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THE GRAVER THOUGHTS
OF A
COUNTRY PARSON.



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GRAVER THOUGHTS

OF A

COUNTRY PARSON.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE RECREATIONS OF A COUNTRY PARSON,' AND "LEISURE
HOURS IN TOWN."

A. K. F. Boyd

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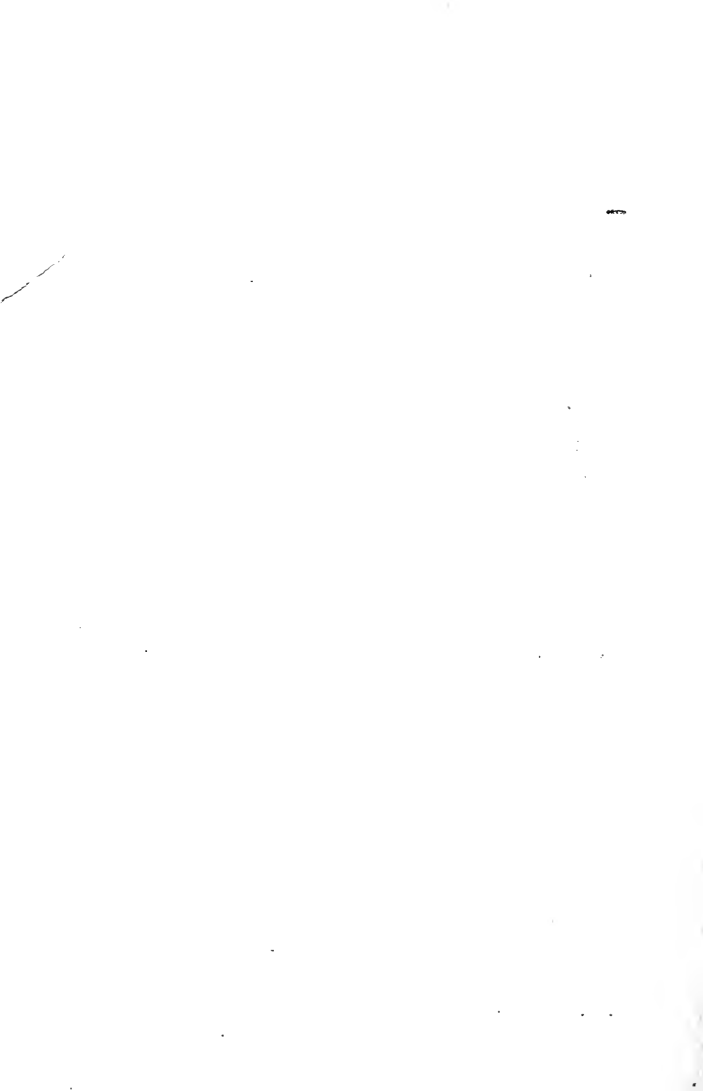
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I.

SUNDAYS LONG AGO.



HERE is a subdued, silvery light on the sea to-day, and the hills across the water look like blue clouds. The air is so still, that you may hear the beating of the paddles of a steamer miles distant, unseen in the veil of mist. There has been drizzling rain at intervals through the morning; and the road by the sea-side, yesterday ankle-deep in dust, is pleasantly firm and cool; and the trees, just beginning to be touched by the Atlantic breezes of the early days of September, look green again as in May, in the glints of silvery light from the clouded sun. You may see many fair scenes within the compass of Britain: but yesterday morning, when the sky was sapphire-blue, and the sunshine was the brightest;— when that expanse of sea shut in by noble hills was glassy smooth, and the yellow corn-fields round, bounded by green hedges, looked so still and rich in the quiet air, not without a touch of bracing crispness; you would have said that there could hardly be anything fairer in the world than this bit of the homely Clyde.

Milton was wont to declare that in the autumn

days, when the leaves are changing and falling, his poetic genius quite deserted him; and he could not write a line. But in the spring-time, when the sap began to stir in the trees, and all nature to revive, the life around him thrilled his heart though it could not reach his eyes; and the amanuensis could hardly keep pace with the flow of unpremeditated song. One does not wonder at the spring burst; but it seems curious that the quiet, thoughtful days of autumn, which waken many old remembrances in most men, should have so chilled and disheartened the great poet. Many people can say, that there is hardly any influence that so stirs them to vague feelings and impressions which would be poetry in the hands of one who was able to give them expression, as the clear, still air, and the motionless autumn woods in the beautiful autumn sunshine. It is a season in which to recall the days that are gone: and sitting down here, on the steps which lead to this pretty Gothic church, let us think of Sundays long ago. The present writer, for a certain sufficient reason, has this morning been reading over certain pages, bearing truths and counsels which have been addressed to two Christian congregations, one in the country and the other in the town; and altering a word here and there. And in reading some of these pages, how strangely there comes back the feeling of the old quiet Sundays, far away! And the season has decided what kind of Sunday shall come most plainly back. It is the autumn Sunday, with its morning

stillness : with the clear hills round : with the bright dew on the grass : with the yellow fields bounded by the green hedgerows : with the river murmuring by, under the gray churchyard wall : with the aged oaks round the little church just touched into greater beauty by the slight morning frosts : with an influence in the air that seems to brace up mind and body together : with the quiet country people sitting on the gravestones before service, resting after their miles of walking over the crisp rustling leaves. Turning a new leaf in life, my reader, you know how misty your former mode of living soon grows in your remembrance : it is only now and then that the old time comes over you ; and you seem to breathe the air and to be surrounded by the little cares and interests of those departed days. And even when these come back most vividly, they serve only to make you feel the more deeply how completely the old days are gone.

I suppose that almost everybody feels that the Sundays of life are much better remembered than the series of any ordinary week-day. Sunday has always a character of its own : whereas Tuesday in one week need not be the least like Tuesday in the next week, in occupation, in scene, in feeling. Nobody can speak of the character of the Tuesdays in his history. A number of Sundays is like a flock of sheep, all very much like one another. A number of Tuesdays is like a drove of animals of the most

varied aspect: as, for example, pigs, dogs, horses, lions, whales, giraffes, and peacocks. They form a heterogeneous mass. The peculiar kind of atmosphere that breathes from the Sundays of childhood, depends entirely on the bringing-up you have passed through. But most men, looking back upon the Sundays of childhood, are aware of a very decided character that invests them. The character may be pleasant, or it may be painful: but it is there, and you feel it strongly. Would that all parents were so kind and so judicious, as to have the will and way to make Sunday the day on which their children shall always look back as the happiest of all days! It can be done, very easily: and I believe that in these more enlightened times, it is very generally done. Let it be the day of little indulgences; which are very great in the judgment of the little men and women. I am well aware that many people in England entertain a most grim and repulsive idea of a Scotch Sunday. One of the present writer's most valued and revered friends says, on a page which has been read by scores of thousands, "In those fortunate regions they have not learned to make a ghastly idol of the Sunday." It does not matter where those regions are: but of course Scotland is the country aimed at by innuendo. No doubt, there are people in Scotland who make the Lord's day a ghastly idol: who compel their children to sit in church for three or four hours at a stretch, listening to two tremendously long sermons preached

at the same service, in which Christianity is reduced to a system of the dryest metaphysics : and who, on returning home, devote the entire evening to questioning the poor little things upon the *Shorter Catechism*. That Catechism is a very admirable one : but one may easily have too much of even the best things : and the peculiar system which has been described, generally results in making the children hate both the Catechism and the Lord's-day as long as they live. And I have heard of a man who said that when he looked at a certain green expanse, on which on Sunday afternoon you might see many people quietly and decorously walking, before returning home from church, he was always reminded of Sodom and Gomorrah, and expected to see fire from heaven come down to destroy the wicked race. You have heard, too, of the Highland elder who spoke of the awful sight which may be beheld on a Sunday at Edinburgh. There, he said, you might see people walking along the street, smiling **AS IF THEY WERE PERFECTLY HAPPY!** But there are multitudes of men and women in Scotland who could tell you, that their Sundays, in childhood and manhood, have been the happiest days of their life ; restful, thoughtful, cheerful days of elevation above the little cares and worries of week-days, when care and worry come : kept sacred, as far as may be, from the intrusion of these : and spent as in a purer air. You remember, my friend, how you used to think that all nature looked quieter

and sweeter upon the day of rest : you remember the sunshiny evenings, so calm and bright : you could not wish, in this world, for anything happier or better ! They are gone, indeed : and some who spent them with you are no longer here : but you may humbly trust that all that was good and happy about them will come back again.

But Sunday is especially interesting to the preacher. It is his most important day. And his work is a very solemn and anxious one ; particularly in Scotland, where the clergyman feels that the entire service depends so much upon himself. The profit and comfort of the congregation, from the worship of that day, are too dependent, you know, upon your clearness of head and devotion of heart. But the preacher's work is always a solemn and weighty one : whether he walk in, one of four or five clergymen, surpliced, stoled, and hooded, following a procession of surpliced choristers, while the solemn tones of the organ peal through the long-drawn cathedral vault ; or enter a little Scotch country-church, homely as homely may be, a solitary minister arrayed in robes of sober black, to do the whole duty of the day. For several Sundays past, the writer has been far away from his parish ; and has gone to church daily with no feeling of responsibility for the conduct of the service. With what a different feeling one goes ! However much you may love and enjoy your work, my friend, I am sure it is both pleasant and profitable for you

now and then to go to a strange church merely as a worshipper, and to join in the service with unanxious quiet. It is a delightful rest and relief. If you hear a very poor sermon (which I am bound to say I hardly ever do, anywhere), you may be aware of some wish, or even longing in your heart, to be allowed to say a few sentences of comfort or warning to your fellow-Christians: you may vainly fancy you could give a better discourse; which in all probability is a fond delusion. But as for you, my reader, who never have to preach at all, you go to church on Sunday: you are there an hour and a half, or a few minutes more: all this is a little part of the week to you: it is but an incident in the week, though perhaps an important one: and as for the sermon, it is just half an hour's occupation to listen to it, which you do sometimes with interest, oftentimes with patience. But think how different a thing that sermon is to the preacher. I mean, to the preacher who is preaching in his own church on an ordinary Sunday. To him, if his heart be in his work, and if he be doing his duty, not merely to get through it decently, but to the best of his ability, that discourse is the culmination of all the week. His best thoughts for the entire week past have probably been running on that discourse which to you is just the occupation of half an hour. He fixed on that text, very likely, last Sunday evening, after considerable perplexity. Then he sketched out the sermon: and by day and night, its subject was

always simmering in his mind. It cost many hours, possibly on three or four days, of steady work at his writing-table, to cover those pages which you see him turn over, one in every minute or two. And then, perhaps, he spent many hours more of toilsome drudgery, in committing all that material to memory, so as to give it without the aid of that *paper* which is the abhorrence of uneducated and stupid folk in many Scotch parishes. I have heard of good Scotch ministers, on approaching whose manse on a Saturday, you might hear a sound of howling, and of an occasional stamp on the floor. These noises signified that the minister was getting his sermon by heart; which in Scotch phrase used to be called *mandating* it: and that he was repeating it over in the fashion in which he intended to preach it from his pulpit. And no doubt, if the work of *mandating* was done so thoroughly, that the sermon could be given without a painful effort of memory, and a nervous fear of breaking down, the sermon gained greatly in its effect when preached. You had the accuracy of language and the deliberation of thought which can hardly be counted on in extempore speaking: with something of the fire and spontaneity of extempore speaking added to these. And I cannot admit that it is a mere vulgar prejudice, to prefer that a man in speaking to you should look at you, and seem to be addressing you, rather than that he should look at a written page, and read at you, or read in your hearing. But in many cases in which a

sermon is committed to memory, and repeated without the aid of the document, you can see that the preacher is painfully reading from his memory: and that a very little thing would put him out, and cause him to break down entirely. And I can quite imagine that a man who could speak extempore with sufficient fluency if he had made up his mind to do so, might flounder and stop if suddenly cast upon his extempore resources by his memory failing him in repeating a written discourse. A good swimmer has been drowned when he has unexpectedly fallen into deep water. And considering the facts, that with most preachers, the sermon gained nothing in effect by being repeated and not read: and that the weekly labor of memorizing one sermon, and much more two, was the most irksome and depressing conceivable: we may rejoice that even in Scotland, the fashion of repeating sermons from memory is all but extinct. And in the most retired country parishes, where once upon a time many of the congregation would have risen in wrath and quitted the church had the preacher begun to read his sermon, you will find the rustics listening with the most decorous attention to a preacher who turns over his leaf at minute intervals. And no preacher now makes any secret that he reads: while I can remember, as a boy, the hasty and surreptitious fashion in which the leaf used to be turned over. You may imagine what a fearful mental burden a Scotch minister in old days had to bear, when he walked

down to church with two long sermons in his memory And any one who knows Scotland, must be aware of the great number of amusing stories current among high and low, turning upon the inveterate dislike to *the paper*, and the desperate and not always successful efforts of preachers to do without the forbidden aid. You are to understand, my English friend, that the reading of sermons was never forbidden by any law of the Church; but merely by popular dislike to it. A faithful clergyman, aware that to read his sermons would greatly diminish the good they would do his parishioners, would feel it a sacred duty to give in to a prejudice which he heartily disapproved. But even when a clergyman is free from the painful pressure of a sermon memorized to its every word and point: even when the fairly-written pages lie before him; we have all seen plainly with what nervous strain and anxiety the very greatest preachers begin their solemn and responsible work. And as for the ordinary run of men of fair ability, of whom their congregations expect less: the strain, my reader, is quite as great upon their moderate powers. And after all the labor of preparation, and the anxiety of the time of preaching, the hearer very likely thinks the sermon not very good after all. Depend upon it, my friend, the preacher feels *that* at least as much as you.

I have remarked that several preachers of great eminence are quite cool and unembarrassed before beginning their duty. I have seen such talking away

on indifferent subjects in the vestry till the moment they ascended the pulpit; yet able instantly to call up the right feeling which becomes the solemn occasion, and to give very admirable sermons. I have heard one very distinguished man, of that happy equanimity of temper, declare that he could not understand it as possible that a preacher, in giving the same sermon on two different occasions, should give it on one occasion with great feeling, and on the other with very little. He said that surely any man might at any time express the same thoughts with equal perception of their force. Happy man! Many clergymen know that the self-same words are felt, and tell, very differently at different times. I have heard a great orator give a discourse, with a manifest effort, a painful and unsuccessful effort, to call up the corresponding feeling. The orator was at the moment quite out of sympathy with the mood in which what he had to say had been written. And such persons as have passed through this experience, I have remarked as specially nervous and anxious before their work. They know that though they have done their very best at home, many little things, physical and mental, may prevent their giving their sermon with comfort and effect. I am not going to mention names; but I can say that I have had opportunities of observing this in the case of several of the most eminent preachers both in Scotland and England. I have heard a very distinguished preacher say that he

would think no reward too great for the man who would tell him how to come up to his work on Sunday in perfect condition for it. Body and mind should be at their best. And to secure any approximation to such an end, many things, little and great, must be attended to.

All past things, of course, are past; but one can not but think how thoroughly past are the services and the exhortations of Sundays long ago. One has thought of this, going to hear a great pulpit orator. There is the church; the dense crowd of worshippers, or at least of hearers; the beautiful music; the audible stillness in which the telling voice poured forth its sentences of warning and comfort. But it is all over. There is the sigh of relief at the close, as if people had not had a full breath for many minutes past; and then the great tide of life ebbs away. And there is nothing to show for it all; nothing to be easily traced by sense. Robert Stephenson is dead, but there is the Menai Bridge; Brunel is gone, but there is the Saltash Viaduct and the *Great Eastern*. But now Chalmers is silent, a fading impression in many memories is all that remains; and in a few years, when all who listened to him are dead, it will be impossible rightly to understand what he was. It will be impossible to recall the almost awful impression of the moments in which you heard him: and in which you thought to yourself, that never before could you

have believed that human words could have so thrilled through you and swept you away. Yet, there are enthusiastic recorders of all that. I have seen men, not easily roused to enthusiasm, warm into an unwonted glow of admiration and affection, in telling of that simplest-minded and noblest-hearted of great and good men. But the thing they always insisted on was, how vain it was by any description to make you understand the reality. You may go and visit the plain church where he preached: but his burning words have left no echo there. You may read the sermons in print; but to do that gives you no idea whatever of what they were when said by him. He could not publish that fire of manner, which made single words, and bits of sentences, tingle through you, which when you afterwards coolly looked back on them, seemed nothing particular. It seems to me, there is no more incommunicable gift of genius. An ordinary man may make a deep impression by saying something which is very fine and impressive; but he must have the divine gift who makes you start on your feet by saying *Mesopotamia*; or, *That is not true*; or who moves a crowd of thousands to tears by saying, *He did it, because Providence was kind to him*. Speaking of Chalmers, one is taking the extremest case; but it comes almost as touchingly home to one, to think how the thoughts and exhortations of ordinary men pass into entire oblivion. I once saw a great mass of old faded sermons of a good clergyman who was dead.

They were lying on the floor of an empty room in a house to let. I have little doubt they were ultimately used for lighting fires. You could not but think what a great amount of labor had gone to producing those neglected manuscripts. The good man who wrote them had for many years held the charge of a considerable country parish. You could not but think how the words written there, heartily spoken on Sundays in church, might be remaining (some of them) in the memory of a generation of rustics who had grown up under that instruction, and who had doubtless heard all the sermons several times preached. And in that case you might hope and believe that the exhortations remained not merely in the memory, but (better still) in the lives of the people of that quiet parish. You could not but think of a bright summer morning, when the people came along leafy ways, and listened (a little drowsily) to that faded sermon which, as you may see, was preached on the 24th of June, 1817. You thought of a clear frosty winter day, bracing and cheering, on which that other sermon did duty; which bears to have been given on a certain 24th of December. But our calculations are usually wrong; and it is probable that the June Sunday was cold and rainy, and that the Christmas time was a damp and green one. But how little trace remains of many things? All the work of preparing that sermon, and committing it to memory; all the anxiety of the Sunday morning; all the hearty tones in which it was

given ; all the warmth of heart it awakened in the people who listened to it ; all the volume of simple but telling praise that preceded and followed it ; have left no more trace than that inscription of *June 24th*, 1817. I see the people walking away home, by the various paths which lead from the church-door ; I imagine how the poor little children in many homes were required to give some account of the sermon, and could not do it ; I think of the good old clergyman going home from church, and having a quiet turn in his garden ; and of the sun going down over each dwelling in the pastoral district which I can see ; and here is what stands for all that : in faded ink, the date I have already told you. And when a clergyman who is still living and preaching turns over his stock of sermons, and looks at the inscription at the end of each, which states the churches and the dates at which each was given, he cannot but feel how little vestige remains of the circumstances in which it was preached, and of the impression made by it. There is nothing more completely forgot than the average Sunday sermon of even a very good preacher.

But a happy result follows. The preacher can use his discourses, even in the same church, a good many times over. In about four or five years, all remembrance of a sermon is gone, unless perhaps of its text, and of some odd sentence here and there. I have heard of a very excellent clergyman, who had charge of the same church for thirty years. His stock of

sermons lasted just three years: so in that period each was preached ten times. Yet the people did not grumble: probably did not know. Here is an advantage which the preacher has over other producers and salesmen of thought. A man who writes leading articles for newspapers, or tales or essays for periodicals, must always go on, producing what purports to be new. He cannot republish an old article word for word, as the preacher can reproduce an old sermon. No doubt, literary men do reproduce themselves: it is the old material slightly rearranged and touched up: but it is their readers who feel this as an imposition and infliction; not the literary men who feel it as a relief. They fancy they are producing something new: there is all the effort of fresh production. The reader feels it is the old thing, but not so good. At least, it is not so fresh. It seems but a faint echo of the old days. But the preacher, after a suitable time is gone, takes out the old sermon, and preaches it exactly as it is. And if the sermon be fairly good, those who remember something of its tone, are quite pleased to hear it again. The person who likes it least, is probably the preacher himself: if his mind and experience be still growing. He feels he has got beyond it; and grown out of sympathy with it. And even besides this, he is aware of many defects and flaws. You look with great favor at a composition fresh from your mind: but after the lapse of years, you regard it much more coolly and more justly.

In the pages which follow, my friend, you will find certain of the graver thoughts of a writer whose lighter ones have been received by very many readers with a favor much beyond their desert. You will find some portion of the material to which the writer's best pains have been given, on many forenoons and many evenings in country and in town : which has been carried to church on Sundays in his pocket ; and which has been spoken from the pulpit to the congregations given to his care. Many of these words have been said to a little handful of kindly country-people : and all of them to a large congregation of educated folk in a great city. It has been the writer's desire to make those who listened to him feel that religion is a real thing, with the most practical bearing on all the interests of life ; and not a thing quite beside and beyond our daily experience. He has aimed at simplicity and clearness ; and at that reality which comes of the preacher's saying what he has actually known and felt, and not merely what he thinks he *must* say. And he wishes for nothing better in this life, than to continue to set forth the blessed gospel of Christ, **ever more simply and sincerely.**



II.

HOW GOD FEELS TOWARDS MANKIND.

‘If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?’ — **ST MATT. vii. 11.**

I BELIEVE that one of the first and most important things that mortal man can do; I believe that the very first and most important of all things, for our spiritual welfare; is that we should get and keep just and right views of God. Many human beings, I say not only in heathen lands, where men have set up and worshipped as divine, stocks of wood, and images of stone, and fancied beings invested with every attribute of monstrous cruelty and foulness, — not only *there*, but even in this country of Christian light, — live under entire delusion as to what God is, and as to how God feels towards us His poor sinful creatures, — delusion which affects all their views, all their conduct, all their life. There is nothing whatsoever, which man can ever think or ever do, which will not be influenced, more or less, by the thought and the belief he has in his heart concerning Al-

mighty God. Oh, then, how precious an attainment, how great a blessing it will be, if we are enabled, by the light of God's Word, and by the teaching of His Spirit, savingly to know God ; to discern Him rightly ; and (so far as may be here, where we see so dimly and darkly) to see Him as He is !

Now, here, in our text, we have words of authority concerning God. We might have doubted them, if we had heard them spoken by man : we cannot doubt them now. *He* said them, who spake as never man spake. *He* spake them, who could speak with undoubting authority of God, forasmuch as He himself was God. And you see the great principle which is involved in these words. The principle involved is *this* : that the way to judge of God, and of God's feelings towards us, and of what God will do for us, is to look at the best, and purest, and kindest feelings of human nature ; and to think that God is like all *that* : only that He is infinitely purer, kinder, and better. *That* is the way to arrive at some faint notion of what God is, and of how God feels.

We are made in God's image, after His likeness. No doubt, the image is defiled and ruined : yet there are traces of the great, pure, happy original state. It is only because there is something in us, something in our spiritual nature, which resembles God, that we are able to form any conception of Him and His character. But for this, we could no more conceive of God's attributes, than a blind man, who never

saw, can conceive of color. Of course, we are fallen creatures; and our blurred and blotted qualities bear only the faintest and farthest likeness to that Divine image in which we were made. Speaking as men speak, we may say that there are feelings which are unquestionably good in human nature; but we know that tried by the standard of perfect purity, the very best has some alloy, some lack, some flaw. And it is in these that something of God's likeness lingers: it is from these distant hints and indications of what God is like, that the Saviour would have us learn what God is.

And thus, in our text, Christ tells us what we are to expect of God, in His treatment of us. There is mystery about God's nature: we cannot fathom it: and we bow humbly before Him, taking up the prophet's words, "Verily thou art a God that hidest Thyself." And as God is thus mysterious, our kind Redeemer takes something that all men will know. He appeals to feelings which are lacking in very few human hearts. He goes to the love and care of parents for their child: something which is there, even in the most wretched and the worst. It is rightly thought one of the saddest and most miserable sights to be seen in this sorrowful world, — something indicating the loss of all that stamps a being as human, — the unnatural heartless wretch that does not care for his child: God be thanked that such heartless wretches are few, even among the most degraded of the race!

Now, says the Blessed Redeemer, speaking to you, and me, and all: If you want to know how God feels towards you, and how ready God is to give you everything that is really good; here is something to go by. You know how much you would do for your children: you know how anxious you are to care for them in every way. You know how a father will work, and how a mother will watch, all for the good of their little ones. You know how much of the work that is done by men in this world, and how much of the care that is felt, is not for themselves at all, but for their children: all for them. After the dream of fame is past, — after ambition is outgrown, — the man toils on as steadfastly and earnestly as in his most hopeful and most aspiring days, — that he may provide for his little ones; that he may see them in comfort and happiness; that he may push them on (as he trusts and prays) to be far better and happier than ever he was himself. The human heart is always the same: you do *that* now, my friends; and so you may be sure that people did *that* long ago, in the days when Christ was here. Well, says Christ, you know all *that*. You know all *that*, says His blessed voice: and now hear me and believe me when I tell you, that the great Father above is just like *that*; only a thousand-fold better. If even you, sinful and evil, would wear your fingers to the bone, would lose your rest, would cut off every selfish indulgence, that you might see your children's wants supplied, that you might see the

little things happy and good, — then take this blessed truth to your heart, that in all you feel towards your children, you have a faint and far reflection of how the great God above us feels towards you. He feels for us just like *that*: cares for us, loves us, wishes us well, works for us. And if you know that when your poor little boy or girl comes to you, and asks you for something that is needful and right, they will not ask in vain; then be sure that when we go, with our feeble words and our many sins, and ask what we need from God, he is as ready to bend down from the throne of the universe, as with a smile on his kind face, and listen to our imperfect petitions, and help them out, and give us in answer all that is right for us, thoughtfully and graciously. And hear me when I tell you, my Christian friends, that even such is the picture we should have in our minds of the Christian's God! Not the grim tyrant, not the mere rigorous and inflexible punisher, that some misguided and gloomy religionists worship, and terrify their children with; not a being all severity and wrath and cursing and woe; not a being hard and cold as granite; not a being that damns little children that never sinned, and then asks us to thank him for doing it; not a being that made millions for sin and misery, and looks on in gloomy satisfaction as his poor creatures are consigned to hell, all for his glory. Call that black vision, conjured up by heartless and soulless logicians, as though they longed to drive man

away from his Maker, — call it Moloch, or Jugger-naut, if you will ; but never dream that in *that* you see the Christian's God, — the God revealed to our love and hope in the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ ! No ; our God is one who, while hating the sin, pities and loves the sinner ; one who wills not that *any* should perish ; one who made a real sacrifice, the greatest, by sending his Son to die that we might live ; one who would that his glory should be vindicated by our bliss and salvation ; who “ sent his Son into the world, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life ; ” who entreats us to come to him and trust him and believe that he loves us ; who has manifested himself to us in no grim face, and in no cruel judge, but in the kindest heart that ever beat, and the kindest face this world ever saw ; or where can we find a better and happier way of saying the truth than our Saviour's own way, — a kind Father listening to our prayers, with patience and love and care of which our best feelings are but the feeble reflection : “ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more,” — oh, listen to it, — “ how *much more*, shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ! ”

If St. Paul had told me *that*, I should not have dared to believe it. If the greatest and most inspired of mere mortals had told me that, I should have said *that that* was too simple, kindly, and homely, to be a

fair statement of the truth concerning the Infinite God. If any other had told you, that the way to know how God feels towards you, is to look into your own heart, and thinking how you feel, when at your best, towards your little child; you could not have taken it in. But you know Who said it. One, from whose lips you would believe anything; One, whose lips beseemed the best and most hopeful words; One, who knew God best, and what God is, seeing he is one with him; yea, One in whose face we see the invisible God. "The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,"—and never in words more precious, or that come straighter to our hearts, than here.

And so, my friends, God feels towards each of us as a kind and wise father feels towards his child; and the difference is just this: that God, our Father in heaven, is infinitely better than the very best earthly father. And now that I have shown you the great and blessed truth which is taught us by the text, on the first glance at it, let us turn our thoughts to the further truth, that is brought out by the words in the text, "how much more;" the truth that God differs from an earthly father by being far kinder, wiser, and better. O brethren, there is an immense deal suggested by that "how much more!" It would be an unspeakable comfort to us, it would be a glorious and comfortable truth, that God was just as willing to give us all we need, as you kind-hearted people

are to give what is needful to your little child. I think I know men and women who have hearts so good and kind; who are so ready to do what they can to make their own children happy, or to add to the happiness of any little child; that I should feel safe enough and sure enough in going, sinful, weary, to Almighty God, to ask for his mercy and his Blessed Spirit, even if I knew no more than this, that I should find such a welcome at his throne of grace as these good men and women would give to any suffering, helpless child, even if it were not their own. But "how much more!" What a silent reference to an inconceivable depth of love and pity in the heart of God! It is as if Christ had said to those whom he addressed, *You* cannot understand the difference; words cannot explain the difference; here is the kind of thing, in yourselves; but in God "how much more!" Yet not a different kind of thing; the same kind of feeling you bear towards your children, only heightened up to a pitch you can never know. And then, what a silent suggestion in the hint of what we are, even at our very best: "If ye, being evil;" *that* is what we are at our very best, in the sight of God. The man who bears on his kind face the unmistakable signs of the kind heart within, that make little children (those unerring physiognomists) hail him on short acquaintance as a congenial friend, — that kind good man, after all, is nothing better than *evil* in the pure sight of God. Far kinder, purer, wiser, better,

is the care for all his children which dwells with the great Father of all. How inconceivably better is God than man at his very best! You, being evil, will do a great deal for your children; but God, "how much more!"

And so you see, my friends, that it is impossible for us fully to understand all the love of God for us; its essential depth and excellence are beyond our comprehension. But though Christ's words suggest that it is impossible for us to fathom the essential depth of our heavenly Father's love, still it may be comforting and profitable to think for a little of certain respects in which even we can understand how much better a father God is, than any earthly father can ever be.

And these points of superiority are so plain and simple, that they need very little illustration. For one thing, God knows what is good for us, as no human parent can know what is good for his child. Although no human parent, with a parent's heart, would give his child a stone for bread, or a serpent for a fish, many a human parent has done, and will do again, what really comes to *that*. With the kindest intentions, we all know how injudicious parents often are; how often they err on the side of over-severity or of over-tenderness; how completely they sometimes mistake what is to conduce to the true good or happiness of their children; — indeed, it is not too much to say that a very great proportion of all the

sorrow that is in this world arises from the mismanagement of parents in youth, or from the consequences of that mismanagement in after-years. Now God knows us ; knows what we are, and what we can do ; knows what we are fit for, and how things affect us ; knows all our peculiarities of temperament and disposition. He knows what we really need ; he knows when to give us what we wish, and when to deny it ; he knows how to make "all things work together for good" to such as love him. There is no caprice with him, no fretfulness, no passion. He never punishes merely because he is angry. Nor does he refrain from sending punishment when needful because he shrinks from giving pain. In short, he knows best what is good for us ; and he has firmness to send us just *that*.

Another point in which appears the superiority of the great Father to whom Christ points us above all earthly parents, is his power. He is able to do all he wishes. He has all power to give us all good things ; to help and save. You know how different it is with us ; how well we often know what we should like to do for our children, to make them wise and good and happy ; yet how very little we can do. When the ruler's little child was dying, what could he do but turn his back upon the house where was the darkened room and the little bed and the white little face laid upon the pillow and the cold lips laboring with the rapid breath, — turn his back upon all these,

— because *he* could do nothing to help, and hasten away along the lake side, — going in his despair to just the very best place where any of us can ever go, — going to the presence of our beloved Saviour, and saying, “ Lord, come down ere my child die ! ” But, O brethren, think what a glorious combination: the kind Father’s heart and the almighty God’s power! Oh, how bright and happy and Christian a future would the wise and good among you picture out for your children, if you had the power to make them as good and happy as you could wish ! But with human beings it is a commonplace ten thousand times repeated, how far apart are will and power. You have heard of the poor mother with her infant, who perished in a snow-storm crossing the hills on a wild winter night ; there, in the dark night, and amid the waste wilderness, the mother died. They found her in the morning, cold and dead ; but the little child was alive and well ; for the poor mother had spent her last strength in stripping the clothing from her own stiffening frame and wrapping it about her child and clasping the little bundle to her breast. Ah, brethren, that tight clasp of the dead arms, and those poor garments, so carefully wrapped, — surely they spake from the world beyond the grave, and told the last care in the dying mother’s heart ; and told how her last thoughts had been with the unconscious little one that never would remember or miss her ! Now *there* is the type of God’s love ; not more tenderly did the

dying woman yearn over the little thing that must go through life and she far away than does God over each sinful soul in this place; and the grand difference lies in this, that our heavenly Father has infinite power to do all we ask or need!

Then God is always kind. There are unnatural parents — let us hope, very few. There are people who repel their children's confidence; who from mistaken principle or from a bad heart do all they can to make their children miserable; who point out with pride in the misery of a child, that things have come just as they said they would; who so act as to make us wonder that a trace of natural affection should be left in their children's hearts. I shall not dwell on a subject so miserable, save to remind you that our heavenly Father has anticipated such a case: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."

And now the last matter I shall name, as to which our heavenly Father excels the best earthly one, is that he is always near. Earthly parents may be far away, just when they are needed most; there is many a father, away on Indian plains, thinking day and night of his children here; and thinking how he is losing their society just at the most interesting season of their life, — losing the years that change them from boys and girls into men and women, — losing those impressionable days, in which the soul is taking the

character it is likely to keep forever. And earthly parents must often leave their children orphans; must leave the little thing, so pleasing and happy now, not knowing what things may befall it, — not knowing how years in this world, without a parent's care and love, may change that fresh young heart, and make the soul such that in the better world they may never meet again. You know, my friends, that with worthy people, it is not very long till the chief interest of life comes to be about their children, and about how it is to fare with *them*. Oh, I can well think that when the shadows steal from the sight this world and all its concerns; when the glazing eye of death can no longer see the faces round the bed; the sorest thought in many a parent's heart, is of how his poor little children are to fare when he is gone. The very bitterness of death to many a heart is in the words, "My little child, I must leave you! And who will care for you when I am far away?" The kindest earthly parent that ever lived cannot help or guide his little ones from the farther shore. They may go to his grave with their story of grief; but they might as well tell it to the winds. But, O brethren, our heavenly Father is always near! Always within hearing; always within reach; never leaving, never forsaking; Father of the fatherless, Friend of the friendless; yea, "When father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up!" O Father of mercies, remember *this* word unto Thy servants, upon which Thou hast caused us to hope!

Thus kindly and graciously, my friends, does our Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him. Yes; and to them that do not ask, save by their needs. The good earthly father does not give good things only to those among his children who are able to ask; the mother's heart never warms more tenderly to any than to the little thing that cannot speak at all, — that cannot ask for anything, — most touching in its helplessness, and its incapacity to say or even to know what it needs. And even so with the better Parent above. He hears the voice of our wants; he gives us many a blessing that we have not the sense to ask for. Yea, when our race was asking nothing, and knowing nothing of its deepest wants, he gave us the best of all good gifts, — he gave us the Blessed Saviour and the Blessed Spirit! And well for us, my friends, that God did not wait to be asked; well for us that he supplied great wants of which we did not know; well for us that he treated us as the thoughtful mother does the little infant that cannot tell its needs; for true, as beautiful, are the words of the poet: —

“So runs my dream; but what am I?
 An infant crying in the night, —
 An infant crying for the light, —
 And with no language but a cry.”

There was a man who once said, that he was the best-abused man in Britain. I believe we may say, much more truly; that the most misrepresented and

misconceived of all beings is Almighty God. You know that every syllable I have said of him has its warrant in his own Word. You know that the only right manifestation of him to our weak minds is in the face of his dear Son, our blessed and beloved Redeemer. And yet you know how many people think of God mainly as a grim punisher, mainly as the keeper of the dark prison-house below. I lately read, with extreme disgust and abhorrence, a book intended for little children, in which a mother was represented as asking her child, "What does God do for little children?" and the answer put in the child's mouth was, "God sends bad little children to hell." Think of *that* given as a fair account of God's character! It is as if a man, being asked, "What does the sun do for mankind?" were to answer, "Oh, he gives people sun-stroke and makes them drop down dead;" but not a word of his cheerful light and genial warmth, guiding the steps, ripening the grain, gladdening the heart! Oh, God does punish, but sorely against his will! He does not want to be glorified in the sinner's destruction;— he may be driven to *that* at the last;— but he wants to be glorified in the sinner's complete salvation. Hear his own words, as he pleads with his rebellious children: "Fury is not in me; who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. But let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he

shall make peace with me!" The day may come, my friends, when that will not be so; but on this day of grace hear me when I tell you, that our God's right name is, "The Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin!" It was because he loved us that he sent our Saviour to die for us; because God loved us, that our Saviour died. And freely and fully, through him, we can offer this day to all who will but receive them pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace. Let us all believe and live; God wills not that one should perish! And as I tell you these things, my friends, I come back ever to the blessed truth, whose preciousness and sublimity admit of no addition, that the self-same love which dwells in your heart, as you look on the rosy little face of your child, dwells in our Father's heart above, as he looks down upon us sinners; that he rejoices to give good things to them that ask him; and that when we go to ask the best thing, the good part in Christ, we may be as sure that he will give it us, as the child that runs confidently to a mother's arms can be of a mother's care. Surely there is not one among us who would not trust and love this God! Surely there is not one who will not join in the prayer, Our Father, keep us through life, thy poor wandering children; wash us in our Elder Brother's blood; and bring us to thy Home!



III.

THE THORN IN THE FLESH.

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” — 2 COR. xii 7-9.



DO not know where we shall find words more touching, more comforting, more saturated with the deepest wisdom, more filled with the true spirit that should abide in the true Christian, than these words which you have read. They are touching words. I have no doubt at all but it cost St. Paul an effort to write them. You can see it was a sore subject about which he was to tell. Not often. I dare say, even to his nearest friends, would the great apostle speak of that heavy burden, of that sore infirmity, so humiliating in its nature, and so sure to last as long as he lasted, which he names as his “thorn in the flesh.” And we seem to know him better, we seem to get at his

inmost thought and heart in a way we seldom elsewhere do ; when the good man thus takes us into his confidence, and speaks less like an authoritative and inspired apostle than like a tried and suffering man : frankly and fully telling us all about something to which *we* should not have liked to allude in talking to him ; frankly and fully telling us about something he had to bear which was painful and humbling ; frankly telling us how much he needed it, yet how earnestly he wished to escape it ; thankfully telling us how God told him he must bear it to the end, but that the grace would never be wanting that would enable him to bear it rightly ; and then humbly yet resolutely stating the determination to which he had come at last, of entire submission to his wise and kind Master's will. Yes, when St. Paul speaks to us in this brotherly manner, we feel a sympathy and a brotherhood with him which we cannot always feel with one so far above us and beyond us in all the graces of the spiritual life ; and I think we could clasp the trembling hand of that greatest apostle, and tell him how well we understand him here ; tell him that we too have our burdens, sore and crushing ; that we too have our infirmities, of which it is painful to speak that we too have had our disappointments ; that we too have thrice and oftener than thrice besought God to do for us *that* which in his wisdom he saw it meet not to do ; and then humbly pray, and ask him to pray with us, that the same needful grace may be

vouchsafed while the trial lasts ; and that in the end it may all prove to our true good and to our blessed Saviour's glory !

It seems to be God's way, and we may humbly and firmly believe a kind and good way, to give his creatures heavy burdens to bear ; to make all, so to speak, carry weight in the race of life ; and work and fight at a certain disadvantage. There is some little thing about every one which holds him back from being a far better, happier, and more successful man, than now he will ever be. There is something in our nature, something in our circumstances, which is as the additional pounds laid on a race-horse's back, preventing his doing his very best ; greatly abating the visible results of his strength and speed. Now St. Paul had his drag-weight, we see ; something that took him down and held him down ; something that caused him suffering ; something he would have given much to be without. You know, I doubt not, that much industry and ingenuity have been spent, to very little practical purpose, in trying to settle what St. Paul's thorn in the flesh was. It does not matter at all what was the precise nature of that trial. It may be stated, however, that the usual belief at present is, that the overpowering impression made upon him by that mysterious rapture, when he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, had so affected the system of his nerves as to leave a permanent infirmity ; affecting, as we gather from various allusions in

his epistles, his sight, his speech, and his hands. You remember how he could not write his own epistles, save a few tremulous lines at the end ; you remember how kindly he spoke of those who did not despise his “temptation which was in his flesh ;” and who listened with respect to one whose “bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible ;” to one who in his worn features and his emaciated frame, was “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.” The material thing for us to bear in mind is just this : that St. Paul had to bear something humiliating and painful ; painful as a sharp thorn ever pressing deeper into the quick flesh.

I need not say to you, my friend, that it is not merely to observe what the apostle did with his special cross, — how he felt towards it, and how he bore it, — that I have turned your thoughts to this subject. It is because all this is a matter of such deep personal concern to ourselves. It is because in all this we are not looking at St. Paul the apostle and the worker of miracles, doing things the like of which we could never do ; but at St. Paul the suffering man, bearing his burden as we might ours, and feeling and acting under it as we might act and feel. It is because each human being has his own cross to bear ; and because we ought to do with ours just what St. Paul did with his, — find out (that is) what God is seeking to teach us by it, and understand the way in which God may very likely deal with us as concerns

the bearing of it. And thus applying the subject to ourselves, I take a large view of St. Paul's thorn in the flesh ; I look at it, not in its specific and peculiar nature, but just as a great trial laid upon him for a certain end, and to be borne in a certain way. I take the thorn in the flesh as a type of any great trial which is daily pressing upon any one who shall read this page ; bodily pain, perhaps, in some ; disappointed hopes and ambitions, perhaps, in others ; separation from dear friends, it may be, or their loss by death ; the frustration of some cherished plan on which we have set our heart ; domestic jars and discomforts, perhaps, with some ; poverty and privations ; heavy cares and anxieties as to the means of life, and the like ; in short, by the thorn in the flesh I mean each man's especial trial and sorrow, — the thing which mainly detracts from the happiness of his life, — the thing as to which he would be ready to say, Oh, if *that* trouble were only gone, — if I were but delivered from *that*, it would be well with me. That is your thorn in the flesh, my friend ; the thing you think you would be happy and right, if you could just get rid of. Each human being has his own peculiar thorn, whose painful pressure he himself knows best ; many human beings are ready to fancy that they could bear almost anything, better than the particular trial which God has been pleased to send upon them. You will find people who speak as if they fancied that the Almighty knew just the sensi-

tive place where they would feel a blow most keenly ; and that his hand fell heavy there. It is just the most cherished hope that is blighted ; it is just the thing on which you have set your heart that you are least likely to get. You may get something else ; perhaps something better ; but not *that*.

Now, my friend, the first lesson which is suggested to us by these words which St. Paul speaks, manifestly speaking from his heart, is this : that the thorn in the flesh comes for a specific end. Of course it does not come by chance ; nothing does ; it comes by God's appointment or permission. But more than this ; God does not send it out of mere wilfulness, or caprice ; He sends it for a certain purpose ; and a purpose which we may in many cases find out. We cannot always, indeed, discover the design for which God's afflictive dispensations come, of the good that is to come of them. But in many cases we *can* discover all that ; and whenever we feel the thorn pierce our flesh, we ought diligently and prayerfully to seek to do so.

Let us look at St. Paul's case. There are many lessons for us in it. Was it not hard that he should be weighted for the race of life with that which took so much from his usefulness and his happiness ? It was not merely that the thorn in the flesh caused St. Paul suffering ; that would have been a lesser trial to one whose heart was so entirely in his work ; if the suffering had been something that made him do his

work better, he could have welcomed it all; but the thorn was far worse than that: it was something that took from his usefulness; that faltering speech, those trembling hands, those weak eyes, that contemptible bodily presence,—all these things tended to make him a less successful missionary and apostle; ah, the thorn in the flesh pierced St. Paul just where he would feel it most bitterly! St. Paul did nobly for Christ, as it was; but how much greater and better things he might have done! Take off from him that burden he bore; give him the fluent, fiery words, that would convey the feelings of his burning heart; give him the swift hand that could freely trace upon the written page the message he so yearned to deliver; give him the dignified commanding port that should conciliate the respect and attention of the stranger; curb that hasty temper, that came of his shaken nerves; and who shall reckon how much more might have been done by St. Paul? And I believe that to many an earnest-minded man, the thorn in the flesh, or the crook in the lot, never comes in a form so painful as in the form in which it came to St. Paul; in the form of something that diminishes or destroys his usefulness; that keeps him from serving as he would wish his generation and his Saviour; that constrains noble powers, or the makings of noble powers, to rust sadly and uselessly away. Think of a heart, brimful of the longing to declare to dying sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ; but joined to a feeble, nerveless

bodily frame that neutralizes all ! Can you imagine a sorer thorn in the flesh ? Or think of wonderful gifts of nature and training ; cribbed and confined by circumstances to a sphere in which they are turned to no account. Think of Moses, wasting (as human beings would judge) the best years of his life, as a shepherd in the desert of Midian. *There* was the thorn too ; piercing, and wearing, through a full third of his life ; through forty long years ! And yet, hard as the divine appointment appears in Paul's case, it was a divine appointment ; it was something which the all-wise God deliberately and advisedly did. And the apostle tells us what the thorn came for ; and tells us that he needed it all. It must have been a hard thing for him to say ; but here it is. He needed it all, to keep down a strong tendency to self-conceit. Yes ; with whatever effort, St. Paul will tell us frankly the unworthy weakness which the thorn in the flesh was sent to cut down. " Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." The great apostle gives us just one reason why the thorn was sent : it was sent to take him down. There were many things which tended strongly to puff him up ; and he had not got over that lingering weakness of humanity, — vanity and self-conceit. He had been especially and wonderfully honored ; and all this tended to make him self-confident ; to make him think

how extraordinary a man he must be, who was thus distinguished above others. He had been early conspicuous for his learning, and for the strictness of his Pharisaic life ; he had been especially called to the apostleship by the Saviour himself ; he had been remarkable for his usefulness as a preacher of the gospel ; doubtless he was held in the highest estimation throughout all the churches he had planted, and by many believers who felt that under God they owed everything to him. And above all these things, the apostle seems to have placed the wonderful revelations that had been especially vouchsafed to himself, which are mentioned in some preceding verses : how he had been, in the body or out of the body, caught up into the third heavens ; how he had been caught up into paradise, and there heard unspeakable words, not lawful for a man to utter. And coming back again to this lower world, with these words yet ringing in his ears, and the light of that vision yet as it were in his face, we can well imagine how he might have been disposed to walk apart from his fellow-men, as one favored and honored as very few have been out of all the millions of the race. But then it was that God gave him something which should save him from high-mindedness and self-conceit ; for though “ the messenger of Satan,” it was yet “ given ” by God ; he would not cherish pride above others, when his special glory was known only to himself, and his special infirmity was plain to the eyes of all ; and so the thorn in the flesh

was given, "lest he should be exalted above measure!"

And so, the thorn in the flesh was sent to St. Paul by God; and sent for a certain specific purpose; and St. Paul knew what that purpose was. Of course St. Paul was an inspired apostle; and he was able to speak with an authority with which we cannot speak, as to the meaning and purpose of the divine dealings. When the thorn pierces *us*; when bodily trouble comes upon us; when sore disappointment is sent to us; when long seasons of anxiety and struggle must be slowly dragged through; when any painful and mortifying thing befalls us; we cannot be so sure as St. Paul was as to the precise end God has in view by all this. And more especially, when these afflictive things befall others; when we see disappointment and sorrow sent to our friends and neighbors; we should be most careful to avoid any such interpretation of these things as is only too common. You will hear some people say of a misfortune or disappointment which has befallen some man, Ah, *that* will take down his self-conceit; he needed it all; it will do him a great deal of good. Indeed I have never witnessed more manifest and disgusting indications of cancerous malignity and a thoroughly bad heart, than in people talking of the misfortunes and trials of their neighbors as providential visitations, and as likely to do their neighbors a great deal of good. I have remarked that people who never rejoice at the blessings

of others when these blessings come in a pleasant shape, evince an immense delight at the blessings of others when these blessings come in the painful guise of disappointments and trials. And I shall venture to believe, that the real feeling of these people is one of pure malignity ; and that what they rejoice at is not the ultimate good that trials and misfortunes *may* cause their neighbors, but the immediate pain that trials and mortifications are sure to cause. We have all known people who had no greater enjoyment, than to see an acquaintance taken down ; the misfortune of a neighbor was a real blessing to these miserable creatures ; and I have not the least doubt but that among people who knew St. Paul there would be a man, here and there, envious of the great apostle's gifts and usefulness, who would chuckle over the thorn in the flesh ; who in his heart would rejoice at the suffering it caused the apostle ; yet who would not venture to express his secret exultation ; but would go about saying, "Ah, that Saul of Tarsus needs it all. Very conceited man ; do him a great deal of good. It will take him down, teach him sense ; and he needs very much to be taught that !" Cannot you imagine, my friend, how the envious, malicious, tattling gossips at Corinth would go about from house to house, saying that kind of thing ? Now, my readers, let none of us here give way to this wicked and contemptible fashion of thinking and talking. What we are to do is this : each of us to try to understand the

lesson which God is addressing to his own self by the thorns and trials that come; and leave our neighbors to interpret their own thorns and trials. It is beautiful, it is touching, it brings the tear to the eye, to hear St. Paul himself telling all about his thorn in the flesh, and about how much he needed it to keep him down, and about how humbly he desired to submit to God's heavy hand. But think how differently we should have felt, if anybody else had said the very same things about Paul; how different a thing it would have been, if Paul had told us about Timothy's weak health and often infirmities; and had said to us, You know Timothy was made a bishop very young; and he was growing quite insufferable, he was so blown up with conceit, till God sent him this failing health to take him down and keep him modest. Now, my friend, what would you have thought, if you had found words like these somewhere in Paul's epistles? You would have been astonished, I think. You would have said, This is not like St. Paul. You would say, No, no; Paul never wrote *that*; it is an interpolation; it is something foisted into the manuscript by some one who envied Timothy and hated him. Remember this then: that there is all the difference in the world between talking as Paul does in the text about ourselves, and about any one else. When trial comes to ourselves, let us humbly seek to find out the lesson God is teaching us by it; but let us not presume to say wherefore the trial has come to any other man.

Little we know of his heart ; little we know of his special temptations, cares, and fears. I dare say we, each of us, may have formed a theory of the character of many a man we see every day, that is as far from the truth as the old astronomy was from rightly stating the nature and movements of the stars ! You may have known men accused of self-conceit, by people who knew hardly anything of them, whom *you* knew well to be the humblest and most shrinking of mankind. You may have known men supposed to be very ambitious and self-confident, by those to whom they were almost strangers, who wished for nothing more in life than to slip unnoticed by.

But, my friend, while thus cautioning you against judging your fellow-men by what you see of God's providential dealings with them ; let me ask you, when sorrow comes to you, or abides with you, prayerfully to inquire why it has come ; and what God may be intending to teach you by it. You know, if you have indeed believed in Christ, you have God's own promise that "all things shall work together for good" to you ; and the thorn in the flesh or the crook in the lot, just like everything else. And we can see various ways in which such things may work us good. Pain, trial, disappointment, may all be sanctified by the Blessed Spirit to wean our hearts from this world ; to impress upon us that great fundamental lesson, that "this is not our rest ;" to lead us with all our heart to Jesus, the only satisfying portion

of our never-dying souls. And the thorn in the flesh may do us good also, by giving us a deeper and larger sympathy with others in their trials and sorrows. People who have not suffered themselves are very impatient of the sufferings and complaints of other people. We cannot properly understand a thing which we have never felt anything like. And you will find those who get positively angry with any one who is weak and ill, as if it were all his fault. But passing by these lessons taught us by the discipline of sorrow, let me turn your thoughts especially to the lesson the thorn taught St. Paul; the lesson which he tells us he needed; and one which perhaps each of us knows that he in some respect needs.

The thorn in the flesh was sent to keep Paul humble. And we may be quite sure it did what it was sent to do. It would be effectual. The apostle had many things to puff him up; but this one thing would keep him down. My friends, perhaps, in the case of each of us, most of those who know us would find it difficult to see any reason why we should be exalted above measure; we have not much perhaps to be vain about; yet who does not know how ready all human beings are to think of themselves far more highly than they ought to think; and to think of themselves as very different from what they appear to others? St. Paul, you see, was thinking especially about spiritual pride, and about temptation to be vain of his spiritual gifts and attainments; and probably

there is no form of self-conceit that steals in more subtly than that, or needs to be more rigorously kept down. A man may feel a deep spiritual pride because he is (as he fancies) so free from spiritual pride. And indeed in all respects, — as regards our talents, our influence, our reputation, our general position, — there is in the heart of almost all a tendency, needing to be constantly held in check, to undue self-estimation. And this tendency is not one that will do to have corrected just once for all. It is not like a tree that you cut down once for all and are done with; it is rather like the grass of a lawn, which you may mow down as closely as you can, and in a little it will grow up again just as before. Now Paul's self-conceit, you see, was mown down regularly every day. If it was always growing, the influence was always at work to keep it down. If at any time the thought began to get the upper hand, how great, and useful, and highly-favored a man he was, — there was the sharp thorn piercing in, sorer and deeper; and *that* set him right. And it is so with us, my friend. As surely as you get to grow out of that humility which best becomes us; as surely as you begin to cherish vain thoughts and high thoughts; so surely, if God loves you, will something come to take you down; so surely will some thorn in the flesh bring you back to your better and lowlier self; — some fresh proof be given you, how weak you were where you fancied yourself strong; how little esteemed where you thought it far otherwise; how

feeble, worldly, and imperfect a believer you are yet; how little grown up to that stature in grace to which you fancied you had grown. And painful as these lessons may be, we need them all. And if they be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, they will effectually do their work. We shall not think much of ourselves in the day of crushing sorrow. There will be a constant lesson of humility in remembrance of some sin into which we fell, or in even the remembrance of some act of weakness and folly. You look back, my readers, over your past life, and you remember many things such as we take to be symbolized by that humbling thorn of St. Paul. You have had many takings down. You have had many things tending to make you lowly; and they are coming every now and then; perhaps there is some humbling thorn from which you are never free. But was it not all needed? Very few can say that they are too humble with it all! Which of us can say that we feel our sinfulness and helplessness too much; and that we are clinging to our Blessed Saviour too earnestly? Which of us can say that we feel too deeply our utter weakness; and that we are praying too often and too heartily for the aids of that Holy Spirit who alone can bring us safely through? Ah, my readers, many as may have been our trials, our disappointments, our temptations, let us thank our God for them; for we needed them all!

And now we come to a most interesting part of the

subject. See what the apostle did about his thorn in the flesh; see what God did! St. Paul tells us that he did not like the thorn in the flesh; no man can like what is painful and humiliating; and three times he besought God that the thorn in the flesh might be taken away. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice." Thrice, you know, is a number indefinitely used in Scripture; we may be sure Paul offered that prayer far oftener than the bare three times. Every day, I doubt not, when the thorn was first sent; morning, evening, noonday, would the earnest supplication go up from his very heart, that this heavy burden might be taken from him; surely it could never be God's will that through the long years of all his coming life he was to bear that heavy and crushing weight! My reader, have not you done the same? Have not you prayed in earnestness, yea, in bitterness of heart, that some cup appointed you might pass away;— have not you prayed in earnestness that some sore trial, that you thought would darken all your life, might be spared you; that some bodily disease would leave you; that some sorrowful bereavement you saw coming might be kept off; that the plans and hopes of years might not be frustrated; in short, that *your* special thorn might depart? And perhaps Paul's answer was yours. See what God said to Paul's prayer. The thorn in the flesh was not to depart. It was to hang about the great apostle, burdening and numbling him, till the last breath went out from that

feeble frame. He was never again to be like other men, — that great apostle Paul! And yet, who shall say that his prayer was not answered; nobly, fully, sublimely answered! There are two ways of helping a man, burdened with what he has to do or bear. The one way is to give him less to do or bear; to take the burden off the back. The other way is to strengthen him to do or bear all that is sent him; to strengthen the back to bear the burden. In brief, you may give less work; or you may give more strength. And it was in this way, which even we can see is the better and nobler way, that the wise and almighty Saviour thought it best to answer his servant's prayer. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Yes, St. Paul's weakness was to be supplemented by God's almighty strength; the thorn was still to pierce, but patience to bear it all was to be sent; the load was to press heavy on the back, but the back was to be strengthened in just degree. And we do not need to go far for proof how completely God's promise was fulfilled. How thoroughly resigned Paul was; how sanctified to him must that thorn have been; how strengthened his heart must have been with an unearthly strength; when he could honestly write such words as follow his account of his Redeemer's promise! Oh, the thorn was there, piercing as deep as ever; marring his usefulness, making him seem weak and contemptible to the stranger; but he liked to have to feel, from hour to

hour, that he must be always going anew to God for help ; he liked the assurance of the Blessed Spirit's presence which he drew hourly from feeling himself kept up to bear without a murmur what he knew that by himself he never could have borne ; and so he wrote, not perhaps without a natural tear, " Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me ! "

We cannot but think, drawing these thoughts to a close, how Holy Scripture sets before us two men, who were favored with very near revelations of God ; and each of whom was visited with a thorn in the flesh to keep him down, and to keep him in mind. You remember the patriarch Jacob, by that stream at Peniel ; — how there he saw God face to face, and won a special blessing through persevering prayer. You remember how he went away from that place, under the rising sun, as a prince who had prevailed with God ; but you remember, too, how he went, not with the free and active step of former days ; how as he passed over Peniel he halted on his thigh ; and he went lamely through all his after-life, bearing about that thorn in the flesh in memory of that great spiritual blessing. And so St. Paul, caught up where living man has rarely ever been ; and who heard words which mortal ears have rarely heard ; bore always afterwards that thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. My friends, have you found special comfort

in communion seasons ; special joy in Christ ; special sense of God's favor ; manifold proofs of God's goodness in your daily lot ; then seek to be humble with it all, that the sore discipline may not be needed, which, if needed, will (in some form) surely be sent. And should God be pleased to send us the thorn ; if there be those who feel the thorn even now ; if there be those bowed under bereavement, or blank with disappointed hopes ; oh, my friends, do like St. Paul under his sore trial ; learn the lesson of humility God is teaching you by it. We blame you not, if thrice, and more than thrice, you beseech God to take the bitter cup away. But if he see meet to deny that prayer ; if he see meet to continue the trial even to the end of life ; oh, pray for the better and sublimer blessing of grace sufficient for you, — of strength made perfect in the weakness of your feeble and sorrowful hearts. And so, by God's kind grace, and by the comfort of that Blessed Spirit whom we humbly desire for our closest companion ; so it may come to this, that you shall never wish things other than they are ; that you shall be content that the path be thorny and steep, so it lead at last to our heavenly Father's dwelling ; and so that meanwhile, "most gladly shall you rather glory in your infirmities," — in your trials, disappointments, and losses, — "that the power of Christ may rest upon you !"



IV.

THE GIFT OF SLEEP.

“For so he giveth his beloved sleep,” — PSALM cxxvii. 2.

WE shall better understand what is, in the first and most obvious force of the words, taught and suggested by this text, if we remember what is the general bearing of the psalm in which it stands, and what were the circumstances in which it is believed to have been written. The psalm bears the title, “A Song for Solomon;” and the usual belief is, that this psalm was written by David, and dedicated to his son; with the purpose of keeping Solomon in mind of a great truth, which every man should seek devoutly to remember, and which it was especially desirable that Solomon should lay to heart. That truth was, that God’s blessing must go with all man’s labor, in order that man’s labor should be effectual. No exertion; no skill; no setting early to work, nor sitting up late at it; can make sure that our plans shall succeed, without the help and blessing of God. It is utterly vain for the creature to think to set up independently of the Creator. Now Solomon was a wise man; and

he was likely to know that he was so ; and there were sure to be plenty of people about him to tell him how wise he was ; and so his father desired to caution him against undue reliance on his own wisdom. Then Solomon had much work before him when he should become king. He had God's temple to build ; and it was well to remind him, that "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." He had his city and his kingdom to guard against evil and invasion ; and it was well to remind him, that "except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." And the Psalmist seems to anticipate an answer to all this ; he seems to anticipate his son's saying, What, will not my most diligent and self-denying labors suffice ? If I toil early and late, if I cut off my enjoyments and recreations, and give my whole mind to it ; may I not then please myself by thinking that I can build the house and keep the city for myself ? No, the Psalmist says ; all that is quite useless. "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows." Not that David undervalued hard work ; not that he did not know the virtue there is in hard work ; not that he was ignorant that there are few things worth much in this world that can be had or done except by hard work ; but still all those long hours, all that hard self-denial, would never make a man independent of God ; would never come to any end but by God's help and blessing. And then, if that blessing be given, what is worth having or desiring

of worldly or spiritual good may come without that life-wearing toil; the time spent in seeking God's blessing upon our work will be as profitably spent as the time spent in actual labor; our task will sit the lighter upon body and mind, if we cast the care of it upon our God, and do not try to bear it all ourselves; "for surely he giveth his beloved sleep." The word translated *so* ought to be *surely*. The proper meaning of my text is, "Surely the Lord giveth his beloved sleep." And I have told you the way in which it comes in.

It is known, I doubt not, to many of you, that a certain great genius who died not long ago, declared that there was no text, even in that book of Psalms whose sentences come so wonderfully home to our hearts still, though spoken to us across the ocean of three thousand years, that fell upon her ear so comfortingly and so sublimely, as this which tells us what gift it is that God Almighty gives, as a great and good gift, to such as he holds dear. "Surely he giveth his beloved sleep." You remember how one of the wisest of heathens wrote, as a great principle arrived at through the meditation of a long life, that "the end of work is to enjoy rest." And you will think of One, wiser than the Greek philosopher, who seems to have thought as *he* did as to what was the largest and best blessing which can be offered to man. You remember the blessed words of Him who made us and who died for us: "Come unto me, all ye that

labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We must be somewhat subdued, indeed, by the wear and toil of this weary world; and we must have gained an insight into the deepest wants of our spiritual nature, such as comes commonly through fuller experience and longer thought; before we shall appreciate such words completely. It is the toilworn man that knows the worth of repose; it is the jaded pilgrim that understands best what it must be to sit down at home; and as we go on, year after year, till our hearts begin to grow a little weary, there is music, growing always sweeter, in the ancient words of the patient patriarch, "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest!"

