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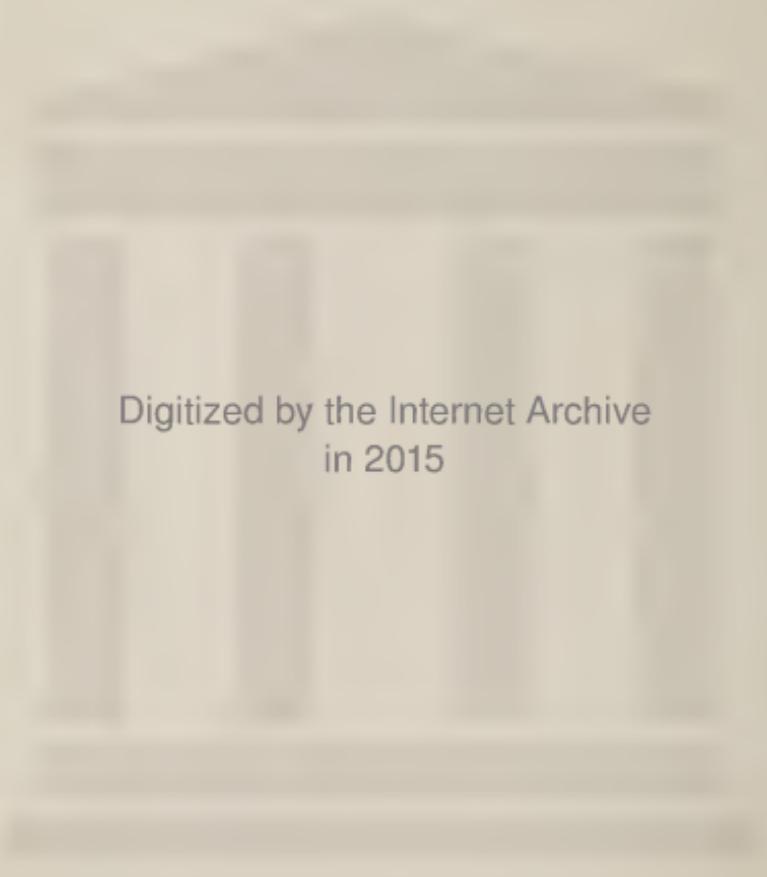
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Foes of faith

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FOES OF FAITH.

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FOES OF FAITH:

FOUR SERMONS

Preached before the University of Cambridge

IN NOVEMBER, 1868.

- I. *UNREALITY.* II. *INDOLENCE.*
III. *IRREVERENCE.* IV. *INCONSISTENCY.*

BY

C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

VICAR OF DONCASTER.

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Οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῶν ἡ πάλη πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα.

Eph. vi. 12.

DEDICATED

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

EDWARD HAROLD,

LORD BISHOP OF ELY,

WITH GRATEFUL AND RESPECTFUL AFFECTION.

I.

UNREALITY.



ISAIAH XLVI. 7.

They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

I WILL not regard it as a mere accident, that this brief ministry begins amongst you on a festival known throughout the Churches as All Saints' Day. Rather would I make this the starting-point and the goal of our course—bidding you to place yourselves in thought in that arena of which an Apostle has written that it is *compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses*¹; witnesses once, in life, to the reality of Jesus Christ; witnesses now, in another sense, from the world unseen, of the struggle and the warfare and (God

¹ Heb. xii. 1.

grant it) the final victory too, of a generation which has entered into their labours, and without which it has pleased God that they themselves *should not be made perfect*¹.

Who is there amongst us, older or younger, who has not some friend, known to him by feature and lineament, in that blessed company? This very place, this very University, has furnished its full contingent to the ranks of that army of the justified and glorified: and doubtless, on the recurrence of this annual commemoration, other recollections, nearer, tenderer, and more personal, rise to the surface of memory, and make one harmonious though secret throb of sympathy vibrate along the benches and galleries of the Congregation.

There is one difference, indeed, between All Saints' Day and that which immediately follows it in another Communion, the festival of All Souls. In the latter the dead only are included; in the former both the dead and the living. In the same degree is the former,

¹ Heb. xi. 40.

this day's commemoration, the more instructive and the more animating. It reminds us that we, we ourselves, have already, as an Apostle writes, *come to the spirits of just men made perfect*¹: we ourselves, if we be Christians indeed, are already one part of that *communion and fellowship* in which God has *knit together His elect in the mystical body of His Son Christ our Lord*². It is not as a remote or even distinct community that we look upon those who have crossed that stream which bounds the dead from the living. It is not with the hope, dim or bright, that we may one day, our earthly course run, join that resting, rejoicing, thanksgiving throng, and find there, what we find not here, a peace and a repose and a conscious union too, reviving and reassuring and comforting, in the presence of God and the Lamb, where shall be no more sorrow, nor sin, nor pain: rather it is as those who are already there, in privilege as well as anticipation, already one with them

¹ Heb. xii. 22, 23.

² Collect for All Saints' Day.

in comfort and communion, inasmuch as already *our life*, like theirs, *is hidden with Christ in God*¹, waiting only for the arrival of that day when He, who is not more their life than ours, shall be just revealed, unveiled, manifested in His glory.

Now when we ask who these are of whom such glorious things are spoken in the Word and in the Church—and when we turn to Holy Scripture, and to its utterances in this day's Services, for the answer—we are struck, first of all, with this most general and elementary characteristic, that they are holy persons: they are those who have, on the whole, not without many spots and stains from the world's contact, not without many infections of a fallen nature within, and many assaults, but too successful, of a wary and crafty spiritual foe beside them—yet, on the whole, lived a good life, set a good example, done a good work in and upon their generation, exhibited, however unostentatiously, those particular virtues and graces which the

¹ Col. iii. 3.

Gospel first made such, meekness, gentleness, humility, an unprovokable spirit, a ready forgiveness, an unwearied unbounded charity; insomuch that it was perfectly plain that, though in the world they were not of it, and, though fallen in Adam, they were raised and renewed and transformed in Christ. This was one part, the broadest and the most legible, of that seal of the Divine authentication, of which this day's Epistle tells, as their badge, and token, and safeguard also, amidst the woes and the curses of a renegade, rebellious, reprobate earth¹.

But already, in this first and most cursory glance at the condition and character of the Saints, we have noticed one feature which must now be brought more prominently into view.

It is not mere respectability—even if that word be raised out of its lower into its truer and more honourable acceptation—it is no mere respectability of life, and it is no mere cultivation of virtues such as the natural

¹ Rev. vii. 2, &c.

man honours—which marks the men and the women and the little children whose birthday through death into immortality the Church is this day keeping. These persons were knit together on earth, are bound together in heaven, in part certainly, but not only nor chiefly, by that moral resemblance which made them patterns of all good to their home, their place, their age: this was not the seal, though it was one of the impresses of the seal, which marked them as God's; and this was not the relationship, though it was one of the results and workings of the relationship, in virtue of which they are not only fellow-citizens to each other, but individually members of God's household. It is not moral resemblance which makes them one communion: it is a single allegiance, a separate devotion, an individual dedication, to one Person, who has taken them severally for His own, and in whom they all meet and centre and are at one.

There is a name given in Scripture to this characteristic feature, this family tie, this

*one blood*¹, which determines the membership of the mystic communion, and that name is *FAITH*. It is Faith which makes Enoch brother to Paul, and David to John, and Daniel to Cephas: it is Faith, which overleaps the chasm of time, and brings together those who could only yearn after Christ in anxious longings, with those who sat at His feet or walked in His steps or saw Him risen: it is Faith, which knits into one races and dispositions and circumstances and cultures the most diverse and dissimilar, and gives already, in no doubtful vision, a glimpse of that magnificent future of which it is written in the Word that cannot lie—

*It shall be in that day, that the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one*².

You will observe also that, as faith is the characteristic feature of all the saints, so there has been in all time something given, communicated by God Himself, for faith to fasten upon. Faith is not guessing. Faith is the

¹ Acts xvii. 26.

² Zech. xiv. 8, 9.

apprehension by the whole man of something which God has told concerning Himself¹. Faith is the sight of the unseen: but that unseen thing is unveiled first by the All-seeing. Faith is not the discovery by man of mysteries lying hid from the race²: it is the grasping, by the firm hand of the soul, of something which God stretches out to it from behind the veil of the Incomprehensible and the Infinite.

Now that something is called in Scripture by a name which connects it, even in sound, with the act which is to apprehend it. St Paul speaks of *denying the faith*; of *erring from the faith*; of *departing from the faith*; of *making shipwreck concerning* (or *on*) *the faith*; of *holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*³. He speaks of himself as *now preaching the faith which once he destroyed*⁴. He speaks of *the faith coming*⁵—and of mankind as *shut up unto it*—kept as

¹ Heb. xi. 3, 7, 11, &c.

² 1 Cor. i. 21.

³ 1 Tim. i. 19. iii. 9. iv. 1. v. 8. vi. 10.

⁴ Gal. i. 23.

⁵ Gal. iii. 23, 25.

it were under the lock and key of earlier and darker Dispensations, until *the fulness of the time* should *come*¹, and the infancy of alphabet and law should be ripe for the manlier, the more confidential dealing of the Gospel and the Spirit². Faith is the sight of the unseen: *the* faith is the revelation of the unseen. Faith is the eye which sees: *the* faith is the light which makes visible. Faith is the apprehension by the man of that which *the* faith communicates to the race.

Leaving then these necessary but unattractive preliminaries of distinction and definition, I would plunge without delay into the subject proposed to us; which must be—I had almost said in these times, but certainly on this day and before this audience—in some form or other, the warfare of faith; and which I will endeavour, by the help of God, to make as practical as possible, by selecting for consideration, from time to time, some one of those real foes of faith, in manful battling

¹ Gal. iv. 4.

² Gal. iii. 24. iv. 1—3. 2 Cor. iii. 6, &c.

with which must lie, for each one of us, the assured hope of being finally admitted into that holy communion and fellowship which is, for time and eternity, *the blessed company of all faithful people*¹.

For this day, then, I take as one of the most formidable enemies of our faith, what I will venture to designate as a spirit of *UN-REALITY*.

I know that the word is not accurate. For it is not of the quality of the thing, whether opinion or doctrine, but of the mind that deals with it, that I purpose to speak. *Unrealizing* rather than *unreality* is what I seek to denote by it. Nevertheless, if the thing meant is plain, I care not for the expression.

Unreality is in one sense the exact opposite of faith. If *faith is the substance* (or *confidence*) *of things hoped for, the evidence* (that *which convinces*) *of things not seen*², unreality is the exact opposite of this. It is the *not* being assured, the *not* being convinced, in

¹ Order of Holy Communion.

² Heb. xi. 1.

the secret of the heart, of things spiritual, of things unseen. But that which is in one aspect the opposite, is in another aspect an opponent, one among many, of Christian, of saving faith. And it is thus that I use it.

Let me try, first, to express what is meant by it. I could scarcely do this more graphically than in the words of the text.

Isaiah is giving one of his contemptuous, consuming pictures of the folly of idolatry. It is a favourite topic with him. *Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth*: the images which could not save Babylon, laden upon the weary cattle, are themselves going into captivity¹. Such is idolatry. Gold lavished out of the bag—silver weighed in the balance—a goldsmith hired—a *god made*—made, and then worshipped; carried to his pedestal, set there—just able to stand, impotent to stir one step in aid of his worshipper—with no voice to answer, and no hand to save²; such is the thing which one greater even than Isaiah, the Apostle Paul, briefly calls a non-

¹ Isai. xlvi. 1, 2.

² Verses 6, 7.

entity, a non-existence¹: an existence, indeed, as God made it; a block of wood or stone; so far, a part, though a humble part, of the universe which God called good²; but no existence in its new, its man-made character, as a person, a being, still less a deity:—even such is that thing which I wish to describe to you; an essence, a truth, a reality therefore, in itself, but no being, no existence, no entity for you, because you have not seen it with the eye of the soul, nor grasped and handled it with the manipulation of the spirit.

1. We see this unreality—to mention but two points—first in relation to *doctrine*.

Some of the most elementary, most blessed, most sustaining revelations of the Gospel, are as yet unrealities to many who now hear me. I can scarcely go wrong in mentioning them.

We have heard, from infancy—for many years the youngest of us have uttered with their lips—the Creeds of the Church. Where is he to whom the Articles of one, the briefest

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 4.

² Gen. i. 31.

and simplest, of those Creeds, the Articles of the Apostles' Creed, are, each and all, realities to-day? You have carried them, and set them in their place—you would be shocked, you would be indignant, if any one doubted them: you yourself would be alarmed, would be displeased with yourself, if you thought it possible that you could deny or expunge one of them. Yet when, in your hour of distress—when, in your moments of just self-reproach—when, in the agony of a temptation or a sin—when, in sickness or by the open grave, you call in one of these first elements of Revelation to your succour or your consolation, do you find—ask yourself—do you find that you have hold of it? Does it help, does it comfort, does it answer you?

I will select just two of these.

I believe in the Holy Ghost.

I believe that there is in the blessed Deity, the Object of my worship, one Person—inexact as the phrase confessedly is—who has specially charged Himself with the individual spiritual well-being; One who has under-

taken, in behalf of all who believe, the office of the Comforter, the Sanctifier, the inward Intercessor, the Guide, the Strength, the Life. I believe that He is as near to me as I myself; that He knows my every thought, feels my every want, foresees my every danger, cares for my peace, wills my holiness; and that He has, for all these purposes, that Omnipotent strength which is an attribute of God Himself. I believe too that this Blessed Person has but to be sought in order to be found; that He comes to those who ask Him; and that, *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*¹. Then how is it, that one, believing this, should yet *walk in darkness and have no light*²? should find himself day by day too indolent for duty, too weak for resistance, too dull to worship, too cold to love? Is it not plain that these things come from that spirit of Unreality, which holds for doctrines a thousand things which it never grasps and never lives by; believes in a Divine Helper and Advocate and Comforter whom it never

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 17.

