, its brotherly love, its burning hope, were new things then in the world. What assurance could there be that

this standard would be maintained, when the small congregation of working people in Thessalonica was cast upon its own resources in the midst of a pagan community? None at all, apart from Christ. If *He* had left them along with the Apostle, no one could have risked much upon their fidelity to the Christian calling. It marks the beginning of a new era when the Apostle writes, "We have confidence *in the Lord* touching you." Life has a new element now, a new atmosphere, new resources; and therefore we may cherish new hopes of it. When we think of them, the words include a gentle admonition to the Thessalonians, to beware of forgetting the Lord, and trusting to themselves; that is a disappointing path, which will put the Apostle's confidence toward them to shame. But it is an admonition as hopeful as it is gentle; reminding them that, though the path of Christian obedience cannot be trodden without constant effort, it is a path on which the Lord accompanies and upholds all who trust in Him. Here there is a lesson for us all to learn. Even those who are engaged in work for Christ are too apt to forget that the only hope of such work is the Lord. "Trust no man," says the wisest of commentators, "left to himself." Or to put the same thing more in accordance with the spirit of the text, there always *is* room for hope and confidence when the Lord is not forgotten. *In the Lord*, you may depend

upon those who *in themselves* are weak, unstable, wilful, foolish. In the Lord, you may depend on them to stand fast, to fight their temptations, to overcome the world and the wicked one. This kind of assurance, and the actual presence and help of Christ which justified it, are very characteristic of the New Testament. They explain the joyous, open, hopeful spirit of the early Church; they are the cause, as well as the effect, of that vigorous moral health which, in the decay of ancient civilisation, gave the Church the inheritance of the future. And still we may have confidence in the Lord that all whom He has called by His gospel will be able by His spiritual presence with them to walk worthy of that calling, and to confute alike the fears of the good and the contempt of the wicked. For the Lord is faithful, who will stablish them, and preserve them from the evil one.

Once more the Apostle bursts into prayer, as he remembers the situation of these few sheep in the wilderness: "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ." Nothing could be a better commentary than one of Paul's own affectionate Epistles on that much discussed text, "Pray without ceasing." Look, for instance, through this one with which we are engaged. It begins with a prayer for grace and peace. This is followed by a thanksgiving in which God is acknowledged as the Author of all

their graces. The first chapter ends with a prayer—an unceasing prayer—that God would count them worthy of His calling. In the second chapter Paul renews his thanksgiving on behalf of his converts, and prays again that God may comfort their hearts and stablish them in every good work and word. And here, the moment he has touched upon a new topic, he returns, as it were by instinct, to prayer. "The Lord direct your hearts." Prayer is his very element; he lives, and moves, and has his being, in God. He can do nothing, he cannot conceive of anything being done, in which God is not as directly participant as himself, or those whom he wishes to bless. Such an intense appreciation of God's nearness and interest in life goes far beyond the attainments of most Christians; yet here, no doubt, lies great part of the Apostle's power.

The prayer has two parts: he asks that the Lord may direct their hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ. The love of God here means love to God; this is the sum of all Christian virtue, or at least the source of it. The gospel proclaims that God is love; it tells us that God has proved His love by sending His Son to die for our sins; it shows us Christ on the cross, in the passion of that love with which He loved us when He gave Himself for us; and it waits for the answer of love. It comprehended the

whole effect of the gospel, the whole mystery of its saving and re-creating power, when the Apostle exclaimed, "The love of Christ constraineth us." It is this experience which in the passage before us he desires for the Thessalonians. There is no one without love, or at least without the power of loving, in his heart. But what is the object of it? On what is it actually directed? The very words of the prayer imply that it is easily misdirected. But surely if love itself best merits and may best claim love, none should be the object of it before Him who is its source. God has earned our love; He desires our love; let us look to the Cross where He has given us the great pledge of His own, and yield to its sweet constraint. The old law is not abolished, but to be fulfilled: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." If the Lord fix our souls to Himself by this irresistible attraction, nothing will be able to carry us away.