There are three shades of meaning in which we purpose to understand this text; and to rest for a little in its contemplation.

And first: take the most obvious meaning of the words. God "giveth his beloved sleep." People whose whole heart is set upon this world may rise early, and sit late, and eat the bread of anxiety and sorrow, in their eager pursuit of worldly aims and ends,—in their breathless quest of wealth, or eminence, or success in some of its many forms; and thus these men may be so fevered and wrought up, and have their thoughts so full of the perplexities of business, and of its manifold cares and worries, that when the jading day is done at last, and they lay their busy head upon their pillow, sleep may fly from them;

and they may seek its blessed refreshment and forgetfulness in vain. Now, this is not a small matter. Looking at its entire effect upon mind and body looking at what it testifies as to the unhealthy and overdriven state of those parts of our physical nature which stand in closest relation to the immaterial and immortal soul; we can see that it is a most grave and weighty matter. There are few things more dispiriting, and more wearing out, than the loss of our natural rest. To count hour after hour in feverish wakefulness, seeking that forgetfulness which will not come; to feel the mind within stimulated to a preternatural activity, and refusing to recall any but the most sorrowful thoughts; to be stung by a host of painful and distressing remembrances of the past and anxieties for the future, — each (as it were) coming up and striking its little poisoned dart into your nature; many a one knows well how dismal a thing all that is. There are physical causes, doubtless, in many cases; we may be told of unhealthy excitement of the brain, and of undue sensitiveness of the nervous system; but I go beyond these second causes, and I say that as a general rule, the great cause of those weary hours of wakefulness, anxiety, and misery, is want of faith in God. It is because we are not able, as we ought, to trust ourselves and all that concerns us to his sure providence and his thoughtful care. You know quite well, my friends, that it is mental anxiety and worry that break your rest; that it is because

you are trying to bear the burden yourselves, to build the house yourselves, to keep the city yourselves, that you have those anxious, miserable hours; it is because you *will* plan too far ahead, instead of letting each day bear its own evil, — because you *will* keep asking what is to become of you and your children if such and such an event takes place, — because you *will* try to take the reins of your lot into your own hands, instead of leaving the direction of it all to his wisdom and kindness, — it is because of these things that you so often rise unrefreshed from your weary bed, to take to the dreary round again. Ah, my friends, if you had all of you a stronger trust in God, you would have sounder sleep! If you have really sought and so found the good fruit in Christ; if you are sure that nothing can go amiss with you, — that all things are ordered for your good, — that “the Lord will provide,” — that the daily bread and the daily strength will come with the day that is to need them, — that God will guide you by his counsel while you live, and receive you to his glory when you die, — that through all your way, in dark and in light, angels guide your steps and guard your beds, and that the Holy Spirit of God himself dwells within you from hour to hour; oh, how free from care and fear you will lay your head upon your pillow, and sink into gentle forgetfulness; to rise again with the morning light refreshed and cheerful and hopeful! You know, that when all is said that can be said of physical causes, it is the

things that prey on our mind by day that break our rest at night. And you know, too, how in those still, waking hours, those thoughts of how it stands with him from eternity, and of the accumulated guilt of his past life, which the heedless sinner can keep off amid the occupations and the companions of the day, force themselves in, and demand that they shall be listened to. It is impossible, then, quite to suppress the question, where the soul is to be when the body shall lie down on its last lowly bed; when all earthly things have faded from around us like the fading light; and left us no other comfort but that which we may draw from things eternal! But if you can humbly trust that it is well with you; that amid your deep-felt unworthiness you are simply believing on the Saviour, and daily striving to grow like him; that your task is appointed you by God; that he is always ready to help you in it; that you and those dear to you are provided for by him, and *that* so effectually that you never shall want anything that is truly good for you, — and you remember the promise, “They that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing;” then, how pleasantly you may rest and how cheerfully wake! Surely God will “give his beloved, sleep!”

Now, in the second place, let us understand the text in a less literal way. We all know that healthful sleep is our most peaceful state. In the untroubled, dreamless, refreshing repose of health after fatigue, you see human nature in that state in which it is *most*

thoroughly free from all annoyance or trouble. You all remember the Spanish proverb as to the comfort with which sleep wraps us round. And in this view, we read in the text something to remind us how amid all the anxieties and competitions of life, God has promised peace to his own. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon God." But how little there is of *that* even amid such as profess to be true believers! How far is the peace from being "perfect" even of the best believers! You remember the single word in which the ancient schoolman hit what he conceived to be the great characteristic of this life. "I entered this world," he said, "in lowliness; I have lived in it in anxiety; I shall leave it in fear." And there can be little doubt, I think, that he was right. Anxiety, care, are the characteristics of most lives here. You need not go far for the proof of this. Look at the faces of the people you see upon the street; remark their expression. You will very seldom see a cheerful face. Almost every face you meet, beyond early youth, is careworn and anxious. There is no doubt that care sits heavy upon the majority of mankind. You know the anxious look and the inelastic step of most middle-aged people in this country. No doubt, there may be something due to the nation and the race. "They took their pleasure sadly, according to the fashion of their nation;" there is no need to tell you of what

nation the old chronicler said *that*. And you know how the greatest physical philosopher of modern times tells us that far in the American woods, beyond the reach of civilization and the cares that come of it, he found an unwrinkled tribe, on whose smooth faces, fresh and young-looking even to the verge of life, anxiety seemed never to have drawn a line. And some of you will think of a sublime description, given by a great poet, of the fresh, serene, unanxious life of certain of the free foresters who were the pioneers of civilization in the wilds of the far western world. But still taking the life we lead, I think you will hold by the schoolman's "Anxious I have lived." You know how many people, even when they could not tell you of any particular thing about which they are anxious, do yet live under the pressure of constant vague forebodings of ill. If some hasty, unexpected messenger were of a sudden to come for any of you, your first question would be, What is wrong? You would be sure that something was amiss. And what testimony does that one little indication bear to the too well-grounded anxiety for the future under which most human beings live! Now, my Christian friends, *that* is not like the perfect peace which God has promised; that is not like the peace and the rest which the Saviour told us he would give to such as went to him in simple faith. But remember this; that faith in our hearts is as it were the hand which we stretch forth to receive all the gifts of God's grace. We

receive salvation, you know, of God's free grace ; yet we must believe that we may be saved ; we must stretch out the hand of faith, and lay hold of the salvation freely offered us. And it is just the same with the promised blessing of rest and peace amid all the agitations of life. God has promised it ; God is ready to give it ; but we must receive it by faith. And we may confidently say, that the amount of peace and quiet that we shall experience in this turbulent and troublesome world, will be in exact proportion to the strength and reality of our trust in God. If we were able really to trust God with everything, and with a whole heart, instead of doing as most Christians do, — never trusting God more than they can help, and never feeling quite safe as to what he may do ; if we were able truly to cast our cares and roll our burdens upon him, instead of trying to bear them all ourselves ; oh, what a blessed fulfilment there would be of the promise in the text ! Surely God would then indeed have given his beloved peace and rest ! We should do our best ; and then, with perfect confidence, leave the issue of all with God. And then, the lined face will grow smooth again ; and the heavy heart would grow light ; the mind, beset with anxious calculations and forebodings of evil, " careful and troubled about many things," would be buoyant and free once more ; — for our heart would be " stayed upon God," and then we should be " kept in perfect peace ! "

But I wish here to suggest to you, that probably the thing which is at the foundation of that vague disquiet and apprehension which in the case of many does so much to gnaw away the enjoyment of life, is one of which they do not think. Some people are disposed to say, Oh, if I could only be free from such and such a thing that vexes me and keeps me anxious, I should be all right; everything else is as I would wish, but that one bitter drop in the cup turns it all to bitterness! Now, any such idea is quite mistaken. I believe that the real reason of the disquiet of many hearts is, that they are not right with God; they have never truly and heartily believed in Jesus Christ. They may have thought a good deal about religion, but still they vaguely feel within themselves that they have never fairly taken the decisive step. Now, we cannot be converted to God unless it be heartily; we cannot go to Christ and at the same time hold by the world just as we used to do; we cannot put our hand to the plough, and at the same time look back, and hang back, and turn back. And if a human being thinks at all, he can never be otherwise than vaguely uneasy, unhappy, unsatisfied, restless, anxious, till he as really and heartily believed in Christ; till he is able, very humbly indeed, and with no vain self-confidence, to say, "I know Whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." I am not careful to explain the logical steps of the process;

there are many things in the working of our deepest consciousness which are beyond our logic ; but let me say to every one who hears me, who is always vaguely foreboding ill, who trembles at the coming of post-time, lest it may bring some terrible bad news, — whose imagination is always running upon the sad contingencies and possibilities of evil which hang over our life here, — who carries only too far the wise man's admonition, not to "boast of to-morrow," because we "know not what a day may bring forth ;" to every such person let me say, Try a different way of escaping from your cares and fears than perhaps you have been trying ; the thing that is at the bottom of them all is the lurking fear that you are not right with God ; it is *that* which is eating the heart out of your enjoyment of life ; it is *that* which keeps you vaguely unsatisfied and fearful ; oh pray to have *that* set right, and then it will be well with you ! Do not foolishly refuse to examine into the truth of the case ; probe your nature to the uttermost ; it will not heal a deep, poisoned wound, just to skin it over ; if you have been wrong till now, oh begin and be right from to-day ! Go to God, and say, I am a poor, sinful, trembling creature ; I fear I have been deceiving myself, and thinking of myself far too well ; yet as I am I come to thee once more, and ask mercy and grace only through Christ ! O brethren, get the great central stay made firm and sure ; and all will be well. But if the keystone of the arch be wrong, or even

doubtful, then all is amiss. The great step towards trusting all to God as your Father, is to be really persuaded that God *is* your Father; to be persuaded that he loves you, unworthy as you are; to be persuaded that he reckons you among those to whom the promise is given, "Surely he giveth his beloved rest!"

And I ask you, my brethren, to remark the kind of peace and rest which the Saviour gives his people; and will give us, if we seek and pray for it. If quiet and peace could be had only by withdrawing from the duties and occupations of active life, then quiet and peace for most of us could never be. Not many of us, perhaps, could escape from manifold work and care in this life. Where most of us are placed in this world, we are likely to remain to the end; it is not in our power to fly to some far and still retreat, in whose quiet we might escape the evils and troubles here. And the corner will never be found in this world, where care and evil shall be unknown by human beings. But the peace which the Saviour gives his own, is peace of heart and mind amid daily duties. It is that "central peace" which may "subsist at the heart of endless agitation." When you look at the believer's busy life, you may see no trace of his inward peace of soul. But you know that the ocean, under the hurricane, is lashed into those huge waves and that wild foam only upon the surface. Not very

far down, the waters are still as an autumn noon ; there is not a ripple or breath or motion. And so, my friends, if we had the faith we ought, though there might be ruffles upon the surface of our lot, we should have the inward peace of perfect faith in God. Amid the dreary noises of this world ; amid its cares and tears ; amid its hot contentions, ambitions, and disappointments ; we should have an inner calm like the serene ocean depths, to which the influence of the wild winds and waves above can never come !

And in the third place, my friends, we come to a yet sublimer sense in which we may understand the text. Let us think of the last, deepest, and longest sleep, as given by God. " Surely he giveth his beloved sleep ; " he gives it ; and gives it to those whom he holds dearest ; sleep ; all sleep ; every kind and form of it. You remember how God's Word names the violent end of the martyr Stephen ; " he fell asleep." You remember how the apostle names the Christian dead ; " them that sleep in Jesus." And you remember the words of One dearer and better by far ; " Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." And that Blessed One liked the word ; he used it more than once or twice ; " She is not dead," — not dead, as you mean by the word, — " not dead, but sleepeth." Thus kindly and hopefully does that kindest and most hopeful voice that ever stirred the atmosphere of this world, speak of our last change. And oh, how the very nature of

death is changed when we thus think of it! Not the gloomy visitor, coming so unwelcome; but the kindly gift of our kind Saviour, gently soothing us to rest. When all is said, our hearts will never be quite free from troubles, fears, anxieties, forebodings, here; our feeble faith, and our many sins, clouding God's face, will make sure of *that*; but in that last repose we shall, if we be Christ's people, sleep into forgetfulness of all these. We never shall know a real, sound, untroubled sleep in this world, till *that*; till the weary head is laid upon the bosom of its God! "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;" how literally, how gloriously true, the great poet's words are of the true believer! Let us bless God for the pleasant thought of death which is given us by this gracious text; we need it all. Gently as a mother soothes her weary infant, the kind Saviour calms away all our cares, all our fears and forebodings, in that perfect rest. We call to our remembrance the lowliness of death; we stand by the last bed; we see the weakness of mortality; we mark the sad signs of dissolution; and who that has ever seen them but knows how sad they are to see; but what a change comes over all *that*, over the parting breath, over the still face when the last pain is over, when we think it is but that God has "given his beloved sleep;" and gently soothed the unquiet heart to the dreamless rest of a child! He *giveth* it; it is not as if it were sent by even the sublimest messenger; he comes himself; he stands by his departing brother; it is he him-

self that composes the weary heart, and closes the glazing eyes. Not the fatal disease ; not the days and nights of weakness and suffering ; not those long years, perhaps, which have silvered the head and worn out the machinery of mortal life ; look beyond these, my brethren ; there is a Higher Hand here. " Surely God giveth his beloved sleep."

Yes, to his beloved. To those washed in Christ's blood, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. We pray earnestly, this day, that all of us, that every one of us who are within these walls, may be so ! We pray earnestly that we all may be led and enabled unfeignedly to love and trust him as we see him in Christ : and so that we may be loved by him ; by him who first loved us, — who sought us in the wilderness when we had wandered away and were lost, and brought the wanderer home to his fold. And then, passing from this life, — closing our eyes upon this world of trouble, we shall rest in our Blessed Saviour ; we shall sleep in Jesus ; we shall win the peace of God ! And in that rest, which remaineth for all his people, we shall be far away from all weariness, all anxiety, all care, all sorrow. And while the soul shall pass to God, to enter on the rest of glory, the mortal body has its rest no less, sleeping peacefully till the resurrection day. And when the green grass of another June waves over us ; when the soft summer wind of another June sighs through the green leaves ;

when the sunshine of some more genial Longest Day shall brighten cheerfully the stone which may bear our name and yours ; what better can we wish, than that if we leave behind us those who may sometimes visit the quiet spot, they may be able to say, humbly and hopefully, Surely here, at last ; and surely there, in a better place ; the weary heart and hand are still ; yea, surely God “ hath given his beloved, sleep ! ”

June 22, 1862.



V.

JABEZ: HIS LIFE AND HIS PRAYER.

'And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.'—
1 CHRON. iv. 9, 10.

THERE was a Hebrew mother, to whom a child was born in a season of special sadness and sorrow. We do not know what was her name; and we do not know the place or the time in which she lived; save that the time was many hundred years ago, and that the place was somewhere in the promised land of Canaan. We do not know what was the cause of the special sorrow which was in that poor mother's heart when her child was sent to her; though we may perhaps suppose, from what we are told as to the mother being the only one to decide what should be her boy's name, that her husband was dead; and so that the little one, half-orphaned from his birth, could never be met by a father's welcome, nor tended by a father's

care. The sorrow of that Hebrew mother is all over now ; and indeed we have reason to think that it was turned into gladness, if she was spared in this world, before many years passed on. But at the time, it had quite crushed her down ; it had so overwhelmed her, that she seemed for the time to have lost even the power of hoping for better days. It seems as if she had thought that no good nor happiness could ever come of that little child that was as the memorial of so sad a season ; and so she gave him a name that told of her present grief and her fears for the future. His mother called him Jabez ; that is, Sorrowful. And he went through life bearing that name ; and his memory has come down to us through all these centuries, linked with that name ; Jabez, Sorrowful.

It is not much we know of Jabez ; we have his entire biography in these two verses which you have read. But I think, my friend, that in this recorded history of that man, there is suggested to us something of as solemn warning, and of as blessed consolation, as you will find within the range of God's holy book. We know nothing of his childhood or his youth ; nothing of the first steps by which he showed how little his name befitted him ; nothing of the pride and delight, mingled with self-accusing for her lack of faith in a kind God, which would spring up in the mother's heart, if she was spared to see what her son became at last. We are only told that Jabez, Sorrowful, grew up to be a man ; and rose to honor, — to special

and supereminent honor. And we have preserved a prayer which Jabez offered, and which God granted him, which shows us that Jabez was as good and wise and energetic and devout as he was honored and renowned. *That* prayer we shall think of hereafter; it might be a pattern for ours; and every petition in it may serve to remind us of great religious truths, which we ought never to forget. But meanwhile, let us fix on this; the preëminent honor to which *he* rose who came into this world at so gloomy a season, and who bore a name expressive of so gloomy foreboding for the days to come. "Jabez," we are told, "was more honorable than his brethren." You have nothing told you of the other members of that family, who perhaps came in happier days, and who perhaps received more hopeful names. We may well believe, from the way in which the story is told, that they were good and worthy too; but still, in fame, in holiness, in wisdom, in goodness, it was Jabez who was always first. And how strange a contrast it must have been, between the sorrowful name, and the honored and happy man who bore it; how strange a comment that life of honor and usefulness must have seemed, upon the mother's faithless forebodings, and her needless fears! Yes, it must have been curious to hear that name that sounded so sadly, mentioned by all men with such pleasant looks, and linked with so many deeds of kindness and wisdom and true heroism. For God, we are told, granted

him the things he asked in that most comprehensive prayer; and oh, how good and wise and brave a man *he* must have been, to whom *that* prayer and all it asked was granted! And we say it must have sounded strange to hear it asked, Who was it that did that kind and noble deed? and to hear it answered, Oh, it was Jabez! Who was it that went out so valiantly against the enemies of his God, and “enlarged his coast,” his portion of the promised land, by those rich fields and woods? Oh, it was Jabez! Who was it that comforted that despairing heart, — who cheered that house of sorrow, — who guided that poor wanderer back? Still, it was he whose name promised such different things; still, it was Jabez! Yes, it was Sorrowful who carried joy to many a desolate home; it was Sorrowful who made the dim eye grow bright again with hope; it was Sorrowful whose name was on the lips of multitudes of men, as their very ideal of all that was pure and good and true and happy. He rose above his fellow-men. He was “more honorable than his brethren;” and the words seem to imply that they, too, were honorable, — were good men, and happy men; but oh! there was none like Jabez! None like Sorrowful to gladden his mother’s heart; none like Sorrowful for worldly success, and for spiritual wealth, wisdom, and happiness.

My friend, let us fix on this point in the history of Jabez to think of first; and tell me, is the lesson of all this far to seek? You see, it was to her best and

worthiest son that the mother of Jabez gave the name, that implied how little hope of future happiness with him or through him remained in her weary, despairing heart. We can think of a contrasted picture; you remember the proud and hopeful name which the mother of our race gave to her first-born son; you know how much of confident hope was embodied in the name of Cain. *Possession*, she called him, — a great thing gained from God, — who was yet so sorely to wring her heart. For even thus vain are human anticipations, whether of good or ill; the first murderer welcomed with the hopeful name of Cain; while this wise and good and happy man was to bear the desponding name of Jabez. But without dwelling upon the vanity of all human calculations, — of all human hopes and fears, — let us now remember how often we all call by hard names, dispensations of God's providence which in reality are to prove great blessings. Probably in many cases those events in our history, those dealings of God with us, which we should call sorrowful at the time, stand us in more real stead, and do us more real good, than the brightest and happiest that ever come in our way. Even here, and now, we can understand, that *that* earthly trial or loss is not rightly called Jabez, Sorrowful, which works our spiritual good; which leads us with simpler and humbler faith to that blessed Saviour who is our only satisfying portion; and which weans our heart somewhat from those things of time and ~~sense~~

to which it so naturally cleaves. And do you not all know, how sometimes we can afterwards see, that even looking no farther than this world, it was good for us that we were afflicted ; — good for us that we were disappointed, that we were tried, that we were bereaved? *That* turning you wished to take in life, you can now see was the wrong one ; though it was a sad trial at the time when God hedged up your way, and bade you walk along a track so different from that which you would have chosen for yourself. Yes, even worldly success and advantage have come, because of dispensations which were disappointments and sorrows at the time they happened ; and who does not know what precious spiritual blessing has often come out of dealings which when they came were Jabez ; who does not know what blessed graces, — what purity, heavenly-mindedness, sympathy, kindness, faith, and hope, — have beamed out, in modest loveliness, in the soul which has come through the sore discipline of sanctified sorrow, of disappointment rightly met and rightly used? If we be truly united to Christ, we may be sure of this, that nothing can befall us, which may not be turned to good, by God's sanctifying Spirit. Sickness, care even, bereavement ; all may be like Jabez ; dark and unpromising at the beginning, but brightened into glory and beauty in their result ; and the believer, as he looks back on his past history, may be constrained to say, — God has been very good to me ; he has sent me many

blessings ; but oh, never the blessing that was so good and precious, as when he sent me that trial which I felt so crushing ; — as when he blighted the hopes so fondly cherished, or sent the bereavement which almost broke the rebellious heart !

And now, my friend, as we go on to consider the prayer which Jabez offered, and which God granted him ; let us take along with us, to the consideration of the petition that stands first in it, the remembrance of these things which have been said, as to our little power to discern what is a blessing and what is not ; as to the tendency in human beings to call *that* Cain which ought to be called Jabez ; and *that* Jabez which ought to be called Cain. You see the all-comprehending petition with which the prayer of Jabez sets out. He “ called upon the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed ! ” Yes, Bless me **INDEED !** It was because Jabez knew that he could never certainly tell what was truly blessing, and what seemed blessing and was not ; that he devolved upon God himself the charge and the responsibility of deciding what things were to come to him. What a wise, and what a safe prayer ! “ That thou wouldst bless me indeed ! ” Send me *that* which Thou knowest is blessing, though it may not seem blessing to me ; and deny me that which Thou knowest is not blessing, however ready I, in my ignorance, may be to think it so ! *That* is the spirit of the prayer. **It**

was for the All-wise himself to decide what was the exact discipline which Jabez needed at the time; it might be a painful discipline, it might be a happy one; but whatever it might be, Jabez knew that the thing he needed was the true blessing; and all he asked from God was, that, pleasant or painful, God would send him *that!* Yes, my friend; put that prayer together with what we are taught by the entire history of Jabez; and see what a lesson it teaches us as to how we ought to pray. When we are praying for temporal blessings, we ought never to pray for them absolutely; we ought always to pray for them, if they be truly good for us; if not, God in answering our prayer would not be blessing us *indeed*. And even as regards spiritual blessings, though we may pray for them with more confidence and less reservation; — though we are quite sure that it must be truly good for us to have our sins pardoned through Christ, and our souls sanctified by the Holy Spirit; and though thus we are sure that God in giving us pardon and holiness would be blessing us *indeed*; — still, even as regards spiritual blessings, we do not know what is the exact dealing that may be most expedient for us at the time; we cannot be sure that in asking spiritual peace, joy, hope, or strength, we are asking the thing which would suit our present need the best. Perhaps humiliation may be the thing we need just then; perhaps the best thing for us would be to have our overconfidence rebuked, — to be brought back to a deeper

sense of our own weakness, and a simpler leaning upon our kind Redeemer's strength and grace. You know, generally, the direction in which to steer ; but you cannot say what little movement of the helm may be expedient from time to time, to suit each passing flaw of wind, or each crossing wave. And it is just because we do not know these things, that it is so wise to leave the decision of the precise thing to be sent us, as Jabez did, to God ; and to pray, with him, that God would bless us *indeed*. Let him deny us *that* which is not blessing indeed, however like blessing it may seem ; and let him send us *that* which is blessing indeed, though we might write against it, Jabez ! Ah, my brother, you dare not pray, without a reservation if God sees it fit, that you may gain the worldly end on which you have set your heart ; you dare not pray absolutely that you may live a long or a peaceful life ; you dare not pray, without a condition, by the dying bed of your dearest, that they may be spared to you longer ; you must always add, God's will be done, if God sees it good for you and them ; but you can never go wrong, if you do like Jabez ; if you go humbly and hopefully in Christ's blessed name ; and call on the God and Father of our Blessed Saviour, saying, Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed !

But let us go on with the wise and good man's prayer. The next two petitions in it let us take together. " Oh that thou wouldst enlarge my coast ;

and that thine hand might be with me!" These two requests must stand together, as we shall see. No doubt the first of the two refers to *this*: that Jabez was an Israelite who had yet to conquer from his enemies some portion of the inheritance allotted to him in the land of promise. There were fair tracts round him, appointed to him by God; and he wished to win these from God's enemies; and accordingly he prays that God would give them to him; he prays, "That thou wouldst enlarge my coast!" And it was right, of course, to pray for this; but it was not enough merely to pray. It would not do, that Jabez should slothfully sit down, content to have merely asked God to give the inheritance he wished. You see from his prayer that he is going out to do what in him lies to accomplish the thing for which he prays. You see he asks that God's "hand might be with him," as he goes forth to do battle with the idolatrous race which meanwhile possesses the soil which is by right his own. In short, the wise man, in the exercise of a manly common sense, asks God to help him, because he is going to try to help himself.

There is a great and sound principle implied here; a great lesson for all of us. It is the duty of combining effort with prayer. When we, my friend, are desirous to compass any new attainment;—when we wish to enlarge our coast, as it were, by taking in greater fields of faith, of holiness, of patience, of humility, of all Christian grace,—in regard to all of

which we may well take up Joshua's words, that "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed," — let us do like Jabez. It is not enough that we pray to God to give us more grace; we must labor to get more grace. We must diligently use the means that foster the growth of grace in us. We must cultivate Christian grace as we cultivate bodily strength and skill, — by exercise; all the while remembering that without God's help and Spirit we can do nothing; working, in short, like Jabez, as if we could do all, and praying as if we could do nothing. We may well and rightly pray for increase of spiritual comforts: for greater joy in communion seasons, — for greater heart and earnestness in prayer, — for more of Christ's love and life in our daily work and warfare, — for greater and happier elevation above worldly cares; but while for these things we pray, like Jabez, for these things let us also labor and strive, like him.

We may safely say, that if Jabez had merely prayed that God would enlarge his coast, and then remained idle at home, making no exertion for himself, his portion would not have been enlarged. God would have regarded such a prayer as a mere mockery. And on the other hand, if Jabez had gone forth against his enemies in his own unaided strength, he would likely enough have failed too. The wisdom of Jabez appeared in *this*: that he put prayer and effort together. You know how a wiser and greater than Jabez had done the like; how our Saviour bade us at

once "Watch and pray." Now is it not a curious thing, that when God's Word and our own common sense tell us that these two things ought always to go together, and are (so to speak) the closest of allies, — we constantly find people talking as if they were things opposed to each other, — and as if by holding to the one, you sacrificed the other? But you just see here the narrowness and one-sidedness of man's view, as compared with the largeness and comprehensiveness of God's view. Jabez, you remember, prayed that God would enlarge his coast; and even as he prayed, he went forth to enlarge his coast for himself. Jabez was wise and right. But if Jabez had been like some people nowadays, he would have prayed that God would enlarge his coast, and then sat at home and done nothing; and finally wondered why his coast was not enlarged. And if Jabez had been like other people nowadays, he would have gone out to enlarge his coast without troubling himself to pray at all. You know how many among us take these one-sided views; and apparently cannot look at both sides of a truth together; or see that prayers and pains must go together; and that it is foolish to cry up either at the expense of the other. Thus, when pestilence threatens the land, you will find one set proposing to have a fast-day, and pray to God to avert the pestilence. And you will find another set proposing to flush sewers, and cleanse and ventilate close and filthy dwellings. And, strange to say, in-

stead of seeing that *both* these things ought to be done ; that you ought to drain and cleanse with all your might, and at the same time to pray with all your heart ; you will find the advocates of the fast-day, and the advocates of the cleansing, abusing each other like bitter foes ; as if the plan of the one set excluded the plan of the other. Why, of course, both should be done. Watchfulness and prayer must go together, alike in things temporal and things spiritual. And it is foolish to raise a question which is the more essential, when both are essential. It would be abundantly absurd to get up a furious controversy whether food or drink were the more necessary to the life of man. Both are necessary. And Jabez, wise and good man, knew it. And so, while he prayed that God “ would enlarge his coast,” he buckled on his harness and went down to the battle. Do you the like, my friend. Pray earnestly for more grace ; and work heartily to get it.

And so we come to the last petition in this prayer ; a petition comprehensive and wise as the first. The first petition, you remember, was for true blessing. The last is for deliverance from true evil, — and from the evil effects and influences of all evil. Here are the words : “ And that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.” You know that this is a world of evil, bodily and spiritual ; a world of suffering and wrong ; and through these, among other

means, God works his ends on our souls. It is not God's purpose that we should never see or come in contact with evil at all. And you see the moderation, the acquiescence in God's appointments, the sound sense, which characterize Jabez's prayer. "And that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." He does not ask, you see, that evil may never come; but that evil may not be suffered to really harm when it comes. And so his prayer is in perfect harmony with that which was dictated to us by Christ: "Deliver us from evil;" for Christ's words do not lead us to hope that evil will never come; but that by God's grace when it *does* come, we shall be saved from its evil tendencies and results. Jabez did not ask, and we would not ask, that evil should never befall us at all; *that* would be too much; and if *that* prayer were granted, we should miss some of the most blessed and precious influences that ever helped to make the believer meet for the better land above. Evil coming, and trying us, may do us great good; we should not thrive without it; some of the heavenliest fruits of the Spirit would never grow in us if we never knew sorrow; patience, resignation, humility, sympathy, could hardly exist in the soul that never knew grief; and I think, my friend, that we should feel almost alarmed if we were never visited with trial; we should almost feel that our heavenly Father was not treating us as his children, — he who disciplines his children for immortality by the sad ex-

perience of sorrow and pain ; we should feel it strange to be excluded from that training, so salutary though so sad, to which such multitudes of believers have been witnesses, — and which is embodied in that ancient declaration of St. Paul and St. Barnabas, that “ we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” But Jabez prayed, and we may pray, that evil should not *grieve* us. We may pray that evil may never be suffered to harden us ; to stir us up to wrath against God ; to make us fretful, rebellious, impatient ; to tempt us to sin ; in short, to do us harm when God intends it always to do us good. It was for *this* that Jabez prayed.

Oh, my brother, we know that evil will come to us ; it has come already, and it will come again. There is not a heart — not even the youngest — that has not had its share of grief ; and *that* which has been is *that* which shall be. But if evil be sanctified to us ; if it be met in a right and humble spirit ; then, though it may come, it will not grieve ; it will not offend us, — it will not prove a stumbling-block in our heavenward way. Nay ; it will further us with a continual help ! It will prove a blessing, — a blessing *indeed*. It will wean us from earth ; it will purge away our dross ; it will quicken our steps towards that peaceful home, where dwell such multitudes who “ came out of great tribulation !” Let us then pray like Jabez. Let us prefer, not the unreasonable and extravagant request, that evil may never come ; but the modest and Chris-

tian request, that when evil comes, as it surely will come, still that it may never grieve !

And such, my friend, was the prayer of that good man whose history so belied his name ; and who, doubtless for our comfort and warning among other ends, lived and died, so long ago, and so far away. And see what came of Jabez. No wonder he was so honorable ! You have seen what the things were for which he asked ; and God's word tells us, closing the history of Jabez, " And God granted him that which he requested." God gave him all he asked ! Oh, what a biography for any man ! See what is taught us in the assurance that God granted Jabez his prayer. It tells us that through life, God blessed him indeed ; that God enlarged his coast ; that God's hand was with him ; and that God kept him from evil, so that it did not grieve him. Think of *that*, my friend ! Could you even pray for anything better ? If God were this day to allow you to sketch out for yourself the kind of life which you would wish to lead, so long as you are spared in this world, — could you ask for more than that God would grant to you what he granted Jabez ! Well, now for a comforting thought. It must have been a good and a noble life that Jabez lived ; and perhaps you are ready to think that it is far beyond your reach ; that it was all well in those distant days when men felt God's presence nearer them ; but that only a specially-favored one, here and there, can look for such things now. But

do not think *that*. It does not at all follow, from what we are told of that good man's honored life, that it was one of unmingled brightness; or that it was beyond what we may humbly ask through Christ, and humbly hope. God "blessed him indeed;" but *that* which is a blessing indeed, may not be what the worldly man would think a blessing at all. We cannot be sure, even of the man whom God blessed *indeed*, that his life was all sunshine. Likely enough, he had his share of the worries of life. Likely enough, he had now and then a great trial. Likely enough, there were days when the heart of Sorrowful was sorrowful enough; and when Jabez mourned beside the tomb where those he loved were sleeping. But still, he went on through life in such fashion that he drew good from all things that befell him; and so, through all, God kept his promise, and "blessed him indeed," — for all that came was truly blessing. And then, though his "coast was enlarged," perhaps the portion he got, after all, seemed large only to his moderate desires and ideas; perhaps it was no such very great tract of territory after all; and likely enough, his neighbors would smile at Jabez for being so well pleased with it; and I dare say the ill-set people among them would try to put him out of conceit with it, — just as ill-set people do the same thing now. And then, when evil befell Jabez, all men could see the outward affliction, but none could see what was the inward result; all men could see that evil came,

but only Jabez knew that it fell where it could not grieve. And so, to the eyes of ordinary onlookers, the outward lot of Jabez may not have seemed so much happier than the lot of other men. Perhaps his path in life may, to outward view, have appeared like the average one of ordinary believers. His lot was not beyond our reach ; nor beyond the possibilities of what may come to ourselves. Perhaps there are people in every Christian congregation, who are very like what Jabez was. People who are more deserving of honor than most of their brethren of mankind, though they may not get it. People whom God blesses indeed, though they have their many cares. People whose coast is enlarged, though it be in fields of faith and holiness and peace, which are not visible to the passer-by. People to whom their share of evil comes, but is made by God's Spirit to conduce to their eternal welfare. And *we* may fitly ask for all *that* ; and hope for all *that* ; through our Redeemer, and for his sake.

Let us humbly pray, then, this day, to the God of our fathers, through that Blessed Redeemer who is our Elder Brother, saying, Oh that thou wouldst bless us indeed, and enlarge our coast ; and that thine hand may be with us ; and that thou wouldst keep us from evil, that it may not grieve us !



VI.

GAIN IN THE SAVIOUR'S LOSS.

“It is expedient for you that I go away.” — ST. JOHN xvi. 7.

THE parting of friends, we all know, is always a sad thing, even if it be for not a very long time, and to not a very great distance; for it never can be quite forgot, in this uncertain life, that many things may come to prevent a meeting again. But partings sometimes are among the very saddest things that ever happen upon the face of this sorrowful world; partings of those who are very dear; partings of the playmates of childhood; partings of those who hitherto have kept close together in the race and the warfare of life, bearing one another's burdens, dividing one another's sorrows, sharing one another's joys, but who are now to be severed by long months and years of time, by long leagues of land and sea. I have seen an emigrant ship depart upon its long voyage; I remember the bustle and hurry which attended its departure; the crowded deck, thronged with old and young; gray-haired men bidding farewell to their native land, and little children who would carry but

dim remembrances of Britain to the distant Australian shore. And who that has ever witnessed such a scene can forget, how, when the white canvas was spread at last, and the last rope cast off, the outburst of sobs and weeping arose as the great ship solemnly passed away! Doubtless that parting was to many of those who parted then, as complete as that which is made by death.

And why was it then, that those who felt the pang of parting so much, were yet content to part? Why, but because they felt it was better so. The emigrant felt that he was leaving a country where he was not needed, a country which would not yield him bread, for another where there were work and bread for all. And the friends who remained behind knew all that too. They knew that however keen might be the anguish of that day, brighter days would follow. They knew that it was best that the youthful son should carry his sturdy arm and his active brain to the young, fresh world across the Atlantic, and not remain to be hampered and held down through life in the over-crowd and over-competition here. "It was expedient" for all parties, "that he should go away." He would find a new home, far away. He would form new ties there. He might find there, perhaps, a path to fame and fortune. He would often think, indeed, in the thoughtful twilight, of the hills of his native land; and sometimes, perhaps, wonder whether, for all that he had gained by leaving

the country of his birth, it might not have been as well had he saved his home-bred virtues in his father's lowly lot, and laid his head at last in his father's honored grave.

But after all, my friends, I do not doubt that you have found it in your own experience, that the thing to which people most naturally have recourse to blunt, in some measure, the pang of parting, is some such thought as is suggested in the text. The dying wife tries to persuade the husband she is leaving, that it is far better as it is. The poor, friendless young laborer, reckless and graceless once, but reclaimed by a kindness and a wisdom that were half angelic, said, as he felt life ebbing away, and thought of all the temptations he was saved from, — said in his own simple way of speaking, that “perhaps it was as well he should go home pretty soon.” And just with that simple and natural thought did the Blessed Redeemer seek to console his disciples as he was leaving them behind. He is addressing them in those memorable words, in that last and most beautiful discourse, which we all know so well. It is the night on which he was betrayed. He has partaken of the Jewish Passover for the last time, and he has instituted that better Christian Passover which was to take its place; and now more plainly than ever before, he begins to tell his friends of his speedy removal from them. And as he sees the shadow fall deep upon their faces, and deeper upon their hearts, at the thought, he hastens

to comfort them as a parent might the child from whom he was for a season of trial and training to be divided. I go, it is as if he said; and it is better that I should; I leave you, and though you may sorrow at first, you will gain more by my leaving you than you could have gained by my remaining with you. "I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away."

Now, we all know it perfectly well, that such words as these are oftentimes spoken, and spoken with a kindly intention too, when they are not really true. When some stroke of disappointment has fallen, when some cherished hope has been blighted, we are anxious to persuade ourselves that it is better as it is; we say so and we try to believe it. And the dying father, who is leaving his little ones alone in this cold world, would try to make them think that it is better he should go in God's good time, although his anxious mind and his feeble heart belie the words he utters. We often say, and we often hear such words as those of the text, when they express rather what is wished than what is felt and believed. "It is expedient that we should part," we say; "it is better as it is;" when we could give no sufficient reason for thinking so; no sufficient reason, that is, save that one sheet-anchor of the weary and disappointed heart, the wise and kind decree of God. God orders all things that happen, we know; and whatever God does must be right; and so we may safely say of everything that

happens that, in one sense, it is best as it is. But it is not merely in this general view, — and it is not merely by way of saying a kind word that might cheer up somewhat in a trying hour, that Jesus said to his disciples ere he left them, “It is expedient for you that I should go away.” There must be good reason for his saying these words, or he would never have said them. And the reason, too, you see, must be one which related rather to his disciples than to himself. He was not thinking of that bright and happy home that was waiting for him, and of that glory into which he could enter only by bidding his earthly followers for the while farewell. He was not thinking of all the advantages which might thus follow for himself. “It is expedient for *you*,” he says, “that I should go away.” No doubt, to look at it selfishly, it was better for Christ himself to go away. It would be a change for the better, indeed, when the homeless wanderer, rejected and despised, who had not where to lay his head, should stand on the right hand of God, the centre of heaven’s glory, the object of heaven’s praises ; but Jesus was not thinking of himself, or of what would be most agreeable to himself. He was thinking of his disciples, and he declared that it was expedient for them that he should go away. He was indeed their best and dearest friend ; they never could find such another ; and it must be some very strong reason indeed to make them believe that they would be as well or better without *him*. There must be

much indeed to gain by his going, to outweigh what would be gained by his staying. And the Saviour himself fixes upon a single reason. His departure, he said, was the condition of another's coming, who would more than make up for his loss. Precious indeed, then, must that other be! Think of it, my friends; try to comprehend it; he was to be a better companion in that present season, a better friend than Christ! It was not merely that the new friend would make up for the loss of the old one; situated as they then were, the disciples would gain by the exchange. "It is expedient for you," said the Redeemer, "that I go away;" that is, You will gain by my going,—it is not merely as well, it is better for you that I should go. "For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

We must all feel that although it is our duty and our privilege to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, and strength, and mind;" and although that pious affection ought to extend to each of three Persons in the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; still there is one of these Divine Persons whom we cannot choose but single out for special love. It is our Blessed Saviour who has done the most for us; it is only he who has suffered for us; it is the remembrance of him that must always most warm our heart; and it is his constant presence which will make the Christian's heaven. And if the question

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were absolutely, whether we loved more the Saviour or the Sanctifier, and so which of the two we should absolutely desire to have with us; I believe that every Christian would feel his whole being answer, "Christ all in all," "Jesus the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." And we should hardly be able to persuade ourselves that even the coming of the Blessed Comforter could make up for the absence of the Blessed Redeemer. Absolutely, this is so; but you see Christ's words are not uttered absolutely, but in a qualified sense. All that the Saviour declared in the text was, that for believers so situated as the disciples he was addressing, it was expedient and advantageous that the Comforter should be present with them, even at the price of his own departure. For you, it is as if he said,—for you who have to live in a world of work and warfare, a world of sorrow and temptation, a world which is not the heaven to be enjoyed, but the trial and training to be endured,—for you, so placed and so exercised, it is expedient that I should go away; for my presence with you holds away from you one whose society is, for beings placed as you are, even more important and more advantageous than my own. And it is not straining our Lord's words beyond their natural meaning, to say that they are spoken to the entire Christian Church on earth; that they make an assertion which holds good of the whole multitude of true believers; that they lay down the great principle, that for men

and women like us, with our work to do, our sorrows to bear, our cares to bear up under, our sinfulness to strive against, it is better, so long as we remain in this world, to have the Holy Spirit of God constantly though invisibly present with us, than it would be to have Christ himself, in visible presence, still remaining here. Oh! if it had been good for us surely he would never have left us! If it would really have conduced to our eternal well-being, then there still would be found on this earth a place, the centre of the Christian world, towards which, from all lands and climes, the streams of pilgrims would converge; and there we should even yet be able to behold the gracious face, and to hear the gentle voice, and to look on the beloved form of him who died to save us! We should even yet be able to touch the hem of his garment, to bring our troubles to his feet, to bring our children to his arms! But *that* is not to be; we must love him, while we see him not; we must mourn an absent Lord; we must wait till the fleshly vesture shall fall from around our spirits, before we shall see him as he is. And yet think not that the decree is made in severity; do not imagine that it is merely to deprive us of a privilege that we should dearly prize; it is for our own good that our Redeemer is unseen by us; it was the kindest consideration for our true welfare that dictated the law that looks so stern; it is far better, though it may be hard to think so, — it is

far better as it is ; “ it was expedient for us that Christ should go away ! ”

Yes, my friends, it was expedient that Christ should go away, because unless he went, the Comforter would not come ; and to the Christian Church, cast upon a world like this, the invisible Comforter would stand in even better stead than the visible Redeemer. But the thought naturally suggests itself, Why might the Church not have had both ? Surely it would have been best of all to have Jesus still with us, gracious as of old ; and the Blessed Spirit as well. Might not the Second Person in the Trinity and the Third have been both on earth together ? Now, my friends, we must just take Christ's word for it, that this cannot be. We cannot tell how and why it is ; but for some good reason, unknown to us, we cannot have both together. In this world, it is needful that we should do with one. The Saviour's words are perfectly explicit : “ If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you. ” And so, receiving this as a truth which cannot be questioned, let us consider for a little how it comes to be, that it is better for the Christian Church to have the Holy Spirit, than even to have the Saviour personally present. Can it be made out that it was better on the whole to submit to the Saviour's personal loss, if *that* was the condition upon which alone the Comforter could come ? We may not be able to make out all the reasons which were present to the Saviour's mind, when he thus exalted the Spirit's society above

even his own. Yet it would be pleasing if we could in so far understand the matter; and it is a very fit use of our reason, to employ it in seeking to discover grounds for that which we receive by faith.

It is but the merest sketch of two or three considerations which it is possible for me now to present to you.

For one thing, then, let us remember that the choice lay between Christ as he then was, a person, dwelling in a human body; and a Divine Spirit, capable of being universally present at the same time. Christ, dwelling in flesh, could be only in one place at a time; while the Comforter, unbound by fleshly trammels, could be in a thousand places, working on a million hearts, all at once. And I think you will see, that for the grand end of carrying on the government of a Church that is to overspread the world, and to include within itself men of every country and every tongue, it was better to have one Divine Being, equally present everywhere, working with equal energy everywhere; than even to have Christ himself dwelling in visible form in some favored spot, and by the very fact of his being visible there, making those disciples in distant countries who saw him not, feel as though they were so far overlooked, — as though they were in some sense placed at a disadvantage. Far better, surely, to be able to think, as we can gladly think now, that there is *no* disciple who is far away from his Saviour's presence; and far better, surely, to b'

able to think, as we can think now, that *wherever* two or three are assembled in Christ's name, he is there in the midst of them ; than even to be able to journey far away, till we reached the place of his visible presence ; and there, entering some noble pile, the mother church of Christendom, to join in a worship, simple and sublime, wherein the visible Christ himself took part. No, it is the fancy of Popery, but it is not the purpose of the Redeemer, to have one fixed, localized, visible centre of the Christian Church. It is better to have a Divine Agent, everywhere present, everywhere exercising an equal power, than to have a living Sovereign, who by the very fact of his being seen at one place, clothed in a human body, is precluded from exercising an equal influence anywhere else. But as it is, the Divine presence is equally diffused over the entire Christian world. No believer can fancy that he is overlooked, no believer can feel as though he were kept at a distance ; the empire of Christ, maintained on earth by the Holy Spirit, is able to afford equal and uniform blessings at all places and at all times. The Holy City has no preference above any corner of God's earth. We are no nearer Christ at Jerusalem than we are in Galloway or at Edinburgh. And if sacred places can even yet warm the Christian's heart ; if not without emotion we can even yet pace the narrow bounds of Gethsemane, or climb the slopes of Olivet, or muse where stood the accursed tree ; it is but the working of natural associations that

awakens the feeling ; it is not that Christ is nearer us here than here. And when you and I, my friends, call it to mind, how the cares and duties of life tie most of us to one little spot of this world ; when we think how vainly most of *us* might wish to make a weary pilgrimage of thousands of miles, even though that pilgrimage should bring us into the visible presence of our God ; shall we not be humbly thankful that *now* we have but to enter into our closet and shut the door, and we are as near our Saviour as we can be anywhere on earth ; shall we not be thankful for the presence here of a Divine Being, Sanctifier and Comforter, who can make our very soul his home ; and shall we not, as we think of all he can do in all places and all hearts at once, and remember that the price paid for his presence was the loss of a visible Saviour, whose visible presence would have blessed hundreds, but only tantalized hundreds of thousands, and who can still remain with us although unseen, — shall we not, as we reckon the gains and losses, agree, after all, with that Saviour's own declaration, that "it was expedient for us that he should go away" ?

So much, perhaps, we are justified in saying, before we have thought at all of the special nature and work of the Holy Spirit. Even thinking of him merely as a Divine Being, whom Christ had deputed to fill his place, it seems as if his power of universal, though invisible presence, made him even more useful to the

members of a Church scattered over all the world, than a bodily, visible Redeemer, limited by time and localized in space. But when we go a little farther, and think what are the peculiar functions of the Holy Spirit, — what kind of work it is especially his to do, — we shall see, I think, even more plainly, how fit it was that so long as the Christian Church is militant upon earth, he should take the place of the visible Redeemer. For what are the functions of the Holy Spirit? He is the Regenerator; he is the Sanctifier; he is the Comforter; he is the Prompter and Dictator of prayer. It is not for us to say how far such duties as these might be performed by other Persons of the Godhead; these are things into which we have no right to pry; but this we know, that it has pleased Divine wisdom to allot such work especially to the Blessed Spirit; and such work will be done, we dare not say better, but certainly more naturally, by him than by any other. Each Person in the Trinity has his own share in the great task of preparing man for heaven; and a certain work has been appointed to the Third Person, the Holy Spirit. Now, when you think of the several things which it is the Spirit's occupation to do, do you not see that this world is the place where they must be done? Do you not see that the Holy Spirit's work lies mainly with a suffering, struggling, sinful, tempted, imperfect Church? Do you not see, in short, a special fitness, a special relation, between the workings of the Holy

Spirit, and the condition of Christian people upon earth, till the day of judgment? Yes, placed and tried as we are, it is just the Holy Spirit we need; and so it is just the Holy Spirit that we get. It is in *this* world that his gracious work is to be done. We shall need him less, with reverence be it said, when we shall have entered upon the immediate presence of our God. For are we dead by nature, must we be quickened into newness of life, must we be regenerated? Then it is by the working of the Blessed Spirit that we are born again. And once new creatures in Christ Jesus, must we be sanctified day by day? Must we grow in grace, and become meet for heaven? Then it is by the working of the Blessed Spirit that we are sanctified. Christ's people are "chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." And are we pressed with cares and sorrows? Has it grown into a trite commonplace, a tale a hundred times repeated, that this is a world of sorrow, that this is a world of care? Then the Blessed Spirit is the Comforter, who can make the Saviour's people bear up patiently, and sometimes even cheerfully, amid all earthly troubles; and who, not forgetting his other great work of sanctifying, can turn all earthly care into heavenly discipline; can make the path of tribulation serve to quicken the steps, and to purify the spirit, for the upper kingdom of God! And is this a world wherein the believer must live and breathe by prayer? Is this

a world wherein prayer is the channel through which we can draw all needful blessing, day by day : daily bread, daily strength, daily guidance, daily pardon, daily comfort and hope? Then the Holy Spirit, Spirit of all grace and all supplication, is by us, to put upon our poor dumb lips the words of acceptable prayer, and to breathe into our cold hearts that fervency of devotion which shall make prayer effectual and prevailing, which shall make it at once profitable and delightful to pour out our hearts in prayer at our heavenly Father's knee. Oh for that blessed Spirit ! Oh that his gracious, soft, beautiful influences, coming in showers of blessing, were poured out in tenfold measure, refreshing, reviving, comforting, sanctifying, upon this dry and dusty world, upon this valley of dry bones, crumbling and cold ! Oh that his gracious influences, sanctifying, comforting, were poured out in tenfold measure, upon our own sorrowful and sinful hearts !

How beautifully, how admirably, surely you will say, the powers and influences of that Blessed Spirit, are adapted to all the exigencies of the collective Church and of the individual believer ! There is not a point in the soul's better life, there is not an emergency in the Christian's earthly pilgrimage, at which the Blessed Spirit does not come in, the very thing we need ! He begins, and he ends, all that the Christian counts of life. His gracious influences, indeed, were purchased at a dear price. He cost the early Church the pres-

ence of its Head and Lord. He would not come, — perhaps (who knows?) he *could not*, — till the last words of blessing had parted from the ascending Saviour's lips, — till Jesus, seen as he is, had quitted this world until that day when he shall come again. But yet, so precious was his presence with us, that the Redeemer's own words assure us that it was well worth all it cost; and in the prospect of his coming, and as the condition of his coming, our Blessed Saviour hesitates not to say of himself, "It is expedient for you that I go away!"

And so, for reasons such as these, it is better as it is. It is better to have the Holy Spirit, the Regenerator, Sanctifier, Comforter, Prompter of prayer, everywhere diffused over the Christian world, working on every Christian heart, than even to have the Saviour himself consecrating some spot on earth by his visible presence. It is better as it is, for this our life of discipline for immortality; and when our life of holiness and happiness begins, then we shall see him as he is, and grow like him through that beatific vision. We have not on earth, as yet, a fitting home for him, nor fitting friends for him; we are not yet pure enough in heart to behold with these eyes our God. His tempered glory beams upon us, his strong hand touches us gently, through the intervention of an unseen Spirit, who is truly and actually God. But still, if you are Christ's true disciples, — and to Christ's

true disciples this sermon is preached, — the Saviour, although “gone away,” is present in your hearts and in your dwellings still. He left us in visible form ; it was “expedient for us” that he should ; but even as he went, he said the hopeful words, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world !” And present in his spirit, in his house, in his ordinances, in his word, surely Jesus is with us still. Softened to our poor comprehension, mellowed like the setting sun to our weak sight, we have our Saviour with us yet, and we will never let him go ! He is far away, yet he is very near ; he “went away,” yet he never left us ; we cannot see him, yet he watches us night and day ; and the hour is on the wing, when he shall return in glory ; when the Comforter’s mission will be fulfilled ; and the Blessed Redeemer and his true disciples shall meet face to face, — meet, and never part !



VII.

SPIRITUAL INSENSIBILITY.

“ Who, being past feeling —. ” — EPH. iv. 19.

IN the wilds of North America, amid vast prairies and trackless woods, there lived, through many centuries, the race of the Red Men. Encroached upon from all sides, hemmed in by settlers from Europe, and defrauded of their ancient territories, that race of men has almost disappeared from the face of the earth. They were a race of hunters; unsettled, cruel, and deceitful; yet not without many features of character which gave them a peculiar interest. Their hospitality was inviolate; and the stern gravity of their manners deeply impressed the stranger. But there was one thing about them, in particular, which they cultivated with especial care, and which was matter of especial pride: this was their power of absolutely repressing the slightest outward exhibition of feeling. If they were glad, they never looked it; if the most awful misfortune befell them, it wrought not the least change on their iron features and their impassive demeanor. From his tree-rocked cradle to his bier, the

Indian brave was trained to bear all the extremes of good and evil, without making any sign of what he felt. If he met a friend, the dearest friend on earth; or if he was being tortured to death at the fiery stake; he preserved the same fixed, immovable aspect. And you could not please him better than by believing that he *was* as completely beyond all feeling as he *seemed*; for he set himself out as "the stoic of the woods," as "a man without a tear."

And, indeed, it is curious to think how much, in this respect, the extreme of civilization and the extreme of barbarism approach one another. Greek philosophy centuries ago, and modern refinement in its last polish of manner, alike recognize the mute Oneida's principle, that there is something manly, something fine, in the repression of human feeling. A Red Indian, a Grecian philosopher, an English gentleman, would all be pretty equally ashamed to have been seen to weep. Each would try to convey by his entire deportment the impression that he cared very little for anything. And there is no doubt at all, that it might be unworthy of the grown-up man, who has to battle with the world for his family's support, were his feelings as easily moved as in his childish days, or did his tears flow as readily as then. Even the gentleness and freshness of womanly feeling would hardly suit the rude wear of manhood's busy life. And it must be admitted, that the highest pitch of heroism to which man has ever attained, as well as

the vilest degree of guilt to which man has ever sunk, has been attained, has been sunk to, by the putting down of natural feeling. The soldier volunteering for the forlorn hope, must do *that* as truly as the desperate pirate who spreads his black flag to the winds. And yet St. Paul was right when he wrote these words of my text. When he was speaking of people who had become hopelessly and fearfully bad, who had broken through every restraint, who had flung off every obligation; he was quite right to mention, as something symptomatic of their case, that they were "past feeling." They were thoroughly hardened. You could make no impression upon them. They were beyond all sense of the foulness of the sin in which they were sunk; and it was vain to think to make them feel it. And *that* was the most hopeless thing about them. Say what you might, they did not care. You could not move them; you could not touch them; you could make nothing of them;—for they were "past feeling."

We all understand, then, that there is a certain pitch of wickedness at which moral insensibility comes on; and when *that* comes on, the case becomes almost hopeless. There is little prospect of repentance or reformation then. No matter how bad any poor sinner has been, there is still some hope so long as you can get him to feel. If when you speak kindly to the poor outcast, and point out to him the shame and sinfulness of his life, and remind him of his better days and of

the home of his youth, and ask him what his father and mother would have felt, if they had lived to see him what he is, and tell him how Christ is ready to receive back even the chief of repenting sinners ; if the poor outcast is touched by such thoughts as these, then there is still hope for him ; there may be joy in the presence of the angels of God over that poor outcast yet. But if when the Christian minister presses such thoughts upon some unhappy being whom he has found in the course of his duty, they are all listened to with a reckless unconcern, with a total apathy ; if the poor wretch shows that but for some miraculous interposition of God's irresistible grace, you might as well speak to a stone ; if no tear flows, if no relenting is stirred at the heart ; if your reception be just one of perfect indifference ; then the Christian minister's heart sinks within him. Then he feels that he can do nothing, — nothing, at least, but pray for an influence that is beyond all human power. Then, indeed, it seems as if the poor sinner is past hope, — because he is “past feeling !”

Yes, brethren, St. Paul was right. It is one of the last and worst symptoms of the soul's condition, when feeling is gone. You know that it is sometimes so also with the body. Sometimes when disease has run a certain length, there is nothing which looks so ill as an entire cessation of pain. For that may indicate that mortification has begun, and so that all hope is at an end. So with spiritual insensibility ; for *that* is

arrived at by most men only after a long continuance in iniquity ; and *that* is an indication which gives sad ground for fearing that the Holy Spirit, without whom we can never feel anything as we ought, has ceased to strive with that hardened soul, — has left that obdurate heart alone. O brethren, let us have sinfulness, however great, so there be with it the sensibility of life ; rather than outward decency and propriety of conduct, and with them the insensibility of death. There is more hope of repentance, more hope of final salvation, for the very murderer, shuddering in the condemned cell, and wakened up to an awful, overwhelming sense of the black transgressions of his life, than for the decent respectable man, who, without ever heartily believing in Jesus, has, year by year, never missed a Sunday from church, nor a sacrament from the communion-table ; and who has thus grown so thoroughly familiar with religious truths, that the mention of them makes no more impression upon him than a wave makes upon a rock. The guilty criminal is now, at least, brought to a state of intense fear, of intense alarm and concern about his soul ; and God only knows what good may come out of *that*. But, oh ! what movement can come of pure stagnation ! What can you look for but *doing nothing*, from the man who has arrived at *feeling nothing* !

But while thus we remember that to have become “ past feeling ” is, morally and spiritually, a very hopeless thing ; and, very generally, a thing which is not

reached but slowly and gradually ; let us not, therefore, imagine that our text describes a state of matters which can only be found among the most degraded and abandoned of the race. I believe, on the contrary, that our text names a spiritual condition which is too common a condition ; a condition to which we have all a strong tendency ; a spiritual condition which we must all daily be striving and praying against. We all run a great risk of becoming so familiar with spiritual truths, as that we shall understand them and believe them without feeling them ; without really feeling what their meaning is, and without that degree of emotion being excited by them that ought to be excited. I am sure that even the very best Christians among us must often be surprised to find how coolly, how indifferently, they can listen to truths so awful, that, when we think of it, it seems almost impossible that men should ever remember them but with the hushed heart and the silent earnest prayer. That God is ever by us, and ever watching us ; that death and the grave are before us all, we cannot say how near ; that beyond the grave there awaits us a great eternity, in which there are but the two alternatives, heaven and perdition ; that Jesus died to save us from hell, to raise us to heaven ; and that we are invited and entreated to believe on him, and live forever ; that the few years of our earthly pilgrimage are to decide the momentous question of our eternal state ; — O brethren, do you not wonder to find that you can

think of all these things, and believe them all, and yet *feel* so little? And if it be true, that even the converted man, in whom what we may call the organs of spiritual perception have been quickened from their native paralysis, and the capacity of spiritual emotion in some good measure developed, by the working of Divine grace, has to wonder and lament that he believes so much, but feels it so little; we need hardly be surprised to find that in the case of most unconverted men, living in a Christian country, and probably frequenting a Christian church, there is a perfect numbness of soul; as regards spiritual things, they are, in the full sense of the words, “past feeling!” They know already all that the Christian minister can say to them; they believe it all; it has been presented to them a hundred times in all conceivable forms, and pressed upon them by all conceivable arguments and considerations; but it produces no impression; you might as well speak to the wild winds; they never feel what you say to be real,—real in the sense in which trees and fields, home and children, friends and money, are real. You may remember what a faithful and zealous minister tells us, of a conversation which he had with an aged man in his parish, a respectable, decent man, who bore an unstained character, who never was absent from church or sacrament. That zealous minister, in his parochial visitation, went to that respectable man’s house, and there, addressing him and his family, he told simply of the salvation that is in Christ,

and urged those who listened to a hearty acceptance of it. The minister finished what he had to say, and when he left the house his friend accompanied him ; and when they were alone together, said something like this : “ Spend your time and strength upon *the young* ; labor to bring *them* to Jesus ; it is too late for such as me. I know,” he said, “ that I have never been a Christian. I fully believe that when I die I shall go down to perdition ; but somehow *I do not care*. I know perfectly all you can say ; but I feel it no more than a stone.” And that man, we are told, died with the like words on his lips. He had lost the spring-time of his life ; he had missed the tide in his affairs that might have borne him to heaven ; his heart had, under the deadening influence of a present world, grown hard and unimpressionable ; and saving only God’s irresistible Spirit, there was no use in any one speaking of religious things to such as him. Oh, past feeling ! Past feeling ! Not past it in the mere sentimental sense in which the poet tells us that “ it is the one great woe of life to feel all feeling die ; ” not past it in that mere sentimental sense in which youth has a freshness of feeling and heart which tames down, which passes away with advancing years ; not past it merely in that sense in which as we grow older we grow less susceptible, less capable of all emotion ; not past it merely in the sense, that when the hair grows gray, and the pulse turns slower, the tear flows less readily at the gospel story, and even at the table of commu-

nion we miss somewhat of the warmth of heart and the vividness of thought which we felt in earlier days ; but “ past feeling ” in that saddest sense, that religious words fall with little meaning on the ear, and with no impression at all upon the heart ; “ past feeling ” in that saddest sense, that now to all spiritual truths, to all expostulation and all entreaty, to God’s abounding mercy, to Christ’s blessed sacrifice, to the hopes of heaven and the fears of perdition, the understanding may indeed yield a torpid, listless assent ; but the heart is stone !