² Isai. l. 10.

calls in, and idly talks of a grace which it has neither will nor faith to *stir up*¹?

I believe in the forgiveness of sins.

I believe that God has made provision, in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the cancelling of guilt incurred by sins committed. I believe that a sinner humbly seeking pardon as the free gift of God, through the Atonement which was made once for all in the death of Christ, may find that pardon, real and conscious, for real sins done by him in this body. I believe that this forgiveness is no theory or figment of theologians; no remote distant peradventure to be looked forward to as a possibility in the world beyond death; but a plain, express, positive promise of God Himself, to be laid hold upon in the present, relied upon and used and rested in, for immediate comfort and for actual reconciliation. How is it then, we ask again, that so few of us are living in the enjoyment of this greatest of gifts; exercising that right of the pardoned, which is the tran-

¹ 2 Tim. i. 6.

quillity of the conscience, and living that life of the forgiven, which is the activity of all the powers in a Father's service? Surely this too is by reason of that unreality of which we are speaking. We hold this truth as a theory, we do not grasp it as a fact: we do not, when we have sinned—and *there is no man that sinneth not*¹—instantly come, with sorrow yet with frankness, to the throne of grace, pleading the blood of Christ for present pardon, and going forth humbled and solemnized, yet with a full assurance of forgiveness, to the duties and trials of a life still before us.

These are examples of that loss and that defeat which hangs about all of us, from the working of a spirit of unreality in the whole region of our faith. We cannot live the Christian life, because we do not realize the Christian revelation. We do not, as a matter of fact, apprehend the forgiveness of sins as a possession guaranteed to us: therefore we never rise to the joyful alacrity of a man free to run with confidence the race set before him.

¹ 1 Kings viii. 46.

We do not, as a matter of fact, expect and claim the presence of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of the heart for truth, and to gird the loins of the life for duty: therefore we never know what it is, for one single day, to live with God and in God and for God; we speak and we act, we work and we enjoy, only as men in the flesh, not at all as those who have been lifted out of the atmosphere of sense into the pure air and blessed light of spirit and immortality.

Would to God, my brethren, that it were as easy to correct as it is to account for the state thus described!

Sometimes it arises from a false teaching as to the demand which this faith makes upon us. A dry dogmatical presentation of truth to the young disciple, often suggests the idea—if it be not put into words—that acquiescence is *the* virtue in reference to God's revelations; that to receive the mighty disclosures of Atonement and Grace, to receive them, I mean, as disclosures, and to count it a sinful exercise of the reason to discuss or

dispute them, is man's part, is certainly the Churchman's part, in regard to the several items of the faith once delivered. Much stress is laid upon the mysteriousness, the unfathomable depth, of each particular doctrine; and the mind is brought back, again and again, to this supposed contrast between acceptance and understanding: it is made almost a higher attainment to bend the knee of the soul to an incomprehensible and unexplored formula of doctrine, than to enter, with however much of humility and reverence, into the examination, into the sifting and handling, of the thing itself veiled under it. Thus a spirit of unreality is made by some almost a synonym for a habit of submission and humility.

Or it may be that there has been, from quite an opposite cause, a timidity in apprehending. It is no uncommon temper of mind, in these days, to feel a general misgiving as to the certainty of Divine truth. Men say to us, *It is all doubtful—nothing can be proved—the supernatural must be indemonstrable—once*

admit miracle—and what else is revelation?—and you are in that land of dreams, in which the closed eye is the first condition of being. Thus even the Christian, even the man of serious convictions and earnest aspirations, finds himself insensibly acquiring a habit of timidity, almost of cowardly skulking, in reference to his own most anxiously cherished doctrine: he becomes afraid to look anything in the face: he clings to his faith, as a drowning man to a frail worn rope, without daring to try its strength, and with but a faint expectation of its ever really lifting him into the vessel of an everlasting salvation.

Or it may be, once again—in this Congregation it may well be—that there has not yet begun to stir, in some hearts, that deep, deepest questioning as to things unseen and eternal, through which and out of which is generally accomplished the new birth of the soul. This kind of questioning comes not, commonly, but with an experience of want, of distress and poverty felt and groaned under, such as is rare in the young. Not least is it rare in

the case of those who have been kept, by the good hand of God over them, from falling into open transgression. They who have never known what it is to find themselves powerless against the assault of a sin, or to find themselves remorseful and anguished by the recollection of a sin, may not yet have felt the necessity of looking thoroughly into that word *grace* or that other word *forgiveness*, so as to make sure their ground before God in the prospect of life and in the prospect of judgment.

These three possibilities may contain in them, for one or for another, the explanation of that condition of unreality in relation to the things of God, which is under notice to-day as one of the foes of faith.

And it is my desire to render you discontented with this condition. I would remind you of a coming day—coming surely even in this life—when such a faith as this must break down under you. It cannot resist temptation—it cannot reconcile to disappointment—it cannot comfort sorrow—it cannot face death.

I would not indeed counsel, as some possibly might dare to do, the absolute discarding, from your list of things believed, of everything which you have not personally realized. I would not venture to advise a deliberate surrender of every belief which is not yet a faith. I would not have a man say, *Because I do not yet feel that I have a firm grasp of the Atonement for sin, or the Deity of Jesus Christ, therefore I must for the present call and treat myself as a Unitarian, and say nothing in my prayers or in my worship which presupposes a confidence, not yet mine, in the deeper and more mysterious doctrines of a Catholic and Apostolical Church.* This would be a wilful, a desperate abandonment of that position which the Providence of God (to say the least) has given you within the pale of that community which worships Him through Christ Jesus, and accepts the Volume of Scripture as His true and inspired Word.

But this I do counsel: first, the utmost possible humility, both of thought and profession, as concerning all doctrine which is

yet to you but a name; the most sincere confession, to yourself and to God, of the backwardness and sluggishness of your heart in receiving those truths which you are taught in the Bible and by the Creeds of your Church as portions of His mind and will; the confession of this unreality as an ingratitude and as a sin, and the prostration of your soul before God for a truer and a more profound discipline of His grace. And then, secondly, and above all, an earnest resolution to bring to a decision this state of unrealizing belief. Say to yourself, *If this doctrine be of God, it must be meant for use: it cannot be intended to be just set in its place, like the idol that Isaiah tells of, dumb to my cry and impotent for my help. Therefore the test of its truth will be its availableness. Let me test it by trial. Let me, in the morning, ask, as a real thing, the presence of the Holy Ghost within me, to strengthen me for work, to keep me from sin of act and sin of speech and sin of thought. Let me expect an answer. Let me wait and watch, let me make room for, let*

me foster and cherish, that blessed influence. Let me too at evening—let me after each several instance of inconsistency, levity, or sin—make application to God for actual, for immediate forgiveness, on the ground of what Christ has done and suffered. Let me expect that forgiveness. Let me go forth, as if forgiven, to be God's child and God's servant still, though sinful, yet not doubting, for that, the truth and reality of His promise. So let me live—and then, in the same degree, the condition of unreality will have ended: mine will be a life, not of unrealized doctrine, but of revelation grasped and apprehended and lived by. So shall I have proof, day by day, of the truth of things believed, and I shall be able to say, like the Samaritans in the Gospel, Now I believe, not because of another's saying, but because I have heard Him myself, and know that He is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World¹—or with the Patriarch of an older antiquity, I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear—now mine eye seeth Thee².

John iv. 42.

² Job xlii. 5.

2. That spirit of unreality which thus eats into the heart of faith in reference to doctrine, is no less ruinous in relation to *worship*.

Has it ever occurred to one of you to place himself, in thought, on any occasion, in the position of a spectator of his own worship? It is a dreadful thing, I think, when we reflect upon it, to notice how small a part of any one Service in which we have ever taken part has been the absorbing, engrossing, self-forgetting employment of the mind, the heart, the soul. If we must interpret the worship of others by our own, we should almost begin to fear that in some Services God who sees in secret sees *nothing*; not one moment of that direct, undistracted, self-surrendered adoration, not one act of that entire, absolute concentration of thought and feeling, which alone passes for worship when He looks on. If at the close of any public Service, if on rising from private prayer, the question were seriously put to us, in the heart, *What have you done? what has been asked, what has been sought, what has been desired, wished,*

or felt, in this act of devotion? what, therefore, on the supposition that God answers prayer, may you now expect as the result? how often must the confession be, Nothing—Nothing: my heart made no response, when the cry was, Awake and praise: my heart uttered no sound, when the lips seemed to be saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabbath: Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory! The very object of our worship, God Himself, was to us an unreality: our conception of Him, our shaping and framing of the thought of Him, was even like that dumb thing of which Isaiah tells—a thing lifted into its place, and helplessly set there, dumb to its suppliant, and powerless to save.

We know too well how many causes have been working to this end.

Worship began for us in form, ere it could begin in spirit. Never did the exact moment come, at which we felt the responsibility defining itself of being worshippers indeed. We had grown accustomed to the being present,

where we could not be engaged. By degrees thought awakened, mind opened, feeling developed itself—everywhere but in worship. Now and then, even in worship, we felt ourselves addressed, summoned, compelled. But never did we feel, as we ought, the profaneness, the wickedness, of indevotion.

Do I outrun your experience, my brethren, in this description? Or do I describe just what you have known? And, if this, how shall I counsel you?

Shall I say, *Multiply forms until at last you shall be constrained into devotion?* Shall I say, *What you want is a ritual more perfect, more persuasive to the sense, more attractive to the idea?* Alas! I fear that in such multiplications of the external, the spirit may be overborne, may be smothered altogether. Rather would I recommend, as the present medicine for a state such as I have described, a ritual so bare and hungry that the soul may be put under compulsion to say whether or no it is engaged in God's worship. Far better

were it, I think, in such a case, for the reality of devotion, that the very mind itself should be stripped bare till there could be no mistake. For if indeed the form is nothing—nothing in the sight of Him who is Spirit, and whom *they who worship must worship in spirit and in truth*¹—surely nothing can be more fatal to the reality of worship, than such a cumbering of service with form that the question is never forced upon the soul, *Art thou present?* such an overlaying of the spiritual with the sensible, that a man can scarcely say whether the spirit is asleep or waking—as though it were possible for the eye and the ear to capture the soul, and carry it by a sort of physical violence into the Divine Presence.

Then shall I say, *Discard forms—cease to worship at all, until the soul shall constrain you to seek God's throne, and then let it be the soul alone, pure and unclothed, which goes to the pursuit of the spiritual and eternal?* Not so. For indeed the soul in this life,

¹ John iv. 24.

cumbered with the body, does need an external assistance, does want the help of sympathy and of communion, to encourage and to arouse it in drawing nigh to its God. Neither in forms, nor without forms, can the worship of the Church militant be made effectual in spirit.

Rather I would say this. The experience of unreality should urge us to a more earnest effort after a spiritual worship. We must carefully dress and equip ourselves for devotion. We must anxiously seek God before we worship. We must severely judge and try ourselves in worship. We must guard and fence ourselves with God's complete armour when we would bow ourselves before Him. And when we leave the place of His worship, we must diligently question ourselves as to the thing we have done. *Have we asked anything? What then have we asked? What shall we go forth to expect and to wait for? Wherein shall we know whether God has answered us?* Thus let us give reality to form, and spirit to substance.

Thus let us practise ourselves here below for a worship which shall be perpetual above. Thus let us make trial of the efficacy of worship, by seeing whether aught, in deed and in truth, comes of it.

And one thing more let me say, most suitable to this occasion. Connect worship with practice. Try the effect of your prayers upon the life. If nothing comes of Services, be sure that all is wrong with you. For this reason—if there were none else—I do not join in the common disparagement of Charity Sermons¹. They bring home to us the connection, the inseparable connection, between prayer and work, between preaching and practice. This day I have again, as on more than one former occasion², to ask your alms for the poor and needy; not indeed for the wants of the body, but for that other and worse famine of which a Prophet tells—*not of bread nor of water, but of hearing the*

¹ A Collection was made after this Sermon in aid of the Fund for providing Additional Curates in Cambridge and its suburbs.

² In 1862 and 1866.

*words of the Lord*¹. Two years ago, you responded to the appeal addressed to you by a noble contribution; enough, or almost enough, for the support of one Minister for a whole year. Let it not be otherwise to-day! Let your thoughts go forth from this honoured, this time-honoured and God-honoured place of hearing, to the population, dense I may truly call it, and deeply, shamefully indigent, lying around this city of God's light, the light of education and the light of the Word, which ought to be, and which in some senses is, a centre of illumination to towns and countries into which it sends forth year by year, godly, God-fearing, God-taught men, carrying the torch of truth, the lamp of grace, the light of life. Let not the near neighbourhood starve, while the far-off are fed by you to the full! Let the offerings of a free heart this day be plenteous as in days of old, to the glory of the one Lord and to the salvation of many souls.

I would dare to urge my plea by one last

¹ Amos viii. 11.

argument. It comes to you from the dead. The Church of England is mourning this day the loss of her chief Pastor¹: a man of many gifts and more graces: a man of diligent, simple, godly life: a man tried in many things and in many places, and carrying into all the same kindly, genial, generous spirit—too kindly perhaps for some offices; too good, I would almost dare to say, for some of the persons and for some of the occasions with which the Providence of God called him to deal. But *he did what he could*²....In himself, he was, in many respects, a specimen of Christian men and Christian bishops. I know of definite instances—one instance specially rises before me—in which he applied himself to the reformation of an individual life; rescuing a poor neighbour from the prison-house of inveterate intemperance, and continuing to watch his recovery, and still to animate him to the struggle by letter, when

¹ This Sermon was preached on the Sunday after the death of the late Archbishop of Canterbury.