Love to God is naturally joyous; but life has other experiences than those which give free scope for its joyous exercise; and so the Apostle adds, "into the patience of Jesus Christ." The Authorised Version renders, "the patient waiting for Christ," as if what the Apostle prayed for were that they might continue steadfastly to hope for the Last Advent; but although

that idea is characteristic of these Epistles, it is hardly to be found in the words. Rather does he remind his readers that in the difficulties and sufferings of the path which lies before them, no strange thing is happening to them, nothing that has not already been borne by Christ in the spirit in which it ought to be borne by us. Our Saviour Himself had need of patience. He was made flesh, and all that the children of God have to suffer in this world has already been suffered by Him. This prayer is at once warning and consoling. It assures us that those who will live godly will have trials to bear: there will be untoward circumstances; feeble health; uncongenial relations; misunderstanding and malice; unreasonable and evil men; abundant calls for patience. But there will be no sense of having missed the way, or of being forgotten by God; on the contrary, there will be in Jesus Christ, ever present, a type and a fountain of patience, which will enable them to overcome all that is against them. The love of God and the patience of Christ may be called the active and the passive sides of Christian goodness,—its free, steady outgoing to Him who is the source of all blessing; and its deliberate, steady, hopeful endurance, in the spirit of Him who was made perfect through suffering. The Lord direct our hearts into both, that we may be perfect men in Christ Jesus.

VII.

THE CHRISTIAN WORTH OF LABOUR

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to imitate us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat bread for nought at any man's hand, but in labour and travail, working night and day, that we might not burden any of you: not because we have not the right, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you, that ye should imitate us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, If any will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing. And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. And yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."—2 THESS. iii. 6-15 (R.V.).

VII.

THE CHRISTIAN WORTH OF LABOUR.

THIS passage is very similar in contents to one in the fourth chapter of the First Epistle. The difference between the two is in tone; the Apostle writes with much greater severity on this than on the earlier occasion. Entreaty is displaced by command; considerations of propriety, the appeal to the good name of the church, by the appeal to the authority of Christ; and good counsel by express directions for Christian discipline. Plainly the moral situation, which had caused him anxiety some months before, had become worse rather than better. What, then, was the situation to which he here addresses himself so seriously? It was marked by two bad qualities—a disorderly walk, and idleness.

"We hear," he writes, "of some that walk among you disorderly." The metaphor in the word is a military one; the underlying idea is that every man has a post in life or in the Church, and that he ought to be found,

not away from his post, but at it. A man without a post is a moral anomaly. Every one of us is part of a whole, a member of an organic body, with functions to discharge which can be discharged by no other, and must therefore be steadily discharged by himself. To walk disorderly means to forget this, and to act as if we were independent; now at this, now at that, according to our discretion or our whim; not rendering the community a constant service, in a place of our own—a service which is valuable, largely because it can be counted on. Every one knows the extreme unsatisfactoriness of those men who never can keep a place when they get it. Their friends plague themselves to find new openings for them; but without any gross offence, such as drunkenness or dishonesty, they persistently fall out of them; there is something about them which seems to render them incapable of sticking to their post. It is an unfortunate constitution, perhaps; but it is a grave moral fault as well. Such men settle to nothing, and therefore they render no permanent service to others; whatever they might be worth otherwise, they are worth nothing in any general estimate, simply because they cannot be depended upon. What is more, they are worth nothing to themselves; they never accumulate moral, any more than material, capital; they have no reserve in them of fidelity, sobriety, discipline. They are to be pitied,

indeed, as all sinners are to be pitied; but they are also to be commanded, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to lay their minds to their work, and to remember that steadfastness in duty is an elementary requirement of the gospel. Among the Thessalonians it was religious excitement that unsettled men, and made them abandon the routine of duty; but whatever be the cause, the evil results are the same. And, on the other hand, when we are loyal, constant, regularly at our post, however humble it be, we render a real service to others, and grow in strength of character ourselves. It is the beginning of all discipline and of all goodness to have fixed relations and fixed duties, and a fixed determination to be faithful to them.