Now, my friends, there is no doubt at all, that in the nature of things, by the very make of our being, we have to lament that we are far less impressed and affected by spiritual truths than we ought to be. We know them ; we understand them ; we believe them ; but somehow we do not realize them ; we do not, in short, *feel* them. And till we have in some degree “ passed from death to life,” — from death, with its torpor and insensibility, to life, with its keen senses and its quick perception, — we never can rightly feel spiritual things in their overwhelming reality and importance. And perhaps, indeed, so long as our souls are clogged by these mortal bodies, the true force and meaning of those grand realities which are discerned by faith and not by sight will never be felt by us as they ought. Oh, there would be no wicked men, if people realized what is meant by heaven and hell ; there would be no worldly men, if people realized

what is meant by time and eternity ; there would be no heart cold to the gracious invitations of the Blessed Redeemer, if people realized to their hearts how kind and merciful and forbearing and gracious HE was and is ; and realized to their hearts that in that gentle, sympathizing, loving Being, we see the visible image of the invisible God ! But true as all this is ; true as it is that at no period in our life, not even when the heart is softest and the head least sophisticated, do we naturally feel spiritual things as they ought to be felt ; still it is true no less, that as we grow hardened through the wear of life, we must, apart from Divine grace, grow less and less impressible by them. Even in earliest youth we do not feel divine things as we ought ; but in the common course of things, as we grow older, we shall always feel them less ; because as we grow older, all feeling becomes less easily awakened, religious feeling and natural feeling alike. We grow so familiar with divine things, that they cease to strike us as they might strike a stranger. We know so thoroughly well all that the preacher can say to us, that his words fall upon our ear with the worn-out interest of a twenty-times repeated tale. What can we hear when we go to church that we do not know already ? What argument can at this time of day be addressed to us, with which we have not been many times already plied ? Oh for a return of the days when we first believed in Christ ! Oh for a revival of the warm, fresh feelings of communion Sabbaths

past and gone ! Oh for a return of those early days when the tears flowed at gospel story ; when, with the warm, touched heart, we traced the life of the Man of Sorrows from the manger to the grave, and listened to his comfortable words, and watched his deeds of mercy, and felt our souls burn within us at the recollection that all he did and all he suffered was done and suffered for us, and for such as we are ! Oh for a revival of those better days, before years and care and hard experience had withered up the heart, and frozen the founts of feeling !

But, my brethren, while we never forget that in the case of even a true Christian, it is a sad thing when, as years go on, his religion appears to be always growing more a thing of the head, and less a thing of the heart ; and while we are well assured that no one will lament *that* more than the true Christian himself ; let us remember that such a train of thought must not be pushed too far. It would be very wrong if the aged believer were to fancy that because his religious feelings are growing less keen, less easily excited, than in former years, he must therefore conclude that he is backsliding from his God, and leaving his first love. He takes his place, shall we say, at the table of high communion ; he receives into his hands those simple elements which mean so much ; but he grieves as he misses something of that warm feeling which he remembers used to come over him in days gone by ; and perhaps he makes himself unhappy by trying to

awaken feeling which no longer comes spontaneous, and which, if it do not come spontaneous, will not come at all. He is causing for himself needless sorrow when he so acts and thinks. It is just that he has grown older, and so less capable of all emotion; but his choice of Christ may be just as firm, and his religious convictions as deep as ever. Religion in the soul has to do with both the head and the heart; it would be quite as false to represent it as entirely a thing of sentiment, as to make it entirely a matter of principle and resolution. We know that Christianity is such in its essential nature as to suit all sorts of men, those in whom the intellectual faculties predominate, no less than those in whom the emotional. True and vital religion is a plant which will grow in either soil; either soil may be good, and we cannot say which is best; and it may be that the calm, thoughtful mood, in which the old man covers his face, as he bends over the white cloth, befits as well our calm feast of remembrance, as do the young believer's tears. It seems to me as if some good divines go wrong, when they lead communicants at a sacrament time to fancy that feeling is the test and touchstone of worthy receiving; and that according as *that* is present or absent, the partaker of that consecrated bread and wine has made a worthy or an unworthy approach to the Lord's table. No doubt, warm emotion at such a time is much to be desired; no doubt we cannot but have a certain disappointment if it

be lacking; but after all, it is of the nature of a luxury rather than of a necessary; and if it should please God to deny it to us, he may still be feeding us with the bread of life, though it may taste to us less sweet and refreshing than we have known it do. If, as years go on, the time comes, when even under the roof-tree of a long-parted father's house, even standing by his young sister's grave, the man of no more than middle age wonders that he feels so little where once he felt so much, we need not wonder if the same law extends to even the holiest emotion. And though we may think of it with sorrow, we need not necessarily think of it with remorse, if we have grown in some degree "past feeling."

But while it would not have been right, had I failed to mark this great exception to the general principle which seems to be implied in the text, it would be wrong, did I fail to add, that it is only to such as have really some good ground for hoping that they have believed in Christ, that all this should be any ground of comfort. If a man is truly a Christian, then the fact, that as time goes on, religious truths come to affect him less, and less than he could wish, may be explained by these two laws of mind: that when things grow quite familiar, they strike us less, and cannot but strike us less, than when they are new and strange; and also, that as we grow older, we grow, by the make of our being, less susceptible of the warm, lively feelings of childhood and of youth.

But if a man be not a believer; and if, when he listens to the declaration of the doctrines of the Cross, he understands them but does not feel them; if he knows thoroughly well that whosoever does not betake himself to the great atonement of Christ must perish eternally; and if he knows too that he himself has never gone to Christ, and never prepared to die; and if, with all this, he *does not care*; ah, *then* there is a sad and a fearful explanation of how he comes to be so! Ah, there is a sad and a fearful reason for all this insensibility! Is there not some reason at least to fear that this dead calm, this utter heedlessness, is because God's Spirit has let that man alone, has given him up, and is striving with him no more? Is there not something awful and strange, something beyond the mere spiritual insensibility of nature, in the calm recklessness, the cool apathetic indifference, of the man who knows perfectly that there is but a step between him and death, and that to him death means perdition: and yet who lives on quite quietly and comfortably, attending to his business, enjoying his home comforts, improving his estate — and *does not care!* Ah, has God indeed given him up? Is the black brand already, if we could but see it, on that composed and polite face! How else can we understand how he can come regularly, perhaps, to church; and listen to doctrines that should save, that should at the very least alarm him; and believe them all; and go away home and never mind! Surely there seems to be no

other way in which it is possible to explain a state of things which exists in too many cases, — which is a sadly common one, — than by supposing that the decree has gone forth which we know went forth concerning ancient Ephraim: “He is joined to his idols, let him alone!” Surely you would say, that man is not sane! Surely he is under some fatal, mysterious influence, that paralyzes the soul’s perceptions, and that deadens its feelings! And so he is, my friends. So are all of you, who weekly listen to the preached gospel, yet never seriously go to Christ, and never earnestly seek to make your peace with God. A faithfully preached gospel will act upon the soul in one of two perfectly opposite ways. It will either save, or it will harden. And if it do not save, it is sure to harden. If you listen to the declaration of the message of mercy, — if you come to know all about it, — if you grow familiar with all the arguments which the Christian minister can employ to impress it upon your heart, — and yet if after all you do not become a believer, — then if all this has gone on for years, it is less likely that the arrow of conviction will ever reach your obdurate, your hardened heart, than if you were a poor heathen in some darkened land that never heard of Jesus, and where, if that blessed name ever should be heard, it will come with the freshness of a surprise. The gospel has hardened *you!* The Saviour has knocked at the door so long, while you never opened it, that now you have

grown familiar with the sound, and it is never noticed by your listless ear. We feel deeply, and right that we should, for the missionary laboring in distant lands, and seeking to convey the elements of the knowledge of Christ to the narrow understanding of the untutored savage; but narrow as is that untutored being's understanding, still he has a heart capable of deep feeling, and on his ear the glad tidings fall fresh and new. And perhaps the deeper sympathy is due, where we should hardly think of giving it, — due to the earnest minister of some beautiful country parish, whose congregation has listened to the gospel message so long, that many among it are thoroughly hardened; that all who are not converted are hopelessly hardened; and have been so often roused to inefficacious convictions, to passing concern that ended in nothing, that now you need speak to them no more, — that now they are “past feeling.”

Then, brethren, let it be your earnest prayer and endeavor at once to go to him who came to seek and save the lost. There is deep philosophy, there is accurate knowledge of human nature, in the inspired warning, “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” For, speaking humanly, every day that repentance is put off, is making repentance more difficult. “*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation.” With every succeeding day, your hearts are growing harder; you are becoming less capable of receiving any deep impression, or of making any vital

change. You are leaving behind you, day by day, the more impressible season of your life. And if you live on, you are advancing to years in which the heart will always be more difficult to touch; and in which the care of religion, neglected so long, may become more than difficult, — may become impossible. The Holy Spirit, without whom you can do nothing, may be finally grieved away. You may reach at last that hopeless condition, that you shall know quite well that your soul is lost; and yet only wish to think of something else, and only feel that you do not care. You may live to know, that, as regards religion, you are “past feeling,” and so past hope. It must be sad, indeed, to see the hardened criminal listen to the sentence of death, which the judge who utters it can scarcely pronounce, with utter insensibility; but all men think of *him* as of some monstrous exception to the common nature of humanity. And surely it is sadder by far to see a human being, a rational man, going onwards to a doom which Jesus wept to think of, which Jesus died to save from, — careless, heedless, feelingless as a stone. And yet there are some in every congregation who are doing all *that!* Oh, God have mercy on such, if there are any here! You have lived too long, my friends. You have outlived “the day of your visitation.” What can we do but pray that the Divine Spirit may even yet speak to you, in sentences so telling, that they shall touch and penetrate even the obdurate heart, that, to human power, is “past feeling!”



VIII.

LIGHT AT EVENING.

‘But it shall come to pass, that at evening-time it shall be light.’

ZECHARIAH xiv. 7.

IT is when the day is drawing to its close, that most men have their hour of leisure. The season of toil is past, the task is laid apart, the strain upon bone and sinew is relaxed; and if it be the winter-time, we gather around the fire to enjoy the feeling of repose; and if it be the summer days that are passing over us, we wander forth in the declining light, and mark how nature sinks to slumber. We know, most of us, how nature looks at evening, better than we know how she seems in the busier hours of the day; we are too much occupied during them to have time for watching the aspect of trees and fields, the form of clouds and the azure of the sky. But in our evening leisure we have many a time had the opportunity of marking the sun’s gradual withdrawal, the shadows as they darkened upon the landscape, the mist stealing upward from the river, and its murmur deepening upon the ear, the leaves so motionless, the silent fields, the universal hush and quiet. But after all, if we were asked what

it is that makes the evening-time, — even the evening-time of summer, — we have no difficulty in singling out from the many features which we have remarked so often, that which is the essence of the evening, and the cause of them all. It is the gradual withdrawal of the light. It is the lessening light, after all, that makes the evening-time. It is because of *that* that the daisies close, and the birds fly to their nests, and this hush comes over nature. And it is just because evening is the time when, in the ordinary course of things, the light is going and the darkness is coming, that there is anything remarkable in the text which you have read. “At the evening-time there shall be light;” that is, light shall come at a period when it is not natural, when in the common course of things it is not looked for. It would be no surprise that light should come at noonday. We expect it then. It is just what we are accustomed to see. Hundreds and thousands of times we know that the sun has risen, and steadily advanced to his meridian splendor; and all this, we think, is only the usual thing. But if, when the twilight shadows were falling deeper and deeper, when the distant woods seemed in a slumberous trance, and the distant hills showed purple against the soft crimson, with a sudden burst the noonday light were to spread around, — that would be a surprise. It would be indeed only a thing which we are accustomed to see, but it would be coming at a time when we are not accustomed to see it. Yet

nothing less than this is signified in that remarkable promise, given first to the Church of God and then to individual believers, that in their experience, in their day, "at the evening-time it shall be light."

That is, to state the promise in the form of a general principle, great and signal blessing shall come just when it is least expected. Evening, usually the season of increasing and encroaching darkness, is to be the season of special light. And this would be a noteworthy thing, if it happened at the close of the very brightest day. But it appears, from the words which precede the text, that this special light is promised at the end of a day which should be somewhat overcast and dreary. "It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark; but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night; but it shall come to pass, that at evening-time it shall be light." The day, you perceive, was not to be one of unmingled serenity, nor yet of unrelieved gloominess; there should be, perhaps, succession of light and shadow, and for great part of it, it might be, a subdued and sober gray; but however that might be, light should come upon the darkened way at last. And in all this, we have the picture set before us, of the ordinary Christian's ordinary life, and likewise of the history of the collective Church of God. As regards our daily life, my believing friends, how true it is that "the light is not clear, nor dark;" childhood looks sunshiny when we

cast back our glance upon it ; and youth, too, has its bright blinks of light-heartedness and freedom from care ; but as years go on, life turns but a matter-of-fact and commonplace thing ; not much of the old gayety is left, not much of the elastic spring of spirit but is pressed out by the weary load of constant care and yet it would be unjust to say that, except in exceptional seasons of deep sorrow, life is all gloom there is usually something to enjoy, as well as something to bear ; there is an equable sobriety, a sort of average endurableness, about this “pleasing, anxious being ;” the light is “not clear, nor dark.” And so, too, as regards our spiritual life. It is with *that* just very much as it is with our outward lot. There are times, indeed, when we seem to be upon the mountain’s summit, and to feel the light of our heavenly Father’s face beaming upon us without a cloud between, and to see the promised land almost as it were under our feet ; perhaps on a Communion Sabbath, perhaps in a lonely walk, perhaps in an hour of solitary prayer ; but oh, how fast these glimpses of sunshine leave us, and we may be thankful if it is no worse with us than just that the light is “not clear, nor dark ;” for sometimes there come days of spiritual desertion and depression, in which it seems to us as if the Sun of Righteousness would never shine upon us more. It should seem as if God judged that neither in providence nor in grace would it be good for us to have either unvarying gladness or unvarying

gloom ; they shall come to us in succession ; — or, if we are to have anything for a continuance, it shall be a sobered twilight, “ not clear, nor dark.” And so, too, in the history of God’s Church on earth ; it is but seldom it has known great extremity, whether of good or ill ; there is for the most part mercy for which to be thankful, as well as judgment to which to bow. But however heavily the day might drag through, with however little of joyous light throughout its course, it was quite certain how it should close, so only it were a Christian day. There might be no great light where it might have been looked for ; but *that* should be compensated by abundant light where men might have expected none. At the evening-time, if never before, — at the evening-time, there should be an end of that subdued twilight. *Then*, there should be light at last. When the Christian’s little day has drawn to its close, when the Christian’s earthly sun has set, then there should be to him the beginning of a day whose sun shall never go down, and whose brightness shall be lessened by no intrusion of the dark. Then a day shall break in which there shall be no anxiety, no care, no sorrow, no hiding of God’s face, no struggle with temptation, no fall into sin ; not one moment’s darkness to mingle with that unvaried day. And so, too, with the Church of the living God, as with the separate members of it. When the world’s day is closing in, when Time’s evening is hastening on, then a light will be dawning upon

the Church, purer and better a million times than that which led her forth from the ages which we call dark. At the evening-time there shall be light; and as for the season which shall follow the evening-time, we know that it shall find the triumphant Church in that country to which darkness can never come; because concerning that country, God's word assures us, that "there shall be no night there!"

We understand the text, then, first, in its most general and extensive meaning, as signifying that, in God's dealing with his children, it very often happens that signal blessing and deliverance come just when they are needed most, but expected least. "Man's extremity," we are sometimes told, "is God's opportunity;" it is when times are at the worst that they begin to mend. I purpose to show the prevalence of this law in the Almighty's treatment of believers individually; a thought upon days past will suffice to remind us how often the case has proved so as regards the collective Church. When was it that the first great promise was given, that contained the germ of so many more, "exceeding great and precious," but in the hour of that first sin which brought in so much death and woe? Surely it was in as dark a season as ever over-clouded this world, that the first beams of the Sun of Righteousness trembled upon the gloomy horizon. When and where was it that Abraham was called out to be the Father of the Faithful, but in a country and an age of the most degraded idol-wor-

ship? When did deliverance come to God's oppressed people in the land of Egypt, but when their slavery had grown altogether intolerable, — when the heavy task was doubled, and the first-born doomed to die? When did the Blessed Redeemer himself come, but in the world's darkest day? He, the "true light," shone upon our race just when "darkness had covered the earth, and thick darkness the people." And, not to multiply instances, was it not when, through centuries of ignorance and degeneracy, the better light of the glorious gospel was all but entirely eclipsed and hidden from men's eyes by falsehood and superstition, that men were raised up to clear away the accumulated rubbish of the Papacy, and set out gospel-doctrines in their saving simplicity again? The least acquaintance with the history of the world will bring before us a host of instances in which the oppressed and persecuted, sometimes the cold and apathetic, Church of God found better days dawn when they were least looked for, and so found the fulfilment of the promise, that "at the evening-time there should be light."

And now, when we turn to think of individual Christians, I might well trust the illustration of my text to the memory and the heart of each of you, — of those among you, I mean, who are able humbly to trust that you have given your souls to his keeping, who is able to preserve what is committed to him till the great day of account. Ah, no sermon that I could

write will go home to the aged Christian's heart, like that sermon which is gently breathed to him from his own life's story. You do not need to tell *him* that in the experience of Christ's people, at the evening-time there often comes light; for he has found it so. He has learned it by experience. Many a time, through the years of his life, it has seemed as though darkness were settling down upon his path and his home; but when things were almost at the blackest, of a sudden his heavenly Father sent unlooked-for deliverance; the perplexity was unravelled, the cloud was dispersed, the falling stroke was withheld, the loss was compensated a hundred-fold, the bereavement was blessed and sanctified; the light came softly, beautifully, upon the benighted way. Yes, the humble Christian's life is the best sermon upon this text; and his own memory the best preacher. Each Christian has had his own dark seasons, to which God sent his own light; and these times of needfulness and of deliverance are known, perhaps, to no one but himself, — not even, it may be, to his very dearest. There is an inner world of thought and feeling in which each of us lives, wherein we are profoundly alone; and many a light and shadow may sweep over that little world, many a twilight gloominess may come, and many a heaven-sent light may scatter it, of which none save ourselves will ever know. And what reflecting person but must look with interest upon some thoughtful, aged man, as he thinks what an unread volume there is within that

aged man's heart, in the remembrance of his own history, and in his reflections upon its changes and events? Yet, though I never can know with what peculiar force my text may present itself to each of you, my Christian friends, or from what passages in your own life you may draw your most impressive illustrations of my text; still, let us in that general way in which alone it is possible to discourse on a subject like this, in discoursing upon which the preacher is but drawing a bow at a venture, think of several occasions in the life of each of us, on which light has come, or may yet come, at evening-time.

And first, my Christian friends, has it been in your experience, that you did not feel the light of God's reconciled countenance lifted upon you, but after a dark eventide of anxiety and fear? We know that in the common course of God's grace, the soul must be awakened from worldliness and carelessness by fear; we must be convinced of our sin and misery by nature by God's Holy Spirit, before we feel our need of a Saviour, and surrender our helpless, sinful souls to him by simple faith. How many a one has never known what it was to find peace and rest in Jesus, till he had passed through a fiery trial; till he had been made to feel his sins a burden that was like to drive him to utter despair! How many a one can tell that the very darkest days of his life were the days of his spiritual awakening; that the terrors of the law laid their grasp upon him; that he felt himself a sinner

above all other men ; and that not till after a long and gloomy evening, say rather night, the happy light visited his soul ! Not that in every case it is so. Not but that some happy souls may have been regenerated from their very birth, and, growing up under the pious influences of a Christian home, may have chosen Jesus as their portion from the earliest dawn of intelligence, and thus may have needed no conversion ; for conversion means turning into another way and wherefore should they do *that* who, trained up in the way they should go, are advancing in the heavenward path already ? But though such cases are conceivable, we believe that they are very rare ; that no holy training, however constant and kindly, can prevent the children of the most pious parents from being at least thoughtless and careless as to their soul's salvation ; and who that has ever been aroused to a conviction of guilt and danger, but knows that *that* is a sin which sits heavy and crushing as any, upon the quickened soul ? Yes, most men need conversion ; and conversion is, for the most part, a dark and miserable time. But that is a darkness which is followed by a gracious light. The more heavily the burden of sin is felt to press upon the soul, the more heartily will the soul turn to him who alone can take it away. The deeper the darkness, the pleasanter the following light. It seemed to you, perhaps, that your sins were too great to be forgiven ; that you had broken your purposes of amendment so often, and trifled with the

gospel invitations so long, that now there was no hope for you, — that God's Spirit was quite grieved away. But at last you were brought to feel how free is the offer of salvation, how willing God is to receive the repenting sinner, how sure is that precious sheet-anchor of the despairing soul, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out;" you were enabled with all your heart and mind to trust yourself to your Saviour; and then the gloom was scattered, and "at the evening-time there was light."

Let me further mention to you, as another occasion on which the gracious promise in the text has often proved true to the Christian, the season of great trial, — of losses, disappointments, bereavements. Every one knows that these are indeed dark seasons in our life; and the Christian knows that it has often happened that wonderful support and strong consolation have often been vouchsafed to him as he was passing through them, — that amid the dreary evening there stole in a strange, unearthly light. And I am not thinking now of those times when the darkness was, so to speak, entirely dissipated, — when the threatened trial was prevented from coming at all; when the hope, though long deferred, met with its fulfilment at last, when the dear one whose loss you dreaded was wonderfully restored and spared to you. I desire you to think of those sad seasons when sorrow did its very worst; when the cherished plan was entirely frustrated, when the possession you so prized was

wrecked, and the friend you so loved died. Even then, have you not sometimes found it so, that a heavenly light has stolen into the bleeding heart, into the darkened chamber, into the house of death? No doubt, indeed, it was a sore trial when it pleased God to shut against you the way to that earthly eminence, honor, usefulness, on which you had set your heart; no doubt it was a miserable time when you were forced to turn your back upon the scenes and the friends you loved best in this world, and, pressed by the hard exigencies of life, to go far away; no doubt, it was a time not even yet to be remembered but with some return of the old aching desolation, when death made the first break in the family circle, and you saw the face that used to brighten at your presence, heedless, fixed, and cold. These were indeed the dark periods of your life; but still the darkness was not quite unrelieved. Did you not feel, with something like surprise, that now the worst had come, you were far less crushed down by it than you had expected; that whatever was taken from you, you still had much left to be thankful for; that as for the disappointment, — well, perhaps things were better as they were; that as for the bereavement, bitter as that was, you could bear it when you remembered how far happier it was to be a pure and blessed spirit in the perfect safety and peace above, than to be perhaps a poor sufferer in this evil world of sin and peril and sorrow and risk of endless loss; and when you remembered, too,

that the same happy world to which your lost friend had gone before you was inviting you no less to enter upon its endless rest and quiet and union. And so, at the evening-time there came light; quietly, meekly, humbly, you set yourself to the duties that remained to you; you would do your task, you thought, though with a breaking heart; you would try to feel kindly towards all around you, though you never could care for any as for those who were no longer here; resignation and content might come, you thought, but cheerfulness and light-heartedness you did not look for; till, as the days and weeks crept on, you felt the revival of the old interest in life; you ceased to feel it a mournful contrast between the desolate feeling within, and the smiling face of the summer world; you felt the strength growing equal to the day, the strong consolation matching the need for it; the cloud was there yet, but the sunshine was breaking through; it was still the twilight, but *there*, in the distant horizon, you could see the dawn of brighter days; you had found, in a word, the fulfilment of God's blessed promise, that grace and strength and consolation should come when they were most needed but least expected; that "at the evening-time there shall be light!"

Thus, then, my friends, we have thought of several times in the progress of the Christian's life, at which he may find, through God's grace, some fulfilment of this precious promise; and now, in the last place, let

us think of one time more, at which the evening may be darker, at which the evening will deepen into night, but at which the light that comes shall be perfect and never-setting. It is to that period, doubtless, that the text, when applied to individual Christians, makes especial reference; the evening-time of life, when the dark valley of the shadow of death must be trodden. The day of life, shall we think, is drawing to its close. It has been, on the whole, a sober day, with "the light not clear, nor dark;" there has been neither unvarying sunshine, nor unvarying gloom; there have been, no doubt, some great trials in it, and a host of little, insect cares, which do no worse than fret and annoy; it has seemed, perhaps, a dull and weary thing, yet we have grown to like even its dulness and commonness; it has had within it times of special elevation, love to the Redeemer, trust in God; and it has had, too, its seasons of backsliding, of coldness and worldliness, of lack of interest in spiritual engagements, of despondency, and almost of despair. For the day of grace goes by just such rules as the day of providence; and, save a few blessed and memorable believers, who have seemed to breathe the air of heaven even while they lived on earth, it is the general experience of even the earnest believer, that his inward feeling, like his outward lot, is a checkered one, is in the main a sobered one,—is shone upon by a light which is "not clear, nor dark." But the evening of the long day is drawing on at length; the

day that dawned with the sunny cheerfulness of infancy and childhood, that went on amid the growing cares of maturity, that sloped westerly amid the enfeebled powers and the flagging hopes of age ; and as the evening advances, as the hours go on in which the light that had lasted through the day might naturally grow less, — strange how it oftentimes is that *that* unwearied light does but beam brighter and clearer ! It was but a cloudy day ; but the Sun of Righteousness has broken through the clouds ; the flaming west is all purple and gold ; it is the evening-time, and oh, how fair its light ! It has sometimes been as in that beautiful story, that the last steps before the dark river was reached lay through the land Beulah ; — that already the brightness of the Golden City shone from afar upon the believer's face, and his sharpened ear could almost catch the fall of its ceaseless songs. I do not say that such a thing is common ; all I say is that such a thing has been ; and wherefore should it not be again with you or me ? I shall not pretend to describe this happy state in my own words ; I shall tell you about it in the words of one who spoke from his own experience, and who, shortly before he died, wrote as thus : — “ Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I might date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which I have been for some weeks a happy inhabitant. The Celestial City is full in my view. Its glories have been upon me, its breezes fan me, its odors are wafted to me, its sounds strike

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upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears but as an insignificant rill, that may be crossed at a single step, whenever God shall give permission. The Sun of Righteousness has been gradually drawing nearer and nearer, appearing larger and brighter as he approached, and now he fills the whole hemisphere; pouring forth a flood of glory, in which I seem to float like an insect in the beams of the sun; exulting, yet almost trembling, while I gaze on this excessive brightness, and wondering with unutterable wonder why God should deign thus to shine upon a sinful worm." There, my hearers, are words dictated by experience; *that* is what was actually written by a dying man. And, oh, what need I add to it, to make you feel how glorious a sermon it is upon the blessed promise, that "at the evening-time there shall be light!"

But then you will say to me, and say it truly, that it is not always so. Not only is it not the case that all who have "died the death of the righteous" have thus tranquilly, fearlessly, hopefully, triumphantly passed away, — but has not such a thing been known, as that one who was a true Christian, if true Christian ever breathed, died absolutely in despair? Oh, who can forget the story of that sweet and gentle poet, who would take nothing to himself at the last of the comfort his words have given to others; whose latest lines sadly tell us how his soul was whelmed in

deeper than Atlantic depths ; who regarded himself as doomed to everlasting perdition ; and who shuddered at the very mention of the name of that Blessed Redeemer who was looking down in kindness upon his wayward child ! But then, let me remind you, that fine as was that poet's mind, it was a mind unhinged and deranged ; and however the Holy Spirit works upon the renewed soul, he no more sets himself to cure the hereditary diseases of the mind than those of the body. Religion does not alter temperament : it leaves the cheerful man cheerful ; it leaves the anxious, desponding man still prone to look at the future through the haze of anxiety and fear. It no more pretends to cure that hereditary taint, that overshadowing gloom, that all his life had its grasp of Cowper's mind, than it pretends to weed out the family consumption or apoplexy from the Christian's body ; and never let us forget, that constitutional temperament, and the depressing influences of many forms of disease, may make dark and distressful the dying bed of the very best believer. Perhaps, even with true Christians, the death is as the life was ; the evening is what the day was, " not clear, nor dark," as the general rule. There are blessed hopes, but there are also distressing fears. And shall we say, then, that this text does not speak truth ? No, far from that. The light *does* come ; and it comes at evening ; but evening is the close of day ; and the light may perhaps not beam forth until day has entirely closed.

Not upon this side of time may the blessed promise find its fulfilment. The foot may be dipped in the chill, dark river, before the heavenly light has shone upon the face. The eye may be blind to dearest faces and forms, ere the Sun of Righteousness dawns ; as in the natural world, the darkest, coldest hour is that before the daybreak. The tongue may never be able to tell surviving loved ones, how the shadows fled away when the dark valley was past, till they have passed through that darkness too. Yes, to the believer, true as that God liveth, "at the evening-time there *shall* be light ;" if not in this world, then in a better ! Bowing his head to pass under the dark portal, the believer lifts it up on the other side, in the presence and the light of God. It is but a single step from the darkness of death into the light of immortality ; and if the evening should remain gloomy to its very end, all the brighter will seem the glory when the latest breath has parted. I told you how that Christian poet passed away almost in despair, — how the gloom that overshadowed his spirit endured all but to the end ; but even in the last moment there came a wonderful change, — and they tell us how even on his dead face, there remained till it was hidden forever, a look of bright and beautiful and sudden surprise ; the light at evening had been long in coming ; but oh, it had come at last !

There is something very touching about the story of that eminent teacher, the most eminent of his time,

who, when his mind wandered in the weakness of the dying hour, fancied himself among his pupils, engaged in his accustomed work ; and whose last words, when the shadow of death was falling deeper, were, " It grows dark, boys ; you may go." There is something touching too, in the parting scene of that great poet, dying as the sun was going down in its summer glory, who bade his friends raise him up that he might see the light once more, — open the window that he might look on the setting sun again, before his eyes should close upon the earthly light forever. And very strange it is, indeed, to stand, as some of us may have stood, in the chamber of death ; and in the west to see the summer sunset blazing, and the golden rays shining upon the still face, and the closed eyes which never shall open more till the sun has ceased to shine. But it is only to us who remain that the evening darkness is growing, — only for us that the sun is going down. Oh ! look on the fixed features of that disciple now asleep in Jesus ; and think, as the prophet spake, " Thy sun shall no more go down ; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself ; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." And oh, my hearers, tell me ; as the evening falls on you, but not on him ; as the shadows deepen on you, but not on him ; as the darkness gathers on you, but not on him ; — if now, at last, the glorious promise has not found its perfect fulfilment, that " at the evening-time there shall be light !"



IX.

A GREAT MULTITUDE A SAD SIGHT.

“ And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them.” — ST. MATT. xiv. 14.

HERE is something, surely, that is remarkable in this statement of the evangelist. Our Saviour, we are told, looked upon a great multitude of human beings; and the feeling which that sight awakened in his breast was a feeling of pity and compassion. He saw the people; and he felt sorry for them. Now the general impression is, that a great mass of human beings collected in one place forms a grand and imposing spectacle rather than a pitiful and a sad one. Most people who have seen a vast crowd of many thousands of men, would tell us that they felt thrilled and awed at the sight; — that there was something in it inexpressibly awe-striking and impressive. Any one who has been accustomed to worship God in the presence of a very large congregation, could tell you how fine a sight it is when the great dark mass arises at once to the prayer, or listens as with one heart and mind to the exhortation. And no doubt this general

belief that there is something grand and impressive about a great multitude is a true belief; but if we may draw a general principle from the words you have read, there is something farther and deeper about a great multitude, which suggests itself less immediately and less generally. We are not told whether when Jesus looked upon this occasion on the vast crowds that had followed him into the desert, he was impressed by their wide extent and their wave-like undulation, and awed by their mighty hum. We are not told whether he felt roused and stirred by the thousands of eager faces that were bent upon him, or whether he thought to himself that here was a congregation that was worthy of even his best preaching. But one thing we *are* told: that when he saw a great multitude, he was moved with compassion toward them. Nor does it appear that there was anything peculiar about *this* multitude specially to draw forth his compassion. He would have felt just as much pity awakened in his kind heart by the sight of *any* great assemblage of men. No doubt there were sick folk in that multitude, for we are told that the Saviour "healed their sick;" no doubt there were weary people there, for they had "followed him on foot," and they had followed him far; no doubt there were hungry people among them, for not without sufficient reason would our Lord have multiplied the loaves and fishes to keep them from "fainting by the way." But it does not seem that there was much,

if there was anything, about that crowd to make it a sadder sight than any other. Hunger and weariness, sickness and sorrow, are not such uncommon things. Look at any great gathering of human beings, in any part of the world, and you may feel sure that there are many sad hearts there. No, it was for no accidental reason that the Saviour compassionated the multitude. If Jesus felt moved to pity in the sight of that crowd, it must have been because in some sense and in some measure, it is always a sad sight to look upon a crowd of men. And what we wish to do, in this discourse, is to consider what there can be in the presence of a great multitude that should move a kind and feeling heart to compassion. Why was it that when "Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, he was moved with compassion toward them"?

And to give us some little light on the subject, let us call it to mind that Christ was not the first who had felt that the sight of a great number of men was sad. It is now three-and-twenty centuries since a great monarch of the East, bent upon subjugating an independent race, collected together a force so large that it has hardly been equalled in the history of the world. His ships were ten thousand; his soldiers were three millions. When this incredible array was assembled, the king desired to see it all at one view; and he sat down, we read, upon a throne of white marble, whence, stretched along the shore, he beheld his fleet and his army. I will tell you the story in the simple words

of the earliest of secular historians. "When he saw the whole Hellespont concealed beneath the ships, and all the coast of Abydos full of men, Xerxes held himself happy; but soon after he burst into tears. This being observed by his paternal uncle Artabanus, he, understanding that Xerxes was shedding tears, addressed him thus: 'Sire, how very different are your present actions, and what you did erewhile! For then you declared yourself happy, and now you weep.' The king answered, 'Yes; for when I consider how short is human life, pity enters my heart; since of these, many as they are, every one will be dead before a hundred years.'" That Persian monarch, knowing no immortality, looked abroad over his millions, gathered in proud array; and he knew that whatever might be their courage and their numbers, there was one quiet and sure adversary who would vanquish them at the last. The plains and the shores around him were warm with life. Millions of pulses beat; millions of strong hands and anxious brains were there; but before a century, they would be all dead and buried and forgotten. And at the thought, even the selfish and foolish tyrant wept. He acknowledged by the act that there is something pitiful to see, in a great multitude of men.

The Persian monarch, when asked why he wept at the sight of something so little likely to move tears as a noble army with gay banners and bright arms, thought he gave reason sufficient when he mentioned

the shortness of the life to which each individual in it was destined. But the historian tells us that the man whom he addressed replied to him, that he did not think *that* the saddest thing in the lot of humanity. "Other woes," he said, "yet more deserving than this of commiseration, do we suffer during life. Indeed he calamities that fall upon us, and the maladies that hake our frames, make life, short though it is, to appear long; death therefore becomes the most desirable refuge for man." It was not that life was so short, but that it was so sad, that the wise Persian counsellor thought the true cause for tears. The true reason, *he* thought, for looking with compassion upon a great multitude, was rather that the men who composed it were pressed by care and sorrow while they lived, than that they would die so soon.

But we may very well combine the two reasons for pitying human beings which were stated by Xerxes and by Artabanus; they are quite consistent each with the other; and there is truth in both of them. No doubt,—no doubt,—it is a reason why the feeling heart should be moved with compassion in the view of a large assemblage of people, to think how much suffering each of them must have gone through; — to look at the anxious faces, the thinned hair, the furrowed brow, and to reflect what weariness, care, disappointment, anxiety, sorrow, each heart there must have known; and no doubt, too, it is a reason why the feeling heart should be moved to compassion in

the view of a large assembly, to think of the last solemn scene which lies before each of them,—to reflect upon the weariness and weakness, perhaps the pain and agony, in which every one of them must some day lie down and die. And no doubt such reasons as these for compassion may have been present to the gentle heart of Jesus, when “he went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them.” We can well believe that the kind Creator and Saviour, who “knoweth our frame” so well, who has proved for himself all our sinless infirmities, and who understands what sore temptations are because he himself has felt them,—we can well believe that as he looked abroad over that Eastern crowd, which would have seemed so strange to our eyes, he discerned the griefs, the cares, the bereavements, the privations, the fears, which were at home in each heart; he knew that all these things were as common under the Eastern sky, and within the Eastern dwelling, as they are now under our roofs and within our breasts; and how could one so kind and generous as the Redeemer look upon sorrow and suffering without feeling compassion for those who suffered and sorrowed? But we feel quite sure, that although Jesus, when he compassionated the multitude, was moved to that feeling by every reason which the eye of omniscience could see, and the heart of mercy be moved by, still that the strongest reason for compassion would be that which would

touch him most, and he would feel the most pity for that which was the saddest thing in the lot of the human souls before him. And what, then, was the saddest thing in the lot of that great multitude? What is the saddest thing in the lot of any great multitude, gathered anywhere? Was Xerxes right, when *he* judged that it was that death is so near; was Artabanus right, when *he* judged that it was that life is so pressed with cares and sorrows? Nay, my friend, it was not either of these considerations that most moved the compassion of our blessed Lord. It was sin rather than sorrow that he was thinking of. It was not so much that the people were wandering weary in the desert, as that their souls and consciences were without a guide. It was not so much that they were faint for want of the bread that perisheth, as that they knew nothing of where they were to turn for the bread and the water of life. It was not so much that they were surrounded by griefs and troubles, as that they knew not how to seek the aid of that Holy Spirit, who can make of all these a heavenly discipline to prepare for a better land. It was not so much that they were hourly drawing nearer to death, as that they were deep in darkness about a glorious life and immortality beyond the grave. And in saying all this, — in asserting that such were the main and principal reasons, if not the only ones, of Christ's compassion for the multitude, — we are not speaking without due authority. True, in the story as related

by St. Matthew, we are not told what were the reasons why the Saviour felt compassion; but, as you know, what is omitted by one evangelist is often supplied by another; and when we turn to the parallel passage in the Gospel of St. Mark, we find not merely the fact of Christ's feeling pity recorded, but the reason why he felt pity expressly stated. It is a striking contrast to the reasons for that feeling which Xerxes and Artabanus gave; it is a reason that goes far deeper, and that means far more. St. Mark tells us,* "And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, *because they were as sheep not having a shepherd.*" So here was Christ's reason for feeling compassion. It was because the people were in spiritual blindness and ignorance. It was because they did not feel the burden of their sins, and had no one to point them to the only Saviour of sinners. It was because in sinfulness they knew not where to go for pardon and purity; it was because in sorrow they knew not where to go for comfort; in weakness where to go for strength; in death where to go for life; in dying where to look for immortality. It was, in short, their spiritual destitution that Christ regarded as the saddest and most pity-moving thing about that multitude. It was for *that* he felt the deepest compassion. It was the soul's disease that most touched the kind Physician of souls. It was the soul's darkness that looked saddest to him that came to be

* Chapter vi. 34.

the Light of the world. It was the soul's thirst and hunger that seemed most urgent to him whose flesh was yet to be meat indeed, and whose blood drink indeed, the bread and the water of life for the nourishment of our immortal part. And so the great reason why our Saviour felt compassion in the sight of that great assemblage was, that there were among it so many sinful souls. The great reason why our Redeemer would even yet feel compassion in the sight of any great assemblage of human beings is, that it is made up of sinful souls. Ah! he knows, as we cannot know, what is meant by sin! He knows how evil and foul it is in itself; he knows all that follows from it, — all that it ends in! He knows that this is the root whence all sorrow and suffering spring. He knows that if there be death in this world, death is the wages of sin. He knows that if there be care, anxiety, disappointment, pain, anguish, bereavement, in this world, they are all the result of sin. And so Christ's reason for feeling compassion in the presence of a multitude is one which includes in it all other reasons. It has within itself the ground of the Persian counsellor's sad estimate of life, and the ground of the Persian monarch's tears. All that ever has wrung the kind heart, — all that ever has darkened the comprehensive view, — every reason for pitying poor human nature that ever was thought of, — all are gathered up in the reason which the evangelist gives us for the compassion of our blessed Lord, —

who, when he saw a great multitude, "was moved with compassion toward them," "because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." Sinful, sorrowful, dying; yet knowing not where to go; wearied with this troublesome life; yet clinging to it because they knew of no better; orphan children, lost sheep, strangers and pilgrims on the earth, they had yet been guided to the right place for once, when thus they came to the feet of the Saviour.

Let me ask you to observe, my friends, that the Redeemer's reason for compassionating the great multitude is a reason of universal application. It was a reason for feeling compassion for that assemblage that day in Palestine; it is a reason for feeling compassion for any assemblage anywhere. Christ's pity was not moved by any of those accidental and temporary causes which exist at some times and in some places and not elsewhere. No; sinfulness, and the need of a Saviour, are things which press, whether felt or not, upon all human beings. If Christ were to look upon you, my friend, to-day, be sure he would look upon you with compassion. Many and great are the differences between you and the people who are spoken of in the text. You speak a different language; you wear a different garb; you live in a distant land; but oh! you are the same in being stricken with that disease which only Christ's blood can wash away. We are all by ourselves like lost sheep, wau-

dering without a shepherd ; we all need to be brought back from our wanderings into the fold of the Good Shepherd of souls. But how much easier it is to confess this with the lips than to feel it in the heart ! Oh that God's Spirit might so effectually convince us all of our sinfulness, that we might deeply feel that the first and most pressing need of our nature, is the need of a share in the great atonement of Christ ! May we feel that *that* is more to us than water to the thirsty, than food to the hungry ; — in very deed the most urgent of all the “ necessities of life.” For that spiritual malady of sin from which the Great Physician alone can save us is one that is wide as the human race. Ah, *he* sees in it the weightiest reason for compassionating any mortal, through every stage of his existence, — from the first quiet slumber in the cradle, to the rigid silence in the shroud.

Let me ask you also to observe, that the Redeemer's reason for feeling compassion toward the multitude was the strongest reason for doing so. One man, we have seen, said that death was the saddest thing in the lot of humanity ; another said that the griefs and cares of life were sadder still ; but Jesus fixes upon that which is the source and origin of both. He fixes, as the saddest thing, upon that which “ brought death into the world, and all our woe.” And when we just think what sin is, and what sin tends to, we cannot but feel how rightly the Saviour judged. For sin is indeed

man's sorest disease, and man's greatest unhappiness. It means that man, the creature, is at enmity with the Creator; that man, the child, has rebelled against his Father in heaven. It means, that whereas, when things are right, all happiness consists in nearness to God, and in God's favor and friendship, man has now brought himself to this, that he shrinks away in dismay and dislike from God; — that he only feels it terrible and distressing to remember that there is a God; — and that he feels communion with God in prayer a weary and irksome task, by all means to be avoided. Sin means that God's handiwork is ruined; that God's creation is defaced; that God's glory is tarnished; that God's purposes are frustrated; all so far as such things can be. And sin, if unpardoned, tends to death, — death spiritual and eternal. A sinful soul is a soul stricken with the worst of diseases, leading to the most awful of deaths. Unpardoned sin leads to endless misery; and when Jesus looks upon a soul going on in sin, he sees at a glance all the ruin and despair to which, if unchanged from above, it is advancing. And O brethren, can you think of a condition so sad, and so fitted to excite compassion in a Being who is all kindness and mercy, and who sees things as they truly are? Surely, surely, if we saw things right, we should see that a soul going on in unrepented sin, and rejecting the Saviour's offered grace, is in the very saddest plight in which an immortal being can ever be. He may be gay and

thoughtless now ; he may never think of the doom that hangs over him ; he may be surrounded with earthly comforts ; and many a one may envy him ; but in very deed, he is in a pitiable and wretched state. You feel compassion for the poor consumptive, whose hectic cheek tells you that the malady is at work which will lay him in his grave. And why do you feel compassion ? It is not that he is suffering so very much now. Many a person, affected by some passing pain which we hardly think of seriously sympathizing with, is suffering perhaps twenty times as much. But we feel compassion, because we look forward, and remember to what end the slow decline is going forward. We remember that the headache goes, and leaves the man none the worse ; but the consumption kills. And it is the serious ending that makes us think the disease serious, even in those early stages when it is causing little pain. It is because sin ends in eternal woe, that it is so dreadful a malady, even while the soul that is stricken with it is cheerful and gay. It was because Christ looked on into the unseen world, and discerned the wrath in which sin unpardoned would land the soul, that he felt so deep a compassion as he looked on the great multitude gathered in the Eastern desert. And just as ruinous as sin was then, sin is yet. This is a disease which has never worn itself out, as it came down to us through successive generations. It has lost nothing of its ancient poison, nothing of its power to bring

down to death. Blessed be God, it is the most tractable and easily managed of all diseases, in the hands of the Great Physician of souls! There is a remedy for it which never can fail. It has healed millions of sufferers; and it can heal each of us. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin!"

Let me ask you further to observe, that if Jesus thought the sight of a great multitude a sad sight,—if he could not look upon the multitude but with compassion,—it must have been because he could not look but with compassion on each individual soul in the multitude. And as that multitude was, so far as regards the circumstances which moved Christ's pity, a fair sample of the human race, it follows that Christ feels that there is something for him to pity as he looks on each of us,—on each separate human being. Oh, how it cuts down pride, to remember this! To remember that when that Being who cannot go wrong in his estimate of us, looks upon you and me,—whatever we may think of ourselves,—*he* feels compassion for us,—*he* feels sorry for us! Surely it is a lowly thing to be a sinful human being! How it pours contempt upon human self-sufficiency, to think that when Christ looks down upon the man of highest rank, and greatest wealth, and most extended power,—one before whom his fellow-creatures grovel,—one who carries a high head and a proud heart,—Christ sees in him only a poor, helpless creature, to be pitied,

to be relieved! There are few things that people like less, at least after they have grown up to maturity, than to be pitied. They think there is something poor and contemptible about *that*. And this opinion has grown into the very construction of our language. We say that a thing is *pitiable*, when we desire to ascribe to it all that is low and contemptible. You cannot say worse of a man, than to say that he is a *pitiful* creature; unless indeed it be to say that he is a *poor* creature, which means much the same thing. Well, then, my friend, just remember this, whenever you feel any tendency to a haughty spirit,—whenever you feel any disposition to talk big, and look big, and speak about your position, and your influence, and what you are entitled to,—just remember this, that Christ thinks us all poor creatures, — pitiable beings, — beggars needing alms, — fever-stricken patients needing the physician, — helpless, hopeless, unworthy sinners, deserving of the deepest compassion because we are so devoid of help or hope. How humble we ought to be when we draw near to God; with how lowly a countenance ought we to address our fellow-men; how carefully we should avoid the least appearance of anything overbearing, or tyrannical, or haughty! The Bible tells us, as you all know, that pride is especially hateful to God. “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” “An high look, and a proud heart,” said the wisest of men, “is sin.”* And what wonder that it should be so?

* Prov. xxi. 4.

Is it not something besides sin ; is it not the most outrageous folly ? A poor creature, the object of Christ's kind compassion, — and fancying to himself how great and influential and dignified a person he is ! — Oh, my brother, let us be humble ! Let us be clothed with humility. It is the right frame of spirit for beings such as you and me. Let us go humbly to the foot of the cross ; and feeling our helplessness, let us patiently wait till the kind Saviour shall look upon us with compassion, and take away our sins. We will admit no lingering trace of pride or self-righteousness : “ After his loving-kindness, according to the multitude of his tender mercies,” may he “ blot out our transgressions, and remember our iniquities no more.” “ Like as a father pitieth his children,” so may the Lord pity and compassionate us in all our sins. And take comfort from the gracious words of comfort to the humble-minded : “ For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

Yes, my friends, there is nothing degrading in bowing humbly, as sinful creatures, in the presence of our Maker, and in beseeching his kind compassion and his pardoning grace. There is no degradation in being compassionated by Almighty God ; nor in being received as penitent sinners by that Best Judge of what

is fit and becoming in human conduct, who looked with anger on the self-righteous Pharisee, and with approval upon the humble publican, standing far away with downcast eyes, and smiting upon his breast. It is a painful thing, and when it can be avoided it is a poor thing, to seek compassion from any human being beyond the circle of our nearest kin. We despise the man who is always grumbling and complaining to strangers about his griefs and troubles, whether these are great or small. We despise the man who is thus always seeking to excite compassion by hawking about the story of his ills, and always harping upon that tedious string. No; beyond the limit of nearest blood, let a man keep his troubles to himself. He may feel assured that his best friend will grow weary of hearing about them; he may be sure that the pity accorded to him will be in most cases mingled with something of contempt. Deception, of course, is never a right thing; but we are not required to wear our heart upon our sleeve; and ever since the days of that stern Spartan youth who kept a composed look while the savage beast was at his vitals, men have felt that there is something sublime in the unflinching resolution that waves off the stranger's sympathy, and that shows the world a firm face when the heart is weary and weak. But oh! when we turn to Jesus, who can read our inmost soul, — when we turn to him, who never will upbraid us or despise us, though we make bare to him every poor weakness, every sorrow, and every sin about us, — we

feel that the need for that reserve is gone, and that it is no shame nor humiliation to tell out to him all we fear and suffer, with the same abandonment with which the little child sobs out the story of its little sorrows at a kind mother's knee. At the throne of grace, the man who, whatever he suffered, would never complain to mortal, may without reserve lay before the Redeemer the tale of his wants and woes. Ah, the dumb spirit that would dissemble and cloak its sins even before the heart-searching God, — *that* is one of the saddest symptoms of the soul's worst disease! Simple confession of sin to God is a part of true contrition; and if we go to God with the humble desire to confess our sins with a penitent and lowly heart, he will be ready to help us out with the sad recital, to anticipate our imperfect words, and interpret our contrite tears. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

And thus, my friend, we have meditated for a little upon St. Matthew's declaration, that Christ found something in the sight of a great multitude to move his compassion; we have sought to discover what it was about the multitude that made it a sad sight for Christ to see; and we have sought to draw some lessons from the conclusion to which we came. It was that the Physician of souls saw in that multitude an assemblage of souls diseased; it was that he saw

before him souls stricken with that worst of maladies, sin ; souls doomed, unless that disease was checked, to be drawn down by it to eternal death and woe. He felt compassion for that multitude, because he saw in it a host of immortal beings in the very saddest and sorest plight in which immortal beings could ever be. It is a sad and a sore sight, when some young one, smitten by wasting disease, is bidden, as the last faint hope, to leave the home of childhood, and to seek some milder clime, whose balmy breezes may perhaps fan the cheek to the glow of health once more ; and we can think of few things more affecting than the last parting from parents and brothers and sisters, whose foreboding looks and sighs tell that they know that death may be delayed but not averted ; that the sunbeams of Italy will smite in vain, and its climate can work no cure. And we can think of few things more sad than of that young exile, fading day by day in a foreign land ; and pining, amid myrtle groves and glorious skies, for the well-remembered trees and sunsets far away at home. But if we saw things right, we should see a sadder sight in many a one who is a parent's pride and hope ; we should see something that angels might weep over in the gay, thoughtless worldling that lives and acts in the forgetfulness of a Saviour and a life to come. For a direr malady is sapping that young life ; a more deadly disease is wasting there. Yes, the compassion that Jesus felt for that multitude of

common human beings, was just a little out-welling of that same kind and gracious compassion which had brought him to this earth at all! What was it that made the Son of God leave the glory and the brightness of heaven, and come down to this world, and suffer, and die, — what was it, but that looking upon this world, he “beheld a great multitude, and had compassion on it,” — he saw the human race infected with the leprosy of sin, — smitten with the disease that ends in ruin, — and came to seek and save! Oh, may he remember now, when the travail of his soul is past, that it was for us it was endured! As for us, may he not have died in vain! And if, when he looks down on us to-day, his kind compassion is stirred by the sight of sorrowful hearts, we ask that he may comfort *them*; but forasmuch as we know and are sure that when he looks upon us, his compassion *must* be stirred by the sight of an evil that is worse than sorrow, we would yet more earnestly ask that he would take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, and blot out all our sins!



X.

THE RULING OF THE SPIRIT.

“ Better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.”
PROV. xvi. 32.

EVERY one knows, and the most thoughtless can understand, that to carry a very heavy load for a mile, is hard work ; or that to go through a long day's ploughing, is hard work ; but not every person is able to understand and to take it in, that the things which cost a man the greatest effort and the hardest work that he ever goes through in all his life, may be done with no bodily exertion at all ; may be done as he sits in an easy-chair with his eyes shut. Here is one great difference between the civilized man and the savage : a great part of the work of the civilized man consists of that which the savage would not regard as work at all. But every thoughtful person knows that the hardest of all work is that which puts the soul upon the stretch, though it may leave the body at rest ; and that there is no wear like the wear of heart and brain. And all this wear and exertion may be without any outward sign, without any bodily effort, without any

of *that* which the uncivilized man would understand by *work*. I dare say St. Paul never spent days of harder work in all his life than the days he spent at Damascus lying blind upon his bed, struggling to get free from the prejudices and convictions of all his past years, and resolving upon the course he would pursue in the years to come. Some of you, no doubt, have heard of that great English engineer who, when he was perplexed how to manage the construction of some new and intricate piece of machinery, would remain for days together in a darkened room, hardly stirring from one attitude, with his mind all the while strained to the top of its bent, till he had struggled through the difficulty, and had the whole plan of the machine clearly before his view. What tremendous work he went through in these days! But a stupid, ignorant person, if told that the great engineer had lain upon his bed without moving for three whole days, in a dark room, would very likely have said, What a lazy man that must be! Here he has spent these days, and done nothing! Done nothing! we might reply; you cannot tell what wearing, perplexing, bewildering drudgery he has undergone!

Now, my friends, the words you have read point us to an enterprise which makes no outward show; and boldly tell us that it is a better and nobler thing to accomplish *that*, than even to carry out another enterprise of the most showy and glaring kind. The text points out to us a certain work, very difficult to

do, very noble when done, which yet is done with so little outward appearance or physical effort, that some might perhaps fancy that it is no work at all. Every one knows that he must be a skilful and a brave man who takes a guarded and fortified city. There must be much skill to devise the assault, — much bravery and exertion to carry it out. There is unmistakable work in sapping a way towards the beleaguered ramparts, in bridging over the deep moat, in shaking down the massive battlements; there are effort and daring needed for the final rush through the deadly breach, in the face of desperate foes, — for the hand-to-hand encounter, with its blood and din, till the central citadel is stormed, and the “city taken” at last. But the inspired writer is not afraid to set before us a companion-picture, and bid us contrast the two. He bids us turn away from the noisy triumph and the crowned conqueror; and he points us to a nobler and a “better” man. He bids us turn away from that wild exhibition of desperate energy; and he points us to a quiet labor that tasks yet more heavily all that is noblest in human beings. “Better,” he says, “better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city!”

Now, my friends, every one of you who has sought to believe in the Saviour, and, by the Holy Spirit aiding you, to lead a Christian life, must have learned by experience how great a part of the work of an immortal being is mental work, is work that makes no

bodily show, is work done by the soul without any corresponding exertion of the body. And I am not thinking now of head-work merely, as contrasted with hand-work. Of course, the man who sits at his study-table, writing his book or his sermon, is working very hard; the judge who sits in his easy-chair weighing the merits of the case which has been argued before him, and making up his mind what his judgment ought to be, is working very hard; far harder than the mason building his wall, or the ploughman following his team. But I am not thinking now of merely intellectual effort; I am thinking of the exertion of the whole spiritual nature, — of intellectual, moral, and spiritual effort, without bodily; and I say that all Christian people must know, that the most important work and labor which immortal beings ever can do, is of that kind. We have to “*work* out our salvation;” but the work is mainly to be done by the unseen exertion of the invisible soul. We have to “*strive* to enter in at the strait gate;” we have to “*labor* to enter into rest;” but the laboring and striving are all spiritual and not bodily. We have to repent; and it is not an easy thing to repent; but the strain to do it comes upon the soul. We have to believe; and it is difficult to believe; but when we go to God, and seek to believe, and pray for grace to “help our unbelief,” it is the soul that goes and strives and prays. Our entire spiritual life; the entire path which we trust is to lead us to glory; is, in one sense, a “ruling of our

spirit ;” the idea of unseen exertions, of spiritual strivings and efforts, is one with which all believers are perfectly familiar. And *that* is the idea which the wisest of men sets before us in this text.

Of course, when the inspired writer tells us that “better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city ;” he teaches us that to rule our spirit rightly is a difficult thing, and a thing from rightly doing which great and valuable results are to follow. And all this is as much as to say, that within the heart of every man there are many unruly tendencies ; many impulses to do and to think and to feel wrong. There is a great deal in every human soul that needs to be kept down. If man’s spirit were always ready to do right, it would need no ruling, or the ruling would be a very easy thing. But as it is, it is very difficult. It is very difficult to hold the path of duty, because there is so much within us that tends to lead us astray from it. And so long as we live in a fallen world, crowded with temptations and snares ; so long as we bear a fallen nature, whose whole bent is towards evil rather than good, towards earth rather than heaven, towards the creature rather than the Creator ; so long will the ruling of man’s spirit be man’s hardest and longest-lasting work ; a work which no one who would not drift to degradation and perdition can avoid ; yea, a work which but for the aid of God’s grace and God’s Blessed Spirit would foil and baffle and weary out the stoutest-hearted !

And now, looking more closely into the details of this solemn and most practical subject, let us think what are the things about our spiritual nature that stand especially in need of ruling. And we may arrange the evil impulses which in ruling our spirit we have to resist, under the two heads of *Impulses to think and feel wrong*; and *Impulses to do wrong*.

Let us look, in the first place, at those tendencies and leanings in our spiritual nature which would lead to think and feel wrong.

And this head of our subject, my friends, includes a vast field; and takes in little impulses, which to resist is no more than matter of worldly prudence; as well as grander temptations, to resist which is of the very essence of religion. If you look to the former clause of the verse in which the text stands, you will see that the special thing which the wise man had in view, when he spoke of ruling the spirit, was the keeping down of an evil feeling; he says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty." He teaches us that it is a noble thing to hold in check this one bad tendency of anger, whether it may manifest itself in fretfulness, or in sullenness, or in violent outbursts of passion. It is in some men, no doubt, in a larger degree than in others, this bad tendency; some have a native amiability and sweetness of temper that makes it easy for them in this respect to "rule their spirit;" but there is none who will not sometimes be called on to do it; and remember this, that for any

of you to give way to little spurts of petulance, or fretfulness, or general ill-temper, is not, as you may think it, a small matter; it is a symptom that something is amiss in your Christian character; that you are failing by God's grace to resist "the sin that doth most easily beset you;" that you are not striving by God's grace to "rule your spirit" as you ought. It is like the little leak which may make the gallant ship go down. I need not suggest how sadly this evil tendency in those who yet, as we would trust, have the root of the matter in them, goes to keep them from being epistles in commendation of their Saviour's cause, — goes to make them into stumbling-blocks and causes of offence. The sullen humors or the peevish outbursts of a professing Christian are not small matters, if they go to fix in the minds of the young a disagreeable and painful idea of what Christianity and Christian people are. Now, my friends, here is something in our spirit which we probably all of us have to rule: let us, honestly, praying for God's grace, seek to rule it. Let us not take up the impression that even the smallest temptation can be resisted in any strength of our own; or that the very least hindrance in our spiritual life is too small a matter to take to God's footstool, and to tell God about, and to make the subject of earnest prayer. I believe that there is hardly anything which does more to injure the spiritual life of ordinary Christians, than their getting into their minds some vague impression that it is all quite right

to go and ask God's grace in prayer for performing great duties and resisting great temptations ; but that really it would be something like profanation to make the little worries of life known at God's footstool, and to ask his Spirit to aid in ruling a little evil tendency in your spirit which you think you might really rule yourself. Let us get rid of that impression ; it is out-and-out wrong. There is nothing that interests you, that is too little to confide to your God, in the solitude of closet-prayer. You may enter into your chamber, and shut your door, and, secure of a kindly hearing, you may tell your Father which is in secret of little things which worry and vex you, and retard you in your spiritual life, which are yet so little that you would be ashamed to confess to your nearest friend how great a space they fill up in your heart. Fix it in your mind, that there is no duty, however little, which we can do without God's grace ; and no temptation, however small, which we can resist without God's grace. And do you need to be told, that little duties and little temptations make up, for most of us, the sum of common life ? We are not called on to rule our spirit on a grand and magnificent scale ; we are just to do the little task God sets us. You are not tempted to renounce your Saviour ; but you *are* tempted to speak snappishly to those under your roof, or to dwell upon some little offence which has been given you. Your temptation is not the scaffold or the stake ; it is no more than some little irritability of nerve or heart ;

but it *is* your temptation, it is your besetting sin, it is the very thing which in *your* spirit needs ruling ; and, whether in things great or small, “ better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city ! ”

I need not tell any hearer, that it is quite impossible, and not even desirable, that I should make out a list, or attempt a description of all the varied tendencies to think wrong or to feel wrong that may be found in the human heart ; — of all the things about our “ spirit ” which in this respect need to be “ ruled,” to be held in check, to be turned in the right direction. I aim at no more than setting before you such representative tendencies as may set your own minds thinking ; I desire to say something which may make each of you remember *that* impulse to wrong or morbid thought or feeling which you yourself are especially called to resist and keep down. And now that we have looked at an impulse to wrong feeling or passion, let us look at another wrong tendency of a somewhat more intellectual cast.