² Mark xiv. 8.

he had been himself removed to a distant Diocese, and to a burden of new toils and cares amidst which forgetfulness might have been pardoned. One such recollection shines more brightly below—one such grace certainly is more illustrious in heaven—than many an eloquent Sermon, or many a triumphant progress through admiring Churches. Well were it for us all if more were like him!

And now he rests from his labours : rests, they say, with a smile on his face—rather anticipative of the future than retrospective of the past. He rests—and we remain. We leave out the honoured name in our Bidding Prayer : but that is because we have inserted it, in thought at least, in the thanksgiving for All the Saints. Let us follow him in his gentleness, in his meekness, in his charity. Let us follow him, first of all, in that reality of faith and devotion, which breathed on his deathbed in words which will long be remembered and treasured in the Churches—

A poor and guilty sinner I know myself to be ... I commit my soul into the hands of my God and dear Saviour. I have had proofs enough of His love in the past, and I am well assured that whatever sufferings or trials are permitted to befall me are visitations of love. Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.

ALL SAINTS' DAY,

November 1, 1868.

II.

INDOLENCE.

HEBREWS VI. 12.

*That ye be not slothful, but followers of them
who through faith and patience inherit the
promises.*

ST JUDE bids us to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*¹. He speaks of Christian people as an army of *holy (consecrated) men*, to whose keeping there has been entrusted a sort of sacred banner, a standard of Divine loyalty and allegiance, for the safety of which they are made responsible to their King. This banner is *the faith*; that revelation of truth (spoken of last Sunday) which is presented to the individual faith as its object of apprehension. This faith, *once* (that is, *once for all*) *delivered*, is in jeopardy. It has to be *contended for*; nay, St Jude's word is, *contended over*—as though

¹ Jude 3.

it were already struck down, *laid low, even to the ground*¹, and the business of the faithful few were to cover, to protect, to fight over it. It is a strong figure; certainly as true and as forcible in our days as in his. And it could not have been inappropriate to make this the text of these Sermons; to bid the occupants of this Church, older and younger alike, to fight the battle of the imperilled faith of the Church in this their day. Where, if not in an English University, can we look for champions of God's truth—for the fighting men of His Church in reference to doctrine? Nevertheless we have not chosen this particular topic. Not because we disparage its importance; not because we think that anywhere it could be more suitable: but for these two other reasons. First, because it could not, even here, come home to all men: there must be, even in this Congregation, many who feel that they have no aptitude, and therefore no call, to come forth as the disputants and controversialists of their day, even *on God's*

¹ Isai. xxvi. 5.

*behalf*¹. And secondly, because there is always a risk in this service, a spiritual risk : there is so much in it which is unwholesome ; such a tendency to personality ; such a temptation to wrath and wrangling ; such a liability to seek triumphs rather than to win souls ; such a fatal readiness to put doctrine in the place of practice, and opinion in the place of life ; above all, so terrible a likelihood of overlooking oneself, and, in the zeal of a supposed anxiety for the faith, forgetting that one *weightier matter*², which is Faith itself.

Therefore, instead of bidding each man, and each young man, in this Congregation, to become a disputant for the faith, however seriously and sorely imperilled in this late (perhaps latest) period of the Church's trial, we have said this rather, *Look to your own faith: guard it, watch over it, your choicest, your most precarious possession: and in so doing you will best be accomplishing that which St Jude, and the Spirit who spake in him, meant, for us, when he charged the men of*

¹ Job xxxvi. 2.

² Matt. xxiii. 23.

*his day to contend and to struggle over the faith itself. We wrestle not against flesh and blood*¹: we wrestle against spiritual foes, and it is the first stratagem of their subtle, their most experienced warfare, to turn off the attention of the soul from the true key of the position, from the actual point of attack.

We have proposed, then, in the plainest and most practical way to do what an old king of Judah proposed to his enemy the king of Israel, namely, *to look our foe in the face*²; to think with ourselves what are some of those adversaries to our faith—in other words, ✓ to our own personal insight into, and interest in, the things of God—with which we must enter into conflict day by day if we would be believing men—if we would ourselves *fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life*³.

We have placed first in this list the spirit of Unreality; that habit of holding for truths many doctrines which we have never grasped and never handled, of going out to battle in

¹ Eph. vi. 12.

² 2 Kings xiv. 8.

³ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

armour which we have *not proved*¹, of worshipping God in words and forms which, for us, at the time, mean nothing—which, if in one sense the opposite, is in another sense an opponent, one amongst many, of that spiritual vision, that sight of the unseen, that soul's intuition, which is the essence of Faith.

To-day we will change the subject, and speak, under the guidance of the text, of another enemy of the personal faith, which is the spirit of *INDOLENCE*. *That ye be not slothful, but followers (imitators) of them who through faith and patience now inherit the promises.* The words themselves give the contrast. *Not slothful, but men of faith.* Indolence, sluggishness, is a foe of faith.

And where, my brethren, shall we begin, and where end, in grappling with this foe? What department of the being is his stronghold? or from what region—of body, soul, or spirit—is he fenced out?

I. It can never be unnecessary—not even here—to dwell, though it must be summarily

¹ 1 Sam. xvii. 39.

and in enigma, upon the warfare of sloth in the *body*.

We do not wish to estimate over-highly that *bodily exercise* of which St Paul says in all senses—though chiefly in a very different sense from this—that it *profiteth little*¹. We do not join in that flattery of flesh and bone, that worship of muscle and sinew, that idolatry of strength and agility, which has been carried, we think, much too far in our Schools and Universities. We must be bold to speak of it, if we are Christians—nay, if we are rational beings—in terms more measured and less exalted. The highest height of bodily prowess is essentially lower than the humblest developement of intellectual strength. And the loftiest flight of intellectual ambition never rises into the very lowest heaven of spiritual grace. These are gradations, not of man's making, but of God's ordaining. Soul first, then mind, last body. Do not expect—for it is impossible—to re-arrange for yourself the primeval law, to in-

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

vert the everlasting order, of the material, the mental, and the spiritual. Do not allow yourself to live as if you could do so. God has settled these things: we must judge, and we must act, accordingly. We cannot admit that either Universities or Schools exist for the sake of games; and still less that that later age, that maturer manhood, in which (if anywhere) man must be served and God honoured below, can devote to sports of the field—and be blameless—its *life and breath and all things*¹.

But, though this is true, and the remembrance of it urgent, it is to a different peril that I would turn your thoughts now. Better any diligence than any sloth. Better the *strenuous idleness* of bodily exercise, than the sluggish, purposeless lounging which is the alternative for many. Not even that absorption of the faculties in corporeal energy—not even that devotion of precious hours to interests which *perish with the using*²—is so fatal to faith as the stagnation of all the

¹ Acts xvii. 25.

² Col. ii. 22.

powers in a dull monotonous idling. The one may be excessive, may be irrational, may be the postponing of higher objects to lower, may be, so far, a dereliction of duty, a forgetfulness of the future, a blindness to the invisible and the everlasting: but it does not so unstring the mind, it does not so drug and paralyze the whole being, as that other habit, of doing nothing, thinking nothing, and caring for nothing, which is as hopeless in prospect as it is fruitless and objectless in the present. The man of activity may find his scope, and even his mission, hereafter, in the great world-wide work-field. Ill would it have been for us, in the Crimean war, in the Indian mutiny, if we had had no soldiers, and no civilians, whose youth had been disciplined in games, whose courage and whose endurance had been practised in the hunting-field. Soul ranks above mind, and mind above the body: but lowest of all in the scale of human existence—in brute animal life there is no such specimen—is that man who does *nothing* in acknowledgment of the creation gift; whose

eye is not only bounded by the horizon of time, but closed, absolutely closed, to every interest of his being.

Do you ask why this meanest of all sloths should be called a foe particularly of *faith*? I will answer, without hesitation, First, because it is expectant of nothing. I might say of it, as of Unreality before, that it is not only one opponent, it is the very opposite, of faith—for faith is active expectation, and sloth is indolent contentment. And secondly, because this kind of sloth is peculiarly friendly to vices which are murderers of faith. These men are the plague-spots of society: in low life, they fill its gaols—in higher life they secretly stain our very *feasts of charity*¹.

2. But I will go a step onward, and urge the charge, *that ye be not slothful*, upon *minds* also.

It is undeniable that there are even in our homes of learning—even amongst those who must be described, by courtesy at least, as scholars and students—a vast number of un-

¹ Jude 12.

occupied minds. There are men who take no interest (to use the conventional, though far too respectful phrase) in the studies of the place. It is difficult to see how this excuse, if such it ever was, can be admissible now. Surely it is a tradition of the past, rather than a suggestion of the present. It comes down to us from a time when there was in this University but one recognized line of study, but one system of instruction and one possibility of reward, and when it might happen that there was such a natural inaptitude, so absolute an incapacity, for the cultivation of that one, as drove a man altogether out of the only course marked out for intellectual effort. Who can say this now? Who, that is not born incapable of thought, can be at a loss, in these days, to find, in this place, a career and a goal? I would most earnestly charge it upon my younger and my youngest hearers to-day, that they allow themselves in no such plea for sloth. The man who can find no interest in the studies of this place, has himself only to

blame for it. Let each one, whose line of study is not yet definitely chosen, choose his line instantly. Let him take counsel upon it—with himself at least, always the best of counsellors if there be first but an honest mind—and let this very week witness the desired obedience, in him, to the Apostolical charge, that, in mind at least, we be not slothful.

But there is a sluggishness of mind, oftentimes, even in those who are not absolutely standing idle.

For example, there is, in almost all of us, a proneness to inattention. The eye passes over the line, reaches the foot of the page, arrives, in due course, at the end of chapter and volume—and nothing remains of it. Of all the reproaches which arise against a man in his chamber of study, there is none more bitter than these two—the sight of his own books unread, and the sight of his own books read. The one accuses him of waste—the other accuses him of inattention. We are slothful in not reading—we are slothful also

in reading. I would beg you to grapple with the demon of indolence betimes, in this form of inattention. Examine yourself in your reading. Make each book, each page, each sentence, give account of itself to you. This which your University does for you in her place, do also—you can better do it—for yourself.

Again, there is in most men a habit too of desultoriness. We see it in the day, and we see it in the life. Some have spent one year, or two years, in this place, and they have not yet resolved upon their line of study. They know not in which, or whether in any, of the recognized branches, they will seek honours. Thus they miss all, in asking which. And so in details. From book to book, from subject to subject, from one study and from one accomplishment to another, we are still passing and re-passing, and there is nothing done, and nothing gained, in any. *Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel*¹.

Once more, still speaking of mind, there

¹ Gen. xlix. 4.

is a general dreaminess and listlessness and vagueness, yet more common perhaps than either of the former. Sometimes health has to do with it:—and yet even health is more under a man's control than we like to believe it: a little wilfulness in habits and hours, in such small things as diet, sleep, and exercise, will make a man an invalid whom God never made so, and whom God must reprove and visit and judge for being so. And even excess in study will account for this: a man cannot fix his thought, cannot concentrate his effort, from mere extravagance of labour, or from mere superfluity of anxiety—in other words, from want of wisdom or want of faith—and so he is *slothful in business* just from over-business—just because he has not been (in the Christian sense) *fervent also in spirit, serving the Lord*¹.

3. Let us turn then—as these last words counsel us—to that kind of indolence of which the Apostle actually wrote the warning, *That ye be not slothful*.

¹ Rom. xii. 11.

It is true, each man is one, not many. We may divide, for the sake of distinctness, this total which is the man—we have Scriptural authority for doing so¹—into two, or into three, parts: but we must not forget that the living, thinking, moving person is one and the same through all these, and if sloth acts in one part it acts in all, and acts in the unit being of which each part is an aspect. If the body is slothful, the man is slothful; and if the mind is slothful, the man is slothful:—and that will be our answer to any one who should object that neither body nor mind have to do with faith. But let us come now to that of which there can be no question—the action of sloth in the soul—that is, in the unit being in its direct aspect towards God.

(1) And here we shall observe it first in its dealing with Divine truth.

There ought to be no doubt that Revelation is not given to save a man trouble. If it be true that in matters of life *man's extremity is God's opportunity*, so in matters of know-

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 34. 1 Thess. v. 23.

ledge it is true likewise that, where man ends, God begins. Man can think, and God would have him think: man can reason and ponder and reflect and exercise judgment, and God would have him do each one of these things in regard to truth spiritual, eternal, and Divine. If Revelation came to supersede effort—to make it needless, wrong, presumptuous, to use God's natural gift of thought upon God's supernatural gift of enlightenment from above—Revelation itself would lose one sure mark of its origin and one chief object of its coming. *Canst thou by searching find out God*¹? No—but, if God declares Himself, it is to show me how to search so that I may find. The knowledge of God is not a science, but an acquaintanceship: it is not the knowledge of a book, it is the knowledge of a Person. And that knowledge presupposes toil and patience and progress, a setting out and an arrival, all the more, not the less, because God has vouchsafed it for our direction. Thus, of all impediments to spiritual know-

¹ Job xi. 7.

ledge, none is greater than sloth. The entrance of sloth into religion is fatal even to the reception of truth.

Watch it in its influence.

It makes one man a bigot. If it is not necessary, if it is not safe, to think—if Revelation was given as a solid lump of doctrine, to be laid up in the napkin of an indolent assent, or used as a missile against infidels, or brought out at set times, on Sundays and holy days, for parade or ornament—let me take it on trust from the family in which I was born, or the sect or the party into which disposition or accident has thrown me, and let me count it a mark rather of attainment than of irreligion to be confident in my interpretation of its meaning, and vehement in my denunciation of all who differently read it. This is the very history of religious partizanship. One man, taught of God or untaught, ponders and meditates, at last speaks and writes : his thought, his conclusion, is taken on trust by thousands, who just call themselves by his name, and follow, or think they follow, where he leads or led.