Besides this disorderly walk, with its moral instability, Paul heard of some who worked not at all. In other words, idleness was spreading in the church. It went to a great and shameless length. Christian men apparently thought nothing of sacrificing their independence, and eating bread for which they had not wrought. Such a state of affairs was peculiarly offensive at Thessalonica, where the Apostle had been careful to set so different an example. If any one could have been excused for declining to labour, on the ground that he was preoccupied with religious hopes and interests, it was he. His apostolic ministry was a charge which made great demands upon his strength;

it used up the time and energy which he might otherwise have given to his trade: he might well have urged that other work was a physical impossibility. More than this, the Lord had ordained that they who preached the gospel should live by the gospel; and on that ground alone he was entitled to claim maintenance from those to whom he preached. But though he was always careful to safeguard this right of the Christian ministry, he was as careful, as a rule, to refrain from exercising it; and in Thessalonica, rather than prove a burden to the church, he had wrought and toiled, night and day, with his own hands. All this was an example for the Thessalonians to imitate; and we can understand the severity with which the Apostle treats that idleness which alleges in its defence the strength of its interest in religion. It was a personal insult.

Over against this shallow pretence, Paul sets the Christian virtue of industry, with its stern law, "If any man *will* not work, neither let him eat." If he claims to lead a superhuman angelic life, let him subsist on angels' food. What we find in this passage is not the exaggeration which is sometimes called the gospel of work; but the soberer and truer thought that work is essential, in general, to the Christian character. The Apostle plays with the words when he writes, "That work not at all, but are busybodies"; or, as it has

been reproduced in English, who are busy only with what is not their business. This is, in point of fact, the moral danger of idleness, in those who are not otherwise vicious.[1] Where men are naturally bad, it multiplies temptations and opportunities for sin; Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do. But even where it is the good who are concerned, as in the passage before us, idleness has its perils. The busybody is a real character—a man or a woman who, having no steady work to do, which must be done whether it is liked or disliked, and which is therefore wholesome, is too apt to meddle in other people's affairs, religious or worldly; and to meddle, too, without thinking that it *is* meddling; an impertinence; perhaps a piece of downright, stone-blind Pharisaism. A person who is not disciplined and made wise by regular work has no idea of its moral worth and opportunities; nor has he, as a rule, any idea of the moral worthlessness and vanity of such an existence as his own.

There seem to have been a good many fussy people in Thessalonica, anxious about their industrious neighbours, concerned for their lack of interest in the Lord's coming, perpetually meddling with them—and

[1] *Cf.* 1 Tim. v. 13: "And withal they learn also to be idle, going about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not."

living upon them. It is no wonder that the Apostle expresses himself with some peremptoriness: "If any man will not work, neither let him eat." The difficulty about the application of this rule is that it has no application except to the poor. In a society like our own, the busybody may be found among those for whom this law has no terror; they are idle, simply because they have an income which is independent of labour. Yet what the Apostle says has a lesson for such people also. One of the dangers of their situation is that they should under-estimate the moral and spiritual worth of industry. A retired merchant, a military or naval officer on half-pay, a lady with money in the funds and no responsibilities but her own, —all these have a deal of time on their hands; and if they are good people, it is one of the temptations incident to their situation, that they should have what the Apostle calls a busybody's interest in others. It need not be a spurious or an affected interest; but it misjudges the moral condition of others, and especially of the labouring classes, because it does not appreciate the moral content of a day full of work. If the work is done honestly at all, it is a thing of great price; there are virtues embedded in it, patience, courage, endurance, fidelity, which contribute as much to the true good of the world and the true enrichment of personal character as the pious solicitude of those who have

nothing to do but be pious. Perhaps these are things that do not require to be said. It may rather be the case in our own time that mere industry is overvalued; and certainly a natural care for the spiritual interests of our brethren, not Pharisaic, but Christian, not meddlesome, but most earnest, can never be in excess. It is the busybody whose interference is resented; the brother, once he is recognised as a brother, is made welcome.