I mean the tendency which exists, more or less, in most hearts, to discontent with the allotments of God’s providence ; to envy and jealousy as regards those of our fellow-creatures who are more favored and fortunate than we. The ruling of our spirit which I am now thinking of, is that which lies in reconciling our mind to painful things ; in acquiescing in mortification and disappointment when they come ; in feeling rightly towards people to whom we are disposed to feel un-

kindly and bitterly. And let me tell you, my friends, there is to many a man no harder ruling of the spirit, than that of reconciling his mind to the place where God has set him. The Hand above gives you your place and your work ; and then there is the struggle heartily and cheerfully to acquiesce in the decree. And this is not always an easy thing ; though be sure that the man who honestly and Christianly tries to do it, will never fail to succeed at last. How curiously people are set down in life ; in all callings whatsoever ! You find men in the last places they would have chosen ; in the last places for which you would say they are suited. And such men, and all thinking men, have doubtless their own battle in making up their mind to many things, both in their own lot, and in the lot of others. I do not mean merely the intellectual effort to look at the success of other men and our own failure in such a way as that we shall be intellectually convinced that we have no right to complain of either ; I do not mean merely the labor to put things in the right point of view ; but the moral and spiritual effort to look fairly at the facts not in any way disguised, — not tricked out by some skilful way of putting the case ; — and yet to repress all wrong feeling ; all fretfulness, envy, jealousy, dislike, hatred. I do not mean to persuade ourselves that the grapes we cannot reach are sour ; but (far nobler surely) to be well aware that they are sweet, and yet be content that another should have them and not we. I mean

the labor, when you have run in a race and been beaten, to resign your mind to the fact that you have been beaten, and to bear a kind feeling towards the man that beat you. And this is labor, and hard labor; though very different from that physical exertion which the uncivilized man would understand by the word.

You know, my friends, that in all professions and occupations to which men can devote themselves, there is such a thing as competition; and wherever there is competition, there will be the temptation to envy, jealousy, and detraction, as regards a man's competitors; and so there will be need of that labor and exertion which lie in resolutely trampling that temptation down. It does not matter whether the prize be great or small; the temptation in all cases is the same in its essential nature. It does not matter whether it be two schoolboys, both bent upon the medal which only one can get; or two traders, each determined to be first in that street; or two statesmen, each resolved that he himself shall be Prime Minister; or two great lawyers, each set upon being Lord Chancellor. You are quite certain, my friend, as you go on through life, to have to make up your mind to failure and disappointment on your own part, and to seeing other men preferred before you. Now, when these things come, there are two ways of meeting them. One is, to hate and vilify those who surpass you, either in merit or success; to detract from

their merit and underrate their success ; or, if you must admit some merit, to bestow upon it very faint praise. Now, all this is natural enough ; but assuredly it is neither a Christian nor a happy course to follow. It is natural enough ; natural in inferior animals as well as in man. You have heard of the race-horse, running a neck-and-neck race with another, and beaten by an inch, which turned savagely upon his successful rival and tore him with his teeth. Natural enough, indeed ; but just one of those wrong tendencies in our fallen spirit which it concerns the Christian man to rule and to put down. *That* is one way ; but the other and better way is to fight these tendencies to the death ; to struggle against them, to pray against them ; to seek God's grace to put them down ; to resign yourself to God's good will ; to admire and love the man who surpasses and excels you. And this course is the Christian one, and the happy one. Rightly rule your spirit ; and, oh, it is a noble thing ! I believe that the greatest blessing God can send a man is disappointment, rightly met and used. There is no more ennobling discipline ; there is no discipline which results in a happier or kindlier temper of mind. And in honestly fighting against these evil impulses we have thought of, — in thus seeking to rule your spirit fitly, — you will assuredly get help and strength and grace from above. And that ruling of the spirit which is needful Christianly to meet disappointment, brings out the best and noblest

qualities that can be found in man. I have seen the homely features look almost sublime, when man or woman was faithfully by God's grace resisting and wrestling with wrong feelings and tendencies, such as these. It is a noble end to attain, and it is well worth all the labor it costs, to resolutely be resigned, cheerful, and kind, where you feel a strong inclination to be discontented, moody, and bitter of heart. It is not philosophy that will win in this fight; but the aiding, sanctifying, comforting Spirit of God. And when I would picture forth a noble conqueror, I turn from even the brave men who, with grim face and bayonets fixed, are climbing the slope slippery with blood, and raked by shell and shot, that leads to the scarce practicable breach; and of whom a bare remnant will in half an hour place upon the ramparts the unconquered flag that all the world knows,—I turn from even *them*, though the bravest of the brave, and I look to where the wisest man has shown us something more heroic; and I see it in the unsoured spirit and the kindest heart, which have gone on through many a care and disappointment, which have withstood many a mortification, and only been made the sweeter by many a taking-down; as I remember that no human wisdom dictated the words of the text, and told all men that

Better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city!"

But now, brethren, you will easily think of a host of tendencies to wrong thought and feeling, which

the Christian man, in ruling his spirit, will need to hold in check. One of these, very powerful in many minds, is to procrastination as to our spiritual interests; it is *that* within us which would lead us, even when convinced that we must see to it that we make our peace with God, always to put off to another day, to a more convenient season, a work for which God has told us that "Now is the accepted time." Ah, my friends, how many a soul has dated its ruin to yielding to an impulse that ought to have been resolutely put down; to postponing till to-morrow a work which should have been done to-day! And after a reflection so solemn, we feel it is coming down to something almost trivial in comparison, though by no means trivial in its bearing upon the happiness of life, or upon the formation of our spiritual character, — when I mention as a tendency to be checked, that unhappy disposition which is in many hearts, to be always dwelling on and brooding over the little worries of life; to be unthankfully and querulously looking away from the hundred kind gifts God has given, and dwelling upon the crook in the lot, — the little vexation, the little cross, the little mortification, which he who would rule his spirit well would look away from, and try to forget. Suppose a man living in a pleasant home, in the midst of a beautiful country. Suppose that he has pleasing scenes all around him, wherever he can look; except that in one direction there is a bleak, uninteresting, ugly prospect.

Now, what would you think of this man, if he utterly refused to look at the cheerful and beautiful prospects which all around invite his eye, and spent the whole day gazing intently at the one ugly view, and at nothing else? Would you not say the man was mad? And yet, don't you know, possibly from your own experience, that there are hosts of men and women who, in a moral sense, do just that? Hosts of human beings who turn away from the many blessings of their lot, and dwell and brood upon its worries? Hosts who persistently look away from the numerous pleasant things they might contemplate, and look fixedly and almost constantly at painful and disagreeable things? How ungrateful to a kind God; how unhappy; how foolish; how detrimental to all that is noble and worthy in our spiritual being; how stunting to our growth in grace! O brethren, let us rule down this evil tendency; we cannot repress it entirely; but we can at least refuse voluntarily to encourage it; we should regard it as of the very essence of our religion to put it down; and by God's grace we may do so in a great degree. I do not mention, as another thing to be stopped, the giving the rein to impure and wicked imaginations, of things you would blush to speak of; for I trust that no one within hearing of my voice would wilfully do that; but I just name it as something which, indulged, has been to many as the opening of a floodgate which admitted the vilest excesses of degrading sin and shame. And I suggest to

you, as my final specimen of tendencies and leanings in our spirit which need ruling, that great pervading tendency which is to most ordinary Christians the besetting sin; the tendency to keep this world and its interest first in the heart, and the unseen and eternal world only second; the tendency in our hearts to "cleave to the dust," — to set our affections upon things on the earth, — to live as if there were no other life, — to work as if food and raiment, as if worldly wealth and comfort, were the "one thing needful." O brethren, that God by his Spirit would in this matter rule our spirits to truth and wisdom, — help us to realize which is the substance and which the shadow, — and grant to us "the victory that overcometh the world," even a living faith! Oh that we might feel it, that not *this* is substance which we grasp, but *that* is substance which we believe; — that not the earth we tread on is the solid, enduring reality, but rather the unseen country which is very far away!

I have reached the end of my discourse, dwelling only on those tendencies to evil thought and feeling which were to have taken up only the first part of it; and there is not space to say anything of those impulses in our spirit, needing to be ruled with a tight and a strong hand, which would lead to express and open acts of evil. We need not turn *that* sad leaf; and I believe that in preaching to an intelligent Christian congregation, the other is the more practi-

cally important. We have thought of the angry passion which would use no deadlier weapon than a harsh word; of the envy and malice which rankle inwardly, rather than of such as would make an outward show. And indeed, it is when sins of thought and feeling are indulged, that they grow into sins of life and conduct; and after all, an actual fact, our great sins, — the main things *we* have to confess and seek pardon for, — are sins of thought and feeling rather than of life and conduct. We do not murder; but we may cherish that hatred of our brother which shall stamp us murderers in the judgment of God. We bow to no idol; yet we may cherish that covetousness, which is idolatry. We lead decent, regular lives; yet we may be so set upon this world, as that we shall be found guilty of crucifying Christ afresh, and grieving the Holy Spirit of God away! Our great sins, in short, are the sins of the heart; are sins of thought and feeling; and rightly to “rule our spirit,” is the sum, the essence, of all our Christian duty. And to do *that*, what a noble work; how hard in its progress, how glorious in its results! All that shall make us like our Saviour; all that shall make us meet for heaven; lies in that work! No strength of our own is equal to it; but only *his* might, who regenerates and sanctifies, — that Blessed Spirit, who is promised without stint to all who seek him in fervent prayer. Oh, may he be poured down upon us, day by day! And so, through many duties, many


trials, many temptations, many cares, we shall hold still that central peace of mind which is promised to the man whose mind is stayed upon his God; we shall be victors in a noiseless, bloodless battle, fighting day by day in many quiet places, — fought in by shrinking women, and by men that never drew a sword, — yet open, too, to the most daring and heroic; a battle which may leave upon the outer aspect no worse trace than the thin cheek and the sad smile; yet which is the heaviest strain upon human pith and endurance; and which may end in the most glorious rewards which can ever be won by human being. For “Better,” said the wisest man, — inspired by wisdom beyond his own, — “Better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.”



XI.

BEARING ABOUT THE DYING OF CHRIST.

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.”
2 COR. iv. 10.

 **H**ERE is something striking and remarkable in these words ; and it is not easy, at the first thought, to take in their exact meaning. St. Paul is telling of the persecutions and troubles which he and his friends had daily to endure, as they carried on their great work of preaching the gospel. “We are troubled,” he says, “on every side, yet not distressed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.” Now, it is likely enough, that there were things in this catalogue of sufferings which St. Paul would have avoided, if he had been able to do so with a clear conscience. He had no special liking for trouble, perplexity, or persecution, any more than we have ; and if the kingdom of the Redeemer could have advanced as well, and his own growth in grace could have been secured as effectually, without these,

doubtless he would have been thankful. It has been said, very truly, that tribulation is not a thing for us to seek, but for God to send. But there is something different about the peculiar trial which is mentioned in the text. It *was* a trial, or St. Paul would not have named it in thus reckoning up the troubles which he was called to bear. But it was a trial of such a singular kind, that the great apostle did not wish to be rid of it. It was a trial of that singular nature, that he prayed that it might be sent to him, and laid upon him. It is not here that he does so; but in another of his epistles he uses words which recall to us at once what he has written here concerning bearing about his Saviour's dying; and he tells us there, that there was nothing in this world he wished for more than *that*. He tells us *there*, that he counted all things as worthless, that he might "win Christ;" that he might be "found in him;" that he might "know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings; being made conformable unto his death." "Conformable unto the Saviour's death;" *that* is what St. Paul wished to be; *that* is what every Christian ought to be; *that* is what we should daily pray that *we* may be; *that* is something which implies difficulty, which implies suffering; yet which implies blessing so precious that you never could seek better for yourself, or wish better for your dearest friend; and what else does *that* mean, but that every true Christian should ever be doing what St. Paul tells us *he* always did:

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus!”

Now, my friends, we know the way in which St. Paul, and many of the first preachers of the gospel, had to do this. There is but one opinion, I believe, as to the first and literal meaning of these words of the text. It is understood that they mean that St. Paul and his friends were in daily peril of such a death as Christ's was; that they had daily to bear such stripes as had been laid upon that blessed Lamb of God; that their daily privations were wearing out within them the principle of life. It is understood that when St. Paul said that the apostles were “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,” he meant that all these trials and privations which they suffered had left their sorrowful trace upon form and feature; that these early Christians bore in their emaciated bodies the outward signs of the tribulation they were passing through. They may have been but a poor, puny race of men, in the matters of outward strength and outward comeliness, who yet were honored to convey to after centuries and to unborn generations, the very best tidings that ever gladdened man's weary heart, — the blessed gospel of salvation and immortality through a crucified Redeemer. They may have been but a weakly, dying-like company of men, in whose weakness God made perfect the martyr's heroic strength; and through whose instrumentality God told us of a Saviour in

whom "whosoever believeth" "shall never die." It may be, that if you had looked upon the living form and face of the great apostle of the Gentiles, you would have seen in the pale, wasted figure, worn down by want and travel and scourgings and buffetings and aged before its time, — that St. Paul bore in his body the traces of such sufferings as wrote too early age upon the kindest face this world ever saw; that St. Paul bore in his body the traces of such sufferings as brought Christ himself to his grave.

That, my friends, was the apostolic way of "bearing about in the body the dying of Christ." It is not so that we are called to be "conformable to the death" of our Redeemer. The days of such martyrdom as that of the apostolic age are gone, in this part of the world. When St. Paul spoke of being conformable to his Lord's death, he probably meant that if need were, he was willing to die in like manner; and at that time, it was so likely that a professed Christian might be called to die a violent death, that the man who made such a declaration was likely enough to have his resolution put to the proof. Nor is it needful or right for us to seek by self-inflicted penances to rival the worn aspect of the early confessors; we are not called, by vigils, scourgings, and fastings, to macerate our bodily frames. You know that there are those among Christians now, who think to obey the injunction implied in the text in a fashion more literal still. There are persons who think to obey it by

always bearing about with them the material representation of the Redeemer's death ; the crucifix, where the artist's skill has sought to picture out the last agonies of our Lord, as he hung upon the cross ; or the cross itself, the recognized emblem over the wide world of our holy faith, and of devotion to him who died for us on the accursed tree. Ah, my friends, *that* is not the way in which the believer is called to be "always bearing about in the body the dying of Christ." You might bear the crucifix or the cross with you wherever you went ; you might have the dying Saviour's image placed where it should be the first thing to catch your waking eyes at morning, and the last thing to leave them at night ; and yet you might be hundreds of miles away from any compliance with the spirit of the text. It is no mere bodily service which our Lord requires of us. The service *he* desires is the devotion of the heart ; it is spiritually, and yet most really, that we, in these days, are to seek daily to do what St. Paul always did ; even to bear about our Saviour's dying.

And now let us inquire, my friends, what manner of obedience to this unrepealed requirement remains for us. Let us think in what way we may still "bear about with us the dying of the Lord Jesus."

In the first place, we may bear about the memory of it. If it be true at all that our Redeemer died as he did die ; and died so for us ; nothing can be more plain than that we ought never to forget it. Even

when we are not specially calling our Saviour's death to mind, the recollection of it should be latent in our hearts, and should be unconsciously affecting all our views of things. I am sure you know that such a thing may be. When you met some great bereavement; when some one very near to you died; even after the first shock was past; even after you no longer had before your mind's eye, wherever you went, the parting hour of the little child perhaps that was taken from you; even when you could once more with some measure of calmness set yourself to your common duties again, without having always breaking in upon you the picture you once thought never would leave you, of the lips of clay silent and still, and the little silky head laid in the last resting-place where *you* could ever lay it; did you not still feel, in the subdued spirits, in the greater sympathy with the sorrows of others, in the quieter and gentler mood, that you had not quite got over your trial; that you were still bearing about with you the dying of the dear one that was gone! The first shock was over; but its memory was there; and you were the kinder and the better for it.

Now, my friends, I say that in all our life, in all we are ever called to do or to bear, we ought to be, more or less consciously, "bearing about with us" the remembrance of our Blessed Lord's death, and of how he died. We should live daily in memory of his death; and that memory should influence and

affect all our views and all our doings. You know, there is something that shocks one, when we see a new-made orphan, or a new-made widow, showing plainly that they have entirely and fast got over the death of the husband or parent who is gone. We have all, perhaps, been shocked by unseemly mirth, by revolting levity, in those who have been freshly bereaved; and most of us will agree in thinking that the rapid dying-out of warm feelings, and the rapid change of fixed resolutions, is one of the most sorrowful subjects of reflection which it is possible to suggest. We do not ask for any long continuance, even in the most tried, of extravagant grief; it is the manifest intention of the Creator that very strong feelings should be transitory. But it is a sorrowful thing when they pass, and leave absolutely no trace behind them. Let us be content, my friends, to look at the case temperately. Let us face and admit the facts. The healthy body and mind can get over a great deal; but there are some things which it is not to the credit of our nature should ever be entirely got over. And if it be a sad thing, and a shocking thing, to see any human being who has been called by God's providence to stand by the dying bed of many near relatives, showing by his entire demeanor that he has quite forgo it; if the tacit consent of all thinking people has decided that such a one may be, and ought to be, unostentatiously bearing about the quiet remembrance of their dying; is it too much to expect that we, whose

Saviour died such a death, and died it, in simple truth, *for us*, should not live quite as if he had not died! You would feel that you had a right to expect the friend you may leave behind you, to “bear about your dying” a little; especially if it were a death of special pain, and if you were to undergo it for his sake. The kind mother, who wore out her life in caring and toiling for her child, might well think that the child might sometimes come and stand by her grave; and remember her living kindness and her dying words, when she was far away. And, O brethren, when we do but try to think what our Saviour Christ has done for us; done for us by his life, but above all by his dying; when we feel how impossible it is for us to reckon up what he has done for us, and how impossible it is for us to understand and realize what he suffered for us; — when we think that every hope, every blessing, that ever can gladden our poor sinful hearts, was won for us by that great sacrifice consummated by our Saviour’s dying; surely, surely, we might well determine that we never shall forget that death, — that we never shall live as if that death had never been! You hear people say, truly enough perhaps, that this world has never been the same to them since such a loved one died; that their whole life has been changed since then. Is it unreasonable when St. Paul suggests to us, that we never should look at anything now, just as if Jesus had not come to this earth and laid down his life for us; that

we ought to look at everything, and specially at all spiritual and moral realities, in the light of his dying; that we should always bear about the remembrance of it! Oh, it is sad to see a Christian living in such a fashion as to show plainly that he has quite forgot how his Redeemer died! It is sad to feel in ourselves, that we spend many an hour just as if our Redeemer had never died! Surely it ought not so to be. It is not that we ought to be, or that we can be, always directly thinking of Christ's death; *that* is impossible; we must think of many a worldly matter, and think intently, too, or we shall do little good in this life; and no one, knowing anything of the laws of the human mind, would ever ask that the mind should be kept running ceaselessly upon any single thought. But what we ask is, that the remembrance of the Redeemer's dying should always be latent in our hearts; that it should, almost unnoticed, color all our views and doings; that even when other thoughts are uppermost, *that* should ever be at the bottom of our hearts; and more especially, that whenever we are called to think of spiritual things, and whenever we come to critical points in our pilgrimage-path, — places where we must go to right or left, — *that* remembrance should spring up into strong and vivid life, and be as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. When we think of sin, let us see it in the light of Christ's death, and hate it because it nailed him to the tree! Let us, whensoever we are pressed by

some pleasing temptation, associate it in our minds with the suffering and dying of Christ; oh, let us, whensoever and howsoever tempted to sin, call up before our memory the pale, drooping figure on the cross, anguished, bleeding, dying, — and let us think that *there* is the proof what sin is, and what God thinks of it; and thus, as a fence against temptation, as something to keep us always right in our views and feelings towards every form of evil, let us bear about with us the dying of our Lord! Or, is it suffering and sorrow that come to us; and are we ready to repine and to rebel? Oh, then, let us call to mind the agony and the dying of our Redeemer; and it will not seem so hard that the servant should fare no better than the Master fared? You may remember that good priest, in the history of our own country, who was subjected to inhuman tortures because he told a wicked king and court certain displeasing truths. The pain was cruel, he said after it was past; but he thought how meekly the cross was borne up Calvary; and *that* thought enabled him to bear it without a murmur. And how slight and trivial all *our* endurances will seem, when we set them by the side of those of our kind Redeemer! Or, are we pressed with the sense of our sinfulness, and the fear of God's wrath for sin? Then let us remember how Jesus died for us, the just for the unjust; how his blood can take all sin away; how he was wounded for our transgressions; how our sins were laid upon his sinless head; how it must

be in the salvation of such as us, that he is yet to see of the travail of his soul. And in days of doubt and fear for the way before us, let us remember how Jesus died; and think, he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to death for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Oh, let us, by faith, bear that remembrance in our hearts! The Redeemer's parting hour, indeed, is passed away; but its remembrance should never pass from us. Yea, rather, as fence against temptation; as light to show the true dark colors of sin; as lesson of patience, faith, hope, and charity; we should be "always bearing about" with us "the dying of the Lord Jesus!"

But there is more than this. There still remains for us a further way of doing what St. Paul names in our text. We have seen that we may always bear about the memory of Christ's dying, and see all things by *that* light; but, secondly, we may show in our daily life the transforming power of the Saviour's death. Our whole life, changed, and affected in its every deed, by the fact that Christ died, may be a standing testimony to all who see us that there is a real power to affect the character in the sight of the dying Saviour; and thus we may, in a very true and solemn sense, be always bearing about with us the dying of the Redeemer; bearing about with us a soul which is what it is, mainly because he died. And there is nothing incomprehensible, nothing mystical, in all

this. We are not asked to believe that Christ's death has a power to transform our nature, without seeing where that power lies, or how it is exercised. We have already, in thinking of the way in which we ought to be ever bearing with us the remembrance of our Master's death, had a glimpse of the rationale of the process by which Christ's death exercises its transforming power. To say that Christ's death has efficacy to transform the character, is just in other words to say *this*: that the remembrance of Christ's death is a practical thing in our hearts; that it will not rest in mere pensive recollection; — that it does not waste itself in *that*; but that it spurs on to action. It is impossible that we should rightly remember our Saviour's death; and yet live just the same as before. The remembrance of his dying; the view by faith of his cross; has something to say to everything we think, or say, or do. There is something in the mere contemplation of Christ crucified, for which heart and life, by God's grace, are the better, we can hardly say how; but we do not rest any weight on such a thought as that, because we know how natural it is for us all, when religious truths like *that* are presented to us, to feel somehow as if they were away from reality; and to fancy that many things are all sound and right enough in theology, but that somehow they fail to work in actual life. But, brethren, when in the view of the cross we see how bitterly and mysteriously evil and ruinous sin

is, surely the practical lesson is plain : Is it not that we should dread sin, and battle with temptation, and resolutely tread it down ; and earnestly seek for deliverance from the curse of that fearful thing which brought such unutterable agony upon our Redeemer ; and constantly pray for that Blessed Spirit who will breathe new life into every good resolution, and vivify into sunlight clearness every sound and true belief? You cannot look upon the dying Saviour, agonized on account of sin ; and then go and live in sin just as if he had not died ! And thus, in a mind and heart all whose beliefs and affections are founded on, and take their tone from, the fact of the Redeemer's death ; and in a daily life which is the outflow and result of these beliefs and affections ; you will be showing that the sight of Christ crucified has a real power to affect and transform human nature ; you will be "always bearing about in your" life and conduct and character, "the dying of the Lord Jesus !"

And this which has been said of the way in which views of sin, as beheld in the light of Christ's death, are carried into the life, and transform the nature, may serve as a specimen of the way in which the Saviour's dying should transform us entirely. Thus do right views of spiritual things, obtained by seeing them all in the light of Christ's death, pass into practice. When sorrow and suffering come, think of them as in the presence of the Redeemer's death ; and you

will learn the lesson of practical resignation. Under the deep conviction how sinful and lost you are, let the sight of your dying Saviour encourage you to go and confide your soul to him by a living, earnest faith. And in days of fear and anxiety, when you do not know how it will go with you, oh look to Jesus on the cross; and learn the lesson of practical confidence in God's disposing love and wisdom, as you think that surely he who provided *that* precious sacrifice will never fail to justify the hope and promise of the name the patriarch gave him; — that his name is still Jehovah-jireh, The Lord will provide; and that not in the mount of the Lord only, but over the wide world in the experience of all his people, *that* shall be seen. And to sum up all in one, let us be made conformable to Christ's death, let us daily bear about his dying, — by dying to sin and living to holiness. *That* is the grand conformity which is open to all of us; *that* is the fashion in which we may be "crucified with Christ!" In the perpetual mortifying of our corrupt affections and desires; in the ruling of our spirit; in the constant struggle against all that in us which is displeasing to God; all envy, hatred, malice, uncharitableness; all self-sufficiency, all pride, everything which there was nothing like in the mind of Jesus; we shall be crucified to the world, and the world crucified to us; and thus bear about our Redeemer's dying!

Yes, always bear it; never lay that burden down

that yoke made so easy and pleasant by the precious communications of the Holy Spirit. Always bear it; not in sourness; not in that hard, severe type of religion which we may see in some mistaken and narrow-hearted believers, and which does so much to repel the young from religion; not in that stupid forbidding f innocent amusement, which is strange indeed in the disciples of One whose first miracle was wrought at a marriage-festival; and who, we may be sure, cast no damp over its innocent mirth. Yes; always bear the Saviour's dying; bear it in humility, in kindness, in charity in your doings and your judgments; in resignation to God's wise appointments, in faith in God's great love, in faith the simplest and in love the deepest towards that Best and Kindest Friend, transcending all thought and word, who died for us upon the accursed tree. Bear it, too, in hopefulness and cheerfulness, so far as these things are given to us in this life. There need be no change upon your outward aspect, like that wearing change which passed upon St. Paul, as *you* bear about in the body your Saviour's dying; no change wrought upon you save that wrought so gradually by advancing years and their many toils and cares; your brow need not be lined a day the sooner, nor your hair a day the sooner gray; but oh that all of us might be daily and hourly bearing that burden! it would be well for the world we live in, and well for ourselves; you would look with interest, and almost with awe, at a man concerning whom you

knew, that all the while he was busied with the little business of life, there was a great, solemn, sacred remembrance at the bottom of his heart, ready to come up in the moment when it should be needed, and even now unconsciously giving its tone to all his thoughts; and oh, if a sand-grain looks small when you compare it with a mountain, think what petty, what inconceivably little, insignificant things the worries of daily life would be, to the man who was always bearing about with him the dying of Jesus Christ!

And thus, my friends, though to the end of our mortal life, we may never know what it is to bear physical sufferings like those of our Blessed Redeemer; though at the last we may lay our bodies in the grave, unmarked by stripes like those which he and his apostles bore; and though our cold hand, when it is cold at length, may moulder into clay, unpierced by such nails as pierced his merciful hands; we yet may, most truly and really, bear about his dying. It may go with us, that dying, in its remembrance and its influence, affecting all our views; leavening and transforming all our life. And when a few days or years are gone, and we are called indeed to die; when the heart, pausing for its long rest, beats feebly and slow, and the cold waters of the dark river seem stealing up and up to pass over us; oh let us think, to comfort and support us then, that we are faring only like our Master; that in this strange trial we are only being made conformable to

our Saviour's death! And not, we may humbly ask and hope, — not quite conformable to *that*. For not, we may humbly ask and hope, not like him, in torment and in shame, may *we* be called to draw our last breath; but on our quiet bed; and with dear friends by, to moisten the parching lips, and to smooth the weary pillow. And oh, my friends, if it shall please God to grant us that peaceful departure, how light will our burden be to his; and how little a part of *his* dying shall we be called to bear!



XII.

THE INCONSISTENT WORSHIP.

“They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.”
2 KINGS xvii. 33.



THE ten tribes which formed the kingdom of Israel, had at length wearied out God's forbearance; and God gave them over to the hand of the king of Assyria. That monarch took Samaria, and carried Israel away into the land of Assyria, where they remained as captives. But the Assyrian king did not choose that the land of Israel should remain without inhabitants; and so he collected a motley band of people from various portions of his dominions, and sent them to dwell in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel. But these new-comers did not find themselves comfortable. Through the country having lain desolate for a while, wild beasts had multiplied; and lions came and slew some of them. They were a poor ignorant race, that mixture of people from Babylon, Cuthah, Hamath, and Sepharvaim; but though they were ignorant, and by consequence superstitious, they came nearer the truth in their idea as to the reason why the lions

came, than some of our wise men nowadays, who regard any interference of God in the system of providence, as an unwarrantable intrusion. These poor ignorant people judged that God had sent the lions; and so far they were right. But they went wrong when they thought that the Being who sent the lions was a God specially connected with the land of Samaria; and when they fancied that this God had his own peculiar fancies, ideas, crotchets; and that he was angry because they did not know his particular way of thinking and feeling. They made their complaint to the king who had sent them; and a pitiful story it was. They sent him word that they were in a bad way; that they did not know "the manner of the God of the land;" and so that he had sent lions among them, who slew them; because they did not know the manner of the God of the land. Then the king of Assyria, feeling for their case; but with little sense, we may be sure, of the depth of meaning there was in that poor, sad, helpless wail of ignorance concerning God; gave orders to send back one of the captive priests, that he might give the new inhabitants of Samaria the information they needed; — that he might "teach them the manner of the God of the land." The priest went; and "taught them," we are told, "how they should fear the Lord;" but he must have taught them very badly, or they must have learned very ill; for the plan on which they fell was this. Each tribe continued to worship its own

god, the idol which it had previously worshipped ; and, in addition to this, all agreed in worshipping the true God as well. The men of Babylon worshipped one thing ; the men of Hamath worshipped another ; the Avites worshipped a third, and the Sepharvites a fourth ; they kept up the worship of the old familiar gods to which they had grown accustomed away in their own countries ; and then, in addition to *that*, they added a certain amount of worship to this peculiar-tempered " God of the land," with whose " manner " they had found it so hard to get acquainted. And the result was, that matters became what they are described as being in that short, but most suggestive sentence which forms my text. These new-comers to the land of Samaria " feared the Lord, and served their own gods." And so well pleased were they with this compromise between truth and falsehood, between God and Satan, that the historian that wrote this book was able to tell us they had kept it up for three hundred years.

If that singular race of men who lived many hundreds of years ago in the cities of Samaria had been the only race that ever did the like ; if there were no such thing known among us, who are living to-day in Britain, as that men should " fear the Lord, and serve their own gods ; " it would not have been worth while to found a sermon addressed to a Christian congregation upon such a text as that which I have chosen for this afternoon. No doubt, it would still have been a

curious study, the conduct and character of those poor superstitious creatures, whom a vague undefined terror of Almighty God led to offer him a little share in that religious worship which they rendered with the heartiness of early training and old associations to various lying idols ; but the study would have been more curious than practical ; and I suppose that most of us have lived too long to be much surprised, however we may be saddened, at the sight of sincere, humble, earnest, honest delusion and folly. But it is different when we remember that in the errors and delusions of these poor benighted beings, we may see new foes with an old face ; when we remember that among ourselves there are hosts of men who are doing the self-same thing which these people did ; when we remember that in the heart of each one of us there is an inveterate disposition to do that self-same thing. Yes, brethren, this subject which the text brings up, is as fresh, and as practically important, to-day, as it ever was ; and in asking your attention for a little while to the strange phase of religious feeling which the text sets before you, I know that I am asking your attention to a matter of personal concern to us all.

The first thought which I think suggests itself to our mind, in looking at the statement that the inhabitants of the Samaritan cities “feared the Lord, and served their own gods ;” is of the curious inconsistency of their conduct. They worshipped the

true God ; and, along with him, they worshipped various false gods. Now, this seems strange to us. We cannot imagine a man being at once a Christian, a Mohammedan, a Jew, a Heathen, and an Atheist. You must make your choice what religion you will profess ; you cannot profess several inconsistent religions together. But, my brethren, it is just because Christianity has so thoroughly leavened our ways of thinking, that there appears to us anything strange in the conduct of these inhabitants of Samaria. For Christianity, we all know, is an exclusive religion. It not merely calls men to believe in itself, but to reject every other faith. It not merely claims to be right and true ; but it boldly says that every other faith is wrong and false. The God of the Bible not merely commands us to worship *him* ; he commands us to worship no one else. His very first commandment is, "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." In short, the great characteristic of Christianity, and of Judaism which preceded it, is, that they are exclusive religions. This is their great characteristic as compared with all other religions. Christianity is a faith which admits no rivals, no competitors ; it demands to stand alone. And the true God is not the God of this land or that land ; he is the God of all the earth ; he tolerates no brother near his throne. But it was not so at all with the gods of false religions ; with the gods whom these poor Samaritans worshipped ; no, nor with the gods and goddesses who were worshipped

by the polished nations of Greece and Rome. It did not follow that because you held Jupiter to be a true god, you held Mercury or Apollo to be false gods. It did not follow because you worshipped Dagon, that you failed to worship Moloch. It did not follow that Beelzebub would feel himself slighted, because you offered a sacrifice to Rimmon. Each false god had his own province, and he held by *that*. One god was in prime favor in Philistia, another in Moab. One god ruled the sea, another the air, another the land, another the region under the earth. When the people at Athens or Rome heard of some new god, who was much esteemed in some distant country, and who was supposed to have done great things there; they took his claims into consideration; they inquired whether he deserved divine honors; and if they concluded that he did, they added him to their long list of gods; they built him a temple and appointed him priests and sacrifices; and all this without the least idea that they were trenching on the vested interests, on the rights and dignities, of the gods they already worshipped. And so you can see that these ignorant Samaritans, when they "feared the Lord, and served their own gods," had no sense at all of the inconsistency, — of the self-contradiction, — of what they did, such as that which we might feel. In all simplicity they imagined that in coming to Samaria, they had entered into the kingdom of a new god; and they judged that it was expedient to offer him such wor-

ship as might prevent his doing them mischief; but they had no notion at all of giving up the worship of the old, familiar idols, which they had worshipped in their distant homes. No; the gods would get on peaceably together. Tartak, Nergal, and Moloch, were still quite good gods, though it had been found expedient to add to their number one, who was evidently regarded as a rather peculiar-tempered god, — one whose “manner” it was not very easy quite to understand. It was upon this principle that these poor Samaritans went; it was thus they judged, and thus they acted.

A second thing worthy of notice in their conduct is this: the motive which led them to offer worship to the true God. You observe, *that* motive was pure and simple fear. They worshipped God, because they were afraid of him. They worshipped him, because they thought he had done them much mischief already; and because they thought that unless they did something to conciliate him, he might do them more mischief yet. They came, you see, from their various regions, to Samaria; they settled down in the abandoned homes which the mourning Israelites had lately left; they went on in their old worship of their old idols; and they never seem to have cast a thought upon the God of the tribes they had supplanted, till evil befell them. Good might have come, in any measure; and they would never have seen God in *that*. But when evil befell them, such was their con-

ception of the Divine nature, they said, Now, *here* is the finger of God. The lions came prowling about their fields and dwellings; and this neighbor and the other was devoured by them; and then at once their thoughts ran up to a God as the sender of mischief; *that* was all they knew about him; and they determined to worship him, not because he was good and kind and deserving of all worship; but because unless they affected some measure of regard and respect for him, he might send them something worse than even the lions who had already come. They thought of God, in short, not as a being whose love they hoped for, but as a being whose wrath they dreaded. Their idea of the Almighty, was of an author of mischief; one who had sent lions already, and who might send worse if he were not kept quiet. And thus their worship was in truth devil-worship, and not God-worship; for the essence of devil-worship lies in offering worship to a being not because you love him, but because you are afraid of him; not because you hope any good from him, but because you fear much harm from him. They could not possibly, these men, have any love for a Being of whom their entire idea was that he had sent the savage beasts who had torn their friends and their children; they could not possibly join in his worship with any pleasure or any heart; the language of their hearts never could be, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" It would rather be, How-

ever disagreeable thy tabernacles, however unpleasant thy worship, we must perforce submit to *that*, for fear of something worse.

And this leads us to the third matter which I wish to suggest to you, as worthy of notice in the conduct of the people of whom we are thinking. It is evident from the entire account of them, that the worship which they paid to the true God was not nearly so hearty and real a thing as that which they paid to their old idols. "They *feared* the Lord;" they stood in a vague terror of him, which prompted them to offer him a sacrifice now and then; to meet for his worship now and then; but "they *served* their own gods; — they lived day by day in mind of *them*; they were not merely the *worshippers*, at long intervals, of these false gods; they were the *servants* of these false gods, — obeying them, working for them, from hour to hour. When the two things came together; the worship of a Being from whom they simply feared evil, and the worship of beings from whom they expected good; you can easily see which of the two would have the predominance. You can easily see which would always have to give way to the other, in case of any conflict between the two. You can easily see that the problem which the sharp-witted man among these Samaritans would set himself to solve, would be *this*: to find the minimum of worship which would satisfy the true God; to find the very smallest amount of reverence and service that would just keep him

from doing them any mischief. The best they looked for from him, was to refrain from doing them harm and the worship which would barely suffice to get him to refrain from doing them harm, was all that a prudent and economical man would think of rendering. But it was quite different with regard to their false gods. From *them* they hoped good, as well as feared evil. And in *their* case the astute Samaritan would think it judicious to offer a very great amount of worship, because he would think that, the more worship he gave, the more good he would get. A little worship was needed, for a beginning, to make sure that these gods should not harm him; and then any extra worship, beyond that point, would go towards making sure that they should bless him. In short, my friends, the worship prompted by fear will be the very least that *will do*. But as for the worship prompted by hope and love, there is no limit to *that*. No part of *it* could be regarded as thrown away; it would all be of use. Now, the great laws of human thought will in the long run sway the belief and the practice of even the dullest minds; and so these poor, ignorant, superstitious Samaritans had still penetration enough to see in what quarter, according to their ideas of Almighty God and of their own false deities, their worship would be most profitably invested. Accordingly, they carried out their views to their natural and logical conclusion: "They *feared* the Lord, and *served* their own gods."

Such, my friends, are the great characteristic features of the conduct of the people spoken of in the text. And in order that their way of thinking and acting might be set before you with greater clearness, I have pointed out to you these characteristic features without interrupting the line of thought by any reference to ourselves, and to our own ways of thinking and acting. But now, brethren, let us seek to give a practical bearing to all this that has been said. Let us look back upon the errors of these Samaritans, so many centuries ago; let us see whether human nature be not now very much what it was then; let us see whether we ourselves, and many around us, are not, day by day, falling into the like errors; or at least tempted to the like errors still.

The Samaritans did not see that it was inconsistent to worship the true God, and at the same time to worship false gods; they did not remember, because they never had been taught, that the true God claims to reign *alone*; that he does not regard himself as worshipped at all, if any other being is worshipped along with him. Now, my friends, we have not the excuse which the Samaritans had; we quite understand how exclusive is the worship which our God claims for himself; but is it not sadly true that day by day we are all too much disposed to combine his worship with other worship, — to “fear the Lord and serve our own gods”? Ah, brethren, many a profess-

ing Christian is trying in his entire life to do the very thing which the Saviour said could not be done, — to “serve God and Mammon.” There is many a man who has that degree of superstitious fear of what God may do to him, that he dare not cast off God’s fear altogether; while yet the love of money, or the love of pleasure, or the love of eminence and honor, really sits upon the throne of his heart! He “fears the Lord;” and at the same time he thinks to “serve his own gods,” — wealth, pleasure, or ambition. Of course, the days of stock and stone idolatry are past, at least in this country; but who needs to be told that idols are worshipped in Britain yet, as truly as idols ever were worshipped at Babylon or Samaria? The essence of idolatry is there, whether a man casts his gold into an image and bows down to it; or only leaves it in the form of a balance at his banker’s, or invests it in the Funds; and then makes it the first thing in his heart and thoughts. Not, my friends, that this view should be pushed to any fanatical extreme. Not that Christianity requires of us to set no value at all upon earthly good, or to refuse to give to those we love any affection at all. *That* is asceticism, monasticism; it is not Christianity. The requirements of Christianity are always characterized, among other things, by sound, practical common-sense. They are always *workable*. They will always *do* in actual life. What Christianity requires is, that God should be supreme in the heart; that nothing else should ever

be put on a level with him ; that he should reign in the soul as he does in the universe, *alone*, with all things else at an immeasurable distance beneath his feet. And the great practical test whether this is so or not, is, whether in the event of our duty to God coming in competition with our obtaining any worldly profit or pleasure or advantage of any kind, the worldly advantage has always and at once to give way. Say you have it in your power to gain some money by doing something dishonest ; by telling what is not true to your neighbor, or by overreaching him in any way. Now, my friend, if you admit for one moment the idea of doing the unfair thing for the sake of the profit that may come of it ; you are for that moment weighing with yourself whether you may not succeed in doing what the Samaritans did, — “fearing the Lord,” and at the same time “serving your own god,” — your god in this case being Mammon. The fraudulent trader who adulterates his wares, and yet is never out of church on a Sunday ; the greedy farmer, who will tell many lies to get a sound price for a lame horse, yet who would not on any consideration be absent from a sacrament ; and I say it with sorrow, brethren, I have known several such ; what are such men doing but what the Samaritans did : “fearing the Lord, and serving their own gods !”

And this brings us to the second thing we remarked

as worthy of notice in the conduct of the Samaritans · they worshipped the true God, because they were afraid he would do them harm unless they worshipped him. Their motive in worshipping God was not love, but fear. And, O brethren, is it not sadly true, that there is too much of the same thing among ourselves? Are not very many professing Christians constrained to make some little profession of religion, and to pay some little regard to religious duties and observances, just by a superstitious fear that something will happen to them if they do not, — that God will send some evil upon them if they do not? Is it not so, that all of us have known what it is to do some religious duty for no better reason? When we were weary and had little heart for it, and would rather have escaped it, have we not sometimes uttered some formal, heartless words of prayer, because we were afraid to omit them; because we feared something ill would happen to us, if we did not interpose this perfunctory performance of duty — a duty that is worth nothing if it be done perfunctorily — between us and the anger of God! Ah, brethren, it is deep-set in human nature, the disposition to serve God from the wrong motive, and to regard him from the wrong point of view. It is deep-set in our fallen nature, the disposition to think of God as a being from whom we dread evil rather than as one from whom we hope good; and the disposition to worship him rather from fear than from love. But surely you do not need to be reminded what an un-

christian way *that* is of looking at God ; what a heathenish motive *that* is for serving God ! Who can forget what Christ told us was the first and great commandment of God's law ? Not, Thou shalt dread God, be afraid of God, crouch and tremble and shudder at the name of God ; no, far from that : " Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind ! " *That* is Christian worship ; *that* is the grand motive that should prompt to the worship of the Christian's God ! Under the dispensation of the Cross, the terrors of the law may still be rightly used to awaken men from utter carelessness as to their soul's salvation ; you may rightly impress it upon them, that away from Jesus, God is to the sinner " a consuming fire ; " but once driven to " flee from the wrath to come ; " — once led to Jesus ; — once united by living faith to that kind, loving Saviour, — oh, it is love and not terror that leads the Christian on ! The mere dread of hell, I make bold to say it, has in the heart of the earnest believer, walking humbly with his God and leaning simply on his Redeemer, really no appreciable weight at all. It is not because sin ends in ruin, that he hates sin so much ; it is because sin bound his gracious Saviour to the accursed tree ! It is not because he dreads final perdition, that he strives daily against sin, and seeks daily the aids of the Holy Spirit, and strives ever to lay up his treasure on high ; it is because he longs for his blessed Lord's gracious presence, because he

pants for the day when sin and sorrow shall be done with, because he thirsts for the time when he shall enter on the blessed rest of God! We did not come here to-day, my friends, because we were afraid of God; we "worship him in fear," indeed; but it is no slavish fear; we are not within these walls, a crouching, panic-stricken, shivering crew, as driven by the slave-driver's lash, in pure abject terror that God would send some terrible judgment upon us if we failed to present ourselves in his house, and to go through some form of his worship. No, we have come to the kind merciful God who loves us, as children might gather at a parent's knee; we have come to One who so loved us as to give his son to die for us; we have come to worship One who wills not that any should perish, but that all should believe and live; we have come to tell of all our wants that he may supply them, and to confess all our sins that he may wash them all away; we have come to ask strength for our work, and comfort in our sorrows, and heart for our weary way. And when we look up to him, we see nothing of which to be afraid. The invisible God, indeed, eludes our sight; but we can see him in a gracious face we know well; with the eye of faith we can see a gentle, loving countenance looking down on us, with eyes that for us have been dim with tears! We see the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" we can trust our souls to his blessed keeping; we can worship and serve him

“whom having not seen we love;” — and love without a fear!

And finally, my friends, you remember that the last thing we remarked in the conduct of the Samaritans was, that it was plain they were far more hearty in serving their own gods, from whom they expected good, than in serving the Almighty, from whom they only dreaded ill. And who needs to be told that in *this* respect, too, many professing Christians exactly resemble them? Indeed, my brethren, by the very nature of things, the three things mentioned as remarkable in the Samaritans will always go together. If you, like them, try to combine the worship of God with the service of Mammon, or Pleasure, or Ambition; you will soon find that any worship you can spare for the true God, you are giving, just for fear that some mischief will happen you if you do not take means to pacify him; and you will soon find, too, that your worship of God is a very chilly and heartless thing when compared with your service of your worldly idol. The avaricious man; the dishonest man; the over-ambitious man; even if for fear of evil he keeps up some kind of worship of God, — will find that God is always growing less in his heart, and money or eminence growing more; will know quite well that if he were free to act as inclination leads him, he would give up the sham of worshipping God at all, and openly give his worship where he has already given his heart. It is a fact about which there can be no doubt, that if a man tries to worship God

and Mammon together, Mammon will always have the advantage; Mammon will always have the pre-eminence, and the chief share of service. If you try to "fear the Lord, and serve your own gods," then in the long run, your own gods will get all your service, and the Almighty will get none, — or, if any, then the very least thing that you think will keep him quiet. You know that, my friends. Your prayers will always get shorter, — your attendance at church more irregular and more heartless, — your reading of the Bible a more wearisome task. Your conscience will always become more easily pacified; the worship of your earthly idols will eat up the worship of your God; and some day you may remember with a start, that weeks have passed since you knelt in prayer, or since you opened God's word; that the care of your soul and of eternity, long pushed as it were into a corner of your time, can now find no time at all!

O brethren, may God grant to us, to make religion the first thing; to give God the first place! We *may* work, we *must* work, for many things; but may we never forget that there is "one thing needful!" And so shall we be enabled to escape that error described in our text; an error as natural to human beings now, as when men six-and-twenty hundred years since "feared the Lord, and served their own gods." So shall we be enabled, in a nobler sense than that in which he wrote them, to take up the poet's words: to "fear our God, and know no other fear!"



XIII.

THE VAGUENESS AND ENDLESSNESS OF HUMAN ASPIRATIONS.

“ And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.” — PSALM lv. 6.



DO not know, my friends, where I could find more convincing proof of the essential identity of human nature now, with human nature thousands of years since, than we find in these words. The words are very ancient; but their spirit is perfectly modern. These words were centuries old, in the days when this country was a savage wilderness, peopled by more savage men; and yet, they have quite the ring of the latter half of the nineteenth century after Christ. Here we find David, king and psalmist, involved in some of those many sorrows and troubles which we may be glad he passed through; some of those many sorrows and troubles which fitted him for writing those sacred poems which come so home to our hearts, and which seem to suit our own case and describe our own feelings so well. Here we find the psalmist and king in great perplexity and grief and fear. The first of modern essayists has said that the great characteristic

of modern life is worry ; but it should seem from the text that it was the great characteristic of ancient life too ; for if there ever was such a thing in this world, here we have the utterance of a thoroughly worried man. And see what he says. From the midst of endless and countless cares, fears, and griefs, he wearily looks up ; he plainly sees that where he is the day will never come in which cares, griefs, and fears will not still surround him ; and so he bursts out into a vague, hopeless, yet passionate cry, — he cannot clearly say for what, — but only that he might get away to some place, — he does not know where, — in which these should be done with forever ! Ah, the vague aspirations and longings of human nature, — only to define them, only to try and get them into a tangible shape, makes us feel how vain and foolish they are. The psalmist wanted, he did not well know what ; — but only to get away from here. He knew he was not at rest where he was ; he felt that he never would be at rest there ; and he breaks out into words which seem mistily to mean that he fancied there surely was, somewhere, some happy island where he might find peace and rest at last. My friends, I spoke of the essentially modern tone of that fancy as proving how like *we* are now to what King David was centuries ago, — as proving that man is always essentially the same. Do you not remember that when the greatest living poet wishes to set before us a human being of this age, restlessly dissatisfied

and disappointed, he puts upon *his* lips words which look almost like an expansion of the vague aspiration of the psalmist; he represents *him* too, as confusedly wishing that he could get anywhere away from where he was; he makes *him* vaguely long to burst all links of civilized habit, to leave all traces of civilized man behind him, to fly to distant seas where an European flag never floated, as though thus he could cast off the burden of his cares and of himself! And no doubt, we can all sometimes sympathize with the fancy. No doubt, it must be accepted as an unquestionable fact, that the many advantages of civilization are to be obtained only at the price of countless and ceaseless worry. No doubt, we must all sometimes sigh for the woods and the wigwam; but the feeling is as vain as that of the psalmist's wearied aspiration in the text. The modern poet, indeed, shows us one point of difference between ancient and modern modes of thought; he makes the man whom he describes analyze his feeling and his wish, and see for himself how vain they are; he makes him confess that his words are wild, and that they set out no more than a dream and a fancy. Here, indeed, we can discern that the psalmist was of an earlier age, and an earlier period in human development. He merely records what his feeling was; he does not stop to analyze and examine it; for all he tells us, the vague feeling might have remained with him yet, that once you gave him the swift wings, he would know where

to fly with them ; — that once he had “wandered far off,” he could “remain in the wilderness,” and be quite peaceful and content at last. But it is just this thing, which makes the aspiration in the text one so practically profitable for us to think of ; it is just because in its vagueness, its unreasonableness, its endlessness, it is so accurate a type of the endlessness and the vagueness of human aspirations. Oh, give the psalmist the swift wings ; and whither could he fly ? Give him all the universe to choose from ; and where would he find the place where he could be at rest ? Give men all this world could yield them ; tell men that for the naming it, they shall have every wish gratified to the utmost, that begins and ends on this world and this life ; and they will be as far from rest for their weary souls as ever. And, thank God, we know the reason why. It is because “this is not our rest.” It was because God had unalterably fixed and appointed, that worldly things alone can never make the soul of man permanently happy. You think to make yourself content and happy without the good part in Christ, and the reconciled love of God in him ; you cannot ; it is impossible. God says *No* to that ; it cannot be done. If you think and try to find real rest for your soul away from God in Christ ; if you think to be really happy away from Christ ; you are thinking and trying to do what, by the make of your being, is impossible. You might as well think to quench the thirst of the parched throat with sand, as

to satisfy man's thirst for happiness with anything merely worldly. You are in the wrong course altogether, when you try to do *that*. And when you think to do it, you are doing something as natural, as endless, as hopeless, as the Jewish monarch thought to do, when in a world which has no corner, no field, no seclusion, no station, no life, that could give him rest, he fancied he could find rest if he could but fly far enough away from the sorrows that were plucking at him where he was; when he said, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

Yes, my friends; it is a most practical, and a most important subject, for us to think of to-day, that this text brings before us. For it would be our salvation, if we could only feel and realize the fact, that this world is not our rest; and that only in God, as we see him in the face of Christ, can we find rest and peace, and that which shall truly satisfy our weary and thirsting souls. For, after all, it is the love of this world that stands between most men, and their seeking to go to Jesus and believe in him; and if you could only get them to feel it in their hearts that this world will not do, — that this world cannot give us rest, — it would be a vast step in the direction of honestly seeking to lay up their treasure in a better. Now it is just by vague fancies, like that of the psalmist, that men encourage themselves to go on setting their hearts on earthly things, and never really

striving to win the good part in Christ with the same real intention and industry with which they strive to gain some worldly advantage. When human beings meet with disappointments, cares, anxieties, bereavements; when they find how different a thing daily worry has made of life from what they had anticipated in the bright dreams of childhood; when they are constrained to feel, day by day, that they are not happy, that they cannot be happy, that there is always something happening to vex them, and keep them from being happy, — instead of learning the lesson which God is teaching them by all this, that they ought not to set their heart on things here, that they ought to seek for that one thing needful which will never disappoint, that they ought to seek for rest in Jesus, where alone it is to be found, — instead of doing all *this*, they do something exactly analogous to what the psalmist did; they fancy that there is some time if not some place in this world to which if they could fly away, they would be at rest; they bear up under the worries of present time in some vague hope that better days are coming, — days in which there will be no more of these little fretting cares, these heavy disappointments, these crushing bereavements, that weigh upon the present; days that shall pass unanxiously, peacefully, happily; and in which this world will, not perhaps satisfy our early anticipations of it, but at least come up to the moderate hopes of maturer years, and afford the soul something like content and

quiet happiness at last. Oh, brethren, that we could once for all get rid of this false notion,— a notion which does so much to keep our hearts in slavery to the things of sense and time! Oh that we could really feel that it is as vain a fancy, to believe that future years will bring rest with them, as the psalmist's, that once far away in the wilderness, he would be at rest! The days to come will do no more for us, than the dove's wings and the desert would have done for him. Coming days may and will do for us just what the wings would have done for the wearied monarch;— they will no doubt bear us away from the trials and troubles that now surround us,— that are present now;— but they will only bear us to other trials and troubles that are awaiting us then. Oh, brethren, that we could lay it to heart, that the day will never come in which there will not be something to vex and weary; the day will never come in which everything will go as we would wish; the day will never come in this world that will make the soul happy and complete; and all this just because God does not intend that such a day should ever come; all this because this world was never meant for our rest; and whenever it is beginning to grow too like our rest, God will send us something to remind us that it is not; all this because these immortal souls within us are not to be put off with any worldly aim or worldly enjoyment,— but will ever reach and blindly long after something as immortal as themselves! **It**

was not a piece of mystical piety, but a plain, certain, philosophic truth, that sentence of the ancient African bishop, written more than a thousand years since: "Thou madest us for Thyself," — thus he addressed his Maker, — "and our souls are restless, till they find rest in Thee!"

The wings and the wilderness would not have made the psalmist happy; and no imaginable worldly blessings will ever suffice to make us so. The only real rest that the soul of man can ever know, is that which is given by him who said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And not even *that* rest, given by the Redeemer to his own, is perfect in this present life; the best believer's heart will be many a time disquieted and perplexed, so long as he abides here. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." It *remaineth*; it is waiting for them; far away. My dear friends, this is not our rest; our rest is beyond the grave. We are but "strangers and pilgrims upon earth;" and heaven is our home. And it is only our Saviour's presence that can make us happy. God has made us so that we never shall be right, till we are "forever with the Lord!" It is not the quiet country, that will give all the rest he needs to the jaded man of business in the great city. It is not the longed-for breathing space, the longed-for leisure, that is all which is needed by the over-driven brain. It is not the home fireside, and the cheerful domestic circle,

that is all the lonely wanderer needs to give him rest. It is not money that will really satisfy the soul of the man who works hardest for it; it is not high station and eminent fame that will truly enable even the most ambitious man to sit down and feel himself perfectly content at last. There will always be something wanting; always some vague idea like the psalmist's, that if he had but wings, he would fly far, far away. There are rest and peace to be found in God, — in God as we see him in the merciful face of Christ; and no other where!

Now, brethren, we remember that it was a king who wrote these words of the text. It was one who had attained to the highest position which can be reached by any human being. It was one who had experienced an extraordinary degree of what men esteem as good fortune. He was at first nothing more than a shepherd-lad; but he came out from that lowly estate, and rose to fame and power and wealth. He actually reached all those things after which most human beings are striving in vain through all their lives. You know how men labor and pinch year after year to gain money, and possibly after all can do no more than get the ends to meet, of what they get, and what they must give away; here was a man who attained wealth without limit. You know the silly way in which people scheme and plan, to gain a little advance in social position; to get recognized as fairly

belonging to a class a hair's-breadth higher than that in which they were born; to get admitted to good society; well, here was a man who had undeniably risen from a humble origin to the very top of the social scale. And is *this* the man, we are all ready to think, who speaks so poorly of a world which has used him so handsomely? Yes, the very man. All these things he had attained failed to make him happy; there were many thorns yet in the pillow; his heaviest sorrows befell him after he was an anointed king. You remember, too, how his more famous son, Solomon, the wisest and greatest man of his time, summed up the result of all his experience of life in the mournful declaration, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity!" Now, brethren, it is good for us to listen to such words, from such lips. You cannot say that Solomon or David cried down this world because they could not get it; you cannot think that *they* said the grapes were sour because they could not reach them; you might have suspected something like *that*, if you had heard a man who had failed in life declaring that "all is vanity," or wishing for the dove's wings, that he might fly to the wilderness, and get far away from a world of which he was sick and weary. This was not Timon, giving up the world because the world had given up him. Here were men who had got all that life could give them; and who yet declared that all would not suffice to give the soul rest. And not merely is there here for us a

lesson not to envy the rich and great ; not to seek great things for ourselves ; not merely is there something here to remind us, that we may be as happy in a lowly station as anywhere on earth, — that in the Valley of Humiliation, as Bunyan said, we may have as much of the herb called heart's-ease in our bosom, as anywhere ; but there is a lesson of yet deeper spiritual import read us by the history of those great men who stand out like beacons for our guidance as we steer over the sea of life. Very few men indeed ever reach all the specific objects they seek ; and so come to such vague aspirations as those of the psalmist. Very few men, whatever may be their occasional feeling, ever reach that point, that the serious and constant wish of their heart comes to be after the undefined end, the vague rest, of our text. For it is of the essential nature of human objects of pursuit, that while each is in view, it shuts out the view of the rest ; it concentrates our thoughts and wishes upon itself ; it creates some confused impression that we should be happy, that we should be right at last, if we could only reach it. We fancy that something would make us happy if we could get it ; and if we never do get it, we go on under that fancy ; we keep thinking that it would make us happy ; while if we had got it, we should have found that it would not. As for instance : a man wants to be rich ; he sets his heart on wealth. Well, year after year, he toils for *that*. He never reaches it. And so he still **thinks**

that if he had but reached it, however much it may have failed with others, it would have succeeded with him; and he goes down to his grave still fancying that if he had been rich he would have been happy, — still thinking within himself, No doubt I knew So-and-so, and such another man, who were very rich, and they did not seem to be very happy; but *that* was their own fault; they did not know how to manage; if I had been in their place, I should have been perfectly content! Yes, the next end shuts out all the rest; as when you ask a drowning man what he wants, he says, Save me from drowning, — *that* is all he wants in the mean time; he never thinks of anything more till he has got that. But here in the text we find a man who had actually gained all the ends after which men seek and strive; here is a man who has actually gained wealth, rank, fame, empire; and now he vaguely wants more. He has got past the stage in which we fix on something near, — on some specific end, — as money, or position, or the like; he has got past that, and reached the farther stage at which we look up, and take a general view, and ask ourselves to what all this is tending; and *then* comes the vague, confused wishing and reaching on for something which we cannot define; then comes the “Oh that I had wings like a dove! Then would I fly away, and be at rest.”

And now, my friends, let me remind you, that it is not God's word alone that tells us how this world is

not our rest. Other voices chime in, and tell us the same sad story. "Vanity of vanities;" "The world passeth away;" "We all do fade as a leaf;" O brethren, is not *that* the strain of very much of the best part of the literature of this day, and of all days? Do you not know how one of the most brilliant authors of the age has devoted all his writings to the illustration and enforcement just of Solomon's famous text? But, brethren, what a wretched blank we feel, when genius tells us the story of this world's vanity, — and stops short there! Oh, surely those who have, with an eloquence that far surpasses the theologian's, told us of the unsatisfying nature of all this world can yield us, were especially bound to point us to him in whom alone the weary, thirsting soul can find all its needs! If you *will* point man's poor soul away from this world, oh, point it to Jesus; direct its faltering steps to *him* who has promised the rest to which the speediest wings would not bear you, and which you could not find in a wilderness far more remote than that remote seclusion to which the wearied monarch would fain have fled away! Never say that "this is not our rest," without remembering the blessed "I will give you rest," — without remembering thankfully that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God." But how different the case often is! You find it set out, sometimes with all the bitterness of the cynic, sometimes with matchless pathos and tenderness, that "here we have no continuing city;" well,

and what then? You wait in vain for that which would complete that half-sentence and half-truth: "but we seek one to come." No; in many cases you will hear what virtually comes to this: "Here we have no continuing city; and it does not much matter." It *does* matter! If this world be so blank, so vain, so unsatisfying, what could we do, but for the blessed hope of a better; what could we do but for that blessed gospel which tells us of a Saviour who will guide us thither, and wash away our sins in his blood, and send us a Holy Spirit to make us pure as he is pure! This is far too serious a case for mere sentimentalism. Nothing will stand us in stead but the faith of Christ, with its present strong consolations, with its substantial hopes for days to come. There is nothing real upon earth, but that good part, that saving interest in Christ, which never can decay. Everything else, even if it could satisfy while it lasts, is passing away so fast, and will be passed away so soon! We feel this sometimes, when sudden vivid glimpses come back upon us of tranquil days, gone forever; or when we realize it plainly, that all the blessings which now surround us, — home, friends, children, strength and life, are going too, — changing, decaying, ebbing away from us, withering in our grasp. Oh! dear friends, where shall your portion be? Here, amid the cares and changes of time; or here, amid the satisfying and enduring joys of immortality! Oh that we might each choose, for our

soul's portion, him in whom there is pardon for the guilty soul, holiness for the sinful, rest for the weary, and peace for the disquieted ! He made us for himself ; he redeemed us with his blood ; his blessed promise is of rest ; oh, may our souls, by nature restless, find rest in him !



XIV.

COMFORT TO SODOM.

“When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them: that thou mayest bear thine own shame, and mayest be confounded in all that thou hast done, in that thou art a comfort unto them.” — EZEK. xvi. 53, 54.

NOW, first, what is the meaning of this text?

We find that Jerusalem is said to have been a comfort to Sodom and Samaria; and this is mentioned as if it were a fault. Jerusalem was to be punished, we are told; Jerusalem was to be ashamed and confounded; because it had been a comfort to Sodom and Samaria. Jerusalem was the chosen city of God, we know; and Sodom and Samaria were places remarkable for their wickedness. But still, we are a little surprised at the first glance at our text. Is it not a Christian's duty to do good to *all* as he has opportunity? Are we not bidden to love even our enemies, and to do good even to them that hate us; and can it then be wrong to be a comfort even to the worst of mankind, — even to Samaria and Sodom?