It is sloth which really marshals the ranks, and turns the thoughtful utterance of one into the senseless violent gabble of the many.

It makes another man a sceptic. We do far too much honour to doubt when we dignify it by the title of free-thinking. Certainly there are those who have reasoned themselves into unbelief; as there are those who have through much learning, truly or falsely so called, confused and hopelessly entangled an intellect never perhaps the clearest. But of this I am assured—that, for one man who disbelieves the Gospel through overmuch thinking, thousands and tens of thousands doubt about it through the precipitancy of indolence. Sloth loves suspense. Not to reject the Gospel—for this might alarm; not to call myself an infidel—for this still requires some courage; but to leave all doubtful—to recognize the certainty of nothing—to lay no result by in the storehouse of conviction, and to treat no principle as established beyond the reach of assault—this is the counsel of sloth in reference to all truth: and when you point

to this man and that man, of taste, of eloquence, of intellect, who has never given in his adhesion to the Gospel of Christ, I shall still think that, in matters of the soul, indolence may have been his counsellor, and that he who was diligent in business, and sagacious in politics, may yet have been sluggish in answering the greater question, *What must I do to be saved?*

And certainly, if these are the effects of indolence in its more marked and definable workings, there is an influence which it exerts day by day, in reference to the reception of Divine truth, in the hearts of all who are compassed with human infirmity. We read in this Epistle of a *dulness of hearing*—but it is the same word (in the original) as that on which the text turns—a *slothfulness*, or *sluggishness, of ear*¹—which makes men unfit to enter into the deeper mysteries of Scripture and the Gospel. Which of us knows not something of that deadening, by sloth, of the spiritual ear? Where in us is that quickness,

¹ Heb. v. 11, *ρεθροὶ γεγόνατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς.*

that alertness, that alacrity in catching the sound of God's voice in the Bible, which was never so touchingly expressed as in that answer put by the old man into the child's mouth at Shiloh, *Speak, Lord: for thy servant heareth*¹? What record, what disclosure, what command, what expostulation of Scripture, does not come to us clouded and dimmed and muffled and stifled, rather as the muttering echo of a far-off thunder, than as the articulate speech of a Person dealing with us and conversing with us from an opened heaven²? This too is of sloth. We do not arise and bestir ourselves—we do not go forth, like Patriarchs and Prophets of old, to stand under the open sky³ and *harken what God the Lord shall say concerning us*⁴—we sit still at home, and expect the Word to come to us, ready labelled for use, legibly directed for application—we treat it as a dead letter, and expect it to turn itself for us by sleight or magic into a living voice—when, in reality, the change which must

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 9.

² Heb. xii. 25.

³ Gen. xv. 5. Psalm viii. 3.

⁴ Psalm lxxxv. 8.

pass upon it is a change in ourselves, and he who would find God in his Bible must begin by seeking Him in his soul.

(2) And thus we have passed, by a natural, an almost imperceptible transition, from the province of thought to the province of devotion; from the reception of Divine truth to the exercise of Divine communion. And need we spend words or moments in showing to any one how indolence acts day by day in this truest and deepest part of the life—that which has a direct relation to God Himself? What is it which, as a simple literal fact, keeps many young men, and many active and vigorous and (in other respects) not self-indulgent men, from beginning each day with an earnest, thoughtful, deliberate act of self-dedication and devotion? Shall we be afraid to name it by its name in this house of God's worship? Shall we not say plainly, It is sloth—*dull sloth*—sloth in its meanest, poorest, most corporeal aspect—we suffer ourselves to sleep on when we should be waking, and leave no room for God between the in-

firmity of the flesh and the importunity of the world?

But the spirit of indolence, in this form of indevotion, is not expelled even by worship. Who does not vex himself with the miserable experience, not now of that sloth which prevents, but of that sloth which spoils prayer? What other occupation of life is gone through with the languor, with the drowsiness, with the half-attention, with the divided distracted thought, which besets the act of praying? *I will arise*, one said, *and go to my Father*¹: we *arise* not—we *go* not: we say rather, *I will sit still, and see whether God will come to me: it matters not—I will pay my paltry due of worship, and, if nothing comes of it, I shall be blameless!* And nothing does come of it. The prayer so prayed asked nothing—and God, who is a Spirit, saw nothing, heard nothing, recognized nothing, in it. *There is none*, the Prophet says, *that calleth upon Thy name—why?* Because there

¹ Luke xv. 18.

is none, he adds, *that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee*¹. Prayer, true prayer, requires more of effort, more of exertion, than any other act of the life: every other has something to assist it; the mere presence, the mere scene, the mere object, helps the doing: in prayer, there is nothing to aid; everything is against it: the pressure of things seen, the atmosphere of earth and sense surrounding, all fights against that speaking to the Invisible: unbelief prompts the thought, *There is no One listening*: sloth weighs down the arm that should be lifted, and says, *It is in vain—let alone—see whether some answer may not come without the asking*: therefore the expression is not one whit too strong, *that stirreth up himself*, as you would rouse a smouldering fire, or waken a man from that sleep which is death's brother, not merely to approach, not merely to address, but actually, with the strong hand of the soul, *to take hold of Thee!* This is that

¹ Isai. lxiv. 7.

soul's effort of which the Old Testament tells, in mysterious type and shadow, when the way-worn Patriarch, left alone by the brook, wrestled all the night long with an unknown Person, to whom he said, after all those lingering hours, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*¹. This is that agony of mental struggle, of which the garden of Gethsemane, on the night of the Passion, witnessed the Divine example; and of which that Master's latest-born Apostle² wrote to one of his Churches, *I would that ye knew—it would give you an idea of my love, not otherwise to be gained—what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea—and not for these alone, but even for all those who have not seen my face in the flesh*³. Over such prayers as these the demon of indolence had no power. God give us all grace, my brethren, ourselves to *go and do likewise*⁴! Let us, in this sense, become *followers of those who through faith and patience fought the good fight before us,*

¹ Gen. xxxii. 24—26.

² 1 Cor. xv. 8.

³ Col. ii. 1.

⁴ Luke x. 37.

and conquered. Depend upon it, there is one sign which has ever marked the true heir of salvation; and that is, earnestness in praying. All else may have varied: one man has shown one grace, or one kind and class of Christian graces, and another another; one has fallen short in this perfection, and another in that; one has been burdened with this infirmity, and another with that: but I do not believe that there is one occupant, at this moment, of the Paradise of God unseen, of whom this could not be said, *He was a man of prayer*. Sloth assailed him, and sin assailed him, and Satan assailed him, not least, but most of all, when he prayed: he knew what it was to shrink from the effort, he knew what it was to feel that *wrestling* which alone *prevails* difficult, severe, daunting to flesh and blood: but he knew also that to such wrestling alone heaven at last opens, that through such wrestling alone heaven is at last won; and therefore he persevered day by day, and God gave him the victory: of him it was true, on the whole

—or he had not been where he is—that he *always prayed, and never fainted*¹.

(3) Finally, as in the regions of thought and of worship, so also in that region which the context specially contemplates, the region of Christian action, there is a special warfare to be waged with the spirit of sloth.

*God is not unrighteous, so runs the passage, to forget your work and labour of love. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence unto the end: that ye be not slothful*². It is thus, by a diligent earnest continuance in well-doing—in other words, in a life of active charity—that the departed saints are to be imitated.

It might seem as though I were forgetting the peculiar circumstances of the Congregation, when I seek to give prominence to this particular topic to-day. Last Sunday you were invited to an act of almsgiving: to-day it is not so. And, apart from some direct object of that kind, it may not be evident at first sight what can be the practical bearing

¹ Luke xviii. 1.

² Heb. vi. 10—12.

of a call, from this Pulpit, to a life of charity. Shall I be thought to exaggerate if I venture to say that I know of no audience to which such a call could be more appropriate? It is not only that you run some special risks of forgetting it: it is not only that your life in this place is proverbially prone to selfishness: it is not only that a double strength of Christian resolution is needed to make you, at this age, and in these circumstances, that which yet you must be if you would ever hear the glad summons, *Come, ye blessed of my Father... for I was in distress, and ye ministered to me*¹. It is not only the difficulty of the duty which proves its urgency; nor yet the certainty that in some future stage of your life, the very next stage to this, you *must* enter upon a work of unselfish well-doing, if you would be Christians:—far, far more than this. I am going to assert that here, if anywhere, a life of charity is possible, and that here, if anywhere, the evil spirit of sloth is busy to preclude it.

¹ Matt. xxv. 34—36.

I speak not only, though I would ever speak with respect and sympathy, of those direct efforts in behalf of Christ and Christ's Gospel, of Christ and Christ's poor, of Christ and Christ's little ones, which are ever counteracting—never more than now—the more selfish and antichristian influences of a life and a society like ours. I speak not of these only or chiefly. And yet I would, in passing, bear my testimony to the blessed rebound and reaction of good upon characters thus disciplined in the University for serving God afterwards in their generation. I would recall, with grateful affection, names once known here in connection with these youthful enterprises of charity, and made illustrious afterwards in the Church by a maturer devotion, at home and abroad, to the cause of truth and the service of mankind: and I would venture to ask some of those who now, in their stead, fill these galleries, whether they might not, more of them, bethink themselves of some Parish School or Parish District in this Town, to which they might offer a spare hour, on

Sunday or week-day, for the benefit of others and for their own ; learning practically betimes what is the condition, physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, of that world into which God has brought them—in which will lie, for a lifetime, their work and their duty and their suffering—and drawing down, upon their own studies, and upon their own brighter and more joyous existence, a blessing not of earth but of heaven.

But even this exhausts not the capabilities for good, the special capabilities, of a life in this place of education. If the spirit of charity be in you, it will never want a work. Glorious things have been done here in secret, without once stepping forth, even in the cause of charity, into the outer world which surrounds us. Sickesses of mind, and sickesses of body—sharp, sudden, trying emergencies of suffering—come here, as they come everywhere on this earth of sin and the fall ; and often there is none to minister on the instant but a friend. Happy he, whose heart is so attuned and so disciplined by faith

and love, by constant self-control and habitual self-denial, that he may be ready at once with the word of wisdom and the act of kindness—ready to sacrifice rest, exercise, study, health itself, to minister, through long nights and days, to the sin-stricken conscience or beside the bed of sickness and death!

These special calls are of necessity rare and exceptional: but not by these alone are the offices of charity bounded. Where is he, for example, who has not some one amongst his own friends, of whose spiritual or moral well-being he cannot as a Christian feel himself assured? some one perhaps whom he knew in other days, at school, or at home; some one whom friends or relations have requested him to notice, ignorant, it may be, of the dispositions of either, or of the mutual fitness of the two; some one whom he sees (as the expressive phrase is) to be going on ill, living wastefully, idly, or worse yet, and whom it is both easy to shake off and not easy to attract or help. Surely such experiences are common, as of old time: and I

bid you to apply to them the counsels of the text. Enter with serious thought into the character, into the disposition, into the faults and trials, of the person thus brought nigh to you. Despise him not—for God made him. Despair not of him—for for him Christ died. Set before you, as a definite object, his improvement, his progress, his soul's health. Pray for him, watch over him, influence him as God enables. Where is the world so full of such opportunities as this? Where else, where in later life, will you find yourself so placed, as here, within reach of other lives and other souls, still tender with youth, still ductile and pliable to the touch of friendship, brought nigh to you not by official duty but by community of circumstances? Seize, I pray you, while it is yours, the flying moment! *buy up*, as St Paul expresses it, the one, the momentous *opportunity*—remembering always that time is short and that *the days are evil*¹!

And if ever, in this as in all else, the evil

¹ Eph. v. 16.

spirit of indolence should whisper to you, *Am I my brother's keeper*¹? if sloth should bid you think of yourself, your own ease, your own amusement, your own interest, your own profiting, and not another's—then think of all those who before you have thus been tempted, and yet by God's grace have conquered—those who, in the successive generations of this University, have here *exercised themselves unto godliness*², and gone forth, one by one, into the struggles of an ampler yet scarcely more trying arena, the stronger and the better and the wiser for having here proved the strength and practised the wielding of the weapons of God's armour—think of these, and pray for grace to keep the Apostle's charge ever before you—

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

¹ Gen. iv. 9.

² 1 Tim. iv. 7.

III.

IRREVERENCE.

HEBREWS V. 7.

And was heard in that He feared.

Was heard, the Greek text says, *from His reverence*¹. The word expresses that spirit of caution or scrupulosity with which a man takes into his hand an object of peculiar value or sacredness—fearing to spoil, fearing to desecrate. As a substantive, it occurs once only besides in the New Testament, and is there rendered by our Translators *godly fear*. *Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*². But the adjective and the verb are of less rare occurrence. Simeon is described as *just and devout*³: the word is the same

¹ Καὶ εἰσακουσθεὶς ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας.

² Heb. xii. 28. The received text has μετὰ αἰδούσ καὶ εὐλαβείας, and the Authorized Version was no doubt made from this reading. The revised text has μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέουσ.

³ Luke ii. 25, δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβής.

—*reverent.* *Devout (reverent) men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him*¹. In the catalogue of the men of Faith, in this Epistle, Noah is described as *moved with fear*², with a feeling of devout reverence, to prepare his Ark, whereby he *became heir of the righteousness which is by faith*. In the Septuagint the same word is used, in some signal passages, as the rendering, I believe, of two Hebrew verbs conveying the several ideas of *trembling* and of *silence*. *Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God*³ — *trembled*, St Stephen says, with a more exact regard perhaps to the original, *and durst not behold*⁴. And thus God Himself expostulates with His rebellious people in the Book of Jeremiah. *Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence*⁵? And

¹ Acts viii. 2, ἀνδρες εὐλαβεῖς.