Convinced as he is that for mankind in general "no work" means "no character," Paul commands and exhorts in the Lord Jesus all such as he has been speaking of to work with quietness, and to eat their own bread. Their excitement was both unnatural and unspiritual. It was necessary for their moral health that they should escape from it, and learn how to walk orderly, and to live at their post. The quietness of which he speaks is both inward and outward. Let them compose their minds, and cease from their fussiness; the agitation within, and the distraction without, are equally fruitless. Far more beautiful, far more Christlike, than any busybody, however zealous, is he who works with quietness and eats his own bread. Probably the bulk of the Thessalonian Church was quite sound in this matter; and it is to encourage them that the Apostle writes, "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing." The bad behaviour of the busy-

bodies may have been provoking to some, infectious in the case of others; but they are to persevere, in spite of it, in the path of quiet industry and good conduct. This has not the pretentiousness of an absorbed waiting for the Lord, and a vaunted renunciation of the world; but it has the character of moral loveliness; it exercises the new man in the powers of the new life.

Along with his judgment on this moral disorder, the Apostle gives the Church directions for its treatment. It is to be met with reserve, protest, and love.

First, with reserve: "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us; . . . note that man, that ye have no company with him." The Christian community has a character to keep, and that character is compromised by the misconduct of any of its members. To such misconduct, therefore, it cannot be, and should not be, indifferent: indifference would be suicidal. The Church exists to maintain a moral testimony, to keep up a certain standard of conduct among men; and when that standard is visibly and defiantly departed from, there will be a reaction of the common conscience in the Church, vigorous in proportion to her vitality. A bad man may be quite at home in the world; he may find or make a circle of associates like

himself; but there is something amiss, if he does not find himself alone in the Church. Every strong life closes itself against the intrusion of what is alien to it —a strong moral life most emphatically of all. A wicked person of any description ought to feel that the public sentiment of the Church is against him, and that as long as he persists in his wickedness he is virtually, if not formally, excommunicated. The element of communion in the Church is spiritual soundness; "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." But if any one begins to walk in darkness, he is out of the fellowship. The only hope for him is that he may recognise the justice of his exclusion, and, as the Apostle says, be ashamed. He is shut out from the society of others that he may be driven in upon himself, and compelled, in spite of wilfulness, to judge himself by the Christian standard.

But reserve, impressive as it may be, is not enough. The erring brother is to be admonished; that is, he is to be gravely spoken to about his error. Admonition is a difficult duty. Not every one feels at liberty, or *is* at liberty, to undertake it. Our own faults sometimes shut our mouths; the retort courteous, or uncourteous, to any admonition from us, is too obvious. But though such considerations should make us humble and diffident, they ought not to lead to

neglect of plain duty. To think too much of one's faults is in some circumstances a kind of perverted vanity; it is to think too much of oneself. We have all our faults, of one kind or another; but that does not prohibit us from aiding each other to overcome faults. If we avoid anger, and censoriousness; if we shun, as well as disclaim, the spirit of the Pharisee, then with all our imperfections God will justify us in speaking seriously to others about their sins. We do not pretend to judge them; we only appeal to themselves to say whether they are really at ease when they stand on one side, and the word of God and the conscience of the Church on the other. In a sense, this is specially the duty of the elders of the Church. It is they who are pastors of the flock of God, and who are expressly responsible for this moral guardianship; but there is no officialism in the Christian community which limits the interest of any member in all the rest, or exempts him from the responsibility of pleading the cause of God with the erring. How many Christian duties there are which seem never to have come in the way of some Christians.