Yes, in such a case as this it is wrong to be a comfort to a bad man or a bad city ; because in such a case it is the very reverse of a kind turn to be a comfort to them. It is doing harm to them, and not doing good to them, to be a comfort in this particular way. For Jerusalem had been a comfort to Sodom and Samaria in such a manner as had encouraged them in their sins. When the wicked men of these cities were ready to be frightened and anxious about their sins, then the men of Jerusalem had behaved in such a way as tended to keep their minds easy, — to smooth down their anxieties and fears. Jerusalem had, so to speak, kept Sodom and Samaria in countenance. When the people of Sodom and Samaria were growing ashamed and alarmed, and were likely to repent of their sins, they looked across to Jerusalem ; they saw it was just as bad as they were ; and so they said to themselves, If Jerusalem, God's own chosen city, goes on in these evil courses, there can be no great harm in our doing so too. If we are going wrong, we are going wrong in good company. We, who never pretended to be better than our neighbors, need not mind much if we are no worse than people who profess to be the chosen people of God. And so, Jerusalem encouraged Sodom and Samaria to go on in sin ; and so, in this blameworthy sense, Jerusalem was "a comfort to them." It was a comfort, even as the flapping wings of the vampire bat make a cool current of air which is extremely comfortable to the sleeping

man whose blood it is drawing fast away. It was a comfort, as it is comfortable for the weary man, out in the snow-storm, to sink gently down in that slumber from which he will never wake below. But the comfort of that sleep which will shortly end in death is far from a desirable thing. The true friend of a man in such a case would be he who should rouse him up, however rudely, and compel him to push on his way, however unwillingly. And in like manner, if Jerusalem had wished to do a kind turn to Sodom, the course to follow would not have been that of soothing its fears away, and encouraging it to go on peacefully and cheerfully in the road which would end in woe. The best and kindest turn which a good man could render to a bad man, would be, to be by precept and example a constant gnawing discomfort, — to keep his conscience always uneasy, — to give him not an hour of rest, — to keep him ever anxious, unhappy, fearful, — till he had turned him into the right and safe path. It was sin and shame for God's professed people to live in such a way as encouraged those who never professed to be God's people to persevere in their sin and thoughtlessness; and very fitly might Jerusalem be threatened with shame and confusion, "in that it was a comfort" to Sodom.

Now, my friends, I am sure you will all readily see, that there is a great and important principle suggested to us by the words of the text. The text suggests to us, that it is very blameworthy in those who

profess to be Christians, to do anything which may comfort a sinner in his sinfulness, and encourage him to go on in his evil ways. You know, every Christian is solemnly bound to do all he can to make other men Christians. The knowledge of the gospel is not a thing which a man may have, and without blame keep to himself. No; all Christians, and not the ministers of the cross only, are under a bounden obligation to bring all within the sphere of their influence into the same light and liberty in which they themselves rejoice. And we know that a special blessedness is promised to him who shall turn a sinner from the error of his ways. "He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." And just as blessed and happy a thing as it is to bring another soul to the belief of the gospel, — so wretched and wicked and fearful a thing is it when a man who bears the Christian name lives in such a way as positively encourages those around him to contemn and disbelieve Christianity. And alas! how often we find this so! How many a seeming believer, — yea, how many an inconsistent and injudicious real believer, — is "a comfort to Sodom;" that is, by his daily life does what he can to bring religion into discredit, — to make worldly men think it a hypocritical pretence, — a sham and a delusion! Ah, Christianity has received its sorest wounds in the houses of its seeming friends. The infidel cannot damage re-

ligion half so much as its hypocritical professor can. The consistent believer, by his entire life, should be a warning to the unbelievers around him. It should be a daily thorn in the flesh for the unconverted man only to see him and converse with him. To do so should make the unconverted man uneasy, dissatisfied with himself; it should make him feel that he lacks something that is supremely needful; it should stir in him a sense of discomfort which nothing can allay, save an instant hearty acceptance of the great salvation which is in Christ. Now, my brethren, is this so with you? There are many of you here who profess that you are Christians. There are many of you who come season by season to the communion table, and there declare that you are the disciples of Christ. Well, and what does your life say? Does that recommend Christianity to all around you? Does your daily life enforce the sermons which the unconverted hear in church; or does it nullify them? Are you people whose conversation and conduct, — whose candor and scrupulous fairness in your dealings, and manifest dread of committing sin, no matter what gain may be got by it, — are a constant witness to all who see you that your religion is a reality; or are you rather a “comfort to Sodom,” — something that unbelievers may point to as a proof that religion is all a pretence, — something to encourage them in their neglect of religion, — something that worldly men can point at and say, See, that man is a communicant, —

he is never out of church, — he makes a great profession of religion, — and is he a bit better than we are, who make no profession of religion at all? If there is any difference, is it not that he is worse? Ah, my brethren, surely we have all got sins enough of our own to answer for, without making ourselves thus partakers of other men's sins, by so living that they may find in our example an apology for all the ill they do. But let us look more particularly into this matter, and think of various ways in which professing Christians may lay themselves open to the charge of being a "comfort to Sodom and Samaria."

1. There is one obvious way in which professing Christians may do this, which we mention only to pass it by, in the hope that none of us who bear even the Christian name are so sorely and shamefully guilty. This is the way in which we understand from the prophet that Jerusalem was a comfort to Sodom; and that was, by being actually as bad as Sodom itself. You can easily imagine how wicked men would take encouragement to go on in wickedness, when they found those who claimed to be God's peculiar people as wicked as themselves. If there were such a fearful and wretched sight to be seen, as a church-going man and a communicant, who was a swearer, a drunkard, a liar, a slanderer, and a cheat; if there were such a thing to be found, — as God forbid there should ever be, — would not every swearer and drunk-

ard and liar in the parish quiet his conscience with the reflection that *he* was no worse than that wicked professor of religion? Would not such a man be a comfort to all the Sodoms and Samarias in the district? And it is for this reason that it is impossible to calculate the amount of mischief that may be done in a parish by an unworthy minister, — by one of those degraded men whom every now and then the Church is called to denude of the office which he has disgraced. O brethren, it is easy to say, and it is true to say, that religion is a thing that must be judged of on the ground of its own merits, and quite apart from the conduct of those who profess to believe in it; yet, illogical as it may be, foolish and wrong as it may be, the mass of mankind will always encourage themselves in sinfulness when they find professing Christians going on in sin. True it is, that the right way of regarding such a case is to judge that these professing Christians are no Christians, — that they are only men who are adding hypocrisy to their other sins; and that it would be as fair to reckon darkness as a part of light as to reckon them as men for whom religion is in the least degree responsible. And passing by such a case, as one too miserable to be thought of, and in any case quite hopeless to mend, let us consider whether there may not be ways in which even sincere and good Christians may, without saying or doing anything that is expressly sinful, yet so act as to be a comfort to Sodom, — as to

encourage wicked and worldly men in worldliness and sin.

2. And as one of these we mention, allowing sinful conduct to pass without notice or rebuke. If any sincere Christian is present in a company where what is sinful is said or done ; and if he permits it to pass without remark, or even appears tacitly to approve it ; I do not see how he can clear himself from the charge of having been “ a comfort to Sodom.” If any clergyman is present in a company of persons who so far forget, I do not say what is in accordance with God’s law or with morality, but even what is due to common propriety, as to indulge in profane swearing ; and if the clergyman allows that to pass without the least indication of disapproval ; I do not see how he can clear himself from the charge of having been “ a comfort to Sodom.” If any sincere Christian is present when any man avows his intention of doing what is wrong, or mentions with satisfaction that he has already done what is wrong ; and if the Christian makes no sign of what his feeling is or ought to be, then that Christian most assuredly is “ a comfort to Sodom.” If any sincere Christian is present, when a man relates with something like pride how he made an extremely profitable bargain by means which he probably regarded as being decidedly smart, but which right-thinking people would call lying and cheating ; and if the Christian expresses nothing of the disgust which such conduct has excited in his breast ; then that Christian

is proving himself "a comfort to Sodom." For, my friends, the very worst man attaches, and cannot help attaching, great importance to the opinion of his behavior which a real Christian entertains. His own heart condemns him when he does what is wrong; and he has an uneasy feeling that the Christian is in his heart condemning him too. Depend upon it, all who are real consistent Christians are able by their disapproval, — even by their silent disapproval, — to check a man most materially in his wrong-doing; and they are also able most materially to encourage him and comfort him in his wrong-doing by appearing to approve it. The apparent approval of one true and earnest Christian, — even the very humblest in worldly rank, — will have more influence to comfort the wicked man, — to keep his mind easy, and his conscience asleep, — than the loudest declarations of his own wicked associates that he is a fine fellow and has done nothing wrong. And I am not forgetting, my brethren, the restraints which the usages of civilized society impose upon our telling a man to his face what is our opinion of his conduct. The Christian is not called upon to go up to a man and tell him that he is a bad man, merely because he thinks he is one. The Christian is not called to set himself up as a sort of daily reviewer, a moral critic, of the character and conduct of all he knows. The Christian is not commanded to tell every bad man he meets exactly what he thinks of him; nor forbidden to be civil and

even respectful in answer, to those of whose conduct he disapproves the most. It is not demanded of the sincere believer, in order to his escaping the guilt of being "a comfort to Sodom," that he should make an enemy of almost every man he meets. Nay, my friends, — there is a silent, unobtrusive disapproval, by which the humblest may be a check upon the highest ; there is a silent, unobtrusive disapproval, expressed without words or demonstration of manner, one can hardly tell how, which even the most hardened sinner will find it very hard, very uncomfortable, to bear. If the believer in his very heart reprobates and condemns the wicked man's wrong-doing, that condemnation and reprobation will make itself keenly felt, — felt by that electric sympathy which makes us so readily know when a really strong and decided opinion of us and feeling toward us is entertained by another human being. If you truly hate the sin, while yet, so far as that may be, you love the sinner ; then, my friend, your manner toward the sinner will involuntarily be such, that you will be quite clear of the risk of being "a comfort to Sodom."

3. Another way in which a Christian may so act as to encourage and comfort an irreligious man in his godless ways, is by seeking his society and acquaintance ; — showing him that you think him a congenial spirit, and that you feel it pleasant to be with him. I need not say to you, my brethren, that whatever may be a man's position and occupation, it is almost cer-

tain that he will find it absolutely necessary to be upon terms of kindly and even cordial social intercourse with many persons who he knows are not Christians; and perhaps even with some persons who have violated and are violating the laws of common morality. You cannot entirely decide for yourself what kind of persons shall be your acquaintances, in the way of business, or duty, or social intercourse even; you cannot entirely decide for yourself who shall be your *acquaintances*, — but most assuredly you can decide for yourself who shall be your *friends*. You can choose for yourself, and you ought to choose for yourself, those whose companionship you shall seek, whose conversation you shall delight in, to whom you will tell your secrets and confide your feelings, — those, in short, for words can make the idea no plainer, whom you will make your chosen friends. And we do not hesitate to lay it down as a certain principle, that a Christian man ought never to choose for his special friend a person who he knows has no religion. A man, they say, is known by the company he keeps; — that is, if he keeps it by his own free choice and will. No man will choose for his especial friend one whose hourly conversation revolts and disgusts him. The refined taste, to say nothing of principle, of a cultivated man shrinks from contact with that which is coarse and foul; and if we find a professed Christian whose chosen and intimate friends are found among the profane and godless, I believe

the common sense of most men would conclude that such a one's Christianity did not reach far beyond profession. But what we now maintain is this: that if any believer courts, and delights in, the society of those who are not Christians, — no matter how pleasant and elegant and intellectual that society may be, — that believer is incurring the guilt which Jerusalem incurred, when Jerusalem made itself "a comfort to Sodom." That believer is following a course which directly tends to encourage the unbeliever to go on in his evil ways. For what is the natural reasoning of any man who is not a Christian, when he finds a man who is a Christian ever ready to make him a companion and a friend? "How can he think," the unbeliever will judge, — "How can he think that I am going to hell! Is it possible that he should like to be the companion of my walks, — to interchange thought and feeling with me, — to discuss great questions with me, — perhaps often to jest and laugh with me; — and all the while believe and know, that as sure as there is a God above us, I am going down to hell!" Don't you see now what eternal damage you who are Christians may do an unbelieving neighbor? Don't you see how you may so act as to confirm him in all his unbelief? Don't you see how you may so act as to make him fancy that you do not believe the great truths of Christianity yourselves? I do not love, and I do not respect, that Christian man, and still more that Christian minister, who is ready to be as familiar

with a bad man, be he rich or poor, as the bad man himself may choose. I cannot imagine how any earnest believer can ever find it otherwise than inexpressibly awful and tremendous to look in the face of an unbeliever, and to think that he is hastening onward to the everlasting flames! O Christians, "make a difference," as St. Paul said. O Christians, be kind — you cannot be too kind — to the sinful and the godless; but be kind with a sorrowful kindness, — as a parent might weep over a son running fast to ruin! O Christians, love them, — pray for them, — do all the good you can to them; but let them ever see, by your whole demeanor, that you never forget that they are in the wrong way. Let them feel that you dare not make those too dear, from whom the grave must part you forever! See that you be not a "comfort" to them! Rather so hold off from them, — so be kind *to* them, but so shrinking *from* them, as that you may be a constant check on them, — a constant discomfort to them, — a warning voice telling them always that they are on the road to woe! So, with God's blessing, you may save them; so, at the least, you will clear yourself, — clear yourself from the awful charge of having "been a comfort to Sodom!"

4. I go on to mention, as a fourth way in which Christians may encourage and countenance ungodly men in their doings, — the cherishing a worldly spirit, — being as eager for worldly advantage, and as unscrupulous as to the means by which it may be at-

tained, as men who make no Christian profession. And, alas! my friends, how much of this there is among professing Christians! We are told that the true believer should walk by faith, not by sight; should set his affection on things above; should seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness; should never forget that a saving interest in Christ is the one thing needful. But is the fact as it ought to be? Are not many professing Christians — even those in whom charity would hope there may be found “the root of the matter” — the most worldly of men? Are not many who bear the Christian name as eager to get money in any way, as if *it* were the “one thing needful?” Do not many who bear the Christian name show that they are far more eager to get on in life, than to prepare for immortality? Is there not as much vanity and pride and grasping at gain and self-seeking and contemptible worshipping of rank and wealth, — even when completely dissociated from worth and goodness, — among many professing Christians and Christian ministers, as in any class of men? True it is that religion repudiates and flings off such unworthy pretenders; and if the only result of their utter worldliness of heart and life were to make them the contempt of all right-thinking men, we should not quarrel with it; but far worse result follows from the worldliness of Jerusalem; it is “a comfort to Sodom” to see it and hear of it all! The sharp bargain made by the communicant may do worse than

levy an unfair tax upon his neighbor's pocket ; it may damage his neighbor's soul ! It may set *him* up to "go and do likewise !" It may lead him to think that there is no difference between the Christian and the worldly man at all ! Oh, miserable, miserable, that it should ever, even once, be said, as I read in a religious paper not long ago, that "give many a loud professor of religion the chance, and he will take you in as fast as another !" Oh ! what wonder, if *that* can be said with even a distant approximation to truth, — what wonder if the Christian Church is many a time little better than "a comfort to Sodom !"

5. I shall mention, in the fifth place, just one way more, in which a Christian may incur the condemnation pronounced in the text : this is, by never in any way warning his neighbor that he fears or knows he is not a Christian.

My Christian friends, I dare say some of you have some idea that it would be intruding into the priestly office were you to set yourselves to the work of bringing souls to Christ. You think *that* is not your vocation. *That* is the work of the Church ; and by the Church many people mean the clergy. But if you saw a friend manifestly stricken by fever or consumption, would it not be your duty to warn him, although you are not a physician ? If you saw a friend drowning, would it not be your duty to try to save him, although you are not a member of the Humane Society ? Ah, brethren, if a man be really in earnest about re-

ligion, he will never bear the sight of a human being whom he daily sees and talks with, going to eternal ruin, without a word of warning or advice! If you are a Christian, and if a man with no religion is accustomed frequently to see you and converse with you; and if you talk of many things which interest you both, yet never of the most important thing of all; if you talk of your common welfare, your hopes and prospects in life, yet never of the world in which you are to live forever; if you never, in any way, say that word which shall imply that your friend and you are resting upon different foundations,—that you believe in Jesus, and that you know and feel that he does not; if you never express or hint the wish, that so far as you are a true believer, he were such as you,—and that thus only can he be happy here and hereafter; what are you but “a comfort to Sodom;” — what are you but something to soothe down your friend’s latent fears and cares about his soul, and to speed him peacefully along the way to woe? It is possible enough he may not like to listen to your warning words; it is possible enough you may make yourself an annoyance and a discomfort to him; he may think you are his “enemy, because you tell him the truth;” but oh! better, better *that* than to be a comfort to one, to whom comfort is the anodyne that will drug to death, to whom comfort is the stream that will bear on to perdition! Clear yourself, my Christian friend! let not your friend’s blood cry out

against you! Oh! let it not be, that on the day of judgment, a spirit condemned shall be able to cry out, that if you had done your duty by it, — if you had warned it as you ought, — it never would have come to that doom of woe! Never tell us, that really you have not opportunity, — you have not moral courage; the thing *can* be done, — done in many ways and Christian principle, sincere and deep, will not be easily daunted. Who can tell how God's gracious Spirit may carry home to the conscience and the heart the words even of youth and inexperience? I have heard of one who on his death-bed said, that if, as he humbly trusted, he had been led to yield himself to his Saviour, and so to find hope in death, it was by the simple and solemn warning of one, in whom simple earnestness and heartfelt piety gave force to the words of early youth, unsophisticated and sincere. But if it be thus true, that a solemn responsibility rests upon every Christian, what shall be said of that which rests upon the ministers of the cross? How shall they clear their own souls, in the great day of account, if they fail, as each Lord's-day comes round, as dying men speaking to dying, to warn, to rebuke, to exhort, to leave no means untried that shall waken up the thoughtless and regardless from their false peace, — that shall carry such discomfort, such disquiet, such restlessness, such a keen barb to the unbeliever's heart, that he shall never know ease till he has betaken himself to that atoning blood in

which alone our sinful nature can be washed and made pure! Can there be a more bitterly bad account of the preaching of any minister, than that an unconverted man should like to hear it? Could worse be said of any preaching, than that an unconverted man finds it pleasing and soothing? Is it not so, if it be so at all, because *that* preaching is “a comfort to Sodom!” No sermon is good, unless it makes a godless man uncomfortable and ill at ease; it is only thus that it will ever stir him to earnest turning to Christ. O brethren, what an awful thing to think of, that perhaps in the place of woe, there may a soul be found, that shall be able to say: I went every Sunday to my parish church, — I listened to the preaching of the parish minister; his sermons were always pleasing and soothing to listen to; they never made me uncomfortable; they never sent me home dissatisfied with myself, and anxious to get peace and pardon; Sunday by Sunday I heard them; — I heard them and I am here! Think of the unfaithful minister, — think of the cowardly minister that durst not preach the truth for fear of giving offence, — think of him entering the other world, and greeted there by such a cry as *that!* Oh, shall the preacher of the gospel dare to preach smooth things, with such a possibility as *that* before him! Shall the fear of man drive him to dare the curse of God! Shall he, bidden as he is to “speak comfortably to Jerusalem,” speak comfort to Sodom too! Or shall he not rather,

as one bound to "take heed unto himself," as well as "to the doctrine," cry aloud and spare not in the unbeliever's ear; pressing and crushing it home upon him, that he *must* choose between blessing and cursing, between life and death; that so, when his ministry is ended, when his voice is hushed, when he lies down in his winding-sheet, — it never may be said of those cold dumb lips, which shall give out text no more, that when, Sunday by Sunday, they spoke from the pulpit in the house of prayer, they spoke words of "comfort to Sodom!"



XV.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.

‘For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.’—1 Cor. xv. 53.

IT is a remarkable change, when we come to think of it, which at death passes at once on the material and the immaterial part of the nature of man. The soul is separated from its mortal tenement; and that spiritual existence, whose warm affections we vainly referred to the material heart, and whose thoughts and fancies we vainly referred to the material brain, now lives apart from both, and independent of either. But the soul was always a mystery; it was invisible before, and it is no more now; we cannot tell how it left the body, but we never knew how it lived in it, or where in this mortal framework was its home; and its departure is no more inexplicable than its existence. It is on the more familiar body, that the more palpable and the more affecting change is wrought. The contrast with that which a little before it was, strikes us painfully and harshly; and an undefined and mysterious awe comes over us, as we stand by

the body from which the soul has gone. The heart is there, but it beats no longer; the eye, but it sees no more; and the kindest and best-loved voice cannot arrest the attention of the dull, cold ear. The color of life has fled from the cheek, and the light of intellect from the brow; the multitudinous machinery of animal life is there, but the vital spark to set it in motion is wanting; and when weeping friends stand round the bed of death, *that*, which once could never see their grief without seeking to soothe and lighten it, remains heedless and still.

But this is not all. The great law of decay, powerless against life, now asserts its authority over the lifeless frame. To that place where the rich and the poor meet together, alike in the helplessness and humiliation of mortality, — to that narrow house, appointed for all living, — the living bear the dead, and lay them to their long repose. And then, decay begins its quiet work; the worm feeds sweetly on that, round which many warm affections clung, and on which many fond hopes were set; that which parents had caressed and cared for; that by which we knew those we loved; that which was so often the eloquent and loved expositor of the mind within, which spoke in the eye, and flushed the cheek. And in a little, the change grows more complete still; and a little dust, not distinguished from the crumbling mould around, is all to show where sleeps what was once a human frame, but is now of the clods of the valley. The

trees around send out their roots and pierce it ; the long grass waves the greener, nourished by man's decay ; and when daisies grow over the grave, and moss has covered the head-stone, there is now beneath it nothing ;—save earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

And so,—all sense is over. The old churchyard, where every spadeful of earth is mingled with human mould, is as lifeless and feelingless as any common field near it. The heart there throbs no more to the call of passion, nor dances to the song of hope. Over that quiet place there floats the sound of the Sabbath-bell ; but many who heard it once, hear it now no more. Lowly grief, and lordly pride, rest here together. The ashes of friends mingle without sympathy ; and those of enemies without recoil.

My brethren, all the generations of mankind have seen as much as this ; and at this point the informations of sense and of reason cease. *That* is the very last that we see of our fellow-creatures. But we can well believe that through the long ages before our Blessed Saviour “abolished death,” and “brought life and immortality to light,” declaring that he was “the resurrection and the life,”—many a bereaved heart must have asked in anguish if *this* was the end of all ? Was the touch of the vanished hand never again to be felt ; was the well-remembered voice hushed forever ? Was *this* the sorry ending, in the dust of death, of all the thoughts and purposes, of all

the warm feelings and affections, which even in the darkest days of the history of our race, spoke man made at first in the image of God! And have we looked our last, we can hear the mourners asking, upon the features and the forms of those we loved, whose presence once warmed our hearts and brightened our homes? Must it be, that the parting look, when we lifted the winding-sheet aside, and gazed silently and long upon the sharp face, so sadly changed, was indeed the very last? And we can trace, even among those who enjoyed no gospel-light, what look like indications of some dim, confused yearning after the glorious doctrine of a Resurrection, which forms so essential a part of our Christian faith. Perhaps those are right who maintain that at least some vague aspiration, some blind reaching, after that wonderful Christian truth, underlies all doings and observances implying care or respect for man's mortal part after the soul has left it. Perhaps they are right who think they discern in all these some undefined and almost unconscious hope, that at death even the poor body is not done with forever, — that there is something coming yet, in which even the material part of man's nature is concerned. And if this be so, what a meaning and solemnity are breathed through many little things in which we are ready, perhaps, to see nothing more than human weakness; such things as the care which the dying have expressed that they might sleep in scenes, and near friends, they loved;

and that their ashes might remain unmolested, save by the gentle hand of Nature; such things as the sweetness and seclusion of the places where we would wish to lay the dead; such things as the awful inscription which the greatest of philosophers and poets caused to be written over his grave; such things as that last direction of the patriarch Joseph, of which the apostle Paul speaks with such solemn approval; — telling us that “*by faith*, Joseph, when he was a-dying, gave commandment concerning his bones!”

And yet, brethren, we can well understand how, notwithstanding whatever natural longings may be thus indicated, the stupendous nature of the miracle implied in a resurrection of the body baffled the belief of such as walked in Nature’s light alone. That propensity to live in the future, — to be always putting off the true enjoyment of life to some indefinite season, somewhere in the days before us, — conjoined with a horror of annihilation, — both of which seem natural to man, had indeed led some who enjoyed no revelation, to wish and to hope that the spiritual part of man were immortal; and it was a great thing to believe that what in us now acts should continue its agency, and that what now thinks should think on forever. Perhaps it filled the philosophic mind with lofty thought; perhaps it yielded some comfort to humbler and tenderer spirits; when the dying man raised himself upon his dying pillow, and said, with an eye that brightened at the belief, and a voice that

gained strength from the hope that prompted that last exertion, that what in him truly lived was strong now as in his days of youthful strength ; — that his interest in the welfare of those he loved was only growing deeper ; — that it would be deeper on the morrow, though he might never see it in this world ; — and that his better life only began when men said he died. Perhaps there may have been men whom nature alone guided to such a belief as *that* ; let me say for myself that I do not believe there ever were, — that I hold the proofs of our immortality derived from nature alone as worth absolutely nothing, — that I believe that only through relics of God's own teaching had men even the faint inkling of a future life, which some who never heard of Jesus have possessed, — and that only our blessed Lord “brought life and immortality to light.” But granting that the man was ever found, who, untaught from above, was able, in the act of death, to declare confidently that he knew he should never die ; — surely, even then, the white sharp features ; and the tongue that grew palsied with the words of hope on it ; and the drops on the rigid brow ; and soon the cold senselessness ; and then the thought of what was coming in a little longer ; would tell friends around that *that* life, so confidently held by, was the immortality of the soul alone. All merely rational belief was staggered by the first thought of what was meant by raising and reconstructing the mortal part of man. It is so yet. The resurrection

of the body is an essentially Christian doctrine. Wherever the apostles went and preached, you remember the two distinctive words which they always named together: "Jesus and the Resurrection." I believe we often fail to remember both how essentially Christian this doctrine is, and also how essential a part it is of Christianity. How forcibly, how constantly, the apostles pressed it on all who heard them; and with what wonder, what incredulity, even with what contemptuous derision, their hearers listened!

And it need not surprise us. The doctrine implies a miracle the most stupendous. We know how the poet, looking upon a skull cast out from the heaps of a ruined city, moralized upon the mighty power which would be needful to refit that dismantled palace of the soul, and quicken it to life again. We think of the multitudes who have given back their mortal part to the elements; how every period of thirty years sees the grave close over a thousand millions of human beings. We think in how short a time the mortal remains of man cease to bear a trace of what they were in life. "Dust we are, and to dust we return." It was a quaint but solemn fancy of the poet, to apostrophize a molehill in a churchyard, as containing part, perhaps, of a great company of human beings. It is strange, indeed, to think how many mortals may meet in that small hillock; how winds and rains may there have brought together in death those who never met in life; how the warm blood once ran through

that crumbling mould ; how every atom of it claims closest kindred with ourselves ! And we remember, too, how science tells us, not as a striking fancy, but as a certain fact, that the whole material world is pervaded by the atoms which entered into the material frames of generations that are gone. There is something of them in the yellow autumn harvests, and in the leafy summer trees ; something in the dust which our footsteps stir, and which the breeze wafts in play. There is but one generation of humankind alive at once ; but there are a hundred slumbering in the dust together. “ All that tread the globe, are but a handful to the tribes that slumber in its bosom.”

No wonder that men, upon any authority less certain than that of the Almighty God himself, should have failed to believe that what was so widely dispersed and so completely assimilated, should ever be separated, assembled, quickened again. And there was a difficulty hardly less formidable in the very nature of the thing. Human reason has seen, and it can imagine, that gradual series of decay which turns fresh and vigorous youth to weak and faded age, and which then brings the wasted frame to dust and ashes ; but how strange to conceive this process reversed, — the steps of this series retraced ? To think of dry bones arranging themselves in human form, and knitting themselves together by nerves and sinews ; to think of the multitudinous apparatus of animal and intellectual life again appearing about them and

within them ; and, more wonderful than all, to think of the vital spark returning, to set the whole machinery again in action, — warming the heart, and circling in the blood, and beaming in the eye, — was what the human mind, of itself, could not do. “ Can these bones live ? ” said the Almighty to Ezekiel, in the valley of vision ; and the prophet answered, “ God, thou knowest ! ” And till God himself answered the question, *that* was the sum of what man could say.

But the question is answered now. Prophets desired to see the things that we see, and did not see them. Ezekiel, with all his inspiration, durst not say that dry bones could live again ; but there is not a child among us but has been taught to say confidently, in that Creed which we have repeated from infancy, “ I believe in the resurrection of the body ! ” There is not a doctrine of the gospel that is more clearly, strongly, and fully declared. You remember how St. Paul, in the chapter in which our text stands, argues the question at length ; and anticipates and puts down all objections. “ This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.” “ The dead shall be raised incorruptible.” “ That which was sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption ; that sown in dishonor shall be raised in glory ; that sown in weakness shall be raised in power ; that sown a natural body shall be raised a spiritual body.” And remembering that the soul is not all the man ; remembering that it needs body and

soul in union to constitute the perfect human being; remembering that the body is redeemed with Christ's blood as well as the soul;—the great apostle hesitates not to say, that not even the perfect holiness and happiness of the *soul* would content him; that not till the body, wrested from land and sea, and glorified into beauty and perfection, is united to the soul again would he be willing to confess that Christ's great atonement had proved fully successful in all it aimed at for God's glory and man's salvation; and that only "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, *then* shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory!"

I know, my friends, that a hundred objections may be started to the doctrine of the Resurrection; and a hundred questions may be put as to the rationale of it. We are not careful to answer such questions. It is not wise to go into details as to a truth whose details are not revealed to us, and as to which we might speculate endlessly without reaching certainty or clear understanding. St. Paul looked forward to the question, "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" and doubtless such questions would be in the mind of the men of Athens when they mocked at the mention of a resurrection; but it is more reverent and more wise, not to try to explain what is manifestly miraculous, and manifestly beyond our comprehension. Some of you may remember how

the great Emperor Napoleon, in his exile at St. Helena, was wont to speculate upon this great Christian doctrine; and while expressing his wish to be burnt rather than buried after his death, he said, truly enough, that as for the resurrection, *that* was miraculous at all events; and it would be as easy for the Almighty to accomplish it in the case of burning as in that of burial. It is best to hold, with simple faith, by the great truth, that "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." We hold by that truth; and we do not pretend to explain how it is to come true. And we all know that we see daily things we can explain as little. Who can tell us how the oak grows from the acorn; how the golden harvests of autumn grow from the seed which decays in the ground? Let us not perplex ourselves in endless speculations as to the manner in which the dead shall rise; but let us rather repose in the certainty that they surely will. That almighty One, whose voice speaks to us in this text, we may be sure, knows how he is to fulfil it.

The body, then, shall awake; though it be not till "the heavens are no more." The grave is but a place of temporary rest, not of eternal forgetfulness. Great truths are sometimes embodied in single words; and this is so with the word *cemetery*. That word means *sleeping-place*; it is a truly Christian name to give a burying-place; it implies that such as slumber there, sleep for a great awaking. The grave of the right-

eous is the treasury of the skies ; it will hear the voice, " Restore the dead," and every atom of its trust shall be rendered back. From places which we pass with little thought of those who are resting there, human forms will come forth to judgment. From some unknown spot, over which the Deluge rolled its effacing waters, the first of men will rise. Ruth will rise from that place where she was buried by Naomi's side ; and Moses from the sepulchre which no man knew. The cave of Machpelah will give up its charge ; and David and his fathers will rise from the place where they slept together. Martyrs and patriots will come out from the dungeon where they died, and be brought back by the winds to which men scattered their ashes. The material frame will as certainly be there, which was burnt to ashes, ground to powder, cast into a rapid stream, — as that which lay, in careful seclusion, from the hour of death to the day of judgment. Massive stones and cathedral arches do not keep the remains of royalty more securely than the wide elements of nature are preserving the vestiges of every man that ever breathed. From ocean depths, from mountain-side ; from the forest and from the desert ; they shall come again !

And thus, the earth is more valuable than you would think it. God has far more to watch over in it than its living population. It rolls on its way, bearing in its bosom a vast freight of that which is yet to people heaven. Let us remember, that the quiet

burying-place which we pass with scarce a glance, contains mines which in God's sight are richer by far than ever enriched Peru. Not merely the mouldering remains of organized matter; not something which has seen its day and done its work; but something whose day is only coming, and whose work is not yet well begun; something which rests less in memory than in hope; the "body still united to Christ!" The field of the world is a harvest-field. Not vainly did our fathers call the burying-place God's Acre. It is sown with the seeds of God's harvest; and the day of resurrection is God's reaping-day.

The places on earth that are quietest now will be most bustling on that day of resurrection! When the hum has ceased in the great city's streets, the sequestered walks of its burying-place will be trodden by many generations together. It is a strange thing to stand in the breathless stillness of some populous cemetery, and to think what a stirring amid its dust the voice of the last trump will make!

And thus, the human body is as imperishable as the human soul. These frames of ours, which seem among the most fragile things on earth, are the only immortal things about it. That delicate organization, which any slight accident may destroy, and which a century brings to dust, will outlive far, far more than states and empires. It will see the world out! It will last infinitely longer than the everlasting hills. It will be young and fresh after the material universe

shall have fulfilled God's purposes, waxed old, and passed away!

What shall we say, then, to this destiny which awaits such as fall asleep in Jesus? We are ready to think that it would now confer on us a happiness beyond expression, if the Saviour were once more to appear among men, working the same miracles as in ancient days. How it would delight many, if he would now accompany them, as he did the sisters of Lazarus, to the place where lie those so dear, and so missed day by day; and give them back to their homes and hearts! It would delight us, though they were only given back to a world of sin and sorrow, and a life which a few years would close again. How much more, if they were raised to a being in which sin and sorrow were alike impossible, and endued with a life which could never end! How much more, if they came forth from the tomb, not in the pale body worn down by long disease, but in frames which, though yet material, had caught something of the pure immortality of the happy spirit within! How much more, if they and you were no longer to pass your days in the company of sinful men; but in the society of beings all as pure as they are happy, and in the immediate presence of the Blessed Saviour himself!

It is to this latter kind of resurrection that our Redeemer lifts our hopes. It is to a sinless and perfect life that the dead in Christ shall rise. The

corruptible is to put on incorruption; the mortal, immortality. The body raised is to be indeed the same; and yet, how different! The eye that will open on the better world will be brighter by far than ever brightened at the view of native scenes, or long-parted friends. The voices that shall swell the hymns above will be sweeter by far than ever sang God's praises here. These poor frail bodies are, to sum up all, to be made into conformity with the glorified body of Christ. And if we should ever feel disposed to envy those to whom the Saviour when on earth gave back their beloved dead, we may comfort ourselves with the hope, that though ours will never be recalled to tread by our side the thorny paths of this world, — though we have parted, till advancing seasons lay us low, — though "our path" meanwhile may be "in these ways we know, and theirs" through scenes strange and far away, — they *may* yet — and if God's grace fail us not, they *will* yet — be our companions in that better land, where tears are never shed, and friends are never parted!

The wisest people of antiquity exerted all their ingenuity to arrest the progress of decay in their beloved dead; and so successful was their skill, that we can even yet draw forth from the sepulchral pyramids of Egypt, forms that two thousand years since walked the streets of cities whose very ruins have disappeared before the touch of time. It was but the

other day that I held in my hand the hand of a little Egyptian boy who died two thousand years since ; and it *was* a strange thing as it were to touch that hand across that long waste of years. And though, when we look on the decaying features, which in all their fragility have outlived rocks and empires, we may smile at this earnest anxiety to preserve the least important part of man, we cannot but feel a thoughtful interest in the contemplation of that pious care which made men so anxiously seek to preserve the lips they had in childhood kissed, and the knees they had climbed. It was a praiseworthy, even though a futile task, for such as knew of no resurrection, to care for even the material part of man ; and though we, in these modern days, may bury our dead from our sight, and yield the battle with decay, it is not because we feel no concern in even the decaying relics of a parent or a friend ; it is because we know assuredly that this mortal shall put on immortality, and that God himself will watch over it in the space which must elapse before it does so. Give, then, Christians, the body to the grave ; and never seek to arrest its quiet progress to rejoin the elements. Let it decay like all things here, returning peacefully to the dust from whence it was taken ; and rather cherish in your memory the pleasant recollection of its health and strength, than preserve in your dwelling the wasted image of its weakness and ruin. Lay it in the grave, in the certain hope of a joyful resurrection ; and when

you come to die, cling to the same blessed hope. Know that never pyramid kept ancient king so carefully and well as earth and air and sea will keep the mortal part of your friend and of yourself. And anticipate, through Jesus, that coming day, when the blessed soul shall tenant its glorified body, and the glorified body shall be rendered meet for the dwelling of the blessed soul.

It is sad to have to suggest any thought so fearful, in the presence of hopes so bright. Yet, while we contemplate the resurrection of Christ's people, we must not forget that there is a resurrection of those who are not his people, too. "The dead in Christ shall rise first;" but the dead without Christ shall find no hiding-place in the grave. They shall rise too, invested with a woful immortality. And however, in the prospect of the dismal eternity before them, they may long for the peace of annihilation, *that* peace they can never know. There will be no escaping from life and consciousness and perdition. We dare not amplify such a thought. Is there one who will reject God's offered mercy in Jesus, and brave that awful doom?

I am sure, my friends, that we have all felt, in our own experience, what a curious power there is in the human mind, to cast off the thoughts of these solemn realities of death and resurrection which await us all, almost as rain-drops fall from the wings of the

water-fowl. We have all an extraordinary power of living in the forgetfulness of our latter end. And it seems not to be God's purpose that it should always be present with us. Even those who have sought to bring these remembrances home to them by means to which we are not likely to resort, have told us that they strove in vain. Some of you may think of that good priest, three centuries since, who tells us that not even the mouldering bones which he kept in his chamber, not even the coffin standing continually by his bed, could make him think, indeed, that he must die. You may know, too, how a certain great poet and humorist, who passed away but a few years since, seeking, as it seemed, to bring the fact of death home to his feeling, spent some time during his last illness in drawing a picture of himself dead in his shroud. In his biography, published by his children, you may see the picture, grimly truthful ; but I think you may see there something of a morbid taste for the ghastly and the physically repulsive ; and it is with far more pleasing imagery that the Christian should seek to invest his passage from this life. Surely in perfect cheerfulness and healthfulness of spirit, the human being who knows (as far as man can know) where he is to rest at last, may oftentimes visit that peaceful spot. The hard-wrought man may fitly look upon that soft green turf, some day to be opened for him ; and think to himself, Not yet, I have more to do yet ; but in a little while. Somewhere, doubt-

less, there is a place appointed for each of us; a place that is waiting for each of us, and that will not be complete till we are there. But our Saviour is "the Resurrection and the Life;" and "this mortal must put on immortality." And we rest in the humble trust, set out in words which have been used in Christian prayer for ages, that "through the grave, and gate of death, we shall pass to our joyful resurrection." It *will* be a lowly thing to lie down there, in the humble repose of mortal dissolution; but oh! never forget, that to the true believer, lowly as that sleep may seem, it *is* a sleep, sent by God, and to be broken by a joyful waking!



XVI.

CHRISTIAN SELF-DENIAL.

' And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.' —
ST. LUKE ix. 23.

SO deep an impression did these words of our Saviour make upon the minds of his followers; so great and far-reaching a truth did they appear to convey; so essentially characteristic of the religion of the Man of Sorrows did the truth they imply seem; that three of the evangelists have preserved them in the self-same form. And here they stand, to teach us the necessity and the nobility of Christian self-conquest and self-denial. As for the terms in which the text is expressed, the only thing about them that needs explanation is that reference to taking up the cross daily; and most of you are doubtless aware that the allusion is to the fact that criminals sentenced to the barbarous punishment of crucifixion were forced to carry their own cross to the place of execution; and that sometimes, for lesser offences, the criminal was sentenced simply to carry a cross. And thus the

meaning of our Lord's words is, that if any man, then or now, wishes to be his disciple, *that* man must make up his mind to daily self-denial, and to the daily bearing of burdens, more or less painful to be borne. It was not a smooth or attractive account of his religion that the Blessed Redeemer gave. He said frankly that its requirements were hard, that its standard was high, that it might, nay, that it would, lead along paths where it would not be pleasant to walk ; and that if its ultimate rewards were glorious, you must go through a great deal to reach them, and they were far away. The founder of a new religion would be likely to repel men anywhere, if he dwelt strongly upon the persecutions and hardships which those who went with him were sure to meet ; but the Jews of the Saviour's time were of all men the most likely to be repelled by such statements as these. For, as you know, worldly prosperity was the blessing of the Old Testament, even as worldly adversity is sometimes the promise of the New ; the Israelites regarded wealth, long life, and earthly comfort and honor, as marks of the Divine favor ; they had not learned, as we have, that sometimes "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." But notwithstanding all this, the truth must be told ; the Saviour would not enlist men under his banner as earthly commanders sometimes do, by false representations ; — by putting very prominently the ideas of glory and victory, and saying very little

of certain privations and perils, of possible defeat and death. No man could ever say worse of the Redeemer's service, than the Redeemer himself was content to do. For "he said unto them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

The Saviour hardly ever said words whose bearing is more direct upon the practical work of our daily living; and though it is a bold thing to make the assertion, we do not hesitate to assert that no words ever uttered by Christ were ever so misunderstood and misinterpreted by very many men, in many places, and in many ages. You would say that nothing could be more plain, than that what our Lord meant when he said these words, was, that whosoever earnestly tried to lead a Christian life would find it needful to make many sacrifices of feeling and inclination for duty's and religion's sake; to do many things which would be painful and difficult, and to turn away from many things attractive and alluring. Our Lord plainly meant that no matter how difficult and painful any duty might be, we must do it, if our allegiance to him demanded that we should; and that no matter how dear anything might be, though it should be our most cherished hope or possession, we must give it up, if it stood between us and our salvation; yea, that we should be willing to cut off a right hand or to pluck out a right eye, if these *offended* us in our heavenward career. And I need hardly tell you that when our

translation of the Bible was made, the word *offend* did not bear the meaning with which we are now familiar, but meant *obstruct* or *prove a stumbling-block*. So that Christ's teaching was that the earnest believer must be ready to give up anything, though it should be a right hand or eye, that tended to obstruct him in his Christian course; and that he must be ready to fulfil every Christian duty, however painful, — and to bear every burden laid upon him by the hand of God, though it should press upon him heavily and sorely, as the weighty cross upon the poor criminal who bore it to the place of doom.

Well, *that* was Christ's teaching in the words of the text; and that is the spirit that breathes from the whole New Testament. The spirit of Christianity says, Deny yourself everything, however pleasant, that God disapproves; Bear every cross, however painful, that God lays upon you: Do every work, however hard, that God allots you; Suffer, labor, endure up to martyrdom, when your Redeemer's voice calls you to do so. And the farther teaching of Christianity on the subject, is, that in those ways to tread which God commands, we may look for the kindly guardianship of angels; and better far, that through all these trials a Divine Spirit will go with us, giving us the strength, guidance, comfort, light, we need; and that all these things shall be made to work together for our eternal good; — that all shall go to mature in us a nobler character to develop all in us that is most Christ-like

and divine ; — and so that the “ much tribulation ” of this world shall tend to make us the more meet for the glorious “ kingdom of God.”

I have thus sought to set before you in a brief form the great lines of Christian doctrine concerning self-denial and self-sacrifice. It may be added here, that this doctrine has proved sufficient to produce many instances of the purest heroism that this world has ever witnessed. Many a time it has led men to make a sacrifice of feeling that demanded a sustained resolution more than equal to the fiery, feverish courage that bears the forlorn hope to the deadly breach. Many a time it has gained victories, silently won, in struggling hearts, to which earthly battle-fields are nothing. Many a time has it led the martyr to the stake, and nerved him to abide in calmness the too slowly-rising flames. What incalculable, what inexpressible things has it brought men to do, to suffer, to resign ! It does its work, even yet, amid the trimness of modern society. Ah, my brethren, sometimes the thin cheek, the deep-lined brow, the languid step, are indications of a heroism every whit as noble, of a strife every whit as fearful, as ever were hinted by the empty sleeve, the scarred face, the cross of valor over the brave heart ! Truly said the wise man, “ Better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.”

And now, my brethren, what has man oftentimes made of this Christian doctrine of self-denial and

bearing the cross! What a wretched, what a foolish caricature of the simplicity and truth of the gospel! I should lament very much if I were in any way to exaggerate or misrepresent the teaching of many Christians on the subject of self-denial; but I appeal to all of you who are acquainted with the history of the Christian Church in early ages, with the doctrines still taught by the Church of Rome, and with the spirit that runs through a large portion of contemporary literature, if I am not correct in saying that there are many men and women who fancy that it is a Christian thing to seek out painful and disagreeable things, and to do them just because they are painful and disagreeable, although God never sent them to us, and although no good whatsoever is to come of our doing them. They fancy that it is pleasing in the sight of God, that it is ennobling as regards our own character, that it is carrying out the spirit of the text, to seek out voluntary and self-inflicted sufferings; to cut off the hand and pluck out the eye, though they are doing nothing whatever to *offend* and obstruct us, merely because to part with the hand or the eye is a very sad and painful thing. You all know quite well that the great thing which in the Middle Ages caused a man to be regarded as a marvel of holiness was not the amount of good he had done to the souls of his fellow-men, but the quantity of needless and aimless suffering which he had inflicted on himself; the great things which were told to his honor were such mat-

ters as the number of years he had slept upon sharp flints ; the bloody stripes he had daily laid upon himself ; the irksome garments he had worn ; and the nearness to starvation which had been reached by his daily diet. They fancied then that the more repulsive and revolting anything was, the more like Christ you would be if you resolutely faced it. They forgot that though Christ was the "Man of Sorrows," he did not bear his sorrows just for sorrow's sake ; but because a noble work was to result from them, — the work of man's salvation in consistence with God's justice and glory. And such of you as are conversant with the literature of the present day must know how much of the old spirit of Romish austerity — the spirit that idolized Stylites on his pillar — runs through a great part of it. There is a current idea that it is a fine thing to go through self-imposed trials, — to do what is disagreeable just because it is disagreeable ; it is noble to climb Alpine heights — not because the slightest good is to come of your doing so, — not because you have the faintest idea of what you are to do when you reach their summit ; — but just because it is difficult and dangerous to climb them, and most men would rather not. Some people nowadays appear to think that when our blessed Lord uttered the sublime words which form the text, He meant that we are to be always seeking out a tribe of petty disagreeables, — constantly finding out something we don't like to do, and then doing it ; some

people, I do believe, have a vague impression in their minds which they have never put into shape, but which really comes to this, that God would be angry if he saw his creatures cheerful and happy. Oh, the wicked delusion! God is love! When will men believe that grand foundation-truth! You may see something like God's feeling in the kindly smile with which the kind parent looks on at the merry sports of his children, delighted to see them innocently happy. But believe it, brethren, there is nothing the least like God in the sour, morose look of the gloomy fanatic, as he turns with sulky indignation from the sight of people who venture to be harmlessly cheerful. Let us try to feel it, that God loves us; — that God wishes us to be happy; — that it was because he loved us and wished our happiness that he sent his Son to die for us; — and that he does not desire or intend that in this life we should endure any suffering or sorrow, except that which for wise reasons he himself sends us, — sends us for our spiritual good, and would not send us if that end could be attained without it; — for “He doth not afflict *willingly*, nor grieve the children of men!”

You now see, my friends, what is the Christian doctrine of self-denial; and what is the perversion of it. Christ says that whosoever would be his disciple must be prepared to deny himself, and take up the cross, because it will oftentimes be duty and necessity to do so. But those who misapprehend Christ's mean-

ing, put the case in this way : they say, Christ said that if any man will come after him, he must deny himself and take up his cross ; it therefore appears that Christ thought painful self-denial a good thing, a wholesome discipline, — perhaps a work of merit ; and if self-denial be such a good thing, we cannot have too much of it ; the more of it the better ; and so, let us seek out pain and suffering for ourselves. In short, here is the point at issue : Christianity says, Deny yourself, cut off the right hand, if it be your duty ; if God call you to do it ; and if your soul's salvation and sanctification are to be advantaged by your doing *that*. But Bhuddism, Romanism, Puritanism, and modern Asceticism, say, Deny yourself, find sorrow for yourself, although there is no end or aim whatsoever to be gained by these ; for self-denial and self-inflicted suffering are good things in themselves. Ah, we meet them here with a flat denial. We say that it is the teaching of Jesus, that all the glory of work and self-sacrifice is reflected back on them from a noble end. It is noble, it is heroic, it is martyrdom, to go to the stake for the cause of the blessed Redeemer ; it is folly, it is wrong-headedness, it is self-murder, to give your body to be burnt, merely because to be burnt is something terribly painful and abhorrent. The self-denial required by Jesus does not lie in seeking needless suffering for ourselves, but in bearing humbly and submissively what should come in the discharge of Christian duty. "Let a man,"

says Jesus, "deny himself, and take up *his* cross," — *his own* cross, — the cross God is pleased to send him, and no other! Let him bear the sorrow allotted to him in love and wisdom by the Almighty; let him not tempt the Lord by trying to take the reins of providence into his own puny hands. Let us ever seek, my brethren, to hold unswervingly on our Christian way; and let us seek to mortify every evil propensity, every worldly lust, that would turn us aside from it. And *that* will give us enough to do! If we take the trials God sends us; and strive faithfully against the temptations from within and without that God permits to assail us; we shall find that we need not go out of the way to create trials for ourselves. The world, the flesh, and the great Adversary, are hourly seeking to mislead us; and if any man will come after Christ, he *must* deny himself, and take up his cross daily!

And now, brethren, lest any of you should fancy that it is setting up a low and an unworthy standard of Christian self-sacrifice, to say that it never should be attempted merely for its own sake; let me remind you of a case in point. Not one of those romantic persons who are represented in modern literature as almost afraid to breathe God's air and look on God's sunshine lest *that* should be a sinful self-indulgence, — not one of them, I suppose, will pretend to exceed the great apostle Paul. And you know that although he,

like the other apostles, was ready to suffer even to death in the way of duty, and for the gospel's sake, he never did so gratuitously; he never suffered as though there were anything good in the mere suffering itself. He avoided suffering whenever he could avoid it without making a sacrifice of principle. You remember how on two different occasions he pleaded his rights as a Roman citizen, to escape bonds and stripes. Yet he bore these cheerfully when they came in the way of duty; he could say, sincerely, that he "rejoiced to be thought worthy to suffer the shame of stripes for the name of the Lord Jesus;" — that is, when they could not be avoided but by the giving up of Christian principle.

But as regards suffering of any sort, it is a fearful responsibility that rests upon the man who wilfully brings it upon himself, with the purpose of thus disciplining and forming his character. It is intruding upon the special province of the Almighty God. When God sends you sorrow, you may hope that he will send you the grace to bear it and profit by it; you have no right to expect *that*, if you presumptuously bring it upon yourself. You have sometimes known of a mother, perhaps, who was making an idol of her child, saying, long after, that it was in kindness and love for her soul that God took that little one to himself; that the sore affliction was sanctified for her good; that it served to turn her affections towards the better world. Yes; it was well for her when God took

away her child. But suppose any human being had thought to do her good in this way : suppose any man had dared to say to her, You are making an idol of your child, — it is injuring your soul, and therefore I shall kill it ; would you not say that *that* man was a profane intruder on the province of Deity ; would you not say that he was a blasphemous madman ? It is so of all disciplinary suffering ; it is not for us to seek it ; it is for God to send it, and for us to bear it when God has sent it. If indeed it were so, that suffering never came without seeking it, *then* perhaps occasional acts of uncalled-for self-denial would be a good spiritual discipline ; just as those gymnastic exercises which exert the muscles when there is no necessity for exerting them, tend to keep them fit for use when they are needed. But, O brethren, God sends us trial sufficient ! We have crosses enough to bear, to keep our souls ever in training ; we have occasions enough on which God calls us to deny ourselves, without seeking supererogatory woes. There is no need that we should seek out flints to sleep upon, and hair-cloth to wear, scourges for our discipline, and vigils and fastings to keep down our fleshly nature ; there is no need to seek out petty vexations that may daily sting us like insects, nor weightier disappointments to crush out the spring from life. No ; so long as we are in a world where our hearts cleave to the dust and worship the creature, we shall find it needful to mortify and crucify the affections which gravitate

towards earth ; so long as we are in a world where there is work to be done and temptation to be met, so long shall we have to deny and hold down a hundred feelings within, that shrink from work and side with temptation. And even in a world where "godliness has the promise of the life that now is ;" and where the true believer is the truly happy man, the Saviour's words have never ceased to hold good, that "if any man will come after me," he must "deny himself, and take up his cross daily !" Not that there is merit in any suffering of ours ; not that by sufferings inflicted upon ourselves, we have to eke out anything that is lacking in those mysterious sufferings of the Lamb of God that took away sin ; not that God grudges us the cheerful enjoyment of life, or that it pleases him to see his creatures wretched ; not that there is anything noble in crucifying affections which are beautiful and right, or in denying ourselves happiness which God meant us to partake ; not that the noblest specimen of human kind is the emaciated eremite, with the haggard face and the wasted frame, who (for God's sake, as he fondly fancies) has weeded out all save bitterness from life ; who has resolutely denied himself everything that he ever loved, and accumulated upon himself all that our nature shrinks from ; who has no home, no hope, no love ; not that God would have us deny ourselves anything that is right, or take up any cross save that which he himself imposes ; but simply and entirely because from the very make

of this universe, you never *can* follow Christ without finding that in following him you *must* deny yourselves many things, or you will stray from the right path; and you cannot, except by denying your Lord miss taking up your cross daily!

And it is a far more difficult thing, a thing demanding far more faith and prayer, to live in the daily practice of true Christian self-denial; than to heap upon yourself those foolish though terrible austerities in which even the Romish anchorite has been beaten by the Hindoo fakir; and which seldom have failed to foster a deep-set spiritual pride, and to produce a most repulsive and unamiable temper. No doubt, there is a factitious pleasure in self-imposed suffering; no doubt there may be an acquired taste for it; no doubt there is in human nature a capacity of coming to feel a positive satisfaction in thinking how much you are denying yourself, how much you are taking out of yourself; no doubt there is a prejudice, very hard to get rid of, that all this is in some way noble, beneficial, pleasing to God. No doubt this erroneous belief has not been confined alone to the disciples of the Man of Sorrows; it runs through all religions; India, Persia, Arabia, have known it, no less than Rome and Scotland; the fakir, the eremite, the hermit, the monk, the covenanter, have erred together here. The Church of England and the Church of Scotland are no more free from the tendency to it, than the Church of

Rome ; and the grim Puritan, who thought it sinful to smile, was just as far wrong as the starved monastic and the fleshless Brahmin. It shows how all men, everywhere, have been pressed by a common sense of guilt against God, which they thought to expiate by self-inflicted punishment. But we, my brethren, know better than *that*. Jesus died for us ; Jesus suffered for us ; *his* sufferings took away our sins ; our own sufferings, how great soever, never could ; Christ's sacrifice was all-sufficient ; and any penance on our part is just as needless as it would be unavailing. Take, then, brethren, without a scruple or a misgiving, the innocent enjoyment of life. Let your heart beat, gladly and thankfully, by your quiet fire-side ; and never dream that there is anything of sinful self-indulgence in that pure delight with which you watch your children's sports, and hear their prattle. Look out upon green spring fields and blossoms, upon summer woods and streams ; gladden in the bright sunshine, as well as muse in the softening twilight ; and never fancy that though these things cheer you amid the many cares of life, you are falling short of the ideal sketched by that kindly Teacher of self denial who said, " If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily ! "



XVII.

THE GREAT VOICE FROM HEAVEN.

“And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them,
Come up hither.” — REV. xi. 12.

THIS is a world, my friends, in which there is no standing still. Ceaseless progress is the law of nature. Everything is going on. Time is going on; life is going on; among all visible things there is nothing that remains always the same; everything is either wearing out or growing better; some things indeed more slowly than others; but even the living rock crumbles in the lapse of ages; and the everlasting hills wax old.

And in our lives, my brethren, we feel it often, and sometimes we feel it sadly, there is no pause nor cease. We have all of us, perhaps, known quiet and happy days that we would have liked should never have gone over; seasons when it would have pleased us if time would just have stood still. But whether it be the school-boy, who wishes the day would never come that is to take him once more from the love of the home fireside to the cold indifference of strangers; or

the youth, doomed to long years of Indian exile, who lingers, with a sinking heart, on every moment of the last days he is to spend among dear ones whom he may see no more ; or the man condemned to die to-morrow, who wonders what makes the hours fly so fearfully fast when he most longs for their lingering ; all men feel that there is no making life stand still. Indeed, it is more especially on the life of man, and the formation of his character, that this law of progress lies ; it has been suspended to many things else, but to these never. The sun once stood still, but human life never did. The shadow on the dial went back, but all the time the shadow of death was stealing lower on the brow of man. The Jordan was arrested in its course, but the stream of Time flowed on. There is indeed in human life sometimes an appearance of standing still. We have all observed that many a man among us remains for years very much the same in external appearance ; we see little outward difference in him from what he was this time last year, or what he was five or ten years since. But he has not been standing still ; to the eye of God he is a very different man ; he has moved away from the point where he stood before ; he is so many years more confirmed in the service of God or the service of Mammon ; so many years more bent on the things of time and sense, or elevated to the interests of eternity ; so many years more grown into that habit of mind in which he will live forever. Here, in truth,

we have no continuing city ; our feet are not set upon solid land ; from birth to death we are carried on by a rapid current against which there is no striving. We are cast, at birth, upon the stream of Time ; and we must grow and decay as the stream flows on with us. Sometimes it bears us as it were through happy fields, where flowers grow along the banks, and green leaves are reflected on its waves ; by a motion so calm and quiet that we hardly feel we are advancing. But the current goes on yet ; goes on in the quietest country-place, where the pulse beats calmest, no less than in the throng and excitement of the great city ; and in fast fleeting strength, and fast fading beauty, in the silvering hair and the withering cheek, in anticipations sobered and tempers mellowed or perhaps soured, in the soul more earthly or more heavenly, we see the work it is doing. You and I, my friends, are going on ; and the great question then is, Whither ?

Now there are just two ways in which men can advance. Advance they must ; and there are just two great tracks along which all possible progress is bearing all human beings. The one leads upwards, and its end is heaven ; the other leads downwards, and its end is perdition. In one of these ways every man is walking ; every one of us here is advancing either to heaven or to hell. Yet a little while, and we who are here met in one place, may be parted by a gulf which all eternity can never bridge over. In far less than a hundred years you will have walked your last

mile along the path in life you made choice of; you will have reached either the glory or the grief in which the two paths end. And God knows there are voices enough to invite us along the downward road to ruin. Pleasure, with her siren voice; Fame, with her trumpet tongue; Worldliness, with its choking cares; Temptation of every kind, with its varied allurements; all tend to lead men on in a way which is not heavenward. And man's own weak heart, with its vain affections, lends a willing ear to these congenial invitations, till the whole soul is engrossed by things seen and temporal; and then the unseen realities of eternity are forgotten, till death rends the veil of flesh away!

But let us, my friends, this Sunday afternoon, try to bring in our minds from the cares of our daily life; and listen, in thoughtful attention, to a Great Voice from heaven which says to us, Come up hither. Let us consider whether there be not a voice around us, not speaking indeed to the outward ear, but speaking all the more solemnly to the heart; stealing gently upon us in our thoughtful hours, and breaking rudely in on the busy whirl of life; blending with our own serious moods, and sometimes checking the power of folly. And if we never observed it before, let us listen now; let us think whether there be not near us another voice than that of birds and winds and waters; a voice that harmonizes with these, and yet stands apart from them; a voice from God's dealings and

God's word, from Christ's cross and Christ's throne, from the Blessed Spirit the Sanctifier and Comforter, from angels and apostles, from saints and martyrs, and from our own dear friends who once trod by our side the thorny path of life, and who have gone before us.

First, then, the voice of God comes to us from heaven, and says to us, Come up hither.