² Heb. xi. 7, εὐλαβηθεῖς.

³ Exod. iii. 6, LXX. εὐλαβεῖτο γὰρ κατεμβλέψαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ.

⁴ Acts vii. 32, ἐντρομος δὲ γενόμενος κ.τ.λ.

⁵ Jerem. v. 22, LXX. ἧ ἀπὸ προσώπου μου οὐκ εὐλαβηθήσεσθε;

the Prophets Habakkuk and Zechariah are interpreted by the same word in the Septuagint Version, when they say, the one, *But the Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him*¹—and the other, *Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for He is raised up out of His holy habitation*².

These examples give some additional force and fulness to the thought here presented, *And was heard from His reverence; heard by reason of that spirit of awe, which trembles, and which keeps silence, where God is; which made the Eastern exile put off his shoes when God spake with him*³; which made the Psalmist himself write, as though in express contradiction to his own act in handing over his inspired song to the Chief Musician, *Praise is silent for Thee, O God, in Sion*⁴. The deepest praise of all is a silence too: even as the profoundest prayer is that which breathes

¹ Hab. ii. 20, LXX. εὐλαβείσθω ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ.

² Zech. ii. 13, LXX. εὐλαβείσθω πᾶσα σὰρξ ἀπὸ προσώπου Κυρίου.

³ Exod. iii. 5. Acts vii. 33.

⁴ Psalm lxx. 1 (margin).

itself in *unuttered groanings*¹, the very voice of God's Spirit, *heard in that it feared*.

We have not touched yet the most memorable thing in this brief text; that the Person spoken of is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is He who *in the days of His flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death*, and it is He who *was heard by reason of His reverence*.

We can scarcely fail to see in this verse an allusion to the Agony in the garden of Gethsemane. At all events, that was an instance—a chief, a crowning instance—of the thing spoken of. Does any dull prosaic mind raise the objection, *Christ was not saved from death—Christ, on that occasion, was not heard?* It is a striking example of our manner of reading God's Word, and of our manner of interpreting God's dealing. Is there no answer to prayer but the literal? Is there no hearing of prayer but that which just tamely puts into the hand the very thing asked? Is there

¹ Rom. viii. 26.

no answering by contraries, and yet answering the more completely? Is there no *saving out of death*, which was not a *saving from death*¹? no *strengthening with strength in the soul*², far more blessed, and far more glorious, than the mere excusing from suffering? All these questions—and yet one more—must be pondered before we presume to say that the text was not written of Gethsemane.

I say, *and yet one more*. For indeed it may be doubted whether the prayer of Christ our Lord in the Garden was a prayer for deliverance from the Cross; was, in other words, an outburst of human shrinking from pain and shame and mortal extremity, of which at least we should have to say that it was at variance with all else that we read concerning Him—for calmly and uncomplainingly, and with solemn longings also³, He had set before His disciples, as before Himself, the necessity

¹ The Greek is, *πρὸς τὸν δυνάμενον σώζειν αὐτὸν ἐκ θανάτου*.

² Psalm cxxxviii. 3.

³ See Mark x. 32. Luke xii. 50.

of that end, and the glory thus only to be attained both by Him and them; whether it was not rather against the blackness of a spiritual darkness, against the crushing weight upon the soul of the burden of a world's sins, separating Him then, as afterwards upon the Cross, from that blessedness of conscious communion with the Father which had been His stay and solace heretofore—whether, I say, *this* was not the *cup*, *this* the *hour*, for the *passing* of which Christ prayed¹, and whether it did *not* pass, for the time at least, when there came that conscious, that visible, answer, of which St Luke tells, *There appeared an Angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him*². *He was heard in that He feared.*

These are mysteries too deep for us, straggling, tottering, sin-laden souls, to expect to penetrate. We will leave them in their solemn recesses, and turn to one other, the last remaining, preliminary to our designed application of the text to-day—which

¹ Matt. xxvi. 39. Mark xiv. 35.

² Luke xxii. 43.

is, the enquiry, How are such words as these to be understood of the Divine Lord? how can we reconcile them with that revelation upon which the availableness of the Cross itself is suspended, the oneness of the Son with the Father, the true Divinity—let us use the plain word, the proper Deity—of Him who died for us and rose again? *He was heard for His reverence. He learned obedience,* the next verse says, *by the things which He suffered.*

We can grasp each half of the Christian verity; we can apprehend the Godhead, we can comprehend the Manhood: but we cannot put them together; we cannot frame into one whole the parts of which our faith is made up. Be it so. We could almost say that it was thus with inspired men. We read in this same Epistle, of a Person *by whom God made the worlds*¹—what is that but an act of Deity? We read of a Person who *upholds all things by the word of His power*²—what is He

¹ Heb. i. 2.

² Heb. i. 3.

by whose agency Creation itself—including time and space, extension and duration, sun, moon, and stars, worlds seen and unseen, systems, our own and other, of orderly movement and inconceivable vastness—was called into existence, and is hourly, daily, annually, everlastingly, maintained in existence—what is He, let us know, but God, very God? We have no third term by which to designate Him. Omnipotence, Omnipresence, Omniscience, existence before time, universal agency, the keystone and condition of all being—what is this but God? We know not of degrees of Deity: that which has these properties, that which exercises these powers, *is* Deity: it is our idea, it is almost our definition—were it reverent to define—of God Himself. Therefore I say there is no doubt who and what this Person is of whom it is written, in words now before us, that *He was heard for His reverence.* God give us all grace to hold fast this faith—these two parts of the faith, if we cannot as yet piece them into each other—the

Humanity and the Deity, the *Ecce Homo* and the *Ecce Deus*, out of which, in their combination, springs the faith of saints, when they say, in the adorations of time and eternity, *My Lord and my God*¹! Of this Person it is here written, that *He was heard in that He feared*. For He too, for the sake of us men and of our salvation, condescended to give, in human flesh, an exact pattern of the perfect man; so that we, we who live in times nearer or more distant, even to the end of all time, might know *how to walk so as to please God*²; even by becoming like Him, in spirit and life, who did truly divest Himself, by a miracle of self-sacrifice, of the exercise of the attributes of an inalienable Deity³, and did consent to live upon earth, through childhood, youth and manhood, as a Prophet and a Minister and a Sufferer too, as though He were only a Man perfectly inspired and indwelt of the Holy Ghost⁴. Of Him it is written that His prayer

¹ John xx. 28.

² 1 Thess. iv. 1.

³ Phil. ii. 6, 7, ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων. . . ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν κ.τ.λ.

⁴ Luke iv. 1, 18. John iii. 34. Acts x. 38.

below—most of all, His latest prayer, His prayer of anguish and agony—was *heard because of His reverence.*

We are speaking, in these Sermons, of the Foes of Faith; of those tendencies and inclinations of the fallen nature—we might even go further, and call them—St Paul, certainly, would have called them¹—those workings and influences of a personal spirit of evil—which are directly antagonistic in us to the life of faith. We have spoken of a spirit of Unreality, making profession unmeaning, and carrying a practical falsehood into truth itself: we have spoken of a spirit of Indolence, relaxing the very sinews of the spiritual being, and making thought and worship and conduct alike vague and desultory and purposeless: to-day we have another foe in view—it is the spirit of *IRREVERENCE.*

And nothing seemed so likely to shame us into self-reproach and self-abasement concerning it, as the contrast presented in the text by the example of Christ Himself. He,

¹ Eph. ii. 2. vi. 12.

equal to the Father as touching His Godhead¹—He who, even on earth, was still, as to His Divine Nature, *in heaven, in the bosom of the Father*²—yet, when He prayed, was *heard in that He feared*. What are we, that we should stand upright, when our Divine Lord Himself not only *kneeled down*³, but even *fell on the ground*⁴, before that God with whom He was one—His soul *sorrowful unto death*⁵ beneath that load of a world's sin which the world itself carries so lightly and fears not?

The spirit of Irreverence. What is it? Whence comes it? And how, under God, shall we cast it out?

I. We have seen what reverence is: we have seen it in Christ. We know then its opposite. Irreverence is the *not* fearing, the *not* being awed into silence, the *not* bending the knee of the soul before Him *in whom we live and move and have our being*⁶. And we

¹ Creed of St Athanasius.

² John i. 18. iii. 13.

³ Luke xxii. 41.

⁴ Matt. xxvi. 39.

⁵ Mark xiv. 34.

⁶ Acts xvii. 28.

see this evil spirit everywhere. We have seen it in the open profaneness of the scoffer at holy things. We have seen it in the insolent defiance of the *busy mocker*¹ who asks, *Who is the Lord*²? and *where is the promise of His coming*³? We have heard it in the light jesting quotation, of words, either sacred, or nothing. We have heard it in the wicked, horrible oath; in the appeal, on occasions trivial and trifling, to One who, if He is, must judge. We have seen it, alas! in the actual profanation of our Churches, of our College Chapels, to purposes of shameless levity—or worse things yet—in the very hearing of words of revelation, in the very performance of acts of worship. This is irreverence, let loose, and running riot.

If this were all, I would not speak of it here. This audience shudders at the very mention of atrocities like these in the Churches and in the Universities of Christian England. And yet this Congregation itself feels, if it

¹ Psalm xxxv. 16 (Prayer Book Version).

² Exod. v. 2.

³ 2 Pet. iii. 4.

listens, if it reflects, that it too knows something of this foe of faith; knows it in the secret of the soul, if not—as we trust not—in the utterance of the lips.

Where, indeed, is the spirit of irreverence not working? in which of all us? in what part, in what act, of any one of us?

We can trace it, God helping us, in the lurking-dens of the heart, *in the chambers of the imagery*¹. Every movement of the mind, concerning Providence, concerning duty, concerning Revelation, is an irreverence if God is not remembered in it.

Who has not cherished thoughts of discontent and murmuring, in regard to his place in life, and his adaptation to it? O, I know well what are the thoughts of many young men as to their rank and circumstances, as to their talents and prospects, as to their gifts of look and manner, as to their acceptance with friends and strangers—as to deeper things than these, their disposition and temperament—their proneness to this particular vice, their

¹ Ezek. viii. 12.

sluggishness towards this special virtue. In all these things there is in all hearts a tendency to say to the Creator Himself, *Why hast Thou made me*, or why hast Thou placed me, *thus*¹?

And if we pass from irreverence concerning the original moulding and ordering of this being, to irreverence as to that which befalls it; when we see how those who are dependent upon God for everything presume to call in question His dealings and His providences—to find fault with this event and that condition, with disappointments, and defeats, and losses, and sicknesses, and deaths, which they must feel, if they reflect at all, to come straight and direct from the hand of God; when we not only see these things, but feel them ourselves at the heart's core—find ourselves, when we are tried, just as unbelieving, as undutiful, as refractory, as the worst—ever questioning, complaining, repining, all but blaspheming, so soon as the will is thwarted in the smallest matter; I know we

¹ Rom. ix. 20.

must say that it is impossible for us to cast the first stone: we can but lay the hand upon the mouth, and confess ourselves irreverent with the vilest!

Or if, yet once more, we track our own footsteps into the Divine presence-chamber, and notice how we—for I speak now of us all—deal with God Himself in what He says to us and in what we say to Him—in other words, in the two matters of faith and worship; I am persuaded that here too we shall have to confess the power over us of this same wicked spirit: we shall find that the very idea of *sitting at Jesus' feet to hear His word*¹, of receiving information as true because He gives it, of bending the mind and the heart to the receptivity of the little child—and are not these things due, if God vouchsafes to teach?—is lost, is exploded, is almost ridiculed, in the mind within us: other notions have cast it out, so that now we neither have, nor yet miss, this primary condition of Divine instruction—this reverent, devout answer of

¹ Luke x. 39.

the thrice-summoned understanding, *Speak, Lord: for thy servant heareth*¹.

And if we speak to God, as we profess to do when we pray, what is the posture, what is the attitude, of the heart nominally drawing nigh? Where is that sense of an Auditor, that consciousness of a Presence, without which the whole thing is nugatory, or worse? Where is that *coming* as to a *throne of grace*², where is that *drawing near with a true heart*³, where is that heart-service, as contrasted with the service of the lips⁴, of which, not Scripture only, but conscience tells, as the first preliminary to an act of real devotion? And where is that self-recollection as to the subjects and topics of the particular address, that summing up of the wants, and that carrying of them, as real things, to a real Person actually present and certainly listening, without which, if there may possibly be adoration, there cannot be petition; and for lack of which we are silenced

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 9.

² Heb. iv. 16.

³ Heb. x. 22.

⁴ Isai. xxi. 13. Matt. xv. 8.

instantly when Christ comes to us with His grave, calm, searching question, *What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee*¹?

We will not hunt down the same question in its application to the perseverance or the persistency of our worship. We will not ask how much of any one public Service is gone through at the full stretch of devotion, or how many thousands and tens of thousands of wandering thoughts cross the mind, in the course of it, to confuse and spoil and ruin the act of professed communion with Him in whose sight earthly things are only so far significant as they may help or hinder the safe arrival of the imperilled man in the home and sanctuary which is to be his rest for ever. All these are of the same spirit of irreverence which is our subject to-day: all are proofs of the manner in which we have departed, in this latter day of the Church, from the primitive model²; from the example, above all, of Him, our Divine Master, of whom it is written that

¹ Matt. xx. 21, 32.

² Acts i. 14. ii. 42. iv. 24—31. Eph. vi. 18.

He offered up His supplications with strong crying and tears, and was heard for His reverence—was heard in that He feared.