Finally, in the discipline of the erring, an essential element is love. Withdraw from him, and let him feel he is alone; admonish him, and let him be convinced he is gravely wrong; but in your admonition remember that he is not an enemy, but a brother. Judgment is

a function which the natural man is prone to assume, and which he exercises without misgiving. He is so sure of himself, that instead of admonishing, he denounces; what he is bent upon is not the reclamation, but the annihilation, of the guilty. Such a spirit is totally out of place in the Church; it is a direct defiance of the spirit which created the Christian community, and which that community is designed to foster. Let the sin be never so flagrant, the sinner is a brother; he is one for whom Christ died. To the Lord who bought him he is inexpressibly valuable; and woe to the reprover of sin who forgets this. The whole power of discipline which is committed to the Church is for edification, not for destruction; for the building up of Christian character, not for pulling it down. The case of the offender is the case of a brother; if we are true Christians, it is our own. We must act toward him and his offence as Christ acted toward the world and its sin: no judgment without mercy, no mercy without judgment. Christ took the sin of the world on Himself, but He made no compromise with it; He never extenuated it; He never spoke of it or treated it but with inexorable severity. Yet though the sinful felt to the depth of their hearts His awful condemnation of their sins, they felt that in assenting to that condemnation there was hope. To them, as opposed to their sins, He was winning, condescending, loving.

He received sinners, and in His company they sinned no more.

Thus it is that in the Christian religion everything comes back to Christ and to the imitation of Christ. He is the pattern of those simple and hardy virtues, industry and steadfastness. He wrought at His trade in Nazareth till the hour came for Him to enter on His supreme vocation; who can undervalue the possibilities of goodness in the lives of men who work with quietness and eat their own bread, that remembers it was over a village carpenter the heavenly voice sounded, "This is My beloved Son"? Christ is the pattern also for Christian discipline in its treatment of the erring. No sinner could feel himself, in his sin, in communion with Christ: the Holy One instinctively withdrew from him, and he felt he was alone. No offender had his offence simply condoned by Jesus: the forgiveness of sins which He bestows includes condemnation as well as remission; it is wrought in one piece out of His mercy and His judgment. But neither, again, did any offender, who bowed to Christ's judgment, and suffered it to condemn him, find himself excluded from His mercy. The Holy One was the sinner's friend. Those whom He at first repelled were irresistibly drawn to Him. They began, like Peter, with "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord"; they ended, like him, with "Lord, to whom shall we go?'

This, I say, is the pattern which is set before us, for the discipline of the erring. This includes reserve, admonition, love, and much more. If there be any other commandment, it is summarily comprehended in this word, "Follow Me."

VIII.

FAREWELL.

"Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with you all.

"The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle : so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."—2 THESS. iii. 16-18 (R.V.).

VIII.

FAREWELL.

THE first verse of this short passage is taken by some as in close connection with what goes before. In the exercise of Christian discipline, such as it has been described by the Apostle, there may be occasions of friction or even of conflict in the Church; it is this which he would obviate by the prayer, "The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always." The contrast is somewhat forced and disproportioned; and it is certainly better to take this prayer, standing as it does at the close of the letter, in the very widest sense. Not merely freedom from strife, but peace in its largest Christian meaning, is the burden of his petition.

The Lord of peace Himself is Christ. He is the Author and Originator of all that goes by that name in the Christian communion. The word "peace" was not, indeed, a new one; but it had been baptized into Christ, like many another, and become a new creation. Newman said that when he passed out of the Church of England into the Church of Rome, all the Christian

ideas were, so to speak, magnified; everything appeared on a vaster scale. This is a very good description, at all events, of what one sees on passing from natural morality to the New Testament, from writers so great even as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius to the Apostles. All the moral and spiritual ideas are magnified—sin, holiness, peace, repentance, love, hope, God, man, attain to new dimensions. Peace, in particular, was freighted to a Christian with a weight of meaning which no pagan could conceive. It brought to mind what Christ had done for man, He who had made peace by the blood of His Cross; it gave that assurance of God's love, that consciousness of reconciliation, which alone goes to the bottom of the soul's unrest. It brought to mind also what Christ had been. It recalled that life which had faced all man's experience, and had borne through all a heart untroubled by doubts of God's goodness. It recalled that solemn bequest: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you." In every sense and in every way it was connected with Christ; it could neither be conceived nor possessed apart from Him; He was Himself the Lord of the Christian peace.