We need hardly say that none of us who are here now has ever heard God's voice with the outward ear. We have listened to the thunder, as it rolled above us, but no articulate words were there. Where the wind rustled the leaves, their sounds were not those of our English tongue; and where great sea-billows thundered their anthem of praise, it was the mind of those who listened that clothed their stormy music in meaning. The true voice of God speaks not to the ear but to the heart; for wherever God does that in which man can make out deep meaning; — wherever what happens to us teaches us a great lesson; — wherever in nature, or providence, or revelation, we can find out what is the mind of God; — there is God speaking to us. And it is in this fashion that God says to us, Come up hither. He says these words to us, in very truth, in a voice more solemn, though it be more still, than any which this world of sense could make. Get the key to the cipher in which the Almighty expresses his purposes, and you will find that from every quarter to which our eyes can be turned,

from every thought on which our minds can rest, from every event that befalls us, from every joy that cheers us, from every grief that saddens us, from every care that perplexes, from every disappointment felt, from every hope deferred, from every friend that fails us, from every man that dies, — we can discern and discover that God never meant that man should take any path but that which leads to heaven. In what a multitude of ways he has shown us that it is upwards he would have us go; what hosts of things and events and circumstances and actions, stand like guideposts of God's own erecting along the way of life, pointing us away from this world, inscribed in great letters — To Heaven! There is the vanity which God has impressed upon all earthly objects; what means *that*, unless it be, that the place of our affections, and the home of our heart, should be somewhere else, amid purer and holier things? Would a Being of infinite goodness have placed men, with their capacity of infinite happiness, in a scene where every rose has its thorn, every blessing its canker, and where every imagined source of enjoyment, if compassed to the utmost, would still leave an aching void within, — if he had not meant, thus disheartening them with things seen, to make them think, May there not be something more satisfying and more real that is not seen as yet; and since there well may be a better world than this, may we not take God's word that there is; — should we not bestir ourselves, and seek

out the way, and go up thither? And then, death and change; the mutability of the most permanent things, the fleeting character of the most precious things, the evanescence of the happiest feelings; — what mean *these*, but to turn our thoughts to a place where “every loveliest thing lasts longest,” where joy is eternal, and decay never comes? And when God resumes the friends he gave us; — when the sudden stroke, or the slow decline, has snatched or has worn down those we love to the house appointed for all living; when the ties that bound us to earth seem almost parted, and we feel “the bitterness of death,” and the soul turns weary away from all things here, and longs for the rest and the meeting which never can be in this world; — is not all this God’s sharp discipline to turn us into the upward way; God’s solemn voice saying to us, Come up hither, — where anguish is never felt, and friends are never parted?

But we are not left to read, by the light of reason, the pages of nature and providence alone, to find which way God would have us go. Elsewhere God’s voice is heard more plainly; heard in the thunders of the law, and the invitations and promises of the gospel. The whole Bible is a great voice from heaven, saying, Come up hither. For, what is the Bible, but the history of that plan of redemption, but for which all men must have trodden one broad way, the downward way to ruin? It is revelation that furnishes us with convincing proof that it is the upward path

which God would have us choose from the two that lie before us. Had he willed that we should take the downward path, he had but to leave us alone; and then the curse of that law which we have every one of us broken would have crushed us down to final woe. There was but one road before us by nature; only one road, save for the work and sacrifice of him who said of himself, "I am the way." And could there be more certain proof that God would have us choose the path to glory rather than this, — that he made that path where before there was none; that path which begins as it were from every poor man's door, but ends in glory which no mortal eye hath seen! And lest the doubting spirit should fear that such a path was not made for it, in its unworthiness, the Bible is thronged with declarations of God's desire, that "not any should perish," but that "all should come to repentance;" that all should "forsake their wickedness and live;" that "the wicked should forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and return to the Lord that he may have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Nor should we forget, that although the upward road to life is so free to us, — open to us "without money and without price," — it cost the Almighty an infinite price to make it; and in the price he paid — his dear Son's life — to make this upward road, you may see how sincerely he desires that men should

have such a way, and should avail themselves of it. You have heard of great roads made by human hands, for the passage perhaps of armies, or for leading the commerce and civilization of milder regions through rugged and desert tracts. You have heard how the everlasting hill has been pierced through, and the living rock blasted, and the mighty river bridged, and the far-stretching valley spanned over; how all the wealth of kings and states, and all the energies of thousands of men and decades of years, have been bent on the great beneficial work, that was to increase men in wealth and comfort. And even yet, it is fine to look on these unperishing monuments of the industry and skill of past ages; these hoary relics of an ancient race of gigantic strength and gigantic energy; and then to think how long man's works may outlive man's self; — to think where are now the hands that quarried these huge stones, and reared these time-worn arches — where the feet that trod them first, and the eyes that saw them when they were fresh and new. And our own modern days have seen roads more wonderful still link distant cities and provinces, making space almost vanish, and perplexing our old notions of time, making the bustling city a near neighbor of the sylvan quiet, and bringing the deep hum of crowded men almost close to the still music of nature. But oh! how infinitely little all these ways which man has made, — how utterly insignificant the price they cost, — compared with that mighty

way which bridges the space between earth and heaven, — the time between now darkly and then face to face ; which it cost Christ's sufferings to make, Christ's death to open ; — which the feet of patriarchs and prophets, of saints and martyrs, have trod ; — and along which the Saviour invites us to follow ! Oh, brethren, if it proved the military commander's intense determination to convey his army to a point he had fixed on, when through Alpine solitudes and snows he cut his onward path, with lavish expense of labor and of life ; is it not fair to reckon that when the Almighty at the expense of his dear Son's blood, opened the way to heaven, and made it plain for man to tread, he did by that very act call from heaven to man with affectionate, earnest entreaty, and say " Come up hither ! "

A second voice that invites us up to heaven is that of our Blessed Saviour.

We have spoken hitherto of the First Person in the Trinity, — of God the Father ; and we have seen that in many ways he is calling upon men to turn their steps into the path to glory. But we are now to speak of One whose name makes appeal to deeper and tenderer sympathies than even that of God ; of that beloved Divine Person who has learned by experience what it is to be a man. He was whatever we have been, sin only excepted. And the same gracious voice which spake so kindly to the least deserving while he dwelt on earth, speaks to our hearts yet

from the glory where he dwells, and says to us, "Come up hither." For even now he says, as before, "I am the way;" "Follow me;" "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be:" "and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also:" "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." And what mean all these gracious words but this, that Christ would have men choose the upward way, though the gate be strait and the path be steep? "I am the way," says Christ: and whither, but to heaven? "Follow me," says Christ: and whither, but to heaven? "I will that where I am, there ye may be also:" and where is that, but heaven? Does he not thus cry to us, "Come up hither"? Oh, may it be the answer of our hearts, Lord, we come; for, blessed be thy name! whither thou hast gone and where thou art, we know, and the way we know! And putting out of view altogether the many invitations to sinners to repent and be saved, which our Saviour uttered, and which his apostles uttered in his name; putting out of view altogether the fearful representations he gave of the place of woe and the miseries of its tenants, and the beautiful pictures he drew of the rest and happiness of the blessed, — all calculated in

the highest degree to startle and to invite sinners to thought and repentance, — what was the Redeemer's whole appearance on earth, but one earnest, unceasing, life-long entreaty that men would turn to God? It was all that men might “wash their robes and make them white in his blood, and therefore appear before the throne” on high, — it was all for *this* that he lay in the manger at Bethlehem; it was all for *this* he went about doing good; it was for *this* he preached his every sermon, and wrought his every miracle, and withstood his every temptation, and bore his every pang of pain. It was all for *this* that the sun was darkened, and the rocks were rent, and the dead came back, and all nature shuddered at the sufferings of the expiring Son of God! And the Saviour even yet appears to remind us of all his earthly travail and sorrow; and to whisper to our hearts, As ye would not that all *that* should prove in vain, — “Come up hither!” I died that ye might have leave to come! And will ye not “come unto me, that ye might have life?”

The Blessed Spirit, too, adds his voice to that which invites us towards heaven. The whole scope and object of his working, meant as that chiefly is to make us fit for heaven, is an indication of his design and his wish that we should go up thither. The Spirit the Purifier, as he makes us holier and better, thus fitting us for a clearer atmosphere and a nobler company, is ever whispering within us that it must

be a higher life in which virtue shall be perfect, and another world in which hearts shall be pure. As his gradual influences, like gentle rain, steal into the soul; as the fruits of righteousness appear, and the work of sanctification progresses day by day, — what is this for, but that we may be made meet for the place where God is seen, — fitted for the society of the spirits of the just? It is not for time that his seed is sown; it is not for time that his harvest grows; and though his blessed influences may rear up virtues which shed a fragrance over this sinful earth, and breathe a blessing on the weary hearts of suffering men, and make Christianity a name to be revered, and the true Christian one whom the eye sees and blesses, — yet it is in a more genial clime that this gracious work is made perfect; and thus the Holy Spirit, as he works to make us fit for heaven, is not uncertainly calling us up thither.

And the Spirit in his great work of comfort, too, is calling to us from heaven, “Come up hither.” If you consider, you will see that there is a reference to heaven in every part of the Comforter’s work. For, is not the great comfort when dear friends die, that we may meet them yet, where farewells and partings are a sound unknown? Is not the great comfort under the pressure of suffering, that there is a place where there is no more pain? Is not the great comfort in the night of weeping, that God tells us of heaven, that there is no night there? Is not, in short,

the great comfort of earth, that there is such a place as heaven!

Is it fanciful to think that the angels, too, concerning whom we know that they rejoice when a sinner repents and prays, and thus gives the first sign of choosing the heavenward path, add their voices to the great call thither? And surely the apostles and martyrs, who first preached the gospel of Jesus, in labor and peril and much tribulation, until the fiery or the bloody baptism sent them from their work to their reward, — seem, in no fanciful sense, to be even yet pointing to all they did and suffered that men might know a way to heaven was made, and asking if all that shall have been in vain. Even yet, from the pages of the inspired history, the burning zeal of Paul reproves the lingerer; even yet, the proto-martyr Stephen, from where his dying eye saw Christ standing, says, “Come up hither!” And the whole of the noble army who from that day to this, have borne a martyr’s testimony to the faith of Jesus, — from the first whom Jewish stones crushed, and Roman lions tore, and Greek philosophers laughed at, — to the last whom the clubs of savages slew, and the racks of the Inquisition silenced, and the venomous shaft of polished ridicule assailed, — seem to cry in one vast voice from their place of rest, — “Come up hither!”

And now in the last place, brethren, there is one voice more that invites us up to heaven; one voice

more, that adds itself to that great call, to the several parts of which we have been listening. It is the voice of those dear friends who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and gone before us from the place we knew together. There are few, indeed, who have lived long in this world, and have not stood by the bed of the dying; and let us hope that there are many who have seen a Christian friend or brother depart:— who have looked on such a one as life, but not love, ebbcd away, — as the eye of sense grew dim, but that of faith waxed bright and brighter. Have you heard such a one, in bidding you farewell, whisper that it was not forever; have you heard such a one tell you so to live, as that death might only remove you to a place where there is no dying; and as you felt the pressure of that cold hand, and saw the earnest spirit that shone through those glazing eyes, have you not resolved and promised that, God helping you, you would? And ever since, have you not felt, that though death has sealed those lips, and that heart is turning back to clay, *that* voice is speaking yet, *that* heart is caring for you yet, *that* soul is remembering yet, the words it last spoke to you? From the abode of glory it says, “Come up hither!” The way is steep, the ascent is toilsome; it knows it well, for it trod it once; but it knows now, what it knew not then, how bright the reward, how pleasant the rest that remaineth, after the toil is past. And if, my brethren, we go with interest to the grave of a much-loved friend, who bade us, when dying,

sometimes to visit the place where he should be laid when dead ;— if you hold a request like *that* sacred ; — tell me, how much more solemnly and earnestly we should seek to go where the conscious spirit lives than where the senseless body moulders? If day after day sees you come to shed the pensive tear of memory over the narrow bed where that dear one is sleeping ; if amid the hot whirl of your daily engagements, you find a calm impressed, as you stand in that still spot where no worldly care ever comes, and think of the heart which no grief vexes now ; if the sound of the world melts into distance and fades away on the ear, at that point whence the world looks so little ; if the setting sun, as it makes the gravestone glow, reminds you of evening hours and evening scenes long since departed ; and the waving grass, through which the wind sighs so softly, speaks of that one who “ faded as a leaf,” and left you like “ a wind that passeth away and cometh not again ; ” — oh, how much more should every day see you striving up the way which will conduct you where the living spirit dwells, and whence it is ever calling to you, “ Come up hither ! ” It was the weak fancy of a dying man that bade you come to his burying-place ; but it is the perpetual entreaty of a living seraph that invites you to join it *there !*

Mothers, who have seen your little ones depart, believe that from that glory in which there are far more little children than grown-up men, they are calling you to join them. Listen, wherever you go ; and

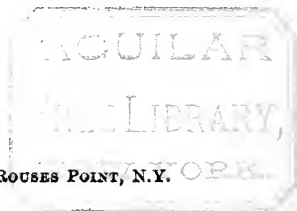
your heart will hear a little, familiar voice, saying, "Come up hither." Parents, who have seen your children die in the bloom of youthful hope and beauty, and in the faith and hope of the gospel, — remember that you can now reckon an angel among your family; and believe that he or that she whom you remember so well, remembers you not less; and believe, too, that the dear voice, which you sometimes hear in dreams, is coming down from heaven to you with a thousand others, and bidding you hasten there. And, aged pilgrims, who can remember yet, with a quivering heart and a tearful eye, how, long, long since, you knelt at a pious mother's side, and said your evening prayer, — till on one sad evening you said your prayer alone, and thought, at "Our Father which art in heaven," that now you had a mother there too; — think that she has watched you all through your course in life, and that now from her place of rest she speaks and says, Son, "come up hither!"

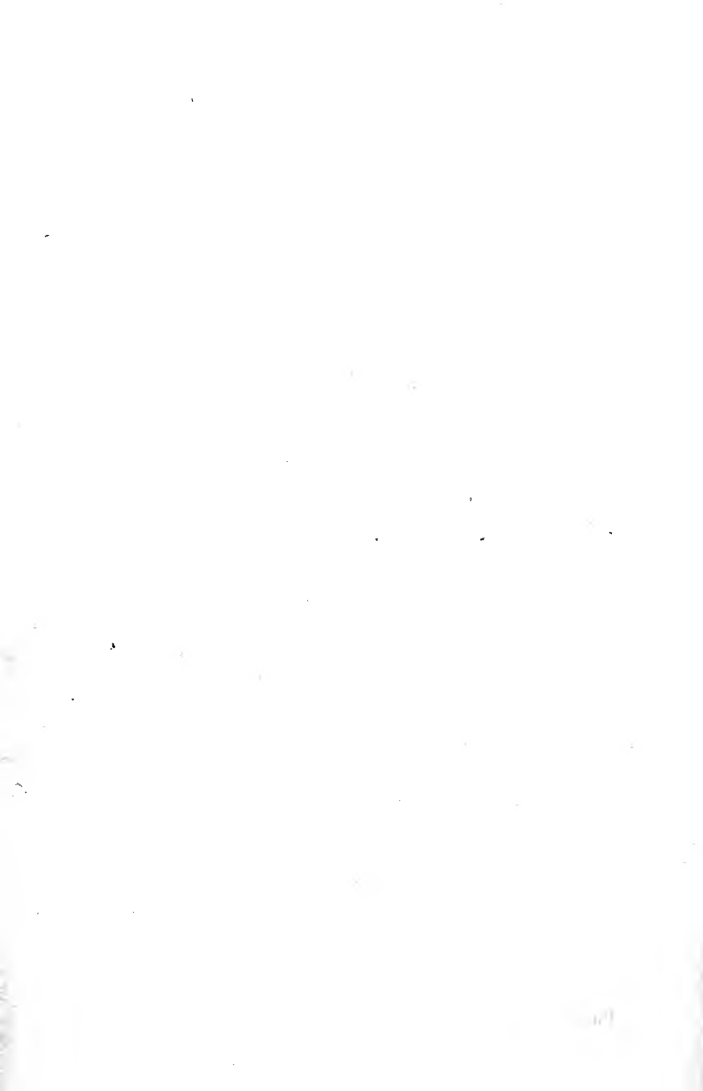
You are going away, my friends, from this house of prayer; and no one here can tell how these words now spoken may affect you. You may regard all that has been said of this Great Voice from heaven, as nothing more than the fancy of the preacher; or you may hereafter keep your attention awake to that mighty sound, which in sober earnest is about your daily path, and which mingles in your ear with the voices of your daily companions. You have heard the like a hun-

dred times before, on a hundred previous Sabbaths ; and you may fancy that you are now just what you were then ; and that hereafter, just as you are now, you may hear and consider the gospel invitation elsewhere. But, my friends, you are *not* the same ; you have used up so many weeks' or months' quantity of your little allotment of life ; and now there remains so much the less, and you are so much nearer the end of whatever path you are treading. Since every night you must pitch your tent a day's march nearer some home, oh that through the wilderness of this world you may be striving upwards to the promised land ! And there is another thing in which you are not the same. You are more grown into good or evil, more bent upon heaven or earth, than when you heard the gospel-call last ; for every time you hear it and resist it, you are encasing your heart in a flinty armor, that will turn off the arrows of conviction when they reach it next. If you care less for what has been said to-day, than you did for the last appeal you heard like it, — then fear, my friend, lest by an insidious progress, the great Adversary is leading you downwards to his realm of woe. And if so, plant your feet as on the rock, and take not one step farther ; for to-morrow may end your path, and to-day is the accepted time. Repent, believe, obey ; praying for the Spirit's aid, and trusting in the Saviour's grace ; and it may be that you are not yet too late, if so you continue in the downward path not one moment longer. But if,

treading the upward way, you listen to the voices that float around it, till they grow familiar to your ear as your mother's voice, and sweet like that of your native river ; — till the habit of attention grows into your soul, and their ever-regarded sound always warms and cheers and swells your heart ; — oh, what a happy meeting *that* will be, when your sun is set and your journey finished, — when the voices that called you coming shall welcome you come, — when the voices which came sweetly from afar, and sounded pleasant even amid the world's din, shall be sweeter yet close at hand, as they stir the leaves of the tree of life, and melt away upon that tranquil sea ; — when many holy ones and dear ones shall crowd around you, and greet you now grown pure and holy as themselves, — in accents so familiar and friendly that you will feel you are now at last *at home*. And then, more conscious of the soul's great worth, and more bent upon the bliss of others, you will add your own to that Great Voice which from heaven calls to all on earth, and says, — “ Come up hither ! ”

THE END.





THE GRAVER THOUGHTS

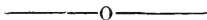
OF A

COUNTRY PARSON.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE RECREATIONS OF A COUNTRY PARSON"

Second Series.



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I.

PRAYING EVERYWHERE.

“I will therefore that men pray everywhere.” — 1 TIM. ii. 8.

THERE is something touching, and something striking, in the thought, How naturally human beings, in times of deep feeling and of great extremity, whether of evil or good, are impelled by something within them to turn to God: — to use some words of prayer. In imminent danger, when all human help is vain, we involuntarily feel that prayer is the only thing. In crushing sorrow, when some stroke has fallen that seems too heavy to bear, what can man do but fall upon his knees and pray? Through long anxiety, in great perplexity, *you* know who have known these, how often you have felt impelled to look away from all the dreary scene about you, and to look up to Him who, if He would, could so easily take it all away. And when some great happiness and blessing has come, — something much wished and little hoped, — something that is like a gleam of sunshine in a lot whose usual light has been equably

overcast and clouded, — what human being that feels aright, but knows how natural it is that tears of gratitude should fill the eyes, and that you should turn with a full heart to God and thank Him! If we have the root of the matter in any good degree in us: if we be Christian men and women with even a little of the better life; — then we know that our deepest feelings ever lead us to God. The feeling that cannot be uttered otherwise, is naturally uttered in prayer to God. When our heart is too full, or too heavy, or too joyful, to let us speak fitly to a fellow-creature, we can always speak to Him! In the average daylight of our life, when things go in a commonplace way, we may be able to pass hours without any direct thought of God, and turning to Him. But in every extremity, whether of good or ill: in every case where we are disturbed from our common way: when things grow serious: when a strain is put upon us: when a change seems to be passing over everything: when there is sickness in the house, when there is death: when there is joy in the house, and thankfulness: then, brethren, surely you know it, you think of God, and you turn to God. You take away your overcharged heart from the presence of your fellow-mortals: you get away from that constraint: you enter into your closet, and shut the door: and you tell out what you feel to the One who thoroughly understands you!

You will perhaps think, my friends, that St. Paul has his will; and that Christian men and women, if they be praying people at all, do indeed "pray everywhere." Many times in the day, and in many places, you look up for a moment from the midst of work and worry; and the brief word of ejaculatory prayer flies with its message to the willing ear of God. Perhaps there is oftentimes more heart and reality in these short petitions, intercalated in the intervals of your work, than there is in your longer and more formal prayers. For in these short petitions, you are going to God not because you think you ought, but because you feel you must: because the sense of weakness and want and sinfulness and helplessness rushes over you: and to whom can you go but to Him?

In thinking of this text, on which our meditation at this time is to be founded, I purpose to turn away entirely from the little niceties and difficulties of criticism, with which it has been surrounded by people who had more time for that kind of thing than we have: and to take the text in its broad and solemn sense, as suggesting the duty and privilege of keeping and cultivating a praying spirit: of keeping our hearts so that we shall be always and in all places ready to turn to God in prayer: of living (so far as may be) in that atmosphere. *We* do not need now to be told, as the Jews needed, that there is no favored place, where prayer to

God is more acceptable and effectual than it is elsewhere: we know that not the spot, if you could be sure of it, where our Redeemer died for us upon the Cross, — not the spot where He knelt in Gethsemane, gaining our salvation by His agony, — is a better place for praying, than is the bedside by which your little children kneel morning and evening, — than is the quiet place where you are wont to pray, — than is the space compassed by these walls, where I trust we have all sometimes been well assured of our Saviour's presence, according to His word. Wheresoever you heartily draw near to God, the promise is that He will draw near to you. Wherever two or three are gathered together: wherever the solitary suppliant, in spirit and truth does but utter the "God be merciful to me a sinner": is the place of acceptable prayer. The poor woman of Sychar had grown up in the belief, that according to the Jewish law, "Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship." But we know better than that. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth": that is the charter under which the Church of Christ offers its prayers. And though the wide, broad principle breathes from the whole New Testament, and needs not to be founded upon single texts; still it is cheering to remember, as we lift up our heart for a moment as we walk the street, as we cover the face for a moment in the crowd of men,

as we hastily ask for guidance in some little perplexity that has arisen in our worldly business, that the great Apostle of the Gentiles said, speaking with his Master's authority and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "I will therefore that men pray EVERYWHERE!"

Come then, brethren, and let us for a little while think of this duty and privilege, of keeping a praying spirit. And may the Holy Ghost, Blessed Spirit of All-prayer, teach us to think rightly. I never would sit down at home to begin or to carry on a sermon to be preached to you, without a moment's prayer for His guidance: so now let us each, in silence, ask for His presence and blessing. If we ask them, we shall get them. There is nothing promised more plainly than that.

My friends, no day ought to pass over us on which we should be content with the mere morning and evening prayer. We should most carefully avoid getting into the way of feeling, when the prayer is ended with which we begin the day, "There, now *that* duty is done with for the present." Let us not think obscurely, as we are prone to do, that now our prayer is over, and we must go forth to our common work, we do in fact go out from God's presence: leave all *that* behind for the time: and stay out of God's presence till the evening, when we shall come back into it for a few minutes again before we go to rest. The Christian who comes to think and

feel in *that* way, is sadly abridging his privilege as a child of God: he is not taking half the comfort that he might. Brethren, we are not like children that must go out from our Father's house in the morning, to spend the working-day away from Him, and only to come back to Him at evening. No: we are with Him, and He with us, all the day through. We never leave His presence: He is beside us through all our work, our weariness, our perplexity, our worry, all the day. And we may tell Him what we want, and how we are feeling, not stiffly and formally twice a day, at morning and evening: but as often as we please. He will not weary of listening to us, if we do not weary of speaking to Him. We need not limit ourselves to morning and evening prayer! Twenty times, — and far more than that, — as you go through your day's work, the eye may look up for a moment, the heart may be lifted up: the brief word may carry up to God's ear the story of your need, and of your trust in Him! Sitting down at your desk, and taking up your pen, — if *that* be your work, — O you do not know how much better you may do it, for just covering your eyes with your hand for a minute, and asking God's blessing in prayer. Or dealing with your fellow-men, some of them impracticable and wrong-headed enough, some of them sharp-set and low-principled enough, some of them provoking and stupid enough, — how much better you will keep your temper amid the

provocations of business, — with how much clearer head and kinder heart you will treat with your fellow-sinners, — for a word of silent prayer ! If you desire to influence any one for good, remember how wisely it has been said, that the shortest road to any human heart is round by God : and explain to your Heavenly Father all you wish to do. Every little pain will be better borne ; and every little joy enhanced ; by a moment's silent mention of them to God. You can, alone with Him, speak of a host of little things, which really make a great part in your thoughts and in your life, — yet which are less suitable for speaking of in united prayer with other people. The good minister in Ayrshire long ago, who astonished his people by praying in church that his lame horse might get well, so that he might the more efficiently fulfil his pastoral work by that faithful creature's help ; had better have kept that petition for his closet when only God could hear him ; and might most fitly and properly have presented that petition *there*. For God cares for oxen : and watches the fall of a sparrow : there is nothing too little for *His* notice ; and if a thing be great enough to vex our heart, to lie on it like a dead weight, as a very small inconvenience may quite well do, — then it is great enough to tell Him who knows what poor weak creatures we are, and who feels for us in all we feel. Going forth, and coming in, — a moment will be sufficient, — let there be a quiet moment

of silent prayer. Let all you do be begun, continued, and ended with prayer. There need be no parade of it; yet let it be there. It will be enough that God should know. I remember well how fit and becoming a thing it seemed, when in another country, hundreds of miles away, I saw an aged clergyman, who was a fellow-traveller, as the railway-train started on a journey that was to occupy a long day, just for a minute, simply and unaffectedly, uncover his head in silent prayer. There was no pretension, but there was no concealment: it did one good to see it: and you could not but think of the solemn counsel of the great Apostle, "I will that men pray everywhere!" Yes, prayer is not a thing to be done for the day at once, and then to be glad that it is over: it is a thing to last all through. There need be no formal words: there need not be a movement that would show the stranger where the thoughts had turned. It is but the silent turning of the soul to the great Father above us: just the reaching of the poor weak wanderer, in his dependence and sinfulness, after the great Source of all strength, all good and blessing.

Now, Christian friends, do you avail yourselves as you ought and might, of this great privilege? It is not as if the gates of heaven were opened for a few minutes morning and evening to admit our supplications: No, they stand open all day long. The mail is always going out, that can carry your message up to the Golden

City! Perhaps, in some measure, we do avail ourselves of all this. But O, we might make far more of it. And how peaceful, how amiable and kind, how forgiving, how holy and happy, what pleasant people we should be to live with and to deal with, if we lived with this prayerful spirit, in this atmosphere of God's presence and of communion with God! There is not a fault about us that this would not mend. There is not a good thing about us that this would not foster. It is an unspeakable privilege. We do not half value it, nor half use it. There is often a great significance in single words: and this is so, truly, in the name of *Ejaculatory Prayer*: the name which means the brief, broken, momentary petition, sent up in little spaces coming amid other things. You know what that highly figurative word means. It means that our soul is like a bow bent, ready to launch away the arrow of the short heavenward sentence. Would that our hearts were always so! Always ready to recognize God's hand in everything: always ready to think of God, and to turn to God: to hasten to Him with every little concern: "in everything," as St. Paul says, "by prayer, to make our wants known to God." And then, my friends, wherever we are, will be as a holy temple: wherever we are, God will be oftentimes "drawing near": The Lord will be in that place, though others know it not: because we shall have learnt, by the teaching of that most tenderly sympathiz-

ing of all friends, the Blessed Holy Spirit, to do as St. Paul would have us, — even to “*pray* EVERYWHERE!”

And now, passing from this, let me suggest to you another thought, arising out of this advice of the Apostle Paul.

It is this: what a hint this text gives us, Christian friends, of the kind of temper and spirit in which we ought to be going on through life! St. Paul would wish us to be praying everywhere: to be living in a praying atmosphere. Now see how much this includes and excludes. It includes a complete sketch of what our character and life should be. It utterly excludes all bitter, angry, and revengeful feeling. No angry person can pray. No envious, jealous, malignant person can pray. No person, carefully considering how he is to vex and annoy a fellow-creature, can pray. No man, thinking and scheming how to overreach his neighbor, can pray. No person filled with uncharitable suspicion, and eager to put the worst construction upon a neighbor's conduct can pray. No person making a malignant speech, or writing a wicked and false attack upon a brother, can pray. Coming to God in prayer, we must come with a quietude and kindness of spirit, which would make this world a better place if it were commoner than it is. Yet if we are to be praying everywhere, that quietude and kindness must be the pervading temper of our

hearts. We must cast out all bitterness, wrath, and malice : we must cultivate that charity which is the chief of Christian graces, and the fulfilling of all God's Law. Most people will feel as if that somewhat ill-natured gossip which forms so considerable a part of the conversation of society, were not very consistent with the lowliness, the penitence, the charity, of earnest Christian prayer. You cannot well rise from your knees, where you have been praying that God would remit your debt of ten thousand talents : and go straight and take a poor fellow-sinner by the throat, who owes you a hundred pence. Every one must feel, that it was not a mere arbitrary command, but a thing which has its reason in the very nature of things, our Saviour's direction : " And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any : that your Father also in heaven may forgive your trespasses." You feel and know, that when you go to your closet that you may pray to God, you cannot pray with any heart or sincerity, if there be some bitter, angry, unworthy feeling gnawing away within you : distracting your thoughts from what you desire to say, and quenching devout feeling as water quenches fire. You must cast out that evil feeling before you can even begin heartily to pray : before you can feel that holy and trustful glow of child-like converse with your Saviour, which makes the lowly believer understand what is meant by worshipping in spirit and truth ; and which

he very humbly yet quite unhesitatingly attributes to the operation of the Holy Spirit. O brethren, bending at God's footstool, let it be with a lowly heart, with a quiet spirit, with a soul free from any feeling but that of good-will and charity towards our poor sinful anxious brothers in humanity! And how the little offences and injuries and unkind sayings of ordinary life and society, will pass away from the soul that is praying everywhere; as the drops of water pass traceless from the water-fowl's wings! There will be an armor about that soul, that will turn harmlessly aside the little darts and arrows that penetrate the moral nature of other men, and stick in it, with such irritating and humbling effect.

But thinking of all this, many of you will call to mind the beautiful words of one who was the Shakespeare of theological writers; the great and good Jeremy Taylor. "Anger," says he, "is a short madness, and an eternal enemy to discourse and a fair conversation: it is a fever in the heart, and a calenture in the head, and a sword in the hand, and a fury all over: and therefore can never suffer a man to be in a disposition to pray. For prayer is the peace of our spirits, the stillness of our thoughts, the evenness of recollection, the rest of our cares, and the calm of our temper; prayer is the issue of a quiet mind, of untroubled thoughts: it is the daughter of charity and the sister of meekness: and he that prays to God with an angry,

that is, with a troubled and discomposed spirit, is like him that retires into a battle to meditate, and sets up his closet in the out-quarters of an army, and chooses a frontier garrison to be wise in. For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upwards, and singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and rise above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over: and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing, as if it had learned music and motion from an angel!" How true and beautiful all that is, my friends! And it may well serve to show you, in better words than any which could be found by me, how much more than meets the eye, or than is suggested by the first thought, is meant when St. Paul tells us that he would that we should pray everywhere,—keep always within us the praying spirit. O what kindness, what charity, what mutual help, what sympathy in other's trials, what meekness and quietness of spirit, what an array of all beautiful Christian grace, what a rich harvest of the fruits of the Blessed Spirit, are implied in that one thing! Everything will be right, if that be there! For prayer is the very breath of the Christian life: if it be there, there must be living faith, and true penitence, and deep humility, and unfailing love: the soul must be indeed united to Christ, and

dwelt in by the Holy Spirit. Yes, my friends: if you know any one very dear to you, whose welfare you care for as your own: one to whom you desire to say your very kindest, and to wish your very best: one for whom you desire a happy passage through life, far happier than yours has been: one for whom you desire a peaceful, yea, triumphant death, and a glorious immortality: then, believe me, you may say to such a one, — to your little child who you hope will be a good and happy man after you are in your grave, — you may express to such a one the very best and kindest wish that ever was uttered by mortal lips, as you go back to the old words of the great Apostle; and say, with the solemnity that befits them, “I wish that you may pray everywhere!”

I have not thought it needful to occupy our little time with any formal definition of prayer. I take for granted that you all know, — that you all live in the daily use of it: just as when we look at a living man, we do not think of asking whether or not he breathes the atmosphere. We know he could not be living if he did not do that: and constant prayer is just as needful to the keeping up of the soul's better life. Yet let me remind you in a word, that all prayer must be offered in simple reliance on the sacrifice and intercession of our Redeemer: The “For Christ's sake” is not to be hurried over as a mere formal thing: the truth and the feel-

ing it implies is of the very essence of our prayer. To go to God, and ask for what we want, is not Christian prayer. It is Christian prayer to do this in the name of Christ. Then, remember, too, that in all prayer you must wait and look for the help of the Holy Spirit: you cannot pray by yourself. You cannot think of the things you need: you cannot get up the spirit in which to go to God. Then further, remember that confession of sin, and the lowly sense of our unworthiness which finds its utterance in confession, is of the essence of prayer. The mere words of confession need not necessarily be present in every brief act of devotion: but the lowly spirit of confession must be always there. And gratitude too: and its utterance in thanksgiving; may be commended in just the same words. As for the special petitions you should offer, I am not careful to speak particularly. Some good people, I think quite unnecessarily, have a great many directions to give as to the things for which you ought to pray. I would say, in a word, Pray for what you really want. Tell God what it is you are really desiring. You may ask for things which God may see meet to deny; but you will not ask for anything which it is wrong for you to ask; if you have heartily sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And under that guidance you will assuredly be led to pray chiefly for the best and most valuable things: for those great gifts of pardon, holiness, peace with God, a

sure part in Christ, which will never fail you. These are not fanciful things : they are the most real and solid of all : the most so now, if we had faith to discern aright : the only things, by this day a hundred years ! And praying earnestly, through Christ and by the Holy Ghost, it will not matter where or how you pray. Kneeling or standing, sitting as King David did, or lying prostrate like Elijah, it matters not a sand-grain which ; only let your prayer go through Christ ; and let it be sincere. Under the gray cathedral's noble roof, and amid its solemn light, following the track of a venerable liturgy : or in a simpler church, with less for mere sense and taste, the silent hearts of the worshippers seeking to keep pace with the words of him who offers prayer in the name of all : it matters not a sand-grain which ; so your prayer go up through Christ, and so it be sincere. Little do they know of the spirituality of true Christian worship, who fancy that it is confined to any place, any time, any way. As for postures and modes, we can find examples of all in Holy Scripture. As for time, we have morning, evening, and at all times. And as for place, you can hardly desire anything wider than that for which we have the Apostolic warrant : " I will that men pray EVERYWHERE ! "

And thus, Christian friends, with the spirit of prayer always in our hearts, and with the words of prayer ready upon our lips, let us go on our pilgrimage way. In a

brief sentence, when we feel it is sufficient, sent up in a pause in work: in more orderly and lengthened supplication, morning and evening: let our desires go up to God. There is no more efficacious means of getting what is really good for us: none which will more surely bring the grace to do without that, which God shall see meet to deny. In every trouble and perplexity, let us have this resort to go to; whence we shall come back resigned and cheered. And in every joy let us remember who gave it; and be sure we have not got the best good of it, till we have poured out our grateful hearts to Him. O brethren, think, that we are allowed freely to go to Him who orders everything, — who has all things in his hand: and to tell Him all we need, — all we feel and fear! Would that we could understand to what a privilege we are invited, every time it is said to us, “Let us pray!” Let us live, my friends; let us work and wait and suffer; in the full exercise of that great privilege, while we live: and let the last words upon our lips when we are dying, be words of prayer!

B





II.

THE DISCIPLINE OF SORROW.

“Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity : therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.” — JER. xlviii. 11.



FEW days since, I read a review of a book by an American author, the purpose of which book is to show that this creation never had any Creator, and that this universe goes on somehow by itself without any Providence to direct it. Various learned, able, wrong-headed, and bad-hearted men have, of late years, set out the like dismal doctrine: but probably there is no recent work (which educated people would be likely to read) which so plainly lays down the great atheistic principle, which so long ago as the Psalmist's days, fools who are now dead were accustomed to hold by, that “There is no God.” But the thing which especially pressed itself on one's mind, sitting thinking of that book, was a feeling of wonder how he poor miserable wretch that wrote it, if he believes

what is written in it, manages to live at all. In this world of care, and trouble, and death, no doubt he must have his sorrows, burdens, and bereavements: now, I wonder, where does he go for comfort under these? When his heart is overcharged and breaking, as all human hearts must some day be, where does he go and pour out his heart, that miserable man who cannot pray? And when taught by disappointment, by failure, by the death of those dearest, by the ever-felt insufficiency of all earthly possessions, that this life will not satisfy us, what can he do that believes there is no other life than this? My friends, if we are Christians at all; then, though our faith and grace be very far indeed from being what we wish and pray, yet perhaps we do not always realize how unspeakably dependent we are upon our religion; how impossible it would be for us to do without it; what a horrible blank it would make, how thoroughly we should break down beaten; if it were not that we believe in a Fatherly God, and a Blessed Saviour, and a sympathizing, comforting, strengthening Holy Spirit, and a happy heaven where sorrow and sin are done with, and where families and friends parted here by death meet forever! Christian friends, how many times in every week do you fall back upon religion for support which you can find nowhere else: how many things do you habitually bear quietly and patiently, that would make you burst out into wild despair if you had

not religion to turn to and there find support: yea, brethren, I am sure I speak the deepest feeling of every believing heart, when I say that if you could prove our Christian faith a fable, we could not live:— we could bear this life no more!

And not the least among the sustaining and consoling truths to which we cling thus resolutely, is this great doctrine; that if we be Christian people, — and may the Blessed Holy Spirit make us all and keep us all such, — then every step of our way is directed by God; and directed in wisdom and love and will for our true well-being. Brethren, let us pray, God increase our faith to believe *that!* O what a difference it would make upon our daily life and the feeling of our hearts, — how much happier and quieter it would make us, — if we could only feel that sublime truth which it is so easy to say! That there is a meaning in everything that happens to us; in everything, small and great: that things turn out as they do, because God thinks it best for us: that the time when we failed so miserably of something on which we had set our heart, we did so because our kind Father above saw that we were poor ignorant foolish children, that did not know what was good for us, — that wanted to get hold of something that was really poison; that wanted to turn into a pretty green path that would have led to a precipice! If God would carry that truth home to our hearts, by the irresistible demonstration of the

Blessed Spirit! Then how patiently, how cheerfully, how humbly, how hopefully, we should go along our path through life: how free our souls would be of the anxieties, forbodings, perplexities, fears, that weigh down many Christians now, and age them before their time! For then we should know that our way was the right one, and that the day would come when we should see that which now we believe on God's sure word: and if the way grew dark, and rough, and thorny, we should only cling the closer to the kind Hand that was leading on through all, — like children that in a dark path, afraid and yet not afraid, press nearer to their father and guide.

My brethren, I trust it is the wish of each of us, that God's will be done, in us, and about us: I trust that it is our daily prayer, not so much that God would give us what we wish, as that He would teach us, simply and completely, to submit our will to His, and that He would give us grace and strength to bear whatever He may send. Let us seek that the utterance of our hearts may be that of the blind Galileo; who said, "It has pleased God that it should be so; and it must please me too." And yet, though all this be so, there can be no doubt that it is natural to us to wish, that it might please God to lead us by as easy and pleasant a way as may be: that it might please God to appoint us as peaceful and happy a life as possible, and to send us just as little evil

and sorrow as may suffice to work upon us the wholesome results of evil and sorrow. To live tranquilly year after year in the same home: to have none of those great shocks coming which leave their outward trace in features which even at their cheerfullest you see can very swiftly and readily take the look of alarm and fear: that death may keep away from the house: that bads news may come rarely, may come never: that cares and anxieties may be absent upon that wearing question, how to make the ends meet, which takes up so great a part of the thoughts of most men and women in a country like this: that you may be able to live in kindness and esteem among your neighbors: that when you wish greatly for anything, you may get it: that your nerves may remain unshaken, and your spirits equable and cheerful: that your bodily strength and activity may hold out,—that heart and brain and hand and limb may remain equal to their duty:—these are the kind of things we all wish for: such is the life we should most of us lead, if it were given us to determine our own lot, and to fix the bounds of our habitation. And quite right too, that we should so feel and so wish. God has made us so, that we wish for what is pleasant, and shrink from what is painful. But it does not follow, that the thing we like best, is the best thing for us. And the text tells us that a life of unbroken ease, a life in which all goes well with us, is a most perilous thing.

Let us look at the text, and think of its meaning. It is a piece of imagery; and the comparison is a homely one; but it brings out the truth in a way every one can understand. It speaks to us of the spiritual effects of an easy and undisturbed life. The kingdom of Moab had enjoyed long tranquillity, though there were troublesome neighbors near, and though it was a state of no great power: it had pleased God to order it so. "Moab had been at ease from his youth." Then comes the comparison to wine: Moab had not been subjected to captivity, nor to other changes and troubles which are to a nation what pouring from one vessel to another is to wine: thus he had remained standing upon the lees, losing no part of his original strength and flavor. The suggestion is, that Moab was not good to start with: and he had not been tried with processes which might indeed have been painful, but in which he would have got rid of a good deal of the evil that was in him at the first. Moab had been secure in prosperity: and so he had remained the same as at the beginning,—all his bad qualities being only confirmed by time and use.

You know there are other passages of Holy Scripture which help us to the spiritual meaning of all this statement concerning Moab. Says the Psalmist, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." And in the book of the prophet Zephaniah we read, "At that time, I will search Jerusalem with can-

dles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees : that say in their heart, ‘The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.’” Now the great lesson from all this is, that there is spiritual danger in the quiet lot, and in the quiet heart ; that it is not God’s purpose that those He loves should enjoy entire worldly tranquillity : that there is something good for you and me, in care, unrest, disquiet, sorrow, bereavement, disappointment, perplexity,—in all that breaks up that perilous calm, in which we grow too well satisfied with this world, and in which we feel ourselves too little dependent on our Saviour and our Comforter ; and in which we come too much to feel as if things went on in their own way, forgetting that God directs them all ; and in which we fail to realize it, that the one thing needful is something quite different from worldly enjoyment or worldly gain.

Is it not true, my friends : do you not know it from your own experience ; that things might go with us in this world so quietly and happily,—we might be so content with this life, so satisfied with things as they are,—that we might utterly forget the care of our souls, and of eternity, and of the world beyond the grave ? Ah, it would not do for us to be what Moab was, “at ease from our youth” to our age ! The great thing, after all, that will make us seek our rest, and the portion of our souls, elsewhere, must be our learning from actual trial, sanctified by God’s spirit, that this is not our rest. It is only

through being made to feel the want of something better than we can find here, that we are led heartily to turn to Christ,—and to make up our mind that our treasure must be above, and not below. If we found that our lot here would satisfy us, and fill the cravings of our soul: if no sorrow came near us, and no care: if the sense of sin never disquieted us: then we should forget that we are no more than strangers and pilgrims on the earth; we should fancy that this was our home! And so you see how uninterrupted worldly prosperity might prove the very greatest of all misfortune, by depriving us of heaven. You cannot expect, in any ordinary case, to get the good part in Christ without seeking for it. O brethren, even as it is, you know we all set our hearts far too much on this world: we think far too much of worldly ends and advantages, and give far too much of our time and strength to these: but what would it be, if this world were all we wish it,—what would it be, if there came no troubles and sorrows, to wean us somewhat from it?—and how thankful, with a lowly thankfulness, we ought to be, that God does not leave us, like Moab, at our ease; that God never lets us go on long without sending something to remind us that we can never be evenly happy here! There always comes some drawback, some vexation, some worry; and now and then a great crushing blow. And truly, brethren, we all get enough of that discipline, if we would but profit by it.

Almost every human being has enough of the teaching of disquiet and sorrow, if it were but sanctified: the temptation of too much peace comes to very few. Perhaps if you knew more of the lot of those whose lot seems most enviable and most peaceful, you would see that they are no more to be envied than yourself. We have all, perhaps, some time passed by some sweet rural dwelling, embosomed with trees and bright with flowers; and thought how quiet and pure and happy life might be in a home so sweet: but when we came to know the inner history of the family that dwelt there, we found that God had not tempted them with Moab's temptation: we learned that sorrow and care and anxiety may quite well live in graceful dwellings grown over with honeysuckle and jasmine, and that very sad eyes may look forth from windows round which roses twine. And where the fretting daily worry is kept away, and something like Moab's temptation of peace and quiet is suffered for a while, we all know how often the sudden heavy blow comes, and shatters the frail foundation of that ease. Many of you remember how the biographer tells us of "the almost awful happiness" of a certain great and good man's home: but you remember, too, how suddenly that state of temptation to that household ceased; how from the midst of love and honor and usefulness and abundant promise, the messenger, coming without any shadow of his approach, called that

good man away. My dear friends, if God loves us, He will not suffer us to be at ease, too much, or too long. The little fretting vexation will be always there. Or, if there be none such, the heavy blow will fall in its time.

And so you see, dear friends, how in love and mercy, and tender consideration for our best good, our Father sends us trouble. It is perilous to be at ease: it may be our ruin to be at ease: and so God takes care that we shall not be so. Brethren, might we but rightly feel this, how it would clear up God's dealings: and especially, when each of us looks back upon his own life, and thinks how much trouble and toil and weariness and disappointment and sorrow have been in it,—how different life has proved from what we anticipated and hoped when we were little children or hopeful youths,—how this explains all, and resigns and reconciles us to all! Philosophers vex and bewilder themselves in trying to explain how there is such a thing as evil in this world: we do not pretend to understand that, but one thing we do know perfectly, we know why evil and sorrow have been sent into our own lot and heart. They have come, to make sure that we shall not “settle on our lees”: they have come, to keep this world from engrossing our affection: they have come, to wean us from this world by making us feel its bitterness: they have come to teach us the grand, all-comprehending lesson,

that if we want what will satisfy our souls, we must go to Christ and find it there. No doubt, brethren, a very great deal of sorrow and trouble have been sent to teach us this: but you know, if you wish to teach a difficult lesson, and to get it thoroughly accepted by a reluctant person that would rather not learn it, you must use a great deal of repetition: it will not do to tell a little boy whom you are teaching his alphabet the names of the letters just once: and even so, when God would drill into our unwilling minds that which is the very alphabet of all religion, he repeats the lesson a hundred and a thousand times: with all the sorrow He has sent us, He has not sent us more than enough: every trouble that ever touched or ever wrung our heart in all our life, was needed: for there is not one of us that will dare to say that he has set his heart too much on heavenly things; that he has made too decided a choice of the Saviour as his only satisfying portion; that he is seeking too constantly for the Blessed Spirit's indwelling, and holiness and peace; and that he is too anxious that he and all he loves, when this troublesome life is past, and this sorrowful and sinful world has faded from view, may be gathered all together in that Golden City, where the soul shall be content at last!

Yes, brethren, it is not good for us in this world to be evenly at peace: and thus sorrow is God's discipline, and disappointment, and bereavement, — in short, every-

thing that is painful and disquieting, — all being sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God. And here is a truth we cannot remember too seriously. In all our troubles, we cannot too earnestly and constantly pray for the presence and influence of the Holy Ghost. For sorrow does not necessarily sanctify: it is just as likely to sour, if left to its natural tendencies. Although Moab, or any one else, had not been at his ease a day in all his life: although he had been the most unquiet, restless, miserable, disappointed creature the sun ever looked down upon; it does not follow of necessity that he would have been a whit better than he was, after all his ease. Ah, there are men and women who are not “left on their lees”: who are cast about from place to place: who have no settled home: who are disappointed and mortified in their hopes and plans and affections: in whom the shoots of self-conceit and ambition and worldliness are pruned, as it were, with a keen knife and an unsparing hand: and yet who are just as far from being weaned from this world as ever Moab was, and just as far from seeking to have their portion in Christ: who hold by the world and by sin, though it is very little they have to hold by, as tightly as though they had lived at ease all their life! Yes, Lazarus at the gate full of sores, might, for all that, have been just as unweaned from time and sense as the rich man clad in purple at his sumptuous fare. There are two things, to either of which sorrow may bring us:

it may bring us to good, or it may bring us to harm. It may make us fall down, like Job, and say, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord": or it may make us "Curse God and die!" Yes, you may have known those in whom sanctified sorrow and disappointment and bereavement, had wrought a resignation, a humility, a sympathy, a quietness, a kindliness, a sweetness of nature, that stamped them but a very little lower than what we fancy the angels are. And again, you may have known those in whom the like sorrow and disappointment and bereavement, had served only to sour and embitter: to fill with rebellious thoughts of God, and with envy and hatred towards men: to develop something of the nature of the devil himself. O brethren, in your troubles, and in the prospect of more, see that you pray most earnestly for the influence and guidance and consolation of the Blessed Spirit of God! For trouble and disappointment are terrible things: they can work us such awful mischief if they are not made by Him to do us unspeakable good. If they are not touched by the Holy Ghost into most precious means of grace, they may be used by the Great Adversary to assure our eternal ruin!

My friends, you who have known many trials: you who have watched by the dying bed, and bent over the grave: you who set your heart on things which God said were never to be: you whose sensitive nature

makes the little worries of daily life sit very heavily on you, and whose quick heart and fancy eat the enjoyment out of your life by suggesting a hundred anxieties and fears: let me ask, Have all these things been sanctified to wean you from this world, and make you feel that your portion must be in Christ and seek it there: or do you still cling to the earth, and refuse to profit by your heavenly Father's teaching through all these trials and cares? Every grief that these hearts have ever known, was a sharp lesson given by the best Teacher: and was meant to show us that this world will not do; and that if we want peace and rest for our souls, we must look for them in our Saviour. Now, do you accept that lesson, heartily? Or do you hold by the idea that this world *would* do if you could only get all you want;— and try again to find your rest and portion here? It is as sad a sight as can be found under heaven, a man who, after making a poor thing, an anxious, fearful, miserable thing, of this life, is going on to make a worse of the life beyond the grave: a man whom the Spirit has pruned severely, has never "left at his ease," yet who is not a whit the better for it all; a man whom worldly disappointment, instead of making heavenly-minded, has only made bitter of heart; and who is as self-seeking, as self-conceited, as worldly, as impatient, as rebellious, as if the Holy Ghost had not been trying, by years of painful discipline, to take these evil things away! We could

bear the sight and the suffering of any amount of sorrow, if we knew it was to result in great good : but O, to think that the misery of long years on earth may all go for nothing ; — may do no good at all !

Then if you would not have it so with yourself, pray earnestly in every trouble that the Holy Spirit may sanctify it ! Unless He do *that*, there is no reckoning the harm it may do !

I know quite well, that it is a hard lesson that care and sorrow teach us : the lesson that this is not our rest. It seems a sad thing to make up our mind that we can get no more here. It is very well for people, in worldly health and comfort, to tell some poor sufferer, with miserable days and sleepless nights, that all this is so : there is no easier commonplace ; nothing more readily said by people who have not the least sense of the meaning of what they say. But O, it is a different thing, to hear it said that sanctified affliction is one of God's best blessings, by one just passing away from this life after months of almost ceaseless pain ; by one who is speaking from his own personal experience ! This is one of those truths which never impress us so deeply, as when feebly yet resolutely spoken from a dying bed, by lips soon to speak no more. And even when it is not told us in the supreme solemnity of ebbing life, there is that which cheers and soothes us in hearing it said by those who

speak because they know. And how many know ! Let us trust that very many in this congregation know. Let us trust that all of us, — since all beyond the very youngest must have known much care and sorrow, — are able sincerely to say that the affliction God sent us, He sent in love ; — that we know *that*, because it has done us so much good : and that, if it has left us with the lined face, the subdued step, the heart that will never again cherish very strongly any earthly wish or hope ; it has brought for these things abundant recompense, in the humility, the sympathy, the charity, the tender consideration for the feelings of others, the affection set above, the will resigned to God's, the simple trust in Him, the readiness to go where He leads, and do what He commands, which perhaps never come to any human heart, except by the discipline of sanctified care and sorrow !

I do not wish to set out a one-sided view of this matter : and remembering God's promise that "all things shall work together for good" to Christian people, I will confess willingly, that if sorrow be a precious discipline, happiness is often a precious discipline too. If there be those among us who can testify that it would not have done for them to have been allowed to be "at ease from their youth," for then they might have settled into utter worldliness and forgetfulness of God : there are perhaps others who can say that nothing did ever so draw them

to God, nothing did ever so bring them to their knees in penitence and thankfulness, as some great blessing or deliverance vouchsafed after long anxiety and sorrow; — some hopeful brightening of the horizon, after many gloomy days. I believe, firmly, that, as many people would be happier if they were better, so many people would be better if they were happier. For “the goodness of God leadeth to repentance”: and doubtless we should all be very thankful if God would draw us to Himself in that pleasant way. Yet if we are truly His, be sure He will not allow us to find this world too pleasant, or to love it too well. When He sees us getting too contented, He will send us something to correct *that*: if not a great sorrow, then some little wearying never-ceasing vexation, — which is just as effectual to teach that this is not our rest or home.

And thus, my friends, I have sought to explain God’s discipline of sorrow: why sorrow comes to God’s people when God knows they cannot like it; and what it is meant to do. It is a sad teacher, which none of us would wish to learn from if we could avoid it: we need not pretend anything other. Yet St. Paul could “glory in tribulation,” when he thought of all the good it could do: he could “most gladly glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him” through them all. And we, my friends, this day, have known sorrow too bitterly in the past, to wish for it any more. If it

be possible for God to work His will in us without *that*, O, may it please Him not to send it again! But if He see good to send it;—and if the weary feet have more rough ways to tread, and the weary heart more pangs to bear;—O may He sanctify it to us by the grace of His Holy Spirit! And, being so sanctified, it will all go to fit us for the place, towards which every right step taken on this earth is tending; and where all right hearts shall be at one at last.





III.

HE MUST INCREASE; BUT I MUST DECREASE.

“He must increase ; but I must decrease.” — ST. JOHN, iii. 30.



HERE are little single things which men say and do, which give us a thorough insight into their character ; and which enable us to construct a complete theory of what their nature is. And a thoughtful observer forms his estimate of those around him, often from remarking very little things : not so much by observing what men and women do when they are put on the alert, and think people are watching them, as by observing their little sayings and doings when they are quite at their ease.

Now in that short sentence which forms my text, and which contains a few words spoken by St. John the Baptist on a memorable occasion, and at a testing juncture in his life, we have something which gives us a deep insight into his nature, and which makes us know what manner of man he was. There is that in this short sentence, that shows us how fit he was to be our blessed

Saviour's forerunner : that shows us what a noble-hearted, generous, great man the Baptist was ; and how superior he was to a certain unworthy littleness, from which many good and worthy men are oftentimes not at all free. There was a day on which his disciples came to him, and, with something of natural concern for their master's waning popularity and influence, told him that Christ was supplanting him, was taking the wind out of his sails : was baptizing, and all men were flocking to see and hear him. These disciples of John the Baptist did not like that their master, after filling the first place, should sink into the second : and with some perplexity, and grief, and disappointment, they came and made their moan. There was something in the whole state of matters to which they found it very hard to make up their mind.

We all know that the very best of ordinary Christian people have a great deal of their feeling. There are worthy men who wish good to be done, souls to be saved, sad hearts comforted, Christ's kingdom furthered ; — but all this to be done *by themselves* : who cherish a feeling they would hardly acknowledge to themselves, but which really comes to this, that they would rather the good were not done, if they themselves, or their church or sect, are not allowed to be the instruments of doing it : and who cannot, without much pain, find themselves surpassed, find that others are drawing ahead of them, —

even in the matters of Christian usefulness, and vigor, and success. Of course, even divine grace leaves human nature, though regenerated and sanctified, yet in its essence just poor human nature: and it is not in common human nature, unless wonderfully helped from above, to be pleased when you find yourself worsted, beaten, set aside; and others preferred before you. The very best Christian minister cannot like it, when his church begins to get empty: the worthiest Christian man cannot but feel it a trial, when something comes to remind him of flagging powers and failing strength.

But all this, though very natural, is somewhat little; and there was no such littleness in the Baptist's noble heart. He listened to what his perplexed disciples told him: he bade them understand that this was just what he looked for, just what was right. "I have had my little day, and my light is paling before the rising sun of another," many a man would sadly enough have said, with a mournful resignation to what could not be helped: not so St. John the Baptist. As for him, he rejoiced that he was to give way to one who was worthier. He was content to be like the cheap fir, under whose shelter the young oak roots itself; and which in a little while is cut down, and gives place to the nobler tree. He was well content to be, not the bridegroom but the bridegroom's friend; not the Christ, but he that was sent before Him. And all this without a murmur.

The words are strange: where many a human being would have said, "My mortification is complete," he says, "My joy is fulfilled!" He says, with all his heart, what many a good man would have said a little grudgingly of even the worthiest competitor, "He must increase; but I must decrease!"

But I do not invite you to-day to a study of the character of St. John the Baptist, interesting as that might be to many of us: for in the character of a good Christian man we have, I always feel, a little world: a complete exemplification of God's plan and will, as regards an individual soul and life: and many a hint we may get from these for which we may be better, — more peaceful, resigned, and cheerful. But I have chosen this text in a different view; because I believe it contains a great principle: the great principle on which God governs His children, always and everywhere. Speaking with that lowliness which is fit, we may yet confidently say, that God's manifest purpose is, to keep His children humble, — to make our Saviour everything, and ourselves nothing. We are empty; in Him dwells all fulness. We are lost; in Him is all salvation. We are weak; in Him is almighty strength. We can bring to Him only our guilt, our cares, our sorrows, our poor unworthy selves: in Him is everything, — grace and peace and hope and life, wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and complete redemption. And it is a great

and happy Christian attainment, — it is a thing showing that grace is strengthening in us, — it is an advanced stage, — when we can with our whole heart assent to this : when we can be content to be just as lowly, insignificant, useless, as Christ intends us to be : content if His glory be advanced and His work done without us : — when the utterance of our whole heart goes forth in the Baptist's ancient words, spoken for all time, "He must increase ; but I must decrease."

O brethren, we have great reason for humble thankfulness, when we come to this ! There is good reason to hope that the Holy Spirit has worked effectually upon our hearts, when human nature, with its tendencies to self-assertion, to self-conceit, to the magnifying of self, to pushing and unworthy arts for the aggrandizement of self, to eagerness to reach a prominent place and to get the start of others ; — comes to this ! When we are content to go where Christ sends us, and be what he bids us ; however little like *that* is to the vain fancies of our earlier days, or even to the ambitious stirrings of more advanced years. When we can kneel down in our closet, and ask the Holy Spirit to listen to us, addressing our prayer specially to Him, as we ought more frequently to do ; and lay before Him all our case, — what we are desiring and thinking and feeling : and ask Him to bring our hearts to this, that our sole desire shall be that our Blessed Saviour's glory may be advanced, and

our Heavenly Father's will be done, in us, by us, and about us: that we should decrease to a little space,—till our vain self-importance utterly vanish,—so our Master be glorified!

God grant that happy and peaceful spirit to every one of us: and then how much lighter our hearts, how much holier our lives would be! If we truly and heartily made God's glory the first thing, God's will the first thing, our path would be plainer, our temper would be meeker, our spirit would be quieter, our sky would be far more bright and clear. If we could but learn to habitually mortify self: to put down, within ourselves, the pride which God resists;—the self-righteousness which holds us away from the cross of Christ: if we could, in brief, just take for the rule of our faith, our feelings, our wishes and desires, our whole heart and life, the all-comprehending words, "He must increase; but I must decrease."

Let us think of these words for a little while: and try to discern in them the two vital and essential things about our eternal well-being. First, we have in them the way to be saved: and next, we have in them the rule of a holy and happy life.