The first step towards recovery is the knowledge of disease. And I think that we may assume, on the part of all who hear to-day, their sympathy in the misery, in the shameful, of the condition described. Many even of our younger hearers feel themselves already lonely and desolate by reason of this unconsciousness of God's presence, which may be taken as the definition of irreverence. There are times, doubtless—hours of each day, longer periods too of a life as yet untroubled and prosperous—during which the unconsciousness of God, as a Person living and present, may be borne without uneasiness; nay, may even be a relief from immediate fear and pain. But I am equally certain that, to have no one, when you do suffer, to whom you can instantly have recourse for sympathy—to have no one, when you do want comfort, to go to on the instant for solace—is a great misery, a wretchedness above words. And

I venture to think that no one's day, even now, can be quite happy if it cannot be begun with the express benediction of a heavenly Father; and that no one's night, even now, can seem quite restful, if it cannot be committed, consciously and expressly, to the charge and safe-keeping of a Friend who neither sleeps nor slumbers¹; and that no one, feeling it, as most men feel it, right and needful to worship, can really like to kneel down beside his bed, and not feel that he speaks to any one, or to come forth to a Church Service and not know by any sign within that he has reached God's House, or that his prayers and praises go anywhere, or can by possibility draw down upon a thirsty spirit and a barren life the dew and the sunshine of a personal, a Divine love. I say that irreverence is a misery even now. And what will it be? What, when old age comes, when sorrow, when loss, when sickness, when death? *What will ye do in the end thereof*²? Who would not then give all that earth has, of possession or pro-

¹ Psalm cxxi. 4.

² Jerem. v. 31.

mise, if it might but be said of him, as of the Divine Master before him, *He was heard in that He feared?*

2. Deeply impressed with this experience of the workings of irreverence in every part and particular of our being, we shall all ask ourselves, Whence comes it? How is it that a creature, owing everything to the Creator, can by possibility come into this state of forgetfulness, of unconsciousness of Him, which is so full of misery and wretchedness? And some answers might be given, true but insufficient.

One might say, *It is because I was compelled to worship. Before mind or thought could be exercised upon it, I was made to bend the knee and to say the words of an utterly unrealized, an absolutely unintelligible devotion. I was not asked what I knew or what I believed: I was taken to Church—I was made to pray. What could such prayer amount to?*

And now, when I am a man, I am still, by the rules of this place, constrained, not on Sundays only but on week-days also, to take

part, by no choice of mine, in a form of worship presupposing faith, and making no small demand upon individual devotion. It is this which fosters, if it did not create in me, a spirit of irreverence. Leave me free, let me worship when I will, force not utterances which to me are conventional: this is only to preclude, by forestalling, that which, to be worth anything, must be from the heart; leave me free, and I shall be more likely to attain to that which certainly I shall not attain thus.

This is the language, possibly, of some hearts to-day. We understand, though we admit not, the plea. It is a difficult question, this, of (what is disagreeably called) compulsory worship. Several points have to be considered. How many, we might ask, would worship at all if all were free? How many, we might ask still more reasonably, have cause to be thankful that their worship is encouraged, is fostered, is rendered unostentatious and unhypocritical, by being thus made a law and a rule? Are there not some, who, beginning by obedience, end by love? Are there

not some who would not come, yet, coming, learn to pray? Can we forget, in this place, one, afterwards a master in our Israel, who owed conversion itself, under God, not to compulsory worship alone, but even—such were the times—to compulsory communion¹? He who was brought to his first convictions of sin and salvation through an Academical rule which (in that form) few would justify, may at least be quoted as an example of what honesty and resolution can do in bringing good out of disadvantageous circumstances, and may encourage some, who are now struggling, with unequal steps, after him, to grapple, like him, with their difficulties, in the name and strength of One who is *the same yesterday and to-day and for ever*².

But indeed, my brethren, none of you supposes that these things are, or make, the real obstacle to that spirit of reverence of which the text speaks. These things are the mere shell and husk of an evil which lies deeper, and is of the soul.

¹ See *Life of the Rev. C. Simeon, M.A.* ² Heb. xiii. 8.

It is easy to tell of some particular influences which assist, if they do not create, this irreverence of which we are speaking.

The first of these is *levity*. *They made light of it*¹, says the Gospel. *Made light* of the King's invitation, of the Gospel call. *Made light*, we will venture to read the saying, of everything. There was nothing which they could not twist into a subject for jesting. Not the purest, most sacred affection; not the deepest, the most sincere conviction; not the noblest, the most self-forgetting devotion. It is the fashion of the times, far beyond any other of which history or literature keeps the record, to seek amusement in human infirmity. That, perhaps, is not new, strictly interpreted: that, perhaps, has always afforded laughter to the playful and sarcasm to the cynic: the new thing is, to find something ridiculous in human suffering, human feeling, human piety, human *life*. Nothing is left, even to the young, for admiration pure and simple: all good is either ridiculous, or hypo-

¹ Matt. xxii. 5.

critical, equally and alike. How can a man go from such reading, from such conversation, from such views of life, and fall on his face instantly before the purity and before the wisdom and before the love of Almighty God? The heart of reverence has died out in him—he is no believer in verities, he is a scoffer at the good, at the beautiful, at the true.

And a second ingredient in irreverence is *vanity*. A man must be humble who would be devout. The ancient Prophet, the ancient Lawgiver, the ancient Psalmist, lay low before his God, because he first felt himself poor and vile and naked. Nothing is more marvellous than the humility of those saints. Men whose shoes' latchet modern thought and modern genius is not worthy to loose—men whose prayers and whose hymns are the heirloom of the ages, and whose names are held in honour where intermediate existences are obliterated—they could revere, because they were destitute of self-conceit: they could humble themselves before God, because they first knew

and felt themselves to be nothing. How is it now? Thousands and tens of thousands of puniest intellects, of men not worthy to be named, I do not say among inspired writers, whether of history or psalmody or prophecy, but not even amongst the third-rate or the tenth-rate thinkers of this age or of any, are yet presuming to sit in judgment upon God and God's Word, as to what He ought to do and it to be, and refusing to take one step towards a firm faith or a manful confession until they can explain to their own satisfaction every mystery, and put a rational gloss upon every revelation, of the Gospel. The first condition of reverence is humility; where this is not, vainly shall we look for the prayer, vainly for the acceptance, of Him who *was heard in that He feared.*

And is it indeed too much to ask of man that he should be humble? to bid him, who knows that he neither made himself, nor can sustain himself in being, nor can shield himself from one fracture or one paralysis or one fever, nor can answer one single question

fully as to the mechanism of his own frame or the causation of his own perceptions, nor can tell you one single thing, out of his own philosophy, concerning that which was in the beginning, or shall be in the eternity which is to come—to humble himself, alike in thought and in worship, before One who holds him *in the hollow of His hand*¹, and certainly must have arranged with absolute authority the time and the place and each circumstance of his being?

A third of these counteractions of reverence is *excitement*. Excitement is of all kinds and all degrees; from that lowest and most brutal which touches mind through body, and rouses into unnatural activity powers which eventually it is to drug into idiotcy, up to that which has for its subject the political interests of a nation, and too often, at a season like the present, makes men estimate characters, and state facts, and judge of motives, not according to truth, not by rules of justice and judgment, but by the bearing of

¹ Isai. xl. 12.

each upon certain ends which they have proposed to themselves as either important to society, or alas! (too often) conducive to a party triumph, in which they are to have a share. Hence many results upon which a thoughtful observer looks with concern: not least an idolatry, a deification, of objects which a Christian knows to be, at the best, earth-bounded and temporal: not least, a shutting out, for the time, of those higher and highest contemplations without which there can be no place, in any, for Divine reverence, for godly fear.

My brethren, I have not yet touched that one higher spring out of which all these turbid waters flow, and without the mention of which the briefest analysis of irreverence would be utterly incomplete and deceptive. We must speak of it plainly, as the Word of God bids us: it is the alienation of the fallen from the God of their life and the God of their satisfaction: it is the repugnance which is in all of us by nature to a close dealing with Him from whom we have broken loose:

it is that mingled fear and shame and enmity which settles down upon the heart of the sinner, and of which the record of the first sinner's experience gives us the token and the parable, when it describes him, after he has broken the commandment, as *hiding himself from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden*¹. That hiding was the devil's counterfeit (so to say) of reverence; all that the sinner, impenitent and unforgiven, can know of it; just a shrinking away, timorous and blindfold, from a face and a voice which is still, could he but know it, the sinner's only rest and only healing.

3. Such is one of those foes with which Faith, the sight of the Invisible, the consciousness of God, the soul's Divine vision, must daily and hourly battle in such as would be saved. *How* it militates against Faith must be obvious to every one. It would be idle repetition to show it. Rather let us spend a few latest moments to-day, in suggesting one or two practical counsels as to

¹ Gen. iii. 8.

the manner in which Faith must combat Irreverence. Let us speak them with all plainness. The battle is one of detail: it is only by attention to particulars that it can be won.

Be reverent, then, first, *in worship*. How difficult this is, we have seen, we have felt. But he who would not be a profane man must be reverent at least in worship. When, if not then? then, when we are gone actually to meet God—then, when we are actually speaking to Him, asking for things, declaring this and that as our knowledge of Him, our feeling towards Him, our desire concerning Him—when, if not then? Surely that irreverence which can trifle with God in worship, is an irreverence inexcusable and double-dyed: alas! is it not also, God being the witness, the commonest of all, and the least conscious?

Be reverent, secondly, *in speech*. It is bad to have bad thoughts: it is worse to utter them. Worse, because then they infect others. Worse, because then they use speech, which

is man's *glory*¹, for the very purpose of doing God dishonour. Worse, because then they fix and stereotype themselves (so to say) upon the man—no longer darts and brands injected by the great foe, only lying for a moment within before we seize and eject them, but rather weapons of our own, taken by us and used and wielded for our own purposes, as parts of ourselves. Not for nothing, be we well assured, did our Lord utter the memorable, the half-paradoxical saying, It is *the things which come out that defile the man*². The things which come out must be his own. There can be no doubt as to the ownership and proprietorship of these. Therefore we say, with all earnestness, Guard your speech from irreverence. If a witty thought occurs to you, and you long to utter it—if the freedom of delightful conversation stimulates within you the power of mirth and the power of jesting, and you complain of the stiffness and dulness of being evermore fenced and guarded when

¹ Psalm xvi. 9. xxx. 12. lvii. 8. cviii. 1.

² Mark vii. 15—23.

you are amongst friends—still, if there be in the repartee one fragment of a parodied text, or in the story that you would tell one profane expression, refrain! as you love reverence, refrain! This is that abstinence which is better than fasting; that self-control which sobers and which disciplines: such self-denials, small as they may be in themselves, by degrees make *men*, Christian men—able to go forth to mightier exploits in the strength of an armour, a Divine panoply, which in these little things, in these youthful days, they have already proved and found sufficient! *By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*¹.

Be reverent, finally, *in thought*. There is a grace which, we sometimes fear, is dying out—could any grace quite die out—in the Church of this latter day; and that is the grace of meditation. Saints of old *kept things and pondered them in their heart*²: saints now, if saints there be, talk of things

¹ Matt. xii. 37.

² Luke ii. 19, 51.

and dissipate them with their lips. Where is he amongst us who knows what it is to meditate—to commune with his own heart concerning God and Christ, concerning life and death, concerning truth and eternity—to *commune with his own heart in his chamber, and be still*¹? But it is out of such communing that reverence springs; the worship of reverence, and the speech of reverence, and the soul of reverence too. Without it there is no root in our religion: the growth is all outward: the world scorches it: *in the time of temptation it falls away*². Without it there may be forms, there may be ceremonies, there may even be throes and paroxysms of devotion: but there will be no steady, even, wholesome development—*first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*³—such as marked the lives of Christian people in generations now passed or passing away. There is no exercise of mind and heart so difficult, none so rewarding. That counting over in the soul the

¹ Psalm iv. 4.

² Luke viii. 13.

³ Mark iv. 28.

treasures of grace—that profound research into the mind and will and work of God as He has revealed it to us in the Word *written for our learning*¹—that secret sacred intercourse, as of a man with his friend², with the Unseen and Invisible One, whom to know, whom to love, whom at last to dwell with, is eternal life³—this, this is devotion. He who goes forth from this exercise into the world of business, into the world of society, into the world of literary, scientific, political, ecclesiastical activity, goes forth to remember God—goes forth (it is the other half of duty) to remind of God. Of that Divine converse, as it is written of the Lawgiver of old, he carries forth upon the very countenance an impress and a memorial; *the skin of his face shone* because God had *talked with him*⁴! Such be our ambition, such our effort—such, in God's measure, our attainment also! Thus, in one and in another, as the record of a life

¹ Rom. xv. 4.

² Exod. xxxiii. 11.

³ John xvii. 3.

⁴ Exod. xxxiv. 29—35.

is written in eternity, shall the blessed words
come at last to be verified, in faint reflection
of an unapproachable glory—

He was heard in that He feared.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

November 15, 1868.

IV.

INCONSISTENCY.

HEBREWS XIII. 8.

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day,
and for ever.*

A HASTY reader, finding no verb in this sentence, concludes that it is to be read with the verse before it, and that *Jesus Christ* is *the end of the conversation* there spoken of. It is only of late that it has been possible for an English reader to interpret otherwise. I mark a gradual progress towards the truth, in that change from semi-colon to colon, and at last from colon to full stop, which is observable in a long succession, at various dates, of editions of the Bible.