The Apostle shows his sense of the comprehensiveness of this blessing by the adjuncts of his prayer. He asks the Lord to give it to the Thessalonians uninterruptedly and in all the modes of its manifesta-

tion. Peace may be lost. There may be times at which the consciousness of reconciliation passes away, and the heart cannot assure itself before God; these are the times in which we have somehow lost Christ, and only through Him can we have our peace with God restored. "Uninterruptedly" we must count upon Him for this first and fundamental blessing; He is the Lord of Reconciling Love, whose blood cleanses from all sin, and makes peace between earth and Heaven for ever. Or there may be times at which the troubles and vexations of life become too trying for us; and instead of peace within, we are full of care and fear. What resource have we then but in Christ, and in the love of God revealed to us in Him? His life is at once a pattern and an inspiration; His great sacrifice is the assurance that the love of God to man is immeasurable, and that all things work together for good to them that love Him. When the Apostle prayed this prayer, he no doubt thought of the life which lay before the Thessalonians. He remembered the persecutions they had already undergone at the hands of the Jews; the similar troubles that awaited them; the grief of those who were mourning for their dead; the deeper pain of those on whose hearts rushed suddenly, from time to time, the memory of days and years wasted in sin; the moral perplexities that were already rising among them,—he remembered all these things,

and because of them he prayed, "The Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in every way." For there are many ways in which peace may be possessed; as many ways as there are disquieting situations in man's life. It may come as penitent trust in God's mercy; it may come as composure in times of excitement and danger; as meekness and patience under suffering; as hope when the world would despair; it may come as unselfishness, and the power to think of others, because we know God is taking thought for us, —as "a heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathise." All these are peace. Such peace as this —so deep and so comprehensive, so reassuring and so emancipating—is the gift of Christ alone. He can give it without interruption; He can give it with virtues as manifold as the trials of the life without or the life within.

Here, properly speaking, the letter ends. The Apostle has communicated his mind to the Thessalonians as fully as their situation required; and might end, as he did in the First Epistle, with his benediction. But he remembers the unpleasant incident, mentioned in the beginning of ch. ii., of a letter purporting to be from him, though not really his; and he takes care to prevent such a mistake for the future. This Epistle, like almost all the rest, had been written by some one to the Apostle's dictation; but as a guarantee of

genuineness, he closes it with a line or two in his own hand. "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write." What does "so I write" mean? Apparently, "You see the character of my writing; it is a hand quite recognisable as mine; a few lines in this hand will authenticate every letter that comes from me."

Perhaps "every letter" only means every one which he would afterwards write to Thessalonica; certainly attention is not called in all the Epistles to this autographic close. It is found in only two others—1st Corinthians (xvi. 21) and Colossians (iv. 18)—exactly as it stands here, "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand"; in others it may have been thought unnecessary, either because, like Galatians, they were written throughout in his own hand; or, like 2nd Corinthians and Philemon, were conveyed by persons equally known and trusted by the Apostle and the recipients. The great Epistle to the Romans, to judge from its various conclusions, seems to have been from the very beginning a sort of circular letter; and the personal character, made prominent by the autograph signature, was less in place then. The same remark applies to the Epistle to the Ephesians. As for the pastoral Epistles, to Timothy and Titus, they may have been autographic throughout; in any case, neither Timothy nor Titus was likely to be imposed upon by a letter

falsely claiming to be Paul's. They knew their master too well.

If it was possible to make a mistake in the Apostle's lifetime, and to take as his an Epistle which he never wrote, is it impossible to be similarly imposed upon now? Have we reasonable grounds for believing that the thirteen Epistles in the New Testament, which bear his name upon their front, really came from his hand? That is a question which in the last hundred years, and especially in the last fifty, has been examined with the amplest learning and the most minute and searching care. Nothing that could possibly be alleged against the authenticity of any of these Epistles, however destitute of plausibility, has been kept back. The references to them in early Christian writers, their reception in the early Church, the character of their contents, their style, their vocabulary, their temper, their mutual relations, have been the subject of the most thorough investigation. Nothing has ever been more carefully tested than the historical judgment of the Church in receiving them; and though it would be far from true to say that there were no difficulties, or no divergence of opinion, it is the simple truth that the consent of historical critics in the great ecclesiastical tradition becomes more simple and decided. The Church did not act at random in forming the apostolic canon. It exercised a sound mind in embodying in