And first, as to the way to be saved;—as to what we are to do to have our sins forgiven, and to be received by God as His penitent children, and numbered among His own;—what Christian but must feel that

the text tells us what it is that lies at the very foundation of all that? You know how natural it is for us all to think that we can do something, or suffer something, that may recommend us to God; — that may make some amends for our sins against Him. It is the very beginning of any care about the salvation of our souls, to feel that we are poor sinful creatures: every religious system takes that for granted: *that* is the starting point from which all ways of finding salvation set out. But when you come to take the very next step, O how widely God's way and man's way diverge from one another! When you come to ask, If I am a sinner then, what am I to do to get my sins forgiven? you know, my friends, how grievously wrong men have gone, through forgetting or through not understanding or through failing to really take home to their hearts the great truth of which this text reminds us. "I will do something for myself," is the natural thought of the man who is made to feel he is a sinner: "I will do something for myself, that may be set over against my sins; that may in some measure counterbalance them, — that may induce God to forgive and forget them: He will never be so hard as to rake up against me the old offences of the past, for which I am heartily sorry, and for which I will do my very best to make amends." My friends, we must decrease from that; *that* would be saving ourselves. We must get off that ground altogether. *That* is magnifying our-

selves, and diminishing our Saviour, — yea, setting him aside. Now, “He must increase, and we must decrease.” We must learn, and feel in our heart, that we can do nothing, to make amends to the law we have broken: that we must be forgiven, if forgiven at all, of God’s free grace, and for our blessed Redeemer’s sake. We must decrease, as regards our merit before God, and as regards our estimate of our merit and ourselves before God, to nothing: and our Saviour must increase till He is felt to be all in all. And the very spirit of the poor sinful creature, emptied of all vain confidence, and receiving pardon and peace and hope of God’s undeserved and free love in Christ Jesus, — which is just the very spirit of the text, — is contained in words very familiar to most of us: words which I have seen written on the stone over a grave, and which gave one a good and pleasant hope as to the trust in which the sleeper beneath it died: words not grand as to their poetry, but sublime in their simple truth and faith, — may they be ours when we die! —

Nothing in my hand I bring:
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

My friends, there is nothing whatsoever, that can be thought of in this place, more important to every one of us than this simple elementary Christian verity: and we may well think of it further. It was a right and good

question that the poor startled keeper of the prison at Philippi put to Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" Yet even in that hour of awful conviction, poor human nature, with its tendency *to increase*, — to magnify itself, and trust to itself, and think much of its own doings and deservings, — did perhaps look out just a little in the "what must I DO?" It was as if he thought he might be saved by something he might do. But the great Apostle put him on quite an opposite course, — bade him *decrease* from that vain estimate, — bade him feel his emptiness and trust in his Saviour's all-sufficiency: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!" And there are few things more sad to think of than that poor anxious awakened sinners, coming with just the Philippian man's question to those whom they trusted as their spiritual guides, have many a time got something so different from the Apostle's answer: — have got an answer that in some form or other bade them look to creature-merit and creature-service for pardon of their sins; and not look to the only Saviour, His atoning sacrifice, His blessed life and death. There was a long time in the history of the Church, in which the answer would have been: "Well, you must inflict on yourself the severest punishment for your past sins. You must deny yourself everything that human nature loves: you must accumulate on yourself everything that human nature fears, and loathes, and shrinks

from: you must abide in a cold cell, and live on the scantiest and most repulsive fare, and go barefoot and bareheaded, and wear a hair shirt, and sever yourself from the society of all you love on earth, and scourge yourself morning and evening, and go a weary pilgrimage to the Holy Land: and then, after all this penance, God will pardon your sins, and give you entrance to Paradise." But *we* have got beyond *that* way of magnifying and saving ourselves, and setting aside the Redeemer. Let us beware of some such notion as this:— "Be sorry for the past; do all you can to be better for the future: and leave all the rest to God." Now *that* looks plausible. It looks like placing perfect trust in the goodness of God; and what more can you demand of a human being than just to do all he can? But mark, I pray you, that while this notion appears to honor God's mercy, it does utter discredit to His justice and His truth: His justice, that demands the punishment of every sin; His truth, that is pledged to the infliction of that punishment: unless the Saviour's atoning sacrifice come between the sinner and what he merits. And then, that which is the other plausible point in this notion as to the way to be saved,—the point that surely man cannot be called upon to do more than just to do his very best,—this proceeds upon utter forgetfulness of the great truth in the text. I know that it looks an affecting thing, to picture a human being

meeting his Maker at judgment: and saying, "I have done my very best to please Thee, and to make peace with Thee; and what could I do more?" Ah brethren, all this just takes for granted that man is to be saved by his own doings: whereas the whole Bible teaches us that it is on a totally different footing man is to be justified before his God: and that, while it is quite certain that the punishment inflicted upon every condemned soul will be just what it deserves, it is no less certain that the soul to which eternal life is given, will get *that* on an utterly different ground from its own deservings, will get *that* simply and solely for the merit of our blessed Saviour. There is an inveterate bent in human nature to think that surely it can do something or suffer something that will somehow avail it. And even when that idea has been put down, the lurking self-satisfaction keeps growing up again: the old self-righteousness revives, and plumes itself somewhat perhaps upon growing grace, — perhaps (so subtle is it) upon our attainment in humility and self-forgetfulness. Yea, Christian friends, as long as we live in this world, we must be ever seeing anew to the foundation on which we rest for eternity, to the ground on which we look for acceptance before our God: we must be trying to understand better that thing which at first so confuses and perplexes, the perfect freedom of God's grace in Christ: we must be daily feeling more deeply that we

are nothing, and that our Redeemer is everything, the hourly utterance of our very heart should be, "He must increase; but I must decrease."³

Let us pass on to those other thoughts to which I ask your attention. In this text we have the rule of a noly and happy life. Here is the secret of great usefulness: here is the thing that will keep us kindly, unenvious, and unsoured in spirit: to utterly cast out self-seeking, self-assertion, self-conceit: to quite forget ourselves, and our own importance and advancement, and with a single heart to think of our God and Saviour, and of the advancement of His glory in the saving and comforting of souls. May God's blessed Spirit, who alone can do it, bring us to *that*, every one!

Now it is a very natural thing to think too well of ourselves and our own doings and our own attainments, whether in nature or in grace. No one but yourself, my friend, knows how hard you work, how earnestly you pray, how honestly you strive against temptation, how faithfully you seek to fulfil the part God has given you here; and no one but yourself, too, knows in the face of how much difficulty, in the presence of how heavy a drag-weight, coming from your circumstances and your nature, you are doing all these things. And you do not know that other people, very many, are doing just the like: and that there is many a one, of whom you would not think it, into whose heart if you

could look, you would see that even the best of your doings and deservings are little when compared with his. It is only when God's grace helps us to do what by ourselves we could never do, that we come to the humble, wise, kindly spirit which the text shows us the Baptist had attained. If we are left to the unsanctified impulses of unrenewed human nature, our desire and our effort will always be that we should be magnified, that we should increase, no matter who else has to decrease.

Yet it is easy to see that all that is best in Christian character and life will come, only through our arriving at the stand-point indicated by the words of the Baptist. Do you desire to grow in holiness? Then *that* can be only through Christ increasing in you and you yourself decreasing, — not merely decreasing in your estimation of yourself, but your old sinful nature which was your original self being daily supplanted and replaced by a better and holier: wrought by God's blessed Spirit. If we are to grow holy, we must die daily to sin, — die daily to ourselves; and live to holiness, live towards that lost ideal in which we recognize our worthier self. Our sinful nature must decrease, and Christ be formed in us, His mind be in us, His spirit (without which we are "none of His") grow in us: yea, our sanctification, and our growth in grace, are stated not figuratively but in the most literal truth, in the words,

“He must increase, and we must decrease.” And it is a searching test of our spiritual progress, that we should be ever lessening in our own estimation; thinking more humbly of ourselves, and more highly of our Saviour. Here is the meaning of what seems a paradox, but what is truly the most reasonable and explicable of all facts, that it is just the best people who think least of themselves: just the most advanced Christians who are the lowliest, — the most thoroughly emptied of all self-assertion and self-conceit. And thus the secret of a holy life, surely our text is the secret likewise of a happy one. In casting out self-seeking, we should free ourselves from the heart-burnings, the envyings and jealousies, the blank disappointments, the bitter sense of failure, all those things which are certain to come of the desire that we should “increase.” A few days since, in the library of a certain ancient and famous University, I saw written in great letters on the wall, two words in the Greek tongue, very familiar even to persons of the humblest scholarship, taken from a celebrated passage in a renowned poet, and well fitted to stimulate the ambition of young hearts. You can render those words weakly in our language, as “Always to be Best!” And a certain student of that ancient seat of learning, who rose by great energy, great ability, and great good-luck, to the highest place which can be held by a subject of the British crown, is recorded to have

said that it was the sight of those words which first stirred in him that ambitious fire which was destined to be so wonderfully favored. And yet, even looking with something of the old feeling upon the grand words, you could not but feel that there is something sublimer than Homer's "Always to be First" in the Baptist's "He must increase; but I must decrease!" You could not but think of the rivalries, the jealousies, the bitterness, which even in the quiet world of the University would be sure to come of the spirit of the Greek poet's words: and of the far greater jealousy and bitterness and enmity which would come of their spirit in after-life, where (unlike the University mode) the greatest rewards are not even pretended to be given to the most deserving. And you could not but think how the humble, self-forgetting spirit of the text would cast all these evil things out forever: how lowliness and resignation, and kindness, and brotherly help, would come, if we did but faithfully endeavor (for we shall never quite succeed) to make our Redeemer's glory our great end: content if that be served, if not by us then by others. For it is wonderful how mere worldly ambition, mere personal self-seeking, will try to veil itself under a worthier form. People wishing to get on in this world, say, and think, "O, we are not just seeking for mere self-aggrandizement: we want to be more useful, to serve Christ better, than we can in this humble sphere."

You are not so sure of *that*, my friends. Perhaps Moses, in his quiet forty years as a shepherd in Midian, was just as useful, in God's view, as in his conspicuous forty years as the ruler of the Israelite race. And perhaps each of you, Christian friends, in the place where God has put you, may serve your Master just as well, and earn as bright a heavenly crown, and gain as much of the spirit of our Saviour, as you could anywhere. O, pray then for grace to be content and cheerful and thankful, if Christ's glory grows without your help: if His kingdom and cause and work are advanced by others more favored, though they be not by you.

And remember this for comfort, — for there are few things more trying than to think that God has appointed you to be useless, or nearly so, when you believe you have it in you to be helpful in His work, — that the man who will do most, who will be the most faithful and successful soldier and servant of the Cross, is just the man who attains the most of the Baptist's self-forgetting and self-denying spirit. Just in proportion to the degree in which you cease to think of self, and with a single eye make your Master's glory your great end, will be the good you will do. There is always some taint of suspicion about all the philanthropy, all the alms-giving, all the visiting of the sick and poor, all the teaching of neglected children about Christ, that has not this for its

great characteristic. There is nothing that goes home to the hearts of people you try to influence for good, like the conviction that you are not thinking of yourself at all; but that you are thinking of them, and of Christ's glory in their advantage and blessing here and hereafter. It is so in everything, you know, as well as in religion. Even in respect of some political question, or some social reform, the speaker who will impress us most is not the man that is thinking about himself and his eloquence, or even that makes *us* think about him and his eloquence: it is the single-minded earnest-hearted man whose one end is to convince you; — in whose mind his subject has *increased* till it looks like all the world, and himself *decreased* till he has dropped utterly out of sight. And so in holier and more important things: in all Christian philanthropy, in all missionary enterprise at home or abroad. It is not the fussy person trying to do good, but with much self-consciousness and self-conceit mingling with all his doings, — it is not that man who will do most good. It is rather the humbler servant whose whole life says, "Now I am not working for effect: I don't care what you think of *me*: I am aiming at your good and Christ's glory only." For that humbler servant, without perhaps ever thinking of it, has caught the sublime spirit of one, concerning whom his Saviour said that a greater was never born of woman; and whose words about his Saviour were these, spoken un-

grudgingly and with all his heart, "He must increase; but I must decrease!"

You remember what Milton said of the desire for honor and pre-eminence: that it is "the last infirmity of noble minds." Perhaps the lack of power habitually to feel that our Saviour is everything, and that we are nothing, and habitually to be content to have it so; is the last infirmity, that longest lingers, in Christian souls. Something of the old self-righteousness and self-conceit will be still sometimes arising: some vain thought that our own good works are really very good after all, and that we are more righteous than the poor publican standing near: some discontented fancy that we have not quite got the worldly success and eminence to which we are entitled by our merits: some lack of the hourly, fixed belief, that we are poor helpless sinners, and that we must be saved and blest through Christ if so at all. O let us pray for the continual help of the Holy Spirit, to put these things down: to clothe us with humility: to number us with the "poor in spirit," whose is perhaps no great place on earth, yet the "kingdom of heaven": and so we shall be content if God will but lead us by the way He judges right, to where beyond these strifes and envyings, these sorrows and sins, there is quiet and peace forever!



IV.

GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

“ And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.” — EPHES. iv. 30.



HERE are different ways in which you may grieve a person.

If the person hate you, and wish you ill, then you may grieve and vex him by taking the course which will make you good and happy. If the person be a bad person, then you may grieve him by doing what is right. There can be no doubt at all, that when a sinner repents and turns to God, though the angels rejoice, Satan and his dark and wretched spirits grieve. Everything good and happy upon earth grieves that father of mischief; everything sinful and sad pleases him.

But if the person loves you, and wishes you well, then you will grieve and vex him by taking the course which will make you bad and wretched. If the person be a good person, then you will grieve him by doing what is wrong. If your parents are wise and good and Christian people, then you who are young lads or young girls will gladden their hearts by turning out well.

And by turning out ill, you will grieve their hearts; and perhaps break them.

And I suppose most of you know from experience, how very powerful a motive is supplied by the remembrance, that what we do will gladden or will vex those who are the dearest to us, or the most esteemed by us. It is oftentimes a good thing, as well as oftentimes a bad thing, that we should be guided a great deal in what we do, by what those around us will think. Sometimes, the thought of what people will say, leads human beings to do wrong. Sometimes the same thought leads human beings to do the best things they ever do at all. From earliest childhood the great motive begins to act, which sways man to the last: the thought how what we do will be esteemed by others. Milton wrote his great poem, actuated by the strong desire that men might remember him and think of him long after he was dead: you remember the touching words in which he himself tells us so. And the little boy at the village school works his hardest to gain his prize, because he thinks how it will please his mother. You would not care much, my friend, for any distinction you might get, or any success, if there were no one but yourself to know of it or to care for it. And you know whether, coming next after God's grace, there be anything that does more to keep a youth, cast alone amid the temptations of a great city, in the right path, than the keeping up of

the old home-feeling: and whether there be a safeguard more effectual than the ready suggestion of the great motive that grows out of it. What greater stimulus to duty, than this? — “Now, you will be industrious, and honest, and good; and make them all happy at home!” And what healthier consideration in an hour of temptation to do wrong, than that which comes first and most natural: “O you will not do *that*, and break your mother’s heart!”

My Christian friends, it hath pleased God, in the words of my text, to appeal to us with just that homely consideration. “Grieve not” — the words are spoken to all of us — “the Holy Spirit of God.”

And first, mark Who it is we are asked not to grieve. You have seen how completely it turns upon the character of the person grieved, what the kind of things shall be that are to grieve him. Now we all know this Person, let us humbly trust: not so well, indeed, as He knows us: but surely we know Who it is that cheered and comforted us in all our wanderings through this world of trouble; and in all our griefs, of which God has doubtless given each of us our share: surely we know Him of Whom is everything good, and kind, and pure, and true, that we ever have thought, or said, or done, in all our life! The Person we are asked not to grieve, is the Holy Spirit of God: the blessed Comforter, Whom the blessed Saviour promised to send:

the gracious and Almighty Sanctifier, whose service to the Church of Christ in this world was so needful and precious, that the Redeemer declared that the Holy Spirit's presence was worth more than His own. That the Comforter might come, said our Saviour, "it is expedient for you," it is better for you, "that I should go away." It is the Third Person in the Godhead, God the Holy Ghost, equal with the Father and the Son, with all God's perfection, and power, and love, that we are appealed to not to vex or grieve. And we all know how He feels towards us: we all know what He wants us to do, and what He wants us to be. Think of His nature and His work: and you will understand all these. O, Sanctifier and Comforter, what can He desire us to be but to be holy and happy: to be the things it is His work to make us? Yes, He wishes us to be everything that is good and happy. And we grieve Him when we are sinful: we grieve Him when we are miserable.

You see, then, the kind of Person we are told not to grieve. He is the kindest and best: He is our warmest well-wisher. And what kindness and consideration there are in the way in which the text shows us our duty! It is our own good that the Holy Spirit is desiring to work out: and we are asked not to vex Him by obstructing Him in doing what? Just in making us holy and happy! We can grieve Him,

only by hurting and destroying ourselves! And remember, too, He is Almighty. He can make us do, and be, just what He pleases. He could drag us wherever He might choose, in spite of all our opposition. But *that* is not the way He takes. He appeals to us: He speaks to our heart: He does not value any obedience which the heart does not go along with. And so He who might command us and compel us,—who might bring to bear upon us the threat of eternal woe,—is content to speak to us, as a kind parent might do to a wayward child: saying to us, “Now don’t do that, for it will vex Me: Don’t do what you can to give Me a sad heart!”

It is right that we should here remember that in such words as those of the text, which speak of it as possible to grieve God the Holy Spirit,—and in the many passages of Holy Scripture which speak of God as repenting, and grieved at the heart, and the like,—there is a gracious condescension to our ways of thinking and talking. In perfect strictness, God can feel no pain, no woe; and of course, no painful feeling like grief or sorrow or disappointment. But words which would, in perfect strictness, express God’s ways of thinking and feeling, we could not at all understand. And we are so truly made after the image of God, that we are sure of this: that the words used in the text

convey to us a true impression: and that the feeling of the Blessed Spirit when we disappoint Him, resist Him, quench Him, is, in Him, what grief is in us.

And now, looking at this precept, addressed first to the Christians of Ephesus, and then to all Christians everywhere, the important thing for us to do, is to know exactly the rock of which the text warns us. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God": May He Himself help us to know and understand what the things are that will grieve Him.

How can we grieve the Blessed Spirit?

Think of this analogous case. How could you grieve your parents, if they were good and wise and Christian parents? How could you grieve any good and wise man, who was deeply interested in your welfare?

Why, to look at the case generally, you would grieve and vex such by doing anything wrong. And *this* is a complete answer to the question. If any misfortune befell you: if some great trial or distress came your way through no fault of your own: your friend or your parents would be sorry for you: they would be grieved indeed; but it would not be *you* that had grieved them. The only way in which you could *grieve* some wise and kind friend, in the sense in which the word is used in the text, would be, by doing something wrong.

Now, the first and most general view we can take of the Blessed Spirit is this: that He is our kindest and

wisest well-wisher. Whatever makes us holy, happy, Christian people, pleases Him. Whatever does the reverse of that, grieves Him. And so we know *this*: Whenever we do wrong, we grieve the Holy Spirit. When we admit a suspicious, envious, or uncharitable thought: when we say an unkind, uncandid, or ill-set word: when we do a sinful deed; we grieve Him. We know *that* just as surely as if we could see, each time we transgress or fall short, a kind face turning away from us with tears in its eyes. And you will generally know in your heart, *when* you are vexing the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian at all, your conscience will be so far quickened and enlightened, that it will tell you *that*. But when you are trying to get nearer Christ and to rest on Him more simply: when you are trying to act more constantly and thoroughly from Christian principle in all your common work and life: when you are seeking to live more above this world, and to have more love towards God and man; then you may be sure you are pleasing the Holy Spirit. For then you are striving to grow in grace: and it is His occupation thus to make you grow.

But all this is a very general account of the way in which professing Christians like us may grieve the Holy Spirit. Let us go into details. By doing anything bad, you would vex a good and wise parent. But you would especially vex such a one, if you went and

did certain special things which he had particularly forbidden you to do: or if you refused to do certain special things which he had particularly begged you to do.

And it is just so with the Holy Spirit. Everything wrong we do, grieves Him. But we may humbly fix upon certain things, which we are especially sure must grieve Him; because they specially concern His own office and work in the great design of grace. I do not pretend to point out all of these: but let us go on to think of some, which may well come home to the hearts of us all.

First, we may be very sure that we grieve the Holy Spirit, by restraining prayer, or by heartless prayers. You know, it is part of the gracious work of that blessed One, to help us to pray: to warm our hearts with child-like and trustful devotion: to bring suitably to our remembrance the things for which we ought to pray. It is perhaps too common in these days to forget this comfortable truth: I am not careful to explain its rationale, or to set forth how in prayer, any more than in duty and temptation, the supernatural influence weaves in with the natural workings of the heart and soul: but what Christian is there but will, in the deepest humility but without a shade of hesitation, testify that he has felt, in his warmed and elevated and comforted heart, the fulfilment of the words of promise,

—the “Spirit helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.” Now, Christian friends, I speak not of such as do not pray at all, for the Christian life, even in its lowest degrees, cannot exist without some measure of prayer: but if you pray little; and seldom; and heartlessly; and with wandering thoughts; and not feeling really to Whom you are speaking, and not really thinking what a strong thing prayer is, and what an unspeakable privilege; can there be any doubt that you are grieving that Blessed Spirit who remembers all that prayer is when we forget it? and who, when He sees a human being stand up or kneel down to offer prayer, does (as it were) graciously draw near, and whisper to the heart, “Now I am here, I am here to help you, if you will only let Me do it: and if you desire really to pray”? And O brethren, can you not imagine Him turning away as in sorrow from many a seeming worshipper in the church, from many a formal utterer of words of supplication morning and evening in the closet, as though saying, “Ah, I am not wanted there!” Christian friends, does not the conscience of each of us testify that we have too often thus grieved Him, by offering the cold, heartless prayer, which could do quite well without *Him*: and He all the while standing by, ready to help us if we would but have it so!

But now let us each resolve, by His grace, that it shall not be so any more! Here, in the house of prayer: and praying together as an assembled household: and when you have entered into your closet and shut the door, and are praying to your Father which is in secret: always remember Who is ready to help you; and always ask His help. Think, you will vex the Holy Ghost if you do not! But if we always ask for Him, and look for Him, and wait for Him, — O how hearty, how peace-bringing, how heart-cheering would be our prayers! Then the mercy-seat would be a spot whence we should return, like Moses, with a radiant face; and with a heart calm, and strong, and unperplexed, and cheerful! And all who see us would take knowledge of us, that we had been with Jesus, — and been with the Blessed Sanctifier and Comforter, there.

A second way in which we shall especially grieve the Holy Spirit, by especially slighting His office and work, will be by refusing to allow Him to comfort us in sorrow. My Christian friends, we all forget this. We too often forget, that a Christian has no right to be miserable. It is not merely his privilege to be happy; it is his duty. And I do not hesitate to say, that there is no duty which Christians more commonly neglect. And I am not thinking of those misguided believers, who think that a sour, morose, gloomy spirit, is the Christian spirit; and that the more unhappy people

are on earth, the likelier they are to be happy in heaven: I am not thinking of such, because I trust there are none such in this congregation. But I am thinking of the disposition there is in all of us, to go about brooding upon our troubles, worrying and vexing our hearts by all manner of vague forebodings of coming evil: I am thinking of the gloom of care and anxiety for the morrow in which many Christians live; and which testifies its existence by the lined faces and the gray hairs we see. My Christian friends, to see the sad, depressed, anxious way in which very many Christians live, you would hardly believe that there is a Being, — not an angel, not an archangel, but God Himself, — whose very office and work it is to comfort Christian people; just to prevent them from being sad or depressed or anxious! *That* is the very work of the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost; and surely He is strong enough for His work, if we would only let Him do it, — do it upon our desponding and weary hearts! Yes, when we go about, depressed and fearful and foreboding, we are dishonoring the Holy Ghost in His character of Comforter. For He comes and offers us comfort; and we do as it were push the kind hand away! If we would but let Him; if we would but open our hearts to Him; there is no trouble or loss we ever knew that would not be soothed into peace by His strong consolation. My friend, if you were sitting by

your fireside desponding and beaten; and if some friend very near and kind came to you, and laid a gentle hand upon your shoulder, — and ever since our beloved Redeemer laid a gentle hand upon the sick He healed and the little ones He blest, there has been something soothing in that; — and if, when your friend began to speak words of comfort to you, you cut him short, — parent or friend or brother, — by saying, “No: I don’t believe you care for me; I don’t believe you can help me”; — is there anything that would so grieve such a one’s kind heart? And yet, *that* is just what we practically say to the Blessed Comforter, if we plod about our path of care and trouble and worry, keeping it all to ourselves, and never asking Him to cheer us. He is there to do it: He is able to do it: He is willing to do it: O let us not grieve Him by refusing to let Him soothe our grief!

My brethren, we do what we can to discredit some great agency, if we refuse to avail ourselves of it. We do what we can to slight some good man, if, when we are in some trouble which it is his special vocation to help people out of, we decline his proffered help. Now, the Gospel provides a spring of consolation; shall we refuse to drink of it? The Holy Spirit of God specially devotes Himself to comforting Christian hearts: He presents Himself in that character: and if we continue always anxious, perplexed, and desponding, this

proves that we are refusing to allow Him to do upon us the work he offers and desires to do. Now let us not any longer grieve Him, by grieving ourselves. We never can vex Him, except by harming and vexing ourselves. Let us train ourselves to the habit, that just as when thirsty we go and drink, so when troubled we shall go to the Comforter! And if a man would be a fool who would perish for thirst with a fountain of pure water murmuring at his feet, — what are we, brethren, if we continue sad and anxious and desponding, when we have within our reach the Almighty and All-sufficient Source of all comfort! Let us go to Him in simple faith and trust, — it is in that spirit of simple trust that God would have His children come to Him: and the sum of all the distracted soul has to say is just *this*: “Thou art the Comforter; and I am in distress: O comfort me!”

There is a third way in which we shall specially grieve the Holy Spirit; and this is by resisting Him when He is seeking to lead us to Christ; by refusing to turn in penitence from sin to God; and then to grow in grace and holiness. And here it is, brethren, that human beings do most deeply and hopelessly grieve the Holy Ghost; even to the extent of quenching Him altogether, and driving Him away so that He leaves them alone. You know, my friends, that after Christ had died as the Sacrifice for sin, and had wrought out

the great scheme of grace, He left it to the Holy Spirit to apply it to the souls of men. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces us of our sin and misery as we are by nature. It is He who enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ;—shows us that Christ can save us from all that. It is the Blessed Spirit who gives us the will to go to Christ: who persuades and enables us to embrace Him as He is offered in the Gospel. And having begun the better life in us, then, in our sanctification He makes it grow up to perfection. In short, penitence, faith, holiness, every virtue and grace,—all are of the operation of the Holy Spirit. You may truly say, indeed, that it is the whole work of the Holy Ghost, including all those parts of His work that have been named already, to apply to our souls the atonement wrought out by Christ's life and death, and the several benefits of it. And you may well discern that the chief and worst way of grieving Him, is to refuse to let Him do for us the great thing He is here to do. If you continue in sin; if you hold away from the Redeemer; you do (as it were) cast back the offered gifts of the Blessed Spirit in His face: you reject His teaching; you refuse His help; you bid Him cease from pressing on you His unwelcome offices, and go and leave you to yourself. This is the great, all-comprehending way of vexing the Holy Spirit: *this* includes all possible ways of grieving him: *this*, fully

carried out, is to quench the Spirit, and to commit the one unpardonable sin!

Ah, my brethren, it is an unspeakably awful thing, when a human being doggedly sets himself to resist the pressure of the Holy Spirit, that is urging him towards Christ and salvation. For the man that does *that* may be too successful: he may grieve the Spirit into finally going away. And you can see why to quench the Spirit is the one sin that cannot be forgiven. It is not but that the blood of Christ can wash away all sin: but not even *it* can wash away the sin of the man that will not wash in it. To quench the Spirit means, finally to refuse salvation in the only way in which God can give it: it means to utterly drive away that Being without whose help we can never repent and never believe. The unpardonable sin is the sin of the man that will not accept pardon in God's way: just as the incurable disease would be the disease of the man who refused to take the only medicine that could cure it.

Let me repeat this in a word: it is a matter on which it is most vital that we should understand clearly. We can get salvation only by believing on Christ. We can never believe on Christ except by the help of the Holy Spirit. And if we will not let the Holy Spirit help us to believe on Christ, then we cannot be saved. When a man quenches the Spirit, grieves away the Spirit, the meaning is that he pushes away the only hand that can lead him to the Saviour.

Now, brethren, in this matter of our spiritual life, we have every one grieved the Holy Spirit many times. In the days of thoughtlessness and sinfulness, before we are converted to God at all, we grieve Him by resisting the manifold influences He brings to bear on us, urging us to care for our souls and confide ourselves to Christ. And if His almighty grace has brought us to the Saviour in spite of ourselves, — if we have been constrained by Him to repent and believe, — then we grieve Him still by our slow growth in grace, — by the little progress which the fruits of the Spirit make in our hearts and lives. You can think of a farmer, looking now in June at a field on which he had bestowed special care and pains, and sown with specially excellent seed: and seeing but a poor and stunted growth, turning away in sorrow, and saying, “Well, that field has disappointed me sadly!” And just in that way, to compare spiritual things with temporal, have we grieved and disappointed the Holy Spirit of God. Months and years go on: the returning Sundays bring us to God’s house; and we read our Bibles, and offer our prayers: and the gracious influences from above come down upon us, like spring showers and summer sunshine: but O brethren, our faith and hope and charity, our patience, our humility, our resignation, — how poorly they grow: how hard it is for us to say, looking back over these years that are gone, that these

graces of the Christian life are growing at all! Yes, even we can see that we must be vexing the great Husbandman of grace! We are poor, weak, sinful creatures, after all He has done for us.

My friends, let us resolve this day, that, by His own grace, we shall strive not to grieve Him in these ways any more. We know that we shall not succeed: but it will please Him to see us try. We know that life will be, to the last, a succession of things to be repented of and forgiven; that, to the last, we shall offend in many things, and come short in all we do. But remember, we never grieve the Holy Spirit but when we harm ourselves: and we please Him best when we are growing holy and happy. Would that we had all more practical faith in Him: more readiness to be ever going to Him: more of the trustful feeling towards Him which it is easier for us to have towards our Blessed Lord! And let us resolve that we shall never enter this church where we are accustomed to worship God, without earnest prayer, earnest though brief, for His kind and happy presence: and then, how much heartier and happier even these hearty services might be, — how they would cheer and lighten and strengthen our hearts! For we live, under the special dispensation of God's Holy Spirit: All Christian graces are of Him. He does not now, indeed, bestow upon Christian people such gifts as He bestowed of old. Proph.

ecies have failed : Tongues have ceased : Supernatural knowledge of human hearts has vanished away : But better, far better gifts than these, He offers still : Things not for one age, but for all time : Ends, to which these were but the means : daily prayer, wherein our communion may be with the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ : hourly comfort, amid worldly care and sorrow : growing grace, making the believer always more like His Master. Let us never grieve Him, Who hath so often comforted us ; but rather, seek that He may dwell in us ; granting us His peace here ; and making us meet for glory hereafter !





V.

INTOLERANCE.

“And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other.” — ACTS xv. 39.



FF the coast of Cornwall, fourteen miles west from the great naval station of Plymouth, and full in the track of homeward-bound ships, sailing up the British Channel, there rises in deep water a great ridge of rocks, whose sharp and rugged crest, sometimes quite hidden by the waves, and at other hours of the tide appearing above them, was known and dreaded for ages under the name of the Eddystone. Many a good ship, bearing many a precious life, after having passed in safety the dangers of the outer ocean, was wrecked on those rocks, within sight of the English shore. For the danger was a hidden one: even by day, and still more by night, the poor sailor was in the jaws of destruction before he was aware. At last, means were taken to warn off from that peril. A lighthouse was built on the Eddystone: and so confident was its builder in the strength and stability of his work, that he

was accustomed to say that he wished no better than to spend a night in it during the fiercest storm that ever blew. He had his wish. One afternoon, while he was visiting his lighthouse, a fearful hurricane arose, which lasted all the night. When the morning broke, the people on shore looked out for the well-known tower, rising from the waves; but it was gone,—swept clean away: and no one that had been in it was ever seen again. Another lighthouse followed, built of wood, which used to bend like a tree before the gale: but after standing fifty years it was destroyed by fire. Finally came the present noble structure; which has borne the brunt of the fierce storms of the channel, and cast its saving light over the dark waters, now for more than a hundred years. It is pleasant to think of the religious spirit in which architect and workmen wrought together on that slight-looking, yet strong tower. Round the highest chamber you may read, cut in the stone, these words: “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it”: and the last mason-work done on the structure was the cutting on the topmost stone words in an ancient language, which mean *Praise to God*. You will think, I know, that it was a good and noble work, to erect, in the face of unheard-of difficulties, in the midst of a stormy sea, and off an iron-bound coast, that lighthouse tower, to warn away from the fatal reef where so much treasure and so much life had perished.

My Christian friends, right in our track, sailing over the sea of life, there is (as it were) a perilous reef, on which many souls have been wrecked; and on which many more, that were not utterly lost, have suffered damage of spars and hull. If I were called to name this perilous rock in a single word, I should call it INTOLERANCE: intolerance of people who differ from us. I will grant that the disposition to be intolerant of those who disagree with them, is found in the highest degree in the very best, noblest, most honest and earnest of mankind: it is present in the highest degree just in those persons who have the warmest hearts and the clearest heads. It is very hard, when you see, clear as the daylight, what ought to be done; and when you are earnestly desirous that it should be done; to bear patiently with stupid and wrong-headed people who will not think as you do; or who, even after they know quite well what ought to be done, hang back and will not do it. And there can be no doubt at all, that there is nothing which helps a man so effectually to show what seems a fair and tolerant spirit in any matter, as the fact, that he really cares nothing at all about the matter. The churchman, who cares exceedingly little for the Church, — who cares for it nothing at all in comparison with his own ease or popularity, — finds it quite easy to bear with those who want to pull the Church down. But that is not a tolerant spirit: that is an indifferent, selfish, mean, contempt-

ible spirit; the spirit of the man who can tolerate any opinion, because in truth he cares much for none. The true tolerant spirit is with him, who holds his views and beliefs strongly as his life; who feels their truth and importance deeply and keenly: and yet who can give other people credit for honesty and sense when they think quite differently, — can bear without irritation the temperate expression of these different opinions, — can feel that such difference need not excite unkindness, — need not break off friendship; need not bring things to this point, that men cannot meet and speak. Because one person thinks that one way of appointing ministers to vacant parishes is the right way, and another person thinks that another way altogether is the right way, *that* is no reason why they should cease to exchange a friendly greeting, and pass each other with an angry scowl. Yet there is a strong tendency to all this mischief and misery, in fallen human nature. There can be no doubt whatsoever, that intolerance is a rock ahead in every honest man's course and in every earnest Christian's; of which he must diligently strive and pray, by the help of God's Blessed Spirit, that he may steer clear.

Now it is possible that the words in which I have described this peril of which I desire that we all may be warned, have turned your thoughts too exclusively to differences in matters political, ecclesiastical, or re-

ligious ; to differences on those public questions, which we all know do excite such keen and angry feeling ; and which only very fair, temperate, thoughtful, well-informed and large-hearted people, are able to discuss without getting into a rage. But we are to remember that the self-same spirit which made the Romanist burn the Protestant as long as he could ; and which has made some men, claiming to be very religious men, refuse to speak peaceably to such as would not think as they did on some trumpery matter of ecclesiastical detail ; may appear just as really in all the ordinary business and conversation of life. The rock against which I think my text warns us, is Intolerance of difference from ourselves, in its largest sense : the desire in everything to have our own way : the disposition not to yield to others, to give and take : the tendency to quarrel with such as differ from us in opinion or belief ; and to split off altogether from such, parting from them in anger. It will be a good work to plant a beacon on this rock, to erect a lighthouse here, that we may all diligently shun it. It is a dangerous rock : the consequences of striking on it are painful and humiliating : and there is a natural current setting in that direction ; there is a tendency that way in the hearts of us all. We all want to get our own way. We are all ready to be angry if any one comes across our getting it. And indeed the beacon is already built for us

in the sad story, to which I am to turn your thoughts. We may well write upon it, the thankful words cut in the last stone of the Eddystone lighthouse: the solemn Praise to God! For if it often helps to cheer us, to look back upon the good examples recorded in Holy Scripture; I think it often does us as much good, and perhaps there is something that comes even more warmly and touchingly home to our weak and wayward hearts, when we are invited to learn and profit by the wrong-doings of good men.

It is a sad story. We see two of the best men that ever lived on this world, — who had long been friends, — whose heart was in the same work, — who had gone through weary journeys and hard toils together, cheering and helping one another through all, — now coming at last to a split and a separation through a wretched little quarrel, in which we can see quite plainly that both were to blame. St. Paul and St. Barnabas had but lately told the Lystrians, that even apostolic friends were no more than men of like passions with others. And in the account of their quarrel, and in the much more it leaves us to infer about it, we find sad proof that indeed it is so. “The contention was sharp between them”: so sharp, that after it they could not work together any more. Doubtless hard words passed between the old friends: doubtless it was as the poet says so touchingly,

“Each spake words of high disdain,
And anger to his heart's best brother.”

And you can easily see here, as in every like case, that there is something to be said on each side. Let us think of the circumstances. Paul and Barnabas, on Paul's suggestion, after a time of quiet work at Antioch, were about to start on a journey, in which they were to visit their brethren in every city where they had preached the Gospel of Christ; doubtless to offer them counsel and comfort. Barnabas determined to take with them his nephew John; no other than the man we know better as St. Mark the Evangelist. But Paul objected to this. Mark had already been tried, and found wanting. Once before, amid labor and danger, Mark had abandoned those he should have held by. Why take, on this new journey, one who had failed before, and might fail again? It was no child's play that awaited these apostolic travellers. Nerve and perseverance were wanted: why take a companion who had shown himself lacking in both? This was Paul's view. Then, on the other hand, you can think, how the mild, gentle Barnabas would say, that it was hard finally to condemn a man for one failure. Had not the great St. Peter failed far more shamefully? And yet *that* did not hinder his Lord's renewed commission, “Feed my sheep,” “Feed my lambs?” Let poor Mark be tried again. Many

prayers, doubtless, Barnabas had offered for his young relative: surely all these could not be quite in vain! Mark was not such a lost child, such a black sheep, that he must be cast off altogether. There was hope for him in this, that he had now left his home at Jerusalem; and come to Antioch; and was willing to brave all that Paul and Barnabas might have to brave. You see, my friends, that each would have much to say. Each would cling to his own idea. Their feelings would get excited. They would attach undue importance to the matter of dispute; and persuade themselves that great principles were involved in it. Hotter and sharper the contention grew; and so, the old friends parted!

Yes, the Son of Consolation, and the great Apostle Paul, after days and months of love and fellowship and common cares and toils;—after doing great good to others, and likely enough composing strifes among them;—after “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”;—did what the meanest and least worthy of mankind can do,—quarrelled, and parted asunder!

Each went his way: neither, be sure, quite pleased with himself. It is not plain that they ever met again, “the beloved Barnabas and Paul,” as the apostles and

elders and brethren at Jerusalem called them in their letter. When Paul came to some of the old places where they had been in company, it would go to his heart when they asked him where was Barnabas. But we all know how St. Paul, as if repenting his severity, afterwards took pains to say a good word of Mark. To the Colossians he wrote, "Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, touching whom ye received commandment: If he come unto you, receive him." Then kindly to Philemon, he writes of "Marcus, my fellow-laborer." And in the last lines he ever wrote, we find the great Apostle still eager to make amends for that old wrong: "Take Mark," he writes to Timothy; "and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." Let us thank God for that: and thank God, too, that Paul and Barnabas have long since met, where there is no difference nor disputing more: where we shall see eye to eye; and where all good men are one in heart,—as, after all, they were one in heart, even here!

Now the whole story, as has been said, is as a beacon built on the rock of Intolerance: its great lesson no doubt is, that Christians ought to learn to differ without quarrelling. But there are other thoughts suggested, on which we may very profitably dwell.

And one, that comes readily at the first glance at the story told by the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, is this: "How candid, straightforward, and above-board

this writer is. You see, there is no glossing over this discreditable fact, of the quarrel between Paul and Barnabas. There is no reserve in telling the story. And you know this is the way with all the inspired writers. There is no petty diplomacy about them. They tell the unvarnished truth; not minding though it should seem to make against their cause. Now we all know some good people who, if they had looked over St. Luke's shoulder and seen him write these verses, would have burst out, "O, that is most injudicious: don't say a word about *that!*" And doubtless heathen men would be ready with their taunts, about the two preachers of love and mutual forgiveness who could not get on peaceably together. Yet, the Holy Spirit, who inspired what St. Luke wrote, said to him, as we see by what he wrote, "Just tell the truth!" My friends, it would be a great blessing if all Christian people would learn the obvious lesson, that honesty, in telling a story as in other things, is the right thing; whether it be the best policy or not. There is far too much diplomacy about many good men. When you get behind the scenes, in the case of many good works and good people, you find that a great deal of Jesuitism is practised: the accounts and reports of religious and charitable societies are sometimes cooked, just as much as those of fraudulent banks and insurance companies: there is an inveterate dislike to let people outside know

the plain truth : and, in approaching a good end, some folk think it deep wisdom to approach it, not in a straightforward way, but by a tortuous course, round corners. My friends, let us lay all that paltry trickery aside ! Let us remember that to suppress truth, is commonly to suggest falsehood. And let us think how St. Luke, writing a page on which his tears must have fallen as he wrote it, — a page that would shame and sadden Christian hearts to the end of time, — yet determined, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, that he would be open and speak out God's truth, though that truth should bear heavily against "the beloved Barnabas and Paul !"

And just a sentence. What does this simple outspoken candour of the New Testament writers say as to the character of our Blessed Saviour ? If there had been a flaw in Him : if He had ever said a wrong word or done a wrong deed ; should we not have known of it ? What an assurance we gather of His stainless perfection ! Truly He, of Whom these open-hearted men could tell nothing save what was good, was the Son of God !

A second thought the story suggests, is this : that we have much to learn from the errors and failings of good men : just as much from these, as from their good deeds. For these remind us, that there is much remaining weakness in the very best of our race : and

how much more in you and me! If Paul and Barnabas erred so sadly,—if they, in the heat of passion, said and did what they would look back on with sorrow as long as they lived;—O what error *we* may any day fall into, if we cease to pray for God's continual help and grace! My friends, morning and evening, and at all times, let us pray for the never-failing presence of the Holy Spirit. Without Him, there is no saying what foolish and sinful things you may say and do. Any day, any hour, there is that fallen nature within you, that may make you say the hasty word, or do the wrong deed, that may plunge you in bitter shame and sorrow. You can never be sure of yourself, or of anybody else, if you have not asked for God's grace, and if you are not depending on God's grace: you can never feel safe, apart from *that!* So, let us ask for it: asking, we shall get it. Let us watch and pray. Never go into any company: never begin any conversation: never take up any work: never go out of your door, and never enter it: without a moment's prayer for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit of God. Rely on it, when Paul and Barnabas began that conversation that passed into a bitter quarrel, they had not asked the Holy Spirit to keep their hearts right, and order their words. If they had heartily asked Him, they would have got Him: for what said Christ: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your

children ; how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Yes, the promise is clear and plain : it is without limitation or restriction : here is a blessing you may pray for and be quite sure you will get : the unutterably precious presence and help of the Holy Spirit. In every step you take in life, you may take a wrong one : and He only can keep you right. Every time you open your lips you may say a word you may be sorry for, unless you have asked His grace. O let us learn this lesson from the sad error of the Apostolic friends ; always, everywhere, to ask God to give us His Holy Spirit ! So shall we keep right. If not, we shall go wrong.

If we had a great deal more time to spend on this subject than we have, so that we could glean up the minor lessons conveyed, I might point out that this sad quarrel arose from an undue favor shown by Barnabas to a relative ; in short, that it arose from the self-same nepotism, or the preference of persons not because they are worthy, but because they are connected with people who have the giving of patronage in State and Church, which has at various times damaged Church and State by loading them with a great host of incapables. If Mark had not been the nephew of Barnabas, Barnabas would assuredly have felt the weight of Paul's argument, that it was not wise to choose a man for a work now, who had discredibly

failed in just the same work before. But Barnabas was blinded by a prepossession in his young kinsman's favor: just as Secretaries of State, Prime Ministers, Lord Chancellors, and much smaller men, have occasionally been. However, we have weightier matters to think of; and matters that come more nearly home to ourselves. So let us pass to the great lesson already named as by pre-eminence the moral of all the story. It is, that Christian people ought to be ready to yield to one another, where principle is not abandoned by yielding: and that, if they are constrained to differ from one another in opinion, then they ought to differ without quarrelling. O that the kind spirit of the good old man had more sway in the Christian Church, who said to his brethren in a season of heated controversy, "Let us agree as far as we can; and where we cannot agree, in God's name let us agree to differ!" If when Barnabas was urgent to take Mark, Paul had said to him, "Well, I think you are wrong; but if your mind is set upon it, I shall not stand in the way"; they would not have quarrelled and parted. And more; if there was anything that would have shaken Barnabas, usually so gentle and mild a man, it would have been this leaving the thing to his own calm reflection. You will never get a number of intelligent persons to think exactly alike upon any large subject: but *that* is no reason earthly for the slightest interruption of kindly

feeling and regard among them. God has made men to differ on many points: wherever men think for themselves, they will differ: it is only the utterly unthinking who will follow their leader as a flock of sheep do, — abandoning the great right of private judgment, — that solemn responsibility of deciding as in the sight of God what your opinion and what your conduct shall be. Now, brethren, because our fellow-Christians differ from us in matters that do not concern salvation, shall we draw off from them, — keep them at arm's-length, — “depart asunder” from them? Because some good people like Episcopacy best, while we like Presbytery best: because some good people hold what is called the Voluntary principle, while we most resolutely hold the principle of a National Church: because some good people hold certain ideas as to what they call spiritual independence, which we can see would lead to the most mischievous results if carried out, as they never have been except in the most tyrannic days of the Church of Rome: because of such differences of opinion, important as I grant you they are, is there any reason why Christian men should quarrel? Is there any reason why Christian men should refuse to one another those little marks of common civility which they give quite readily to people who are not Christians at all? We all know whether or not such indications of unchristian bitterness, following upon differences of opin-

ion, are to be occasionally, alas commonly, found! And O, my friends, think: Is it not a sore reproach to our common religion: is it not a ready occasion to the enemy to blaspheme: when it can be said of Christian men, discussing any question short of being properly vital, as it was said of Paul and Barnabas, that "the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other!"

And more than this. Let us train ourselves to hear our most favorite views opposed and controverted, without getting angry, or quarrelling with those who differ from us. It is an exceedingly bad thing to withdraw ourselves wholly from those who differ from us. It will not do, in this state of the Church of Christ, for a Christian man to live in his own little shell. Whoever does *that*, will grow very narrow, very self-sufficient: will come to think his own little sect or party all the world: will get a quite foolish idea of his own infallibility and importance. We have all known good men, who would have been much better and more useful, if they had occasionally met and conversed with people who did not agree with them. It is a most dangerous thing for any human being, to live among those by whom his views and opinions are never questioned. We all need to be often taken down from our vain self-confidence, and to be pushed out of our own way; and all this is best done by frequent contact with

those who, honestly and Christianly, think quite differently from ourselves. I do not say that any Christian man would choose often to converse with those from whom his differences are vital. We could not make a friend of a man who denied the divinity of our Blessed Saviour; or the work of the Holy Spirit; or the true inspiration of God's Word: we do not want to train ourselves to think lightly of such differences as these. But it is quite another thing, with a host of little contentions that now hold true believers apart. Not only is it sinful to make things which do not concern salvation, grounds of total separation: it is foolish; it is deliberately cutting ourselves off from an influence we need, and that will do us great good. It is most fit that every human being should hourly be reminded, that he cannot get all mankind to think as he does; and that he cannot in everything have his own way. And any man who departs asunder from all who differ from him, is just putting himself out of the way of a most wholesome and necessary discipline: a discipline which all true men need; and none more than the most earnest and honest believers in Jesus. O brethren, in this sinful world of care, let us resolve that we shall bear a great deal from truly good people, without quarrelling or parting! We are all going, as we trust, to the same home: let us keep friends by the way!

And now to end this discourse. Let us remark how God makes good come at last out of the painful differences of good men. The upshot of that separation of Paul and Barnabas was that there were two missions instead of one. Barnabas and Mark went one way: and Paul and Silas another. And doubtless the Holy Spirit went with both. And grieved somewhat, as that Spirit of peace and love would be, He yet did not give Paul and Barnabas up, as they had given up one another! God be thanked that the Holy Ghost is so much more forbearing with us, than we are with our fellow-men! We have all, perhaps, seen the like happy result come of the like unhappy cause: Christian men and Christian communities, between whom the contention grew so sharp, that they departed asunder the one from the other: yet, out of much uncharitable feeling and speaking, never to be looked back upon without sorrow and shame, there came increased agency for carrying on the Saviour's work: and redoubled zeal. We thank God, who makes the wrath of man to praise Him, for that: but no thanks at all to the people who unchristainly quarrelled! And as for us, we may have little influence, or none, in the discussion of public questions: but we all have the opportunity of being peacemakers in our own circle and our own home. It takes two parties to make a quarrel: let us resolve, by God's grace, that we shall

not be one. And forasmuch as we hope that all true Christians, and all we love and care for, shall meet as friends forever in heaven; let us determine never, in anger and bitterness, to part asunder from such on earth!





VI.

NEEDLESS FEARS.

‘ Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau : for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.’ — GEN. xxxii. 11.

“ And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him : and they wept.” — GEN. xxxiii. 4.



I MIGHT almost leave these two texts to tell their own story. A whole sermon will be suggested to every thoughtful person by the first glance at them. Neither is very remarkable, standing by itself: but O, what a lesson there is for you and me when we look at the two together! And you know, my friends, whether you need that lesson, or not. You know whether you have not, many a time, like Jacob, been full of fear and apprehension in looking forward to something that was to happen: and then, like Jacob, when the thing did happen, found that all that anxiety was perfectly needless, and that you had been disquieting yourself entirely without cause. Let us never begin to think on any subject in this place, without a brief prayer for the guidance of God's Holy Spirit: but specially to-day, when the text

brings before us a matter which in this age is of supreme practical importance, a matter which concerns the peace and quiet of every one of us at every hour we live, a matter which gravely affects our spiritual condition and the reality of our faith in God, let us ask His life-giving presence, that the truth now set forth may come with His demonstration to the hearts of all.

As for those two verses of Genesis, taken separately, there is not much to remark about them: unless it be that they show us that human nature nearly eighteen hundred years before Christ, was just like human nature nearly nineteen hundred years after Christ. In this world, even yet, it is so common a thing for a man who has been ill-used by another to take revenge if he can; that everybody reads, quite as a matter of course, that first verse, which shows us that Jacob thought it likely that his brother Esau, whom he had used so ill, whom he had overreached so shamefully, would, now that he had it in his power, avenge himself, and that bitterly and bloodily. And in that prospect, Jacob was afraid. "I fear him," are Jacob's words; "lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." All that was quite natural.

Then as for the second verse, if it stood alone, it would be a pleasing story, but it would not afford matter for a Christian discourse. What could be more

natural than that two brothers, parted for a long time, meeting now for the first time in twenty-one years, should meet thus kindly? And the Orientals were, and are, a demonstrative race. They make more outward show of their feelings, than we do. When death enters a dwelling there, instead of sitting down quietly by the fireside, weeping silently, praying silently, bearing with no parade of what is borne, as we do, people break out into passionate shrieks and cries: they rend their garments, they scatter ashes on their heads. And so, when Jacob came in view, it was all what we might expect that "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And less than one-and-twenty years work so great change on human beings, that we do not wonder that "they wept."

But these two verses are like those chemical solutions which have little power apart, but which united, have the power of life or death. The thing for us, to-day, to think of and to learn from, is, first, Jacob's fear; and then, how needless his fear proved to be.

Let us recall the preceding part of the story, which explains this. Esau, as we all remember, vowed vengeance against Jacob for that false and cruel act of taking away by subtilty the blessing of the first-born. Then Rebekah, the mother of both, sent her favorite son Jacob away, till Esau's anger should cool. And

Jacob went away, by Bethel, to Laban his mother's brother who dwelt at Haran: where he married Laban's two daughters, Leah and Rachel. But it was not for a few days, as the mother thought, that her son was to be parted from her: it was God's will that years should pass on, and that mother and son should never meet more on earth. But worldly prosperity attended Jacob. Children grew up around him: his flocks and herds increased: wealth accumulated. Yet there was one bitter drop in his cup, all the while. Year by year Beersheba and his mother's tent would grow misty and far away: he was content to live and labor at Haran. No doubt, he would think, in his hours of leisure, of his mother growing old, never having seen her grandchildren's faces: of his blind father, and what *he* thought now of the unworthy trick that gave the younger son the elder's blessing: above all, of his brother, and whether he had got over his wrath. *That* was evidently a fear always at the bottom of his heart: never quite absent, and growing greater as the time of his return drew nearer. *That* was the skeleton in Jacob's tent. All these years of prosperity would be embittered, more or less, by that old sin.

But those years passed: and now Jacob, who had left Beersheba a lonely wayfarer, is returning from Haran, the head of a great host. There were his

wives and children: and, as he said himself, he had oxen and asses, flocks, and men-servants and women-servants. But little did those who formed that company probably suspect of the fretting fear which all this while was growing in the heart of the master of all. At length it became apparent. The company was drawing near to that mountainous tract where Esau dwelt; and where, during these years, he had gathered around him a number of daring men, and laid the foundation of that influence which in the end made his descendants the kings of the land of Edom. And now, the meeting so much dreaded, and so long, was at hand. Jacob sends messengers before him with friendly words to Esau: but they come back with an ambiguous answer, which might mean either peace or war. Esau was coming; and coming with four hundred men. Conscience, as we know, makes men cowards: and Jacob regarded this as a confirmation of his worst fears. He was "greatly afraid and distressed": and he took what precaution he could. He divided his company into two bands; so that, if Esau came and smote the one, the other might have opportunity to escape. And having done this, he does just the best thing that man or woman in anxiety of mind can ever do: he turns to God in prayer; and tells all his fear to the Almighty; and asks deliverance in these words which form my first text. And

it is interesting to think that here we have the very first direct prayer which is recorded in the Holy Scripture. Many a prayer had doubtless been offered, but this is the earliest of which we are told: and remember, Christian friends, in your seasons of anxiety, that it was anxiety, and the foreboding of ill, that drove a human being to send up to God the earliest recorded prayer. Doubtless the same things will prompt prayers by millions down to the very last. Yet, for all his prayer, you can see he passes an anxious night: and he is early afoot in the morning, having thought of something more to do. He selects a valuable present: goats, sheep, camels, cattle, asses. And you can see how possessed he is with the presentiment of evil. He sends on his present, with an interval between each drove: so that even if Esau met the first in an evil spirit, his wrath might melt away at the sight of gift after gift of his brother's kindness. You can discern that the wealthy owner of all that great array, has a heart as heavy and perplexed as the solitary wayfarer that lay down at Bethel with the stone for his pillow. Yes, that night was a sore retribution for the day on which he had deceived his blind father.

Then there was a mysterious visitation. The present was gone: his wives and children were sent onward, and all that he had; and Jacob remains at nightfall by the brook Jabbok: doubtless again in earnest

prayer that God would bring him and his safely through this time of terrible trouble. And now, while wrestling in that fervent supplication, whether in fact or in vision, it seemed as though he were engaged in wrestling with a personal being. The circumstances are briefly given: the manifest lesson for us is the prevailing power of prayer with God. "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." And at length, weak, yet confident in self-despair, Jacob prevails with God: and that mysterious Being, the angel of the Covenant, the Blessed Redeemer Himself, gives Jacob His blessing, and a new name. He was no longer to be Jacob, which means *Supplanter*; but Israel, which means *A Prince with God*. He calls the place Peniel, which means *The Face of God*, because he had seen God face to face, and lived: and as the sun rose, bearing, like St. Paul, a bodily reminder, in an infirmity never to leave him, of a special manifestation of the Almighty,—halting upon his thigh, yet having vanquished in prayer, he goes on and overtakes his company.

Yes, he goes on: and with what light step for all that lameness; and with what a thankful, relieved heart! All his fears were gone. He felt safe. He "lifted up his eyes": and the Hebrew words convey that the laden, anxious look of yesterday was gone: he had cast his care on God; and his face was cheer-

ful and hopeful. His wives and children would see at once, be sure, that he was a different man. And now, see the answer to that night of prevailing prayer. We do not know with what intention Esau had left his fastness in the hills. But we are sure that we see God's hand in the proving vain of all Jacob's fears. All those twenty-one years had been spent in the fear of again meeting Esau. Many a time, doubtless, for human nature is just poor human nature, Jacob had pictured terrible scenes of wrath and revenge and blood: and had terrified himself with the vague, unknown future, just as many of you have many a time done. And now here is the meeting so feared. Esau comes! and, sure enough, the dreaded four hundred. But he seems, the warm-hearted though not wise man, to have passed by the presents: he did not care that day about goats and sheep and camels: he hastens fast to welcome the long-parted playmate of childhood: they were not world-hardened men, but boys again together. "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept!"

Now think, brethren, what a revulsion of feeling there would be in Jacob's heart. He would think, "Have I been all these years vexing myself for this!" Here was the thing, so happy and pleasant and kindly when it came, that had many a time broken his night's

rest at Haran just to think of it: that had been a dull gnawing at his heart, making him uneasy and restless in cheerful company: that had been the drop of gall in every cup he tasted; all these years! And one thing we may be almost sure of: that in all his picturing out of this dreaded meeting, thinking of it as coming in twenty sad ways, if there was one thing he never pictured out, it would be just the meeting as it actually came! The thing you expect is, in this world, the last thing that is likely to befall you.

And now, my friends, let us dwell for a little while on two practical thoughts, coming very closely home to ourselves, which are suggested by all that has been said.

The most obvious of these is this, How needless are our fears! In how many cases we conjure up things to vex and alarm us! For one-and-twenty years Jacob had kept himself unhappy through the fear of a meeting which, when it came, proved one of the happiest things that ever befell him in all his life. Now have not you many a time looked forward with great anxiety to something that was coming; and then when it came, found that all your anxiety had been perfectly needless? We all have it our power to make ourselves miserable, if we look far into the years before us and calculate their probabilities of

evil, and steadily anticipate the worst. It is not expedient to calculate too far ahead. Of course extremes are wrong: we are not to run into over-carefulness and anxiety on the one hand, nor into recklessness and imprudence on the other. But it may safely be said that we are forgetful of that reasonable faith in God which is at once our duty and our inestimable privilege, if we are always looking out into the future, and vexing ourselves with endless fears as to how things are to go then. O that we had all more faith, Christian friends, in God's sure promise made to every true Christian, that as the day, so shall the strength be! If your affairs are going on well now, be thankful, and try to do your duty and to do your best, as a Christian man and a prudent man, and then leave the rest to God. Your children are about you: no doubt they may die; and it is fit enough that you should not forget the fragility of your most prized possessions: it is fit enough that you should sometimes sit by the fire, and look at the merry faces and listen to the little voices, and think what it would be to lose them. But it is not needful, nor rational, nor Christian-like, to be always brooding on that thought. And so with everything else. Your health may break down. Some fearful accident may befall you. A hundred sad contingencies are conceivable. And how often these fears prove utterly groundless! We have all

known the anticipated ills of life,—the danger that looked so big, the duty that looked so arduous, the entanglement that we could not see our way through,—prove to have been nothing more than spectres on the horizon; and when at length we reached them, all their difficulty had vanished into air, leaving us to think how foolish we had been for having so needlessly set up phantoms to disturb our quiet. I remember well how a good and able man who died not long ago, told me many times of his fears as to what he would do in a certain contingency which both he and I thought was quite sure to come sooner or later. I know that the anticipation of it cost him some of the most anxious hours of a very anxious though useful life. But his fears proved just as vain as Jacob's in the prospect of meeting Esau. He was taken from this world before what he dreaded had cast its most distant shadow. God, in His own way, delivered that man from the event he had feared.

No thoughtful person, with the subject of this discourse present to his mind, can look at a congregation like this, without thinking what a multitude of interests there must be, connected with your homes and your lot: what an immense amount of anxiety and care these hearts have known, that are now within these walls! Ah, it takes long wearing to draw lines upon the face, and turn the hair gray! But of this we may

be sure: that at least half of all the anxieties and fears you have known, have been about troubles that never came at all. But it is one of the last lessons we learn, really to believe and to take for our own the Psalmist's argument from the past to the future: "The Lord *hath been* mindful of us: He *will* bless us!" And although God has led you so wonderfully and graciously in the years that are gone, smoothing your path, and opening it up when it seemed hedged with thorns, and sending light when you looked for nothing but darkness, yet, not taught by all that, perhaps there are some anxious hearts here to-day, wondering how they are ever to get through the work before them; or how they are to bear some trial or bereavement that seems coming: things which may never come,—or if they do come, God will send strength and grace sufficient for the need. Now, doubtless, all this is in some measure the result of original make and temper. Some people are of an anxious, desponding temperament; ready rather to anticipate evil than to look for good. But all of us, brethren, need more faith in God. How comprehensive a prayer, *that* is, asking so much for time and for eternity, "Lord increase our faith!" We bear a far heavier burden than we need bear. If we had the faith which we ought to have, and which the Holy Spirit is ready to work in us, we should cast

all our care on God, who careth for us. It is not strange, my friends, that we, Christian people, should so often be "careful and troubled about many things," when our holy religion, besides being many things else, is one great antidote against over-anxiety: when it is not merely our privilege, but our commanded duty, not to be anxious or fearful: when we not merely make ourselves unhappy, but positively commit sin, — distrust God's promise, disbelieve God's love and grace and faithfulness, — if we plod about our duty under a burden of care and fear, as Jacob did. "I would have you," says St. Paul, "without carefulness." "Take no thought," says our Saviour, — and the word He used means no over-anxiety, — "Saying, What shall we eat, or What shall we drink, or Wherewithal shall be clothed: But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought" (that is no over-anxiety) "for the morrow." And then St. Paul goes more into details: tells us *how* we are to do all this: gives us the steps of the process by which we are to reach that blessed equanimity which our Lord commands: "Be careful for nothing: but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ."

And this brings us naturally to the second thought suggested to us by the whole story of that terribly anxious time.

It is, that in those seasons of anxiety and foreboding which through our weak faith and our remaining sinfulness will come to us all, we should remember what Jacob did; and where Jacob found relief. He turned to God in prayer. He went and told God all his fear, and asked deliverance from God. And not once, but many times: through a long night of terrible alarm and apprehension, he wrestled in urgent prayer. And see what he got by it. He got relief of heart, certainly: of that we are sure. Perhaps he got more. We cannot say how far those prayers went to turn Esau's heart; and to make him meet Jacob in that kindly spirit. Perhaps Esau left his home with his four hundred men, with a revengeful purpose. Perhaps he intended to carry out that intention expressed so long before, that he would slay the supplanter who had used him so badly. Perhaps he felt, as he was going along, the old time come over him: thought of the days when they were little children together: felt he could excuse Jacob's unworthy dealing; and that the old bygone offence might be bygone forever: till at last they met in love. Ah, brethren, if that were so, it was not mere natural working of opinion and affection in Esau's heart. It

was God's mighty power that did it: did it in answer to Jacob's prayer.

Shall I tell you a like story, of another man? What saith the Psalmist?

“The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold on me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord: O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous: yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and He helped me!”

Yes, Christian friends, here is the neverfailing thing to go on, in our times of anxiety and trouble. When we are overwhelmed, fearful, perplexed, anxious, let us go to God; and humbly and earnestly tell Him all we are thinking and fearing, and ask him to deliver us and comfort us. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” If ever there were words confirmed by the experience of Christian people, you have them there. Perhaps our prayer may cause the trouble we bear, or we dread, to go away. Perhaps, the stroke that seemed sure to fall, may be withheld: perhaps, the hope that seemed sure to be blighted, may be fulfilled after all: perhaps, the blessing that seemed sure to be taken away from us may be spared with us yet. Perhaps, through our prayer, it may be with us as it was with Jacob:

when we come up to the time, the trial, the duty, we feared, we may find that there is nothing about it to be afraid of. But our prayer may be answered in a way that is better and happier still. It may please God to allow all that we feared, to befall us. It may please Him to disappoint the hope, to frustrate the work, to continue the long disease, to bring the beloved one down to the grave: but with all that, to resign our heart, to make us humble and content, to sanctify the trial to work in us a patience, a faith, a humility, a charity, a sympathy, that are worth, a thousand times over, all worldly happiness and success. O what an attainment it is, which Christians sometimes reach, to feel, if only for a little while, that our whole heart's wish is, that our Blessed Saviour's will be done, and His glory be advanced; and that as for us, we are content to go where He leads us, and to do and bear what He sends; sure that the way by which He leads us is the right way, and that it will bring us to our Home at last!