Everything has been against us. The word *end*, with its two meanings, of *object* and *termination*—the word *conversation*, with its invariable but not always understood sense, in our Version, not of *speech*, but of

conduct—the unfortunate use of the present tense in the clause *which have the rule over you*—and then, last but not least, the omission of the word *is* in the text itself, are four separate obstacles to the right reading of the passage, which I will venture thus to remodel:—

*Remember your guides, who spake to you, in their lifetime, the word of God; and reviewing the close of their life, in other words, the manner of their death, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever*¹.

Have always printed in your remembrance, the Apostle says, the words and deeds of departed pastors. Remember their preaching—remember their life—remember their death. Review the holy courage, the stedfast devotion, with which they laid down life itself at the call of truth and duty. It may be that

¹ Μνημονεύετε τῶν ἡγουμένων ὑμῶν, οἵτινες ἐλάλησαν ὑμῖν τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ· ὧν ἀναθεωροῦντες τὴν ἐκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς μιμεῖσθε τὴν πίστιν. Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐχθὲς καὶ σήμερον ὁ αὐτὸς καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

those Hebrew Christians whom he is directly addressing had but two or three years before witnessed the cruel martyrdom of their own chief pastor, St James the Just, *the Lord's brother*¹. They may have seen him thrown from the gable of the Temple; they may have heard his dying cry, *Father, forgive them*; they may have seen the stoning, and the club-stroke, and the burial on the spot in the holy precincts: and thus *the end of the conversation*, the exit of the life, would have a meaning for them far more than general; it would appeal to their tenderest recollections, and enforce by a personal persuasion the call coupled with it, to *imitate the faith*.

And then, lest any of them should despond in the comparison of that heroism with their own weakness; should say within themselves, *How shall we, common men, look for an Apostle's faith or a Martyr's boldness?* the Apostle adds this one last word, pregnant with inspiring thought and brightening promise—

¹ Gal. i. 19.

Jesus Christ, remember, is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.

He, *raised from the dead, dieth no more*¹: He, God and Man, one Person, *fainteth not, neither is weary*²: the grace which He gave, He gives: the strength which He died to breathe into the dead, He lives to communicate to the living: look to Him, and you too shall be strong—trust in Him, and you too shall be courageous. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day*—the same for them and for you: yea, however long, however protracted the struggle, the same *unto the ages*, even for ever and ever.

We have two words in our language expressive of the same general idea—*constancy*, and *consistency*. If there be, as I think there is, a difference between the two, it may perhaps lie in the two definitions, *tenacity of purpose*, and *tenacity of plan*. I think that we call a person *constant*, who keeps the same end in view; the same object of effort,

¹ Rom. vi. 9.

² Isai. xl. 28.

the same object of affection, the same object of life. And I think that we call a person *consistent*, who seeks the one end by one and the same means; who, having proposed to himself a certain goal, runs the same exact course towards it, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, allowing from others no diversion, and in himself no deviation.

Now either of these terms would be applicable, would be appropriate, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the use here made of His name.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was *constant*, in that, having proposed to Himself one end and aim, the rescue of our race from its self-made ruin¹, He never allowed in Himself one backward look, but fixed the eye of His life steadily and persistently upon it. The devil offered Him a ready, an immediate possession of that kingdom upon which He would enter²—the kingdom of the human life, and the kingdom of the human happiness. But

¹ *Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man.* Te Deum.

² Matt. iv. 8, 9.

He would not. He saw that in that offer there lurked the abandonment of the very end which He had proposed to Himself: there would have been a recognition of the Atheist usurper in the very act of claiming the conceded crown. And therefore He would not. His aim was not the nominal but the real emancipation, not the apparent but the actual ransom, of a world *lying in the wicked one*¹. And a deliverance thus gained would but have riveted the fetters in the guise of striking them off. Therefore the constancy of Jesus Christ prevailed against this wile of the devil. Although the refusal cost Him obloquy and contempt, toil and suffering, delay and disappointment, Gethsemane and Calvary, yet, inasmuch as He had an end in view; one end—*a joy set before Him*², one joy—therefore He was firm to *endure the cross*, even to *despise the shame*, and the constancy of Jesus Christ triumphed, amidst seeming discomfiture, over the world, and

¹ 1 John v. 19 : ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται.

² Heb. xii. 2.

the flesh, and the devil, in one. This was the *constancy*.

But the thought specially before us in the text is slightly different even from this. It was not so much the constancy—it was rather the *consistency*—of Jesus Christ, which the Apostle felt to have in it the strength and the courage of those to whom he writes. It is not enough that Christ has one end. He has also one means. Tenacity of purpose is fulfilled in tenacity of plan. It is true that He set before Himself the human rescue: it is true that, cost Him what it might, He adhered to it, and never looked back. But a man might say, *I doubt not the redemption of the race: I doubt not the eventual establishment of the kingdom. But I am a poor, feeble, insignificant unit: I am not the race: I may be one of those fragments, as of dust or dross, which seem, everywhere and in all things, to be the waste and refuse of Nature's dealing, and of the God of Nature's dealing, with the bodies and the lives and the souls which He has made: therefore the constancy*

of Christ, by which I understand the tenacity of His grand world-wide time-embracing purpose, is small comfort to me: I want something on which the poor, feeble, straggling, struggling, suffering life may fasten; something at once small enough to attend to me, and large enough to hold me, and strong enough to support me: tell me of that, and I will hope on—tell me of that, and I will toil and combat and suffer still!

Now this other thing, for which human infirmity yearns and groans and pants, and will not be satisfied without it, is the thing proposed to us in the text. *The consistency of Jesus Christ.* He who is tenacious of His purpose is tenacious also of His plan.

What was His plan? It was the seeking of the race through the individual. It was the delivering of man through the man. It was the dealing with human want, human sorrow, human suffering, not in some grand philanthropic manner, as by philosophies, institutions, or societies, but in detail. It was the going after the *one lost, until He*

*found him*¹. It was the sitting by a single couch, on which lay the actually diseased, the separately distressed, the singly and severally disarranged and disordered being, and ministering to it; and through it, by the universal magnet of an individual sympathy, to all who, in any land and in any time, might want the same help—want, and cry out for it. This was the plan, as the other was the purpose.

Read the Gospels in the light of this thought, and see how bright they become, how strong, how attractive. You will understand *then* how it was no waste of time for Jesus Christ upon earth to make a journey of many miles to heal one sufferer²; to utter words, full of divinest wisdom, to one simple or sinful woman³; to confine His personal ministry to one remote, prejudiced, stiffnecked, stubborn-hearted people⁴; to die without once appealing on a large scale to what might be called the intellect or the conscience or the

¹ Luke xv. 4.

² Mark vii. 24—31.

³ John iv. 7—26.

⁴ Matt. xv. 24.

heart of mankind¹. All this was part of the plan. In order to be the Saviour of the world, He must begin by being the Saviour of one or two: He must begin by making Himself part and parcel of one or two lives; by touching, here and there, just the innermost part of a single human being: and then afterwards—for was He not God also? had He not *the residue of the Spirit*²—the power therefore to provide also for this?—causing the record of this sort of individual dealing to be written for all time; to be so written, that, if any one should ever be in distress, should ever be in want, should ever be drawing nigh unto death and terrified at it, there would He be, beside that bed, inside that soul, in the universality of His Word, in the ubiquity of His Deity! Nothing less than this could make the reflection appropriate here, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*. He died not with the dying martyr; He ceased not to feel because He had once felt, nor to be willing to help

¹ Luke xii. 50.

² Mal. ii. 15.

because He had willed and because He had helped before. Rather was each foregoing act an earnest and an argument of that which should follow; an example and a proof also of that *consistency of Jesus Christ*, which makes His constancy practical, and realizes the tenacity of the purpose in the tenacity of the plan.

Much has been written, in these days, of the character of Christ. Not always in that tone of devout, reverent, profound adoration, which befits a man writing of his Judge; not always without some touch of that cold, that familiar, that almost patronizing treatment, which is characteristic of the age in its dealing with things sacred; still with a feeling, not more confident than true, that here, if anywhere, is to be found an evidence commending itself to man's conscience, and reproving the world's unbelief and ungodliness *of sin and of righteousness and of judgment*¹.

Let us bespeak a page in this record for

¹ John xvi. 8.

the special point before us—the consistency of Jesus Christ. He asked, Himself, of His generation, *Which of you convinceth me of sin*¹? as though He would challenge those who best could judge to a decisive sentence upon the consistency of His life. And, indeed, if we read the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, the Revelation, for the special purpose of answering the question, for ourselves, *What think ye of Christ*²? I know not that anything impresses itself more decisively upon us than the consistency, which is in other words the unity, of that mind and that will and that work which is pourtrayed for us by so many writers, in so many particulars, with every possible opening (so to say) for diversity and discrepancy, and which yet, in every light and in every aspect, shines forth unvarying, changeless, one and the same. It is no mere concentration, no mere blending and combining—as in common hero-worship—of all manner of recognized virtues in one great

¹ John viii. 46.

² Matt. xxii. 42.

founder of a school or in one illustrious ancestor of a family: many of the qualities and graces which shine in our Lord were scarcely known as virtues till He made them so; till He threw upon them the sunbeam of His own manifestation, and gathered them all into the unity of His own example.

But the prosecution of this thought would lead us too far from the special purpose of this closing discourse; which is, to set before you, as one of the enemies of our faith—amongst which we have already enumerated the spirit of Unreality, and the spirit of Indolence, and the spirit of Irreverence—now, in the last place, *the spirit of INCONSISTENCY.*

Jesus Christ, the text says, is *the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.* In childhood, in boyhood, in youth, in manhood; in the home of His parents, in the temple-school of the doctors, in the synagogue of Nazareth, in the malignant presence of the Sanhedrin; walking by the way, sitting by the well, eating bread with the Pharisee,

keeping His last Passover with the disciples ; teaching, healing, praying, suffering ; living, dying, rising, ascending ; on earth, in heaven—there is in Him, as there is in God Himself, *no variableness, neither shadow of turning*¹. Departure from earth has not altered Him. He has been seen since : and though *His countenance was as the sun shining in his strength*², still He was one and the same in that love stronger than death, in that sympathy uniting Him with the suffering, which brought Him from heaven, which gave Him to die.

With us it is not so. Scripture, history, observation, experience, teem with proofs of the inconsistency of the fallen. Saints themselves were not free from it. Men whose names are on the record-rolls of the Churches stand there, in part, as monuments of repentance and reparation. Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Hezekiah—again and again and yet again, the Apostle Peter, the very Cephias and rock of the Church—kept not

¹ James i. 17.

² Rev. i. 16.

their steadfastness; forgot, and fell, and yet rose and returned to *strengthen their brethren*¹. Prophets are full of this warning. *Ephraim*, one says—and it is the specimen of many—*is a cake not turned*²: into one side of him the penetrating leaven, the transforming fire, has not carried the force of grace. Christ Himself tells of the patched garment, partly old and partly new, tattered the more and the worse for the attempt to mend³. It is the Parable of Inconsistency. Christ Himself tells of *the children of light* outdone in wisdom by *the children of this world*⁴. Why? Because the children of this world not only propose to themselves an end, but also make for it; and the children of light set before themselves a blessedness which they do not make for; which they even *pluck down with their hands* in the very act of building⁵.

We try to turn the parable to account in ourselves, and what see we there?

¹ Luke xxii. 32.

² Hosea vii. 8.

³ Matt. ix. 16.

⁴ Luke xvi. 8.

⁵ Prov. xiv. 1.

1. Which of all us, my brethren, is a consistent man all through?

I know we set before ourselves an object. God grant there be none here present, destitute of a hope beyond death; not one who does not hope, when he shall have put off this body, to be *clothed upon with a house from heaven*¹.

But how do we pursue this object? If there be a constancy in the purpose, where is the consistency in the plan?

Examine your *thoughts*. You profess to believe in an immortality beyond death. You profess to *count all things but loss*² that you may gain that. Yet who does not find himself attaching an unchristian, an antichristian importance to *the things which are seen*³? Who does not estimate success and failure by the world's standard, after all? Who does not count himself disappointed, if he has not the wealth, or the office, or the honour, which must perish when earth goes by? Who is

¹ 2 Cor. v. 2.

² Phil. iii. 8.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

able quite to measure with the Angel's measuring-wand¹, and to weigh the world of time by *the shekel of the sanctuary*²?

This in the present. And I ask you to ponder your estimate also of death. Are you able indeed to think of death as Christ teaches us to think of it, as the door of life, as the gate of immortality? Which of you has not sometimes sorrowed, *even as others which have no hope*³, beside the open grave, in the desolate dwelling? Which of you has not counted it all gain, when a dangerous sickness passed by, and you were sent back into the abodes of the living, still to sorrow, still to suffer—still, alas! to sin?

These are the workings of inconsistency in the thought and in the heart. You see how opposite they are, how antagonistic, to Faith; to that spirit which *sees the Invisible One*⁴, and *suffers the loss of all things that it may win Christ*⁵.

¹ Ezek. xl. 3. Rev. xxi. 15.

² Exod. xxx. 13.

³ 1 Thess. iv. 13.

⁴ Heb. xi. 27.

⁵ Phil. iii. 8.

What shall I say of the *speech*? Yes, it is there not least that inconsistency vaunts itself. O these worldly estimates of things desirable and evil! O these uncharitable judgments of persons better perhaps than we are! O these evil surmisings upon truth and duty, these lowering damaging influences—such is the power of that *little member*¹—upon the faith and upon the holiness one of another!

Can we think that these things are of Him who calleth us? Can we make these things, these voices of the tongue, consistent with His service, who never, even in word, departed, by one hair's breadth, from the purity and from the perfection which is in God only?

And how shall I dare to speak of inconsistencies of the *life*? Alas! *the heart knoweth his own bitterness*²: but is there not—veiled in the secrecy (I know) of conscience—yet is there not, in this audience, many a memory, and many an affection, and many an intention

¹ James iii. 5.