the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour the books which it did embody, and no other. Speaking of Paul in particular, one ought to say that the only writings ascribed to him, in regard to which there is any body of doubtful opinion, are the Epistles to Timothy and Titus. Many seem to feel, in regard to these, that they are on a lower key than the undoubtedly Pauline letters; there is less spirit in them, less of the native originality of the gospel, a nearer approach to moral commonplace; they are not unlike a half-way house between the apostolic and the post-apostolic age. These are very dubious grounds to go upon; they will impress different minds very differently; and when we come to look at the outward evidence for these letters, they are almost better attested, in early Christian writers, than anything else in the New Testament. Their semi-legal character, and the positive rules with which they abound, inferior as they make them in intellectual and spiritual interest to high works of inspiration like Romans and Colossians, seem to have enabled simple Christian people to get hold of them, and to work them out in their congregations and their homes. All that Paul wrote need not have been on one level; and it is almost impossible to understand the authority which these Epistles immediately and universally obtained, if they were not what they claimed to be. Only a

very accomplished scholar could appreciate the historical arguments for and against them; yet I do not think it is unfair to say that even here the traditional opinion is in the way, not of being reversed, but of being confirmed.

The very existence of such questions, however, warns us against mistaken estimates of Scripture. People sometimes say, if there be one point uncertain, our Bible is gone. Well, there *are* points uncertain; there are points, too, in regard to which an ordinary Christian can only have a kind of second-hand assurance; and this of the genuineness of the pastoral Epistles is one. There is no doubt a very good case to be made out for them by a scholar; but not a case which makes doubt impossible. Yet our Bible is not taken away. The uncertainty touches, at most, the merest fringe of apostolic teaching; nothing that Paul thought of any consequence, or that is of any consequence to us, but is abundantly unfolded in documents which are beyond the reach of doubt. It is not the letter, even of the New Testament, which quickens, but the Spirit; and the Spirit exerts its power through these Christian documents as a whole, as it does through no other documents in the world. When we are perplexed as to whether an apostle wrote this or that, let us consider that the most important books in the Bible—the Gospels and the

Psalms—do not name their authors at all. What in the Old Testament can compare with the Psalter? Yet these sweet songs are practically anonymous. What can be more certain than that the Gospels bring us into contact with a real character—the Son of Man, the Saviour of sinners? Yet we know their authors only through a tradition, a tradition indeed of weight and unanimity that can hardly be over-estimated; but simply a tradition, and not an inward mark such as Paul here sets on his letter for the Thessalonians. "The Church's one Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;" as long as we are actually brought into connection with Him through Scripture, we must be content to put up with the minor uncertainties which are inseparable from a religion which has had a birth and a history.

But to return to the text. The Epistle closes, as the Apostle's custom is, with a benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." Grace is pre-eminently a Pauline word; it is found alike in the salutations with which Paul addresses his churches, and in the benedictions with which he bids them farewell; it is the beginning and the end of his gospel; the element in which Christians live, and move, and have their being. He excludes no one from his blessing; not even those who had been walking disorderly, and setting at nought the tradition they had received from

him; their need is the greatest of all. If we had imagination enough to bring vividly before us the condition of one of these early churches, we would see how much is involved in a blessing like this, and what sublime confidence it displays in the goodness and faithfulness of our Lord. The Thessalonians, a few months ago, had been heathens; they had known nothing of God and His Son; they were living still in the midst of a heathen population, under the pressure of heathen influences both on thought and conduct, beset by numberless temptations; and if they were mindful of the country from which they had come forth, not without opportunity to return. Paul would willingly have stayed with them to be their pastor and teacher, their guide and their defender, but his missionary calling made this impossible. After the merest introduction to the gospel, and to the new life to which it calls those who receive it, they had to be left to themselves. Who should keep them from falling? Who should open their eyes to understand the ideal which the Christian is summoned to work out in his life? Amid their many enemies, where could they look for a sufficient and ever-present ally? The Apostle answers these questions when he writes, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." Although he has left them, they are not really alone. The free love of God, which visited them at first uncalled, will be with them