² Prov. xiv. 10.

too, by no means consistent with the profession of a Christian law and a Christian hope? God only looks within: the voice of the Preacher *cries in the wilderness*¹, and the bow of Gospel conviction is drawn utterly *at a venture*²: yet I will be bold to ask whether even this day some heart does not misgive itself, and some will almost change itself, as you listen, concerning some act (perhaps) which it meant to have done this evening, and some life inwardly resolve to be henceforth not in name only but in deed and in truth Christian, because it feels that the consistency of Christ towards us demands a consistency on our part towards Him, and makes it shameful as well as wicked to do nothing, nothing ever, for Him who so loved us as to die for us and rise again³?

2. The workings of inconsistency are countless, but they lie open (at least inwardly) to all consciences. Now what are its motives?

¹ Isai. xl. 3.

² 1 Kings xxii. 34.

³ 2 Cor. v. 15.

These too are various. Some of them are poor and mean enough.

There is the fear of the world. A man that must die and be judged, is afraid of the frown of other men who must die like himself and be judged with him¹! And thus he will rather sin against his Judge than offend a few fellow-mortals and fellow-criminals.

And there is the love of the world. When Christ was on earth, there were those who actually believed on Him and yet would not confess Him, because, as St John says, *they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*². That is inconsistency. To have convictions which you will not avow—to live a lie—to carry in your soul a belief which your self-interest forbids you to utter—these are among the motives, the meaner and baser motives, for which we are searching.

Others are slightly less obvious.

For example, there is a self-conceit in

¹ Isai. li. 12.

² John xii. 42, 43.

many of us, which is gratified by the exhibition of versatility. It is a mark of power, with some, to be able to be this in reality, and that in appearance; to cherish inwardly the Christian hope, and yet outwardly to be all the time—in a sense most opposite to St Paul's use of the words¹—*all things to all men*. This feat of reconciling two opposites—this dancing on the tight rope—this traversing of the sword-edge bridge, between Christ and the world, between a Christian conviction and a worldly seeming—has its attraction for some natures: souls have been lost, as lives have perished in the analogous outward thing, in this *halting between two opinions*²—rather, in this endeavour to represent in one person the two opinions—the value of things present, and the all-sufficiency of Christ. We have known such men: and we have mourned over the misapplied ingenuity, which would have, and which sacrificed, two worlds in one.

There is another motive too. Men have

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 22.

² 1 Kings xviii. 21.

felt, or persuaded themselves that they felt, the responsibility of attracting. They have seen some unstable souls repelled by the rigidity, by the rigour, by the rude and rough severity, of a Christian profession. They have themselves suffered from the assertion, made and not proved, that this or that was forbidden, this or that commanded, by the Gospel; that such or such an amusement, in which there was no evident harm, was inconsistent with religion, and that such or such an observance, in which there was some apparent unreality, was one of the conditions, was one of the terms, of salvation. And they have gone forth to show, in their turn, that the way of life was not thus narrow; that a man might be a believer and yet not an ascetic; that a man might enjoy this or that with his fellows, and yet be a Christian. They have even said to themselves that it was their mission—word lightly spoken, and much misapplied!—to attract towards Christ these repelled and distanced ones—not by bringing into consciences the light of His

love, but by keeping off from lives the severity of His judgment. The end of it has been, again and again—whatever the motive—they have not gained others, it may be that they have rather lost themselves.

The motives of inconsistency are many, but its cause is one and the same. It is owing to the lamp of grace burning low within: it is owing to the feeble intermittent seeking of God's Holy Spirit in the shrine and sanctuary of the heart: it is owing, in large measure, to the unbelief which it also, in its turn, fosters—the unbelief of things unseen, the unbelief of God's power to subdue all things to Himself. The inconsistent man is not *walking humbly*, certainly not walking closely, *with his God*¹; and he is not *exercising himself*, day by day, *to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men*².

3. We have spoken of the workings of inconsistency: we have spoken of its motives. Let us say a word upon its consequences.

¹ Micah vi. 8.

² Acts xxiv. 16.

Inconsistency is impotence. In so far as it is perceived, it is ruinous to influence, it is fatal to strength. An inconsistent man is never respected. You see how it is even in political life. It is felt as a taunt—it is resented as an insult—to be called an inconsistent statesman. A man will make any effort to repel, to disprove the charge. And yet in politics there must sometimes be an inconsistency, if there is not to be a worse thing—inconstancy. To be tenacious of his purpose, a man must sometimes be willing to sit loose to his plan. Circumstances change, and with them the possibility (sometimes) of adhering to the exact line once marked out. A brave man will risk the imputation, and follow judgment, and follow conscience, at the expence of change. Still the inconsistency, even when it is conscientious, is a loss, so far as it goes, of strength. It is a wrench which leaves a man the weaker, in so far as others have to do with him. It shakes confidence. It may even break up a party. If this be so in a region in which outward inconsistency is sometimes a duty and a

conscience, how shall it be in that one province in which it always must be a sin? If the politician who varies his course in order that he may reach his goal, is yet punished, and must be punished, for a change sanctioned by conscience; how shall it be with him who can only vary his course to endanger his crown, inasmuch as he is breaking a sure law which changes not—a law over which circumstances have no right of control, because the law is the law of Revelation, the will of God, the example of Christ? For such inconsistencies there is no comfort within, and there is nothing but harm and loss without. Who are the men who in this place have influenced their generation? Who are they who have left their mark behind them when they were gone, and are remembered in the honest gratitude of minds quickened, lives moulded, and souls saved? Whatever else they may have been—and they have been infinitely various in all else, tastes, attainments, manners, gifts, ✓graces—in this they have been one; they have been consistent men: what they set be-

fore themselves as right, they did ; what they sought, they lived for ; what they professed, they were. If they said a thing, you knew that they meant it : if they urged a thing upon another, that other person knew, without their saying it, that they first did it themselves. This was their strength. To have discovered that it was all false ; that they called Christ Lord, but *did not the things which He said*¹ ; that they judged others severely, but never entered into judgment with themselves—this would have been fatal : their influence, had this been suspected, would have crumbled instantly into dust : their consistency was their strength—inconsistency would have been impotence, would have been nothingness for them at once.

Inconsistency is misery. Just in so far as it has place in the life, it is ruinous to peace. If it be no more than the inconsistency of human infirmity—not allowed, not indulged, most involuntary, most exceptional—still, so far as it is there, it is fatal to happiness. To believe

¹ Luke vi. 46.

in Christ as the Saviour to whom all gratitude and all devotion is due, and to feel that you have displeased, dishonoured, grieved Him, in some particular of speech or thought or action—that is painful: if the faith be real, that is painful. If we *walked in the light*¹, the light of conscience and revelation, of the Word and the Spirit, we should feel each sin thus. Sin is an inconsistency, if it be but a thought—and, as such, it is a pain too. Nothing but confession, confession to the forgotten injured Lord—nothing but an express act of absolution, communicated by Him to the penitent soul within—can restore peace after an inconsistency such as this. What then must be the wretchedness of having the whole life, the whole being, one habitual inconsistency—one heap of ruins, one sea of wrecks, one huge lie? To have in the poor dry intellect an opinion or two as to the truth of Christianity—to be uttering with the lips both creeds and prayers, alike unexamined, unrealized, unmeaning, but still a profession—and to be

¹ 1 John i. 7.

daily, hourly contradicting these in every action and movement and principle of the life—what but long use can make a man easy thus? And can long use, can life-long use, really make such a state tolerable, except by utterly spoiling and desolating every noble faculty of the moral being, and sinking the whole man to a level lower than of the beasts that perish?

Inconsistency—I will add but this one consequence more—*is hypocrisy*. I know that I could employ no term more repugnant, more abhorrent, to the hearts that listen. If there be a vice of which men, of which Englishmen more than most, count themselves incapable, it is hypocrisy. And in its coarsest, foulest, most odious form—that of intentionally pretending oneself to be good when one is utterly bad, that of professing faith for the sake of gain, or virtue as a mask for villainy—I quite believe it to be an all but impossible depravity for educated, civilized, Christianized man. But is this indeed the only hypocrisy against which Scripture,

against which experience, warns us? Was any one ever quite this? Was even Judas quite this? Hypocrisy, our Lord Himself by implication tells us, may consist in even disguising the good¹; in locking up within ourselves that knowledge of truth, that sense of duty, which ought to come forth into faithful speech and into Christian action. The essence of hypocrisy, if you trace it far enough, is duplicity: it is the trying to be two men in one: the having principles which are not practised, beliefs which are not acted, convictions disguised by silence, or professions contradicted by conduct. This is hypocrisy. This is the opposite of that singleness which is man's glory; the being one all through and through all; that unity of the whole man, which was grievously broken in upon in Adam, and which can be absolutely recovered only in Christ. He who would shun hypocrisy must fight it out with his inconsistency. When once it has come to this with us, that to know a thing to be true is an insufficient

¹ See Luke xii. 1-9.

motive for avowing it, and to know a thing to be right is no sure guarantee for doing it; when they who know us well and observe us closely, perceive that we have many points in our creed which we do not personally realize, and many duties in our religion which we never set ourselves to fulfil; when they see this, or (which is more true to say) when we ourselves, stirred perhaps by some unwonted influence, look in upon our own inner state and see this to be so; then indeed we have cause to fear that inconsistency, in our case, is beginning to bear its natural fruit in hypocrisy, and that our hope too may be at last like that *hope of the hypocrite* of which it is written, that it *shall perish when God taketh away his soul*¹.

4. But the Word of God never leaves us with gloomy forebodings. It has always something to say to us, will we but hear it, in the tone of practical direction and wholesome encouragement. This foe of faith, like the rest, must be encountered, encountered in

¹ Job viii. 13. xxvii. 8.

detail, by the Christian soldier: happiest he who earliest faces it, and seeks to bring the whole of his life, not a few last days of it, into that unity of faith and practice which is perfected freedom. How shall we counsel him? We will say, first—

Determine to be consistent. There is much, very much, in the power of the will. A man may still say to himself, without presumption, *Whatever else I am, I will be consistent. I will not be that poor, disjointed, hypocritical thing which has been described. I need not be—and I will not. I will not hold a thing for true and yet not believe it. I will not hold a thing for right and yet not do it. If I do not as yet see all truth nor know all duty, still what I do see I will maintain, and what I do know I will practise.* I say that there is no presumption in this resolution—for well do I know that he who sets himself to live it will soon be upon his knees!

Then other thoughts follow.

Never outrun your convictions in your

professions. Much of the inconsistency which is in us springs out of unreality. We have a multitude of religious notions which we ourselves have never brought into judgment. Some of these are traditions, received (true or false) from an ancestry of the past. Some are current maxims of a world calling itself religious. They may be arbitrary rules. They may be truths wrapped in follies. For us, at all events, they are as yet unproven. To adopt all these as our own in theory, before we have established them for ourselves in reality, is to multiply beyond calculation the probabilities of inconsistency; for to break these rules scarcely touches the conscience, and yet they are lying for the present among our stock of duties. It is important then that these matters should be looked into, and those only retained as principles, which will bear the scrutiny of thought. Hence one part of the value of thoughtfulness in religion.

Guard especially against censorious judgments. By finding fault with others for what they do and for what they do not, we, more

than in any other way, lay down laws for ourselves. *These matters, at all events, it will be said, and said justly, are points on which his mind is made up. He could not thus seat himself in the tribunal if he were not sure of his law.* None therefore can make allowance for your own transgression of these rules. If you walk not by them, you are inconsistent at once. And yet it may be, that the thing itself was not so wrong! *Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee*¹.

See that ye walk circumspectly. *Accurately*² is St Paul's word—that is, with a close regard to details of duty. Inconsistencies creep in by unguarded doors: generally in small points first: little omissions, little negligences, little frailties, then little sins—*this is the way of them*³. The consistent man must *look well to his going*⁴. No one will fall headlong, at once, over the precipice of frightful temptation: the first danger will be that of tripping and stumbling:—let that

¹ Luke xix. 22.

² Eph. v. 15: ἀκριβῶς.

³ Psalm xlix. 12 (Prayer Book).

⁴ Prov. xiv. 15.

experience caution us. He who guards against small inconsistencies, of word and spirit, will be forearmed yet more against what the Psalmist expressively calls *the great offence—the great transgression*¹.

Lastly, take a serious view of life. The subject enforces it. The season enforces it. We have reached once again the very threshold of Advent. We are rapidly nearing the end of another year. A Christian year has gone, soon will a natural year be going, to give in its account. Who has not prayed from the heart, this morning, that quickening prayer of the Church, *Stir up, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the wills of Thy faithful people*²—these sluggish, earth-bound wills, so prone to evil, so dull to good? Who has not listened, with some *compunctious visitings*, to the well-known call of this Sunday's Gospel, that we *gather up the fragments that remain*³—fragments of instruction, fragments

¹ Psalm xix. 13.

² Collect for the Sunday next before Advent.

³ John vi. 12.

of opportunity, fragments of grace—relics of *a table largely furnished for us in this wilderness*¹, but of which we have so reluctantly, so thanklessly taken? Let us set ourselves at least to collect the fragments! Soon will fragments alone be left for any of us to gather—fragments of strength and health, fragments of will and resolution, fragments of memory and feeling and life! Let us prepare for that day by using this! Let no evil habit now indulged torture us then! Let no ungrateful waste of God's present bounties—physical, intellectual, spiritual—be the lash of conscience then! God give us all grace so to love and serve Him in this time present, that it may be the strength and stay of our hearts *in the hour of death and in the day of judgment*², to know that there is no exhausting of His will and of His power to save, forasmuch as *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever!*

¹ Psalm lxxviii. 19.

² Litany.

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