still, to perfect the work it has begun. It will beset them behind and before ; it will be a sun and a shield to them, a light and a defence. In all their temptations, in all their sufferings, in all their moral perplexities, in all their despondencies, it will be sufficient for them. There is not any kind of succour which a Christian needs which is not to be found in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here, then, we bring to a close our study of the two earliest Epistles of St. Paul. They have given us a picture of the primitive apostolic preaching, and of the primitive Christian Church. That preaching embodied revelations, and it was the acceptance of these revelations that created the new society. The Apostle and his fellow-evangelists came to Thessalonica telling of Jesus, who had died and risen again, and who was about to return to judge the living and the dead. They told of the impending wrath of God, that wrath which was revealed already against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and was to be revealed in all its terrors when the Lord came. They preached Jesus as the Deliverer from the coming wrath, and gathered, through faith in Him, a Church living in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. To an uninterested spectator, the work of Paul and his companions would have seemed a very little thing ; he would not have discovered its originality and promise ;

he would hardly have counted upon its permanence. In reality, it was the greatest and most original thing ever seen in the world. That handful of men and women in Thessalonica was a new phenomenon in history; life had attained to new dimensions in them; it had heights and depths in it, a glory and a gloom, of which the world had never dreamed before; all moral ideas were magnified, as it were, a thousandfold; an intensity of moral life was called into being, an ardent passion for goodness, a spiritual fear and hope, which made them capable of all things. The immediate effects, indeed, were not unmixed; in some minds not only was the centre of gravity shifted, but the balance utterly upset; the future and unseen became so real to them, or were asserted to be so real, that the present and its duties were totally neglected. But with all misapprehensions and moral disorders, there was a new experience; a change so complete and profound that it can only be described as a new creation. Possessed by Christian faith, the soul discovered new powers and capacities; it could combine "much affliction" with "joy of the Holy Ghost"; it could believe in inexorable judgment and in infinite mercy; it could see into the depths of death and life; it could endure suffering for Christ's sake with brave patience; it had been lost, but had found itself again. The life that had once been low,

dull, vile, hopeless, uninteresting, became lofty, vast, intense. Old things had passed away; behold, all things had become new.

The Church is much older now than when this Epistle was written; time has taught her many things; Christian men have learned to compose their minds and to curb their imaginations; we do not lose our heads nowadays, and neglect our common duties, in dreaming on the world to come. Let us say that this is gain; and can we say further that we have lost nothing which goes some way to counterbalance it? Are the new things of the gospel as real to us, and as commanding in their originality, as they were at the first? Do the revelations which are the sum and substance of the gospel message, the warp and woof of apostolic preaching, bulk in our minds as they bulk in this letter? Do they enlarge our thoughts, widen our spiritual horizon, lift to their own high level, and expand to their own scale, our ideas about God and man, life and death, sin and holiness, things visible and invisible? Are we deeply impressed by the coming wrath and by the glory of Christ? Have we entered into the liberty of those whom the revelation of the world to come enabled to emancipate themselves from this? These are the questions that rise in our minds as we try to reproduce the experience of an early Christian church. In those days, everything was of

inspiration; now, so much is of routine. The words that thrilled the soul then have become trite and inexpressive; the ideas that gave new life to thought appear worn and commonplace. But that is only because we dwell on the surface of them, and keep their real import at a distance from the mind. Let us accept the apostolic message in all its simplicity and compass; let us believe, and not merely say or imagine we believe, that there is a life beyond death, revealed in the Resurrection, a judgment to come, a wrath of God, a heavenly glory; let us believe in the infinite significance, and in the infinite difference, of right and wrong, of holiness and sin; let us realise the love of Christ, who died for our sins, who calls us to fellowship with God, who is our Deliverer from the coming wrath; let these truths fill, inspire, and dominate our minds, and for us, too, faith in Christ will be a passing from death unto life.

Printed by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ld., London and Aylesbury, England.

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