And prayer will bring us to this, if anything will. Do not, with the gnawing anxiety at your heart, sit sullenly and try to bear your burden alone. Go with a lowly heart and roll your burden on the strong arm of God Almighty! O how it will lighten your heart to tell Him, simply, all your fears! You will come back, like Jacob, from your Saviour's footstool, calmed and

cheered. And even if the stroke should fall: even if we come out of our trial, somewhat stricken and subdued, — not quite the people we were, — as Jacob came lamed from that long night of prevailing prayer, — we shall be thankful and content if the stroke be sanctified to us: as he (we may be sure) would never murmur, as he halted on through life.

One word to prevent misapprehension. All this peace and hope is spoken only to Christian people. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked”: or to any who have no part in Christ. We can speak no comfort to such, in their fears. There is too good reason for that dull foreboding of evil they bear through life. *Their* fears are not needless. If there be any one here who feels a constant vague dread of coming misfortune eating the heart out of every earthly blessing, to such we would say, Do not think to reason yourself out of that, or by gayety to escape from that. There is just one way of peace for you, — Believe in Christ! Think of His kind words: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest!” And “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out!”

Some of you know those words of the ancient schoolman, with which he prefaced an earnest prayer to God. “I entered this world in lowliness; I have lived in it

anxious ; I shall depart from it alarmed and fearful !” Yes, it is so : Anxiety is the lot of very many in this life. I have sought, by God’s help, to show the anxious and careworn among you how to escape their fears. And how shall I end a discourse on the Gospel way to such peace as God thinks good for us in this world, without reminding you who it is that gives us the “strong consolation” we need : that Blessed “Comforter which is the Holy Ghost,” whom the Father sends in the Redeemer’s name, to work in us “the peace of God” ; and the Saviour’s own special peace, which is not like that the world giveth. Brethren, in every prayer we offer, let us ask the fuller and more constant indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. There is not a step in our heavenward pilgrimage, not an emergency in our better life, at which His happy influence, His breathing upon our hearts, is not the very thing that is best for us. If He were always sensibly with us, our anxieties and fears would go ! Come now and let us ask Him to work in us our Master’s peace ; and to make all things that come, tend to sanctify us. And then, our souls shall grow in all grace, as the green leaves round us flourish through the spring showers and sunshine !



VII.

NO TEMPLE IN HEAVEN.

“ And I saw no temple therein.” — REV. xxi. 22.



LET us confess it, this sentence falls somewhat blankly on the ear : it is somewhat of a disappointment. Everything else that we are told concerning Heaven, is all we could wish. But at the first glance, and the first thought, there is something sad in the assurance, that there is no temple there.

The most pleasing feature in the most pleasant summer landscape, is the spire of the country church rising above green trees into the blue sky. There is no sight in whose presence many men can pause so delightedly, as the little sanctuary amid its quiet expanse of green graves, gray and ivy-grown. The noblest edifices in this world are, what they ought to be, churches dedicated to the worship of Almighty God. The material glory of our sister country, after all, is in her noble cathedrals, so unutterably solemn and majestic : where man, long centuries since, did his very best to make a worthy house for God. And there is more and better

about Christian churches, than any gratification of mere sense and taste. There is no place, perhaps, in this world, where many Christians have so often felt so quiet and restful and happy : no place where they have found themselves so lifted up above their common cares to so sacred an elevation : where doubts cease to perplex, and burdens grow light, and the blessed Redeemer and the Blessed Holy Spirit seem to draw so near. Never, Christian friends, till you reach Heaven at last, will you feel so near it, as you have by God's grace sometimes felt yourselves in the house of prayer. Our hearts have been poured out in the earnest prayer : they have arisen in the hymn of praise : they have been nerved, cheered, and comforted by the exhortation : we have sometimes been enabled to feel as if our cares fell off from us, entering that retreat ; and as if things which vex at other times lose their power to touch us, bending over the white Communion-Table. And so it seems strange, that the place where in this world we have known most of the peace of Heaven, will not be there.

“No night there,” sounds cheering, when we think of all that darkness implies, and when we think how much there is of it here. No more death, no more pain, no more sorrow nor tears, — all these assurances seem natural and fitting. But is the last Christian church where we shall worship on earth, the last we

are ever to see? Everything else is as we could wish about Heaven, but O, must there be no Temple there!

And then, the explanation given of how this comes to be, does not at the first satisfy us. We all know, that in this world, to say that every day should be kept as a sabbath, comes to exactly the same thing as having no sabbath at all. Some of you will think how a certain eminent man, set free from work after many years of weary and uncongenial drudgery, said that he found that where all your time is holiday, there are no holidays. And yet, this is all the comfort given us in the presence of the statement that in Heaven there is no temple. We are told that there will be no temple in particular, because the place will be all temple. It is, of course, as you all know only too well, but a very vague and indistinct idea we have in our minds, of what Heaven is. It is a Golden City, it is the new Jerusalem: and the book of Revelation tells of its streets, and walls, and gates: it is likewise a country, sought through all these ages by those who confessed that they were no more than strangers and pilgrims on the earth: we are told of thrones, crowns, palms, hymns of praise, and of these last we even partly know the very words. But O, City and Country, better Canaan or New Jerusalem, how confused, indistinct, imperfect a vision it is we can

discern, of that Happy Place where those dearest to us are gone, and where we hope through Christ to go! How little you know of what your child or your parent that left you is like, or is doing, now! Yet we know *this*, that all the region is holy: that the seen and felt presence of the Saviour pervades it all,—for there “we shall be forever with the Lord”: and that the reason why there is no especial temple is, that all heaven is hallowed into a most true temple by the all-pervading presence of our God and Redeemer. “I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”

Now the somewhat blank and disappointed feeling that rises at the first glance at our text, comes of our applying our common worldly ways of thinking to the better world;—to a state of being that transcends our present thoughts. As we are now, Christian friends, it is only for short isolated times that we can be at our best, in the matter of spiritual mood and holy feeling. If every Sunday were a Communion Sunday, our Communion Sundays would not be the very solemn and elevating seasons which we wish to have them now—and by God’s grace often do find them now. And if some in this country are ready to complain, that the Church fails to provide them more frequent occasions on which to show forth their Redeemer’s death as He commands us, they may well be reminded

that there is compensation for this, in the far greater spiritual pleasure and profit which the devout communicant in Scotland seems to enjoy, than the communicant who every week or two sees the Communion-table spread; and the most sacred of Christian rites thus made what we may without offence call comparatively cheap and common. Yes: as we are now, my brethren, what is made common, comes to be held cheap: we need to have places specially set apart for God's worship: we need to have seasons which shall be esteemed specially sacred: the Lord's Day more holy than the week-day; the Communion Sunday one for which more than ordinary preparation is made, and on which we anticipate more than ordinary peace, and rest, and holy elevation. If the Mount of Communion did not rise above the daily pilgrimage path,—if it were all in the same dead level,—it would not be to the believer what by God's grace it often is. You all know how true to the Christian's experience are the Saviour's words, "Me ye have not always." If there be times when our Lord seems very near, and we find from His presence a peace that passes all understanding, there will come times too when He seems to withdraw Himself, and leave us to try how we could stand alone. It is the very condition of our being here, that we cannot be always at our best: and if we should be able to keep for

a long time at the same level, that level must be a humble one.

But in heaven, all this is changed. And it seems to me, my friends, as if there were a sudden light cast upon the state of the redeemed and blest, by the brief statement that as for heaven, the happiest and holiest place in all the universe, there is no temple there. You know, that statement might, standing by itself, read in either of two quite opposite ways. It might be the very worst, or the very best, account of the place of which it is written. "No temple there!" How sadly the emigrant, who has settled far in the woods of the Western continent, or up in the Australian bush, writes home to his friends that there is not a church within fifty or a hundred miles: that not once in months can he and his household meet together in that familiar way which is so cheap here; but which far away there men value at its true worth! And, sadder still, to pass through the poorest quarter of some huge city: to see lane after lane of comfortless dwellings, where life is dragged out in sin and want, and vice the consequence of want: and to think as you may sorrowfully think in the great metropolis of England, that there are thousands on thousands of immortal beings who never enter God's house and never feel *that* as a want and deprivation. Yes: no church, no minister, no one to care for perishing

souls; — what a sad story! And strange, that the very thing which would be the saddest circumstance about an earthly city, is one of the happiest and most significant circumstances about the New Jerusalem above! “No temple there,” might mean no care about religion at all. “No temple there,” may mean that the whole place is one great temple; and that the whole life there is worship: and that the inhabitants are raised quite above all earthly imperfections, and above the need of those means which in this world are so necessary to keep grace in the soul alive. It is fit, brethren, that we should know the kind of region of which such a declaration as that in the text is made. If it be a bad and sorrowful place, it must be very bad and sorrowful. If it be a holy and happy place, O how holy and happy it must be! And written of Heaven, how much these words tell us of the entire holiness, of the supreme spiritual elevation, knowing no depressions, no dark days, of the blest souls there! *All temple* would, with creatures like us, be equivalent to *No temple at all*. But, with glorified souls, it means that they are always at their best: always holy and happy: always up to the mark of the noblest communion with their Saviour and their God! For though it is not to be supposed that the glorified Saints above are to spend the whole eternity in the actual direct singing of God’s praise: though doubt-

less there will be abundant happy employment even in that perfect rest: though many things done by blest souls in heaven may be what we should call secular,—that is, not directly bearing upon the formal praise of the Redeemer; yet all they do will be in the truest sense sacred, because all will be done in a holy spirit, and all as for Christ.

Now, Christian friends, look back on the very happiest and most peaceful communion season you ever knew: think of the sacred hour when every worldly burden fell from off you,—when the power of sin within you seemed to die,—when the strong consolation of the Blessed Comforter seemed to fill your heart as if it never would go away,—when the Saviour seemed so close to you that the breathing of your whole being seemed that of the Apostle, “Lord, it is good to be here.” Then try to think what it would be, if, instead of going down, from the mount of ordinances into the atmosphere of worldly work and care, to speak bitter and hasty words, to feel your nature subdued to what it must work in, to feel within yourself the outbursts of petulance, suspicion, impatience, envy, discontent; you could carry with you, everywhere, the pure and happy mood and frame of the Communion-table, its perfect trust in God, its sense of His near presence, its kindly regard towards all your brethren in sin and sorrow, its holy cheerfulness, its

unanxious peace, its brief, transitory glimpse of how happy a human soul can be: and then remember that all *that*, and unutterably more, is conveyed to us in those words which assure us that the happy souls in heaven are always at their very happiest and best; forasmuch as there is no time and no place holier or happier than other, there!

All this, however, is but one truth set out by this text. Let us now proceed to an entirely different view of it. It is something to remind us of the great fact, that blest souls in heaven are lifted above the need of the means of grace. They have reached the end of all these; and accordingly the means are needed no more. When you have reached the place to which you wish to go, you no longer need the steps that brought you there. You have got the good of them, indeed: but you do not need to use them now. They were very well in their time: but their time is gone by.

Now all the means of grace; and God's house with its praises, prayers, and exhortations, among the rest; are just as steps towards heaven. And when the soul has reached heaven, their need is over. They have done their work: their day is over. And although in a true and grand sense heaven is all one grand temple, yet, if we understand by *temple* all that a Christian church is now, and here, then it is plain

that in heaven no church will be needed, and so none will be found. Even in this world we can see that the great thing about the house of God is the spiritual comfort and profit you get in it: the sense of Christ's presence; the breathing of the Holy Spirit on the heart; the lifting up of the soul to God: and all these you may have without the mere material church, and without the congregation gathered, without the hearty psalm, and without the united prayer. On the lonely hillside, the believer has felt as real communion with Christ, as ever he did at the holy table: and while the noblest church, and the stateliest services, without the presence of the Saviour and the breathing of the Blessed Spirit, would make but a cold and heartless thing; the poorest place where men ever worshipped God, might be glorified by the realized presence of the Redeemer and the inestimable influences of the Comforter, into something that no Gothic arches, no jubilant music, no gathered thousands of worshippers, could ever come near. Now, if we can have all that without the church, then we can do without the church. And forasmuch as in heaven the Saviour is always sensibly present, and the Great Sanctifier has done His perfect work; it will not matter, though there be no temple there. The church, and its services, are no more than the means: and when we can have the end without the

means, we may well be content. You know the scaffolding which the workmen use in building up some tall church-spire, may be very ingenious; may serve its purpose admirably well: but when the spire is finished, you do not propose to keep the scaffolding up permanently: the confusion of crossing and interlacing timbers is taken away, and the graceful spire, no longer half-concealed by that environment, is left in the air alone. And the means of grace, all of them, and God's house with the others, are no more than as the scaffolding by whose means the soul is *edified*;—and you know the meaning there is in that familiar word,—it means *built up*,—built up as a temple to God's glory; built up in faith and hope and charity. And when the glorified soul has reached the highest attainments of Christian character, and has always within reach the sublimest depths of Christian feeling and solid enjoyment,—as it has in heaven, then the scaffolding by which it was built up to this may be taken down; the means of grace, so needful in their time, may be done without, may go.

And thus you see that in this way of looking at the case, the declaration that there is no temple in heaven is something to remind us that when the believer has attained to glory, he will no longer need the means of grace: he will have got beyond these. Strange, to think that some of the most precious possessions the

Christian has on earth, he cannot have in heaven. What more inestimable gift of God than a saving faith in Christ, and a cheering hope of glory? And yet, you know, there will be no faith in heaven: it will all be sight there. And there will be no hope in heaven: for the happy soul there will have reached all it ever hoped for. Yes, in heaven, faith has passed into sight, and hope into fruition: and it is just in that way that the earthly temple, with its Saviour's presence only believed in, with its imperfect praises, with its cold and wandering prayers, shall be superseded by a state in which God will always be worshipped worthily, and Christ always seen as He is. It is just as the blossom gives place to the fruit; as the early dawn gives place to the perfect day; that this earth, with its many temples,—with its cities with their many spires and towers,—with its country landscapes with the parish church amid green graves,—shall yield to that Better Country where there will be neither churches nor graves;—shall give place to that spireless and domeless Golden City, which the kind-hearted Apostle John saw in vision; and concerning which he has put it on record, that “he saw no temple there!”

I humbly trust, Christian brethren, that we all know by abundant experience what a great blessing God's house is to us here. What perfect knowledge of us, what kind consideration for us, He had, who appointed

that there should be one day in the week on which we might turn away from worldly work and thought, and think of our immortal souls, and of the great eternity before us, and of that death which may be within a step of us; and that there should be one house, amid the multitude of those devoted to worldly business and common employments, where prayer should be habitually made, and the great work be to remember and to prepare for the unseen world! And yet, who can have failed to think oftentimes, that it is mainly because we are the sinful and imperfect creatures we are, that all this is so needful to keep religion from being choked out in us? To how great a degree it is our sins, our sorrows, that we have to think of in the house of prayer! God's house is not merely a place for worship and praise: it is also a place for instruction and exhortation: we come here to be reminded of solemn truths we are ready to forget,—to be counselled and warned. Now, the preaching of God's Gospel will not be needed above. And a great part of prayer will be gone. You know that there is no more essential part of prayer in this world, whether public or private, than confession of sin, and supplication for pardon: as long as you live, you will have something new to confess every time you pray. Now, these things will not be needed above. Neither will prayer for comfort and support under pain, sorrow, bereavement, find place above. Half the things

we ask for here, we shall not need to ask for there: and joyful praise and thanksgiving, here too much neglected, will there grow far more frequent and fervent and happy things. We go to church weekly, to seek the pardon of the week's sin: to wash off the rust of worldliness that has accumulated since we last met together: to tell God of our burden of care and sorrow, that He may send His Holy Spirit to comfort us under it, and sanctify us through it. But all these things we shall not have to do in Heaven. Oh it is wonderful to think, as the believer dies with the words of prayer on his lips, what a change will have passed upon prayer before he offers it again! "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great": "God be merciful to me a sinner!" "Create in me a clean heart": "Sanctify me by Thy truth": "I pray, not that Thou shouldst take me out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep me from the evil"; the day for these prayers will be gone. Yes, it will indeed be "a new song": "Thou art worthy; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood, and we shall reign with Thee." "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever!" Such will be the praises there! Because God shall have "wiped away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things have passed away!"

Christian friends, we need the means of grace yet : O how fast grace would die out in us but for them ! It would be a sad thing for us if there were no temple here. Many a time, perhaps, we have come to God's house with the taint of worldliness creeping over us : and got a new impulse in the better way. Many a time, perhaps, we have come with hearts burdened by a special weight of care, anxiety, or sorrow ; and been enabled to lay that burden aside, and to feel free. The better life would fade away in us fast, if we had not God's word to read, God's footstool to go to in prayer, the Communion-table with its special warmth of heart and tenderness of association, and with its feeding by faith on the bread and water of life. Do you not feel, my friends, how much you owe to these things : how impossible it is for us, as we are, to do without them ? It is well said in the Shorter Catechism, that " To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, *with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.*" Yes, let us use these diligently : grace can no more grow without them here, than these fields and trees around us could grow green without sunshine and rain. And let us use none more faithfully, none more earnestly, none with more serious preparation, none with a deeper sense of the solemnity of what we do,

none with a more urgent, importunate prayer for the blessing of the Kind and Holy Spirit without Whom we can do nothing,— Who is Himself the essence and the sum of all the means of grace, — than this most comforting, sanctifying, elevating, and saving institution of the Worship and the House of God. For in truth, we need it yet. We need every drop of the divine dew, every beam of the better Sun, every breath of the Blessed Spirit. Some day, we may do without these: but that day is not yet; and the Place is beyond the grave! If, without the sermon, we could have all the counsel, all the comfort, all the impulse in the right way, of the most simply earnest that ever was preached: if, without the prayer, the peace and light and life could come down from God to our hearts, that ever was drawn down by the most hearty prayer: if, without the praise, our spirit could be lifted up to a devotion never reached through the sublimest hymn: if, with the Church in the dust, we could get all the good we ever got at the holy table or in the house of God: then let church and prayer and praise and sermon go! But these things will never be so in this world. There is but one state in which the soul can do without the means of grace: and *that* is when it is glorified, and perfect in holiness. There is but one place where the house of prayer will not be felt as the most restful and home-like spot for the weary spirit: and that Place is

the heavenly City of which St. John certifies us, that he "saw no temple there!"

And so you have seen, my friends, that it is not discouraging but cheering, this glimpse given us by my text of the Place where we, who confess ourselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth, shall be at last at home. You thought, perhaps, that even in Heaven you would miss the church. When you feel how great a thing it is here; how large a part of our life; you are disposed to fancy that it would be a blank, to miss it there. But you have seen that in the City where there is "no temple," there is still all the good you ever found in church: all the sense of the Saviour's presence and the Spirit's influence that made the church so dear. It was not the building: it was not the music: it was not the sermon: it was not the prayers: but it was the holy communion, the elevation and calm of spirit, to which all these conduced, that gave its sacred charm to the house of prayer. And if you have known these here, O how much loftier and happier degrees of them await you in Heaven! No sins to confess there: no poor wandering thoughts, going away to your cares at home, to your sick child's little white face, to your anxieties for the future: but a perfect, unanxious satisfaction of soul such as never, never can be known on earth. And more than this: if it be true that in one sense there is no temple in heaven, it is because in a sense most real

it is all one great temple : every corner hallowed by Christ's Beatific Presence ; every act done in it an act of worship and praise. No going down, there, from the mount of ordinances : no exchanging holy communion for the poor cares of this mortal life !

But I pause upon that sublime Threshold. Let us not pretend to describe what it is God's purpose we should, here, only most imperfectly know. Yet we know enough. There is one blessed fact certain about the Better Country and the Golden City :

Our knowledge of that life is small :
The eye of faith is dim :
But 't is enough that Christ knows all,
And we shall be with Him !





VIII.

ALL SAINTS.

“ All Saints.” — EPHES. vi. 18.



ALL SAINTS: that is, all Christians. In the New Testament, as you know, the word constantly occurs; and the word Saint always means Christian, and never means anything else. All Saints, when St. Paul wrote this verse, meant all Christians. They are all “beloved of God, called to be Saints.” They are all “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be Saints.” The word Saint, in Holy Scripture, means Christian: no less and no more.

You all know that in our common use, the word has changed its meaning. It has come to bear a certain technical sense. Christians specially distinguished for piety,—for service in the Redeemer’s cause,—sometimes for mere foolish and useless austerities and self-inflicted tortures, have been promoted to the rank of Saint by emphasis. We commonly speak of the Apostles in this way: if we would, we could hardly help saying St. Paul, St. Peter, St. John: and the

name is very generally given to eminent Christians of whom we read in the New Testament. And it is curious, how thoroughly *Saint* is a Christian title: one, that is, confined to those who have been members of the Church of Christ since it was manifestly founded by our Blessed Saviour. We never speak of St. Moses, St. Elijah, or St. Isaiah, however fitly the word might apply to them. Then you know how, coming down the stream of time, we find the name of Saint ascribed by common consent to men and women who are not mentioned in the Bible: to persons who were not inspired, who wrought no miracles, who never had looked upon the living face of our Master, nor heard His voice. Nor need we say but that many among these, if we may credit their story, did well deserve the name. Some certainly did not. The person commonly called St. George was nothing more than a fraudulent army contractor; and St. Dunstan was as wicked a hypocrite as this world ever saw. But St. Thomas à Kempis, who has left us his holy book concerning the Imitation of Christ, did himself seek to follow his Master fully: and the good man whose name it is pleasant to think this church bears, was indeed a Saint; that is, a true Christian, if ever there was one. You know, there are people who object to speaking of even St. Matthew and St. Paul, and much more of St. Bernard; but I may well take

for granted that none in this congregation are so narrow-minded and irreverent as to see any fault in that pleasing and venerable practice in the Christian church. And although in severe logic, there is no special meaning in calling a Protestant place of worship by a saint's name: forasmuch as we do not dedicate our churches to anything except the spiritual worship of God through the one Mediator; and forasmuch, too, as we do not ask the intercession of any Saint either in Church or elsewhere: yet most of us, I believe, will feel that there is something pleasing in the ancient usage, universal over Christendom; and most of us will regret that tasteless fashion which we sometimes remark, of calling a church by the name of the street or place in which it stands.

But you will easily believe that what has now been said, is only by way of introduction to something of infinitely greater practical moment: to something beyond the province of curiosity or of taste; and to something as to which there can be no difference of opinion among true Christians, by whatever name known among men. I invite you, my friends, this day, to think of All Saints, in the solemn sense in which the words stand in the text, and in the New Testament: I desire that we may think for our warning, for our encouragement, for our strong consolation, of the grand characteristics which are common to all

true Christians. God grant that they may be ours, brethren: and God grant, too, that we may be willing heartily to recognize them wherever we find them, though it may be in people differing from us in a hundred lesser matters, but at one with us in those great things which concern salvation. And in these sad days of needless separation among those who all look to Christ as their Saviour and to heaven as their home, how we should feel ourselves drawn together in a sublime unity, as we look away from the miserable little details on which good Christians differ and about which they quarrel, to the grand and saving verities about which all true Christians agree!

Now, every one knows, that when a human being is converted to God, and enters the Christian fold, even though he be regenerated by the Holy Ghost, and made a new creature in Christ Jesus, he does not get rid of his old natural disposition and temperament, nor of the training of all his life hitherto: even that evil part of his being which Scripture calls the Flesh, and the Old Man, is never entirely gone in this world; and still more, those special bents and peculiarities of thinking, feeling, and liking, which make the man's idiosyncrasy, his special temper and disposition, — remain, in him, in very great degree. He has become a Christian man; but he does not cease to be an individual human being. And all attempts to make men think

alike, in regard of anything in religion except what is properly vital, have been wretched failures. Every one knows how a certain great monarch, who ruled a great portion of Europe through a most critical period of its religious history, and who had bent all his energies to the task of compelling men to agree on points as to which God had made them to differ, got a new light upon that matter in the evening of his life. He was fond of clockwork: and had a number of valuable time-pieces. Such machinery was less perfect in those days than it is in ours: and the great emperor found he could not get half a dozen of his clocks to keep time together, or to agree in what they said as to the precise moment of the day. "Ah," said he, "when all the skill of the best artificers cannot make a few clocks agree together, how vain to seek to compel millions of men to agree!" Now, that great monarch, finding that men would differ for all he could do, seems to have thought there was nothing for it but giving up the battle in despair. He saw that the Church of Rome's way of reaching unity would not do; he saw that it was quite vain to think that all professing Christians, with their endlessly various dispositions and temperaments, could ever be compelled (if they retained spiritual life at all, and were not fashioned into mere machines) to think exactly alike upon every little detail: there would be people who preferred a liturgy, and

people who preferred free prayer: there would be people who liked Presbytery best, and others who liked Episcopacy best; people who found it suited them to worship in a grand church, where art had done her best, and people who found they could worship more heartily and undistractedly in a plain one; and finding that all the burnings and beheadings and tortures of persecution could not secure entire uniformity, he concluded that in God's Church there could be no unity at all. But as for us, brethren, we have been led (as we humbly trust) by God's Holy Spirit of light, to a better way. We have been led to the true Protestant way, which is just the New Testament way. We have been taught, let us trust, that the true Christian oneness consists in agreeing on great and vital points; and as for points which are not vital, agreeing to differ upon these: and in feeling that we have a true essential unity after all. O, the Christian church has its lamentable divisions, working incalculable ill: and it has its inevitable diversities and separations, which must be in a world where circumstances often thrust the best friends apart, and whence the noblest and worthiest members of the church are gone: where the kind Saviour welcomes the little child to His fold, in which the old disciple with his white hairs has been through a long lifetime; where the rich and poor meet together; where is a great multitude, which no man can number, of all

nations and kindreds and people and tongues. But all are alike in this, that they are pardoned for Christ's sake : all are alike in this, that they are sanctified and comforted by the Blessed and Holy Spirit of God ; all are alike in this, that they are going to heaven as their home : all are alike in this, that they are numbered in the great company of All Saints.

You will easily see, brethren, that when we cast aside all non-essential things, and try to get at the vital and needful characteristics of all saints, these essential characteristics are not many. There are human beings who would make them very many, if they could : who would hardly recognize, as belonging to the great company of all saints, any one who does not belong to their little sect : any one who will not sound their especial shibboleth : any one who will not use their stock theological phrases ; and even any one who refuses to cultivate certain peculiar tones of voice, which they ignorantly fancy indicate a peculiar sanctity. There was a man, and a good man too, who declared he could not recognize as a Christian any who did not agree with his views as to the appointment of ministers to vacant charges ; and another, who could not believe that any one was a Christian who refused to subscribe to a certain good work of which he was the zealous advocate. But let us be thankful, my friends, that we have God's blessed word to go to : and that when we look there for infor-

mation as to what are the characteristics of all saints, we find them so easy to be understood, so easy to be remembered, and so very few. When we cast aside all the things which are immaterial, we shall find that there remain just two which are vital: two which must be about every Christian: two which are essential marks of all saints. And these are, that they are all pardoned through the great atonement of Christ; and that they are all sanctified by the working of the Holy Spirit. Old and young, rich and poor, white and black, differing in language, country, disposition, everything, — all saints are alike in these two things. Every other characteristic of the believer is included in these, or grows out of these.

My friends, you remember what Christ took for granted when he began to preach. He did not say it in so many words, but all His preaching went upon that assumption. The thing He took for granted was, that every man is a sinner. For “He began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He took it for certain that He never could go wrong in commanding every one he met to repent: and repentance just means the feeling and doing of a sinner when he is made to know really that he is one. So starting from the great and solemn fact, that every human being is a lost sinner, estranged from God by sin, and meriting God’s wrath for his sin, the great sacrifice of Christ

was intended to “save men from their sins.” Now a saint, which is the same thing as a Christian, just means a saved sinner: a human being saved from his sins. And you know what is implied in being saved from sin. It means being saved from the punishment of sin,—which is the thing meant when we speak of being pardoned, or justified. And it means also being saved from the power of sin,—which is the thing meant when we speak of being regenerated and sanctified. Every one remembers the plain and clear statement in the Shorter Catechism: “They that are effectually called,” that is, they who are brought by the Holy Spirit to Christ, and made into true Christians,—“do in this life partake of Justification, Adoption, and Sanctification; and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.” We may regard Adoption into God’s family of saved souls, as one of the benefits accompanying the others: and we get to the kernel of the matter, we reach the essential characteristics of all saints, in these two things, that they are all Justified, and all Sanctified. Everything else either grows out of these two things; or, is not vital.

Just a few words upon each of these.

All saints, that is, all Christians, are alike in this, that they are Justified: that is, Pardoned. Pardoned of God’s free grace, and only for Christ’s sake; and this through a saving faith in Him. Christian expe-

rience is no doubt most varied ; and the ways in which God makes us feel our sins and our need of forgiveness of them, are many. But still, there is one great outline of the course through which all saved souls are led : They are all, in some way, made to feel that they are sinful and helpless, — that they deserve God's anger, and that they can do nothing to take it away : then they are made to know in their heart that Christ is able to help them, and willing to help them : and then they are enabled by the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ, — to trust their souls to Him, — to cast themselves, without the least reservation or hanging back, upon Him. And even as they do this, they are pardoned. The dismal old record of transgression and shortcoming that stood against them in the book of God's remembrance, fades away. They are "justified freely through His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Now, my friends, in order that we may quite understand this great fact, that every Christian is justified ; that is, is pardoned for Christ's sake ; it is not at all needful that we should go into the metaphysics of the Atonement. Many a humble Christian feels the burden of sin, and feels the blessed relief which comes of beholding the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world ; who yet could give you but a very imperfect account of the rationale of the great Atonement. A man may quite well know how to take advantage of the

working of a great machinery, who could give you but a very lame description of the precise fashion in which all the parts of that machinery co-operate towards its great end. Yet it is fit that in these days of uncertain sound as to the gravest Christian verities, we should call to mind how our Saviour takes away the burden of sin from his justified people. As for that load of guilt, which looks so huge and terrible to the soul convinced of its true state by the Holy Spirit, He takes it away, by bearing the punishment due for our sins: — by offering Himself, truly and actually, as a propitiatory sacrifice: a sacrifice so wonderful, so precious, so accepted by God, that it can blot sin out; separate between the soul and its responsibilities: open a way in which the just and holy God can receive as innocent, can adopt into His family, the sinner, cleared utterly from all the burden of his sins. Repent of sin, brethren; and God's Spirit waits to help you to repent: Believe in Christ, — and God's Spirit waits to help you to believe: and no writing stands against you in God's book any more. God is content to look upon you, and to see you clear and blameless, as Adam before he fell. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” “He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin: that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

My friends, we all profess to be Christian people : how does it stand with us as to this first grand mark of all saints ? We cannot open God's book, and see whether our names stand there as numbered with the Forgiven. And yet, we are not left in blank uncertainty. Do we deeply feel our need of the good part in Christ ? Then remember that wonderfully comforting declaration in the standards of our national Church, which people who know little about them sometimes think so stern ; that as for the good part in Christ, in God's view he hath it, who is deeply convinced of his want of it. The perilous symptom is in *his* case, who is quite satisfied with himself ; and does not think himself so great a sinner after all. But O brethren, if we have been made to see our lost estate by nature ;—if we have been made to feel that if we are ever forgiven, it must be for our Blessed Redeemer's sake ;—if we have been helped, by something that never originated in our own sinful hearts, to go to Him who holds out the arms of His love to all, and cast the care of our weary, unsatisfied, conscience-stricken souls upon Him ; though only with that short prayer, spoken first by the poor publican, but just the very fittest utterance upon the lips of every human being,—that true universal prayer, that “ God be merciful to me a sinner ” : then, brethren, we may humbly cherish, not perhaps a confident assurance, but surely a good hope through grace. For our

Blessed Saviour's own words are, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out": and we remember these words unto His servants, upon which he has caused us to hope!

And now, as for the other great and essential characteristic of all believers: They are all sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God. Through his regenerating influence, the Christian is made a new creature in Christ Jesus: the perverse nature is replaced by a better and purer: a new heart is created within him, and a right spirit is renewed; and then, day by day, in the progressive work of sanctification, the remaining evil is further sapped, and subdued; and the gracious fruits of the Spirit are made to appear,—the love, joy, peace, and all blessed graces, which never would have grown in the native soil of the heart. It is a longer work, this, you know, than our justification: it is a work, the best believer knows, never fully carried out in this life: much remaining corruption lingers; and it is the most advanced Christian who feels this most deeply. But still, the work is doing, and on the whole always progressing, which will leave us at the last with souls unvexed by evil and temptation, as Adam's when he knew no sin.

All this is beyond question the teaching of God's Holy Word. "God hath chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit." We are to "put

on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature." "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." There can be no doubt that the Catechism is right, when it tells us that all Christians do in this life partake not merely of Justification, but of Sanctification. They are not only pardoned, and so get the right to enter heaven when they go from earth; but they are renewed and made holy, and so become fit to enter heaven when they go from earth; which mere forgiveness would not make them.

My friends, I greatly fear, that this plain test that comes so home; — that this characteristic of all believers, which is so easy a one to understand, — must fall very sadly upon the heart of many professing Christians: yes, and comes with something of mournful upbraiding upon the heart of all professing Christians. The theory, the sound doctrine of the matter, is very clear: but alas, to what a sad extent it is theory: how imperfectly it is exemplified in actual life! As for being justified, if *that* is done at all, it is done perfectly: *that* is God's work, and there is no failure nor imperfection there. But as for being sanctified, as for growing better, as for putting down sin more effectually, as for doing our duty more faithfully, — why, there is something of our work in all *that*: God's Spirit will work in us, but we

must work too: and O how the sad imperfection of all human work looks out here! Justified, is what, if we be Christian people, we hope we may say *we are*. Sanctified, in any worthy measure, in any sense that deserves the name, — it is not so truly what we are, as what we *ought to be!* O that we were all striving after it more faithfully, every day! Here it is, that the Church of Christ is such a stumbling-block to the world: in the miserably imperfect degree in which this great characteristic of all saints appears in very many professing Christians. Yea, there are people, making a very loud profession of religion, in whom it is hard to say that there is any trace of it at all. And yet, forasmuch as justification is invisible, while a holy life and a Christian conversation are what all men can see, if they are there to be seen, it is just here that we have the great practical test whether we are Christians or not so. “By their fruits ye shall know them”: know others; and what is of far more consequence, know yourself. If you are in doubt whether you are forgiven, whether you are justified, here is the way to settle that doubt: — Are you in any measure sanctified? If you feel in yourself that you are thoroughly worldly of spirit, that you have no liking for God’s service and for heavenly things, no hatred for sin and no desire after a holier and purer and kindlier nature, then you have grave reason to fear that, manifestly lacking one mark of all Christians, you lack

the other; and that, not being sanctified, you are not justified. But if you have some good reason to trust that, by God's Blessed Spirit, there has been kindled within you the spark of a better life;—if you feel a little of that faith that overcomes the world and that trusts all to Christ;—if you have been endued with a will and desire to renounce and withstand your own evil affections, and with a longing for God's righteousness and the keeping of his Commandments;—then, with all your frailty and unworthiness, surely you have some measure of *that*, which never arose naturally in your breast, but which you may humbly yet resolutely attribute to the working of the Holy Ghost, of Whom and through Whom is everything good that ever was thought, or felt, or done, by human being. Far, very far from being what you desire to be, you have yet attained something which you never would have attained if you had been left to yourself: and praying for more grace, and knowing to whom to look for it, you humbly trust that the work of sanctification is begun in you: that the visible mark of a saved soul being (in a lowly degree) present in you, you may cherish the sure though humble hope that the invisible characteristic is present too: that being in some measure sanctified, you are forgiven. The grand evidence that a man's name is written in heaven, is, that he should be striving to lead a heavenly life on earth.

And in these two things of which we have thought, my Christian friends, you see the characteristics of the great assemblage of the best and worthiest of our race; the grand Church of All Saints. Everything that has ever appeared, of excellence, purity, and beauty in the noblest of the members of the great Household of Faith, is included in these, or grows out of these. The glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the noble army of Martyrs, never manifested anything of the sublime, the tender, or the heroic, which went beyond these two great things, which in their essence belong to the humblest that bear the name of Jesus. The most excellent gifts of God's grace, are just those which are given most freely; and though it may have pleased Him, Who does everything right, to bestow on others gifts of usefulness, and inspiration, which he has denied to us: though He has made some Apostles and some Evangelists, and some humble believers living out their life of toil and struggle which hardly any know, still free as the wide bounds of the Church of Christ are the most precious gifts of all,—the blood of Christ that cleanseth from all sin, and the inestimable communications of the Blessed and Holy Spirit. Such honor, such gifts, have *all* His saints! Yea, *all* His saints: those who yet live amid the manifold labors and cares of this life,—and those who have gone to the rest and peace of the better world. For we

are to remember that the Church of All Saints has but a fraction of its glorious extent here on this side of time. You remember how the most thoughtful among the heathen spake of a good man's death, in a phrase that was a dim, blind foreshadowing of the sublime truth we know. He has gone, they said, to the majority; — gone to where there are more! Yes, the believer, passing within the veil, does indeed go to where there are more; — to that general assembly and church of the first-born, which year by year is taking to itself, from our firesides, from our pulpits, from every place but our hearts, those whom God has appointed to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob there: oftentimes in the prime of their powers and their usefulness, — oftentimes too early for us, but never too early for them. And well may we look with interest, Christian friends, towards the Golden City; for the best of the Church is there! They dropped the last trace of earthly sinfulness and imperfection, crossing the dark river; and they have reached to heights of bliss and purity of which we can know but little here. Yet still they have not got beyond the two grand characteristics: for they “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, Therefore are they before the throne of God”: and all their meetness for that rest is of the operation of the Blessed Spirit, who begins and perfects our better life. Surely, surely, there is something to encourage and cheer, in

thinking of the great Church to which we belong; in thinking how God, in His grace, has led our fathers who have crossed the river: in drawing hope from that thought, that He will be with us by His Blessed Spirit, and keep us in all ways that we go, and bring us at last to *that* land: and feeling meanwhile, that it is enough for us poor sinners, if Christ will but take us; and number us among “the least of ‘All Saints’”!

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J





IX.

WORK.

“ Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labor until the evening.”

— PSALM civ. 23.

“ And to every man his work.” — ST. MARK xiii. 34.



EVERY ONE knows what is meant by work: most of us know it well by much experience. The grammarian will tell you that work means prolonged exertion of body or of mind, to attain some desired end. *That* is work. It implies conscious efforts ; — the strain and stretch of mind or body. Even the most slothful are sometimes constrained to work ; and very many human beings do very little else than work, through all their waking hours. They must do so, to earn food and clothing and shelter for themselves and their children. If they did not work they would have to starve. We wrest our livelihood from the elements and from society, by labor. And even those people who are (what some would think) so favored by fortune that they need not work at all unless they please, have oftentimes found that it is so miserable a thing to be idle, — that it makes the mind

so morbid to be idle, — and that a perfectly idle human being is so thoroughly out of harmony with all this busy, active universe of things, — that they have, by their own free choice, worked and labored as hard as ever mortal man did.

Now of course, God's Word has something to say about this thing which is such a necessity to most; and which is the choice of the worthiest among the few to whom it is not a necessity. And I have taken as the foundation of some thoughts on work, as it is and ought to be to Christian men and women, two short texts: one from the Old Testament, and the other from the New. The New Testament, as you know, is an advance upon the Old: it gives us clearer and fuller light: and very manifestly is *that* so here.

There never were words more certainly and universally true, than those of the Psalmist. Day by day the sun arises, the darkness of night goes, and then "man goeth forth to his work, and to his labor, until the evening." As sure as the blank daylight struggles through wintry clouds and rain, and even before it comes: as sure as the morning sunshine of summer brightens green fields and green trees: man in town and country, willingly or unwillingly, cheerfully or despondingly, takes to his work, hand-work or head-work; and with less or more of intermission, toils on till the evening bids him cease. This has been well called the

work-day world. It has indeed its blinks of leisure and recreation ; though most men, to retain the healthy spring of body and mind, ought to have a great deal more of these : and there is one blessed day, the inestimable gift of perfect understanding of us and thorough sympathy with us, on which common labors cease : and which cannot be too carefully kept free from the intrusion of work-day thoughts and cares. Yet in the main, you may read in the Psalmist's words "the story of our lives from year to year."

There is an advance upon all *that*, in our text from the New Testament. There is fuller light : there is the essence of exhortation : there is precious comfort. We are not told who is the author of the Psalm : but whoever he may have been, he speaks as one who simply records a fact, — which many people would think a sad one. For there is no doubt that there are thoughtless people, and overdriven people, who have some vague impression that it would be a fine thing to be put in a place in life in which they would have nothing to do ; and in which, accordingly, they would do nothing. But there is a different face altogether put upon work, by the words of our Blessed Saviour which form our New Testament text. There is something in them to remind us of the entire Gospel teaching about work and labor. They remind us that God appoints every Christian his work in this life : it may not be the work the Christian

likes best, — it may even not be the work the Christian would do best, — yet still it is the right thing for him to do. And these words remind us, likewise, that we ought to do all our work, for Christ; as for His sake; faithfully and well, because He gives it us: and that He will give us grace to do it worthily, — that He will help us in it, sympathize with us through it all, and send us His gracious Holy Spirit to support and comfort us in it: and, finally, that He has provided a glorious rest and reward, after all the toil is past.

And so, my friends, in thinking of work at this time, let us combine the Old Testament and the New Testament view of it: let us think of our work, not merely as a necessity of our lot, and a condition of our being, — but as something appointed to us by our God and Saviour, and appointed to us in love and mercy because it is the right thing for us, — and as something we are to do for His sake. There is something sacred about worthy work: you remember how even a wise heathen said, that “To work is to pray.” You hear people sometimes talk about *the curse of labor*: and no doubt they were words of doom which God spake when he said to our first parent, and through him to all of us, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground.” But when we remember that God’s promise to all true Christians is, that He will make “all things work together for good” to them,

surely it is wrong and ungrateful in us to speak of the thing to which God has appointed that all Christian people should give the greater part of their life, as a curse. It may have been a curse once: it may be a curse yet to those who do not take it from the hand of God; and doubtless there is much that is depressing and evil about over-work: but work, in itself, is not a curse to the man for whose eternal good it is sanctified; and when we look at that New Testament text, — when we think what Kindest Heart and Hand have set us our task, — when we think it was our Blessed, kindly, sympathizing Saviour who “gives to every man his work,” — O what a change passes on its very nature! Labor, whether of brain, or of bone and sinew, is something more than a painful necessity. It has been well said, — said by a poet and in a poem indeed, — but poets sometimes have intuitions of great truths, which though expressed in few words, are worth a great many pages of ordinary theology, — that labor is at once the symbol of man’s punishment and the secret of man’s happiness. And it has well been said too that the Gospel does not abolish labor, but gives it a new and nobler aspect. “The Gospel abolishes labor much in the same way as it abolished death: it leaves the thing, but it changes its nature.” And some of you may remember how it was just this deep conviction that gave an influence which acted like a charm, to a great and good man who influ-

enced for good probably a greater number of immortal souls than any other man in this century. A friend has recorded that the principle which lay at the foundation of all he did, was a humble, profound and most religious consciousness, "that work is the appointed calling of man on earth, the end for which his various faculties were given, the element in which his nature is ordained to develop itself, and in which his progressive advance toward heaven is to lie."

It is not for us to pretend to understand all the reasons upon which our God and Saviour goes. Yet it will be comforting and profitable, if so the Blessed and Holy Spirit of all truth vouchsafe to guide us, to think of some of the good consequences which follow from God's decree that as day after day returns, man must "go forth unto his work, and to his labor, until the evening": some of the benefits and blessings which come of this fact, that our Saviour does not intend that his people should drag out an idle and aimless life in this world, but on the contrary, hath given "to every man his work."

And one good end served by work, and served most effectually when work is felt most hard and painful, is this: it all goes to keep us in mind that we are fallen creatures,—to keep us in mind of the evil of sin. Now, even if man had not fallen, he would have had to work. The primal curse was not simply of work:

it was of painful work: of work when we do not wish it,—when we do not feel equal to it,—when we are weary and weak,—when we work under pressure, and of necessity, to gain the daily bread for ourselves and our families. Man, in short, was at first *intended* for work; and afterwards, when he fell, *doomed* to work. And there can be no question at all, that however different a thing work might have been had man continued innocent, *now* a very great part of all the work that is done over the face of the world is painful work,—forced work,—work done by those who have barely strength and spirit for it,—work done under the spur of necessity, and to earn the means of subsistence,—work that would not be done if it could be done without. O what weary, jaded, spiritless men “go forth” on many mornings “to their work, and their labor, until the evening”! How often all of you, who have reached middle age, have gone through hard work when you very little fit for it! Many are the pages, which have been written with a feverish, throbbing brain, and a trembling, hot hand. Many are the columns of figures, which have been added up with weary eyes, and a confused head. Many are the stitches that have been sewn “with fingers weary and worn, with eyelids heavy and red.” My friends, what is all that meant to teach us? You never would have known painful work, but for sin. Now, if there be a thing of

which we want daily proof, of which we need daily to be reminded, it is the evil of sin. There is not a thing we are so ready to forget. There is not a thing that we find it so difficult to realize and bring home to us. And yet, there are few things that it is so important for us to remember and feel: for unless we in some measure understand how evil, how ruinous, how bad a thing sin is, we shall never heartily go to that Blessed Saviour who "saves his people from their sins." Do we need a daily remembrancer of the evil of sin? Then we have it in the daily necessity of work. Every time the scholar sits down to his work, jaded and weary, and reluctantly forces himself to what he shrinks from, — in all *that* there is something to remind him of the evil of sin. Every time the laborer, stiffened and sore, rises from his poor bed, and in rain and cold goes out to the field to his work, — there is what should remind him of the evil of sin. The distorted form of the miner, laboring in peril and darkness that we may have our cheerful fires; the stiffened limbs of the sailor, drenched with the wintry spray; the lined face, the gray hair, the frail unmuscular body which speak of the over-driven brain; what do all these remind us of, but that sin is bitterly hateful in the sight of God? Sin brought all suffering, and all suffering should remind us of the evil of sin.

A second reason why our Saviour has set "to every

man his work," doubtless is, that in so doing he provided effectually for the health and sound estate of our bodies and our minds.

We cannot be happy when we are idle. No doubt, when we have been for a long time oppressed by extreme labor, it is, for a little while, a pure enjoyment simply to sit still and rest. But *that* will not last. God has made us so, that it cannot last. The machine, body and soul, is made for working, and in a little, the appetite for occupation revives again. Do you not all remember how, when you were children, it was just the most irksome thing possible to feel that you had "nothing to do"? What a weary trouble you may see in the face of the little child that comes and tells you *that!* And it is so with grown-up people too. A French writer said, with the vivacity characteristic of his nation, that we commonly think of idleness as one of the beatitudes of heaven; but we ought rather to think of it as one of the miseries of hell. It has often struck me, that our minds are something like that being for which, according to the legend of the middle ages, a certain great magician was bound to provide occupation, under the penalty of being torn in pieces. Our minds do, as it were, come to us, and ask us to give them something to do; and if we do not give them something to do, they will make us miserable. There is no more wretched condition than that ennui, that loss of all interest and

healthful energy, that comes of an idle life. O let us wear out, brethren, rather than rust out! There is nobody less to be envied than people who may do nothing if they like. Very likely there are many of us who would be lazy enough if we had it in our power: let us thank God that He has saved us from that temptation. Let us bless our kind, considerate Saviour, Who hardly ever did us a kinder turn, though we may sometimes think it severe, than when He bade us daily "go forth unto our work, and our labor, until the evening":—than when "knowing our frame" so well, He set "to every man his work"!

But there is far more good about that decree of our Saviour than merely this. No doubt, it is a worthy end, and one that our Saviour, who is also our Creator, would not think beneath Him to hold in view, to make life contented and cheerful. And honest, faithful work, done to the very best of our ability, tends strongly to do that. There is a cheerfulness and satisfaction in looking back upon a task earnestly and faithfully done: our Master has known the feeling Himself: as the Prophet wrote, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." And there is a keen relish which diligent toil gives to the hours or days of needful recreation. But there is better about honest work than that. Work, hard yet not excessive, has a wonderful power to promote a sober and healthful temper of mind, free alike

from extravagant views and morbid feelings. There is a curious but quite indubitable connection, between diligent industry, and sound views upon all subjects, but specially on religious subjects. It is idle men who have originated the most preposterous opinions; who have launched into useless speculations, which land only in sorrow and bewilderment; and who have sounded the lowest depths of perverted and morbid feeling. Who can forget that solemn declaration, of Him who made us, and who knows us best, — which tells us of the eternal connection between hard work, and sound views and feelings: “If any man will do His will, *he* shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God”! Yes, a holy, diligent life, is the path to firm conviction, and to a faith that never will be shaken. I am not careful to explain the logical steps of the process: but I know that the wisest men and the most experienced Christians will acknowledge the fact. And thus it is, my friends, that our Blessed Lord, when he appointed labor for our portion in this life, did provide not merely for our contentment and sober cheerfulness: but he provided for the assurance of our faith, for the soundness of our views, for the sobriety of our affections, for the healthful estate of our whole spiritual nature, when He gave “to every man his work.”

We were all taught when we were children, I have no doubt, who it is that finds some mischief for idle

hands to do. And indeed, apart from the pure wretchedness and weariness of being idle, you can hardly imagine a position of greater moral risk. The idle man is ready to listen to every temptation. Where is it that we shall find the grossest forms of vice and folly, but among those who by their circumstances are freed from the necessity of labor? Who does not know how many young men have been ruined, have been made useless and worthless beings, have brought themselves down to an early and unhonored grave, through inheriting a fortune which precluded the necessity of toil? And without supposing anything so extreme as that, you remember how even Elijah the Tishbite, that great man of God, broke down, fell into that impatient depth of utter depression, rebelliously asked God to take away his life, for he could bear it no longer, just when his occupation was gone, — when he had no more to do, — when there was nothing to put his mind upon the stretch, and to keep it from turning in wrath against itself. It was then that the wonderful man was beaten: that “he sat down under a juniper-tree, and requested for himself that he might die.” And you remember too, how when the kind God would lift up His servant from that morbid state, He remembered the medicinal virtue there is in work: He gave the prophet something to do, and bade him go and do it! Then you will think of the deep saying of that great, genial, brave, warm-hearted,

and hasty-spoken man, Martin Luther. "The mind," said he, "is like a mill that cannot stop working: give it something to grind and it will grind *that*. If it has nothing to grind, it grinds on yet; but it is itself it grinds and wears away." Yes, it is most certain, that when our Saviour appoints hard labor to all His children,—when He gives "to every man his work,"—He gives us the thing that is healthiest and best for body and soul.

A third advantage to the Christian of having suitable work to do is this: that in faithfully doing his work, and doing it in a right spirit, he is doing what tends to make him grow in grace: he is working out his salvation all the while.

Let me beg your earnest attention to this matter. There are people who imagine that in trying to lead a Christian life, and to maintain a devout spirit, what we have to do is to devote a certain part of our time to the care of our souls, and to our religious duties; and then to spend the rest of our time on our worldly business, to the exclusion of the care of our souls. Now, brethren, that is not the sound and right idea. What we have to do, is to devote the whole of our time to the care of our souls. If we are faithful in our work, if we do it all in a Christian spirit, and as a work appointed to us by Christ and to be done for His sake, and so done as to commend our holy faith to all who see and know us,—

then our spiritual life should be growing all the while. It is not merely the minutes of prayer to God alone in our closet morning and evening: it is not merely the reading of God's word at the family altar, and its united prayer: it is not merely the blessed day of rest with its public services sanctified by the Holy Spirit: not merely the more solemn seasons when we sit down together at the table of communion, and by faith feed upon Christ: it is not merely through these things that we are working out our salvation, by the grace of God. But through all our common business: through all that work and labor to which man goes forth daily until the evening: through all that work which our Lord has set "to every man" in his church: often looking up to God, often sending away to Him the brief word of prayer that tells our need and our sense of dependence: always latently remembering our Redeemer and what we owe Him: "always bearing about with us the dying of Christ": having that most touching and most influential of all remembrances ever at the bottom of our heart, and ever ready to start up when in the exigencies of common things it is needed, for counsel or for comfort: honest and faithful and kind and diligent and patient and candid and forgiving, as those ought to be who trust they have "been with Jesus," and have in them some little of His most pure and merciful and patient mind: we may be, through all, most manfully and effectually

working out our salvation by the kind grace of God. Yes, you may be doing far more than the mere first act, that would strike the stranger. There is a farther reaching sense in every Christian deed, that has its anchor within the veil, — that has its reference to a better world. You are talking, perhaps, to some man, on some detail of worldly business : the mere first result of what you are doing may be no more than the earning of so many shillings or pounds. But in the careful governing of your temper ; in giving heed to your tongue ; in utterly putting down the tendency to take an unfair advantage ; in the silent, unexpressed purpose that our Blessed Redeemer's spirit shall be your example and your aim ; you may be caring for your soul's health and growth through that interview, as truly and really though not so directly as in your season of most devout meditation, or your hour of most elevated prayer.

You know that the day has been, when people thought that it was a mistake in Christ to give "to every man his work." The day has been, when people thought that Christ had better have given to every man nothing to do, but to spend his days in meditation and prayer. People once thought that the best way to care for your soul's salvation was to give up all other work, and go to a hermit's cell, or to a convent or monastery. But it has been found, by abundant experience, that He

who made us and redeemed us knows what suits us infinitely better than ever did cardinal or pope : and so that it is when doing every one his honest worldly work, that our spiritual life thrives best, that all Christian graces most flourish. My friends, if it were not so : if through all the distractions of the many things which often make us careful and troubled enough, we could not keep by our Saviour's side, and live worthy of our high profession ; then the ancient dwellers in the cell and in the wilderness would be right after all. For doubtless our great work here is the working out of our salvation ; and if *that* work could not go on side by side with worldly work, then worldly work must yield. But O, brethren, that old delusion goes, in the light of that New Testament text : it goes, when we remember Who it is that has given to every man his work. Our Redeemer has appointed us to labor as we do : and so labor must be the right thing. It has its temptations, like everything on earth : but the Holy Ghost will help us through them, if we do but earnestly ask His blessed guidance. And if work has its temptations, idleness has tenfold worse and more. And so, my Christian friends, for all the weariness you sometimes feel ; and for all the disposition you sometimes feel to shrink back from the work allotted ; you may well thank your Redeemer that He has given you every one your work ; and humbly, earnestly, and hopefully, as the sun rises

day by day, go forth unto your work, and to your labor, until the evening.

Yes, until the evening. Not merely till the setting sun, going down in winter gloom or summer glory, tells that the toiling day is done: not merely till the close of the week's last working-day brings on that blessed day of rest, that prefigures a better and happier sabbath-keeping that remains for the people of God: but till the evening of the longer day of life, with its close in gray hairs and powers enfeebled; or till the sundown which may come at noon to any of us here. Have your work, Christian friends, according to God's purpose: occupy the talent Christ gave you till He comes: do your work heartily, and not just to get through; not in a procrastinating spirit or in a perfunctory: but trying to feel it is the task appointed you by your Redeemer, and no longer the mere weary drudgery of the primeval curse. And so, looking back at evening upon each day you will feel that "something attempted, something done, has earned a night's repose": and looking back on the longer day of life, you will feel it well that the toil is over; that now the weary hand may cease at last, and the weary brain be still!

I do not promise you, indeed, in that last evening-time, what some people do. I do not promise you the calm approval of conscience, in the retrospect of a well-

spent life. I do not promise you *that*, because I do not believe in it. I do believe that after we have done our very best to do our work aright,—if our conscience be enlightened by God's spirit, we shall see far more to be penitent for than to be pleased with, in the very best spent life that ever was spent by mortal. Let us do our very best, my friends; and we shall be unprofitable servants after all. And let us do our very best, there will be nothing in *that* to rest on in our dying bed,—when the evening, long looked-for, comes at last,—when the long night is closing round us that will close round all. But rather, though our little talent was faithfully occupied;—though the work our Master set us was done to the very best of our little power,—we shall feel that no words will suit us better than those simple ones, which we have all known from childhood:—

Not in mine innocence I trust :
I bow before Thee in the dust :
And through my Saviour's blood alone,
I look for mercy at Thy throne!





X.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

“Pray one for another.” — JAMES v. 16.



H WISH to ask you this question, all you who are here: Do you think it does your friends any good to pray for them? Do you believe that earnestly to ask God to bless and guide and keep those dear to you, will do them any good?

Now do you really think, that if you pray that your little boy may be a good, happy, Christian man, this makes it likelier that he will be so? Or that, if you pray for your child or your sister that is sick, this makes it likelier they will get well again?

Well, of course you do. Of course you think all this; or you would not pray for your friends at all. And of course the Apostle James thought so; or he would not have advised you and me and all Christian people, as he does in the text, to “pray one for another.” No one could really earnestly pray if he thought his prayer was to go for nothing. You might repeat over some careless, heartless, formal words of supplication, without

thinking whether they are to be answered or not; and without caring. But you cannot, with real heart and intention, pray either for yourself or for others, unless you believe that your prayer is to have some effect, some prevalence, somehow. People talk of the secondary and reflex good of praying: that is its good effect on the soul that offers it: the good that will come of getting into the way of going to God with everything that you care about, and thus forming a habit of communing with Him. But it is quite plain that this good will not come, unless the other be supposed and believed in, first. No man can deliberately cheat himself into habitual praying, because he thinks that though his prayer will never be heard, it may do himself good to believe that it will be.

My brethren, it is very hard to understand how prayer does good to the person that offers it. It is quite impossible to give any satisfactory explanation of the truth, — though we hold it as we hold our lives, — that prayer is heard and answered, — and all this without a constant miracle, — without anything like setting aside those ways of God's working which are commonly called the laws of nature, or like breaking in on the ordinary course of things. *That* is hard to understand: though we are quite sure it is all perfectly true. But it is a much more mysterious thing, — and in some points of view it is a very awful thing, — to think that prayer for others may truly affect their state, both here and

hereafter. To think that *you* feel deeply that some one you care for needs the good part in Christ, while he perhaps does not feel it at all: and that you go and ask God to lead him to Christ: and that this blessed end may be, perhaps, brought about by your prayer! That is, in fact, that a human being's fate, in the greatest and most important thing of all, may depend, in a great degree, on what is done by other people. That you are likelier to get to Heaven, because you have a friend who is a pious man and prays for you!

Now perhaps the best way of bringing our minds in some measure to understand all this, is to set it before us, that all this is no more wonderful than certain other arrangements in God's Providence. It is just as hard to explain why your eternal destiny may be affected by another person's conduct, as by his prayers. Yet we know it is. A man's start in life,—and a man's progress in life, which depends so much upon his start,—is decided mainly by his parentage. If his father and mother are good, industrious, duly impressed with the responsibility of having a child entrusted to them by God to train for this life and the next,—then the man has a fair and good start. Being trained up, as a child, in the way he should go, it is in the nature of things likely that when he grows old, he will not depart from it. But if a human being's parents be bad,—if they be drunken and dishonest;—if the poor little thing in its

miserable home, is never told of Christ, never taught to pray, but driven out to beg or steal, — and received with blows and curses if it return without having begged or stolen enough, — O what chance has that little child: at what an awful disadvantage it must run the race of life! No doubt, brethren, God sees and allows for all this. No doubt, the Judge of all the earth will do right. But still, it is all very strange.

And so, if you would ask a good man to do you a good turn, you can never do so better than by asking him to pray for you. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” We all need to feel this more than we do. We believe it: but God help our unbelief! No doubt, there are few requests and few promises ever made with so little sense of what is meant by them, as that to pray for another. A person will say, that *his prayer is* that such a friend may be happy; while in fact he never really went to God’s footstool with such a prayer at all. And it may be said, in a single sentence, that intercessory prayer for others is sometimes characterized by what is even worse than unreality. Sometimes the most ill-set and malignant thing that one man can do towards another, is to pray for him, or to threaten to pray for him. You remember that country clergyman, named in a certain famous book of the last century, who threatened the squire of the parish that if he did not mend his ways, he would

“pray for him in the face of the whole congregation.” Prayer has sometimes been made a way of conveying the most wicked calumnies against a fellow-mortal. Not long since, at a public meeting, an individual took occasion, in a discourse which he regarded as a prayer, to describe another person who had expressed opinions which he esteemed to be mischievous, as “that wretched man who was lately pouring forth blasphemies.” My friends, there is something perfectly awful in that. If ever Satan was transformed into an angel of light, it was when wrath and uncharitableness veiled themselves under the fair form of that holy and beautiful thing, prayer! O let there never be admitted to our minds the faintest idea of *hitting at* somebody in prayer! Let intercessory prayer always be offered in love. Always pray for your fellow-sinner because you wish him well; never because you would hit him hard. And, as a general rule, pray for your fellow-sinner when you yourself are alone with God. You know it is the commonly-repeated reproach of many of our prayers in this country, that they are not spoken *to* the Almighty, but spoken *at* the hearers. Let us, my friends, avoid this desecration. It is not quite fit to use prayer as a means of conveying advice: but far less fit is it to use prayer as a means of casting reproach and of wreaking vengeance.

Let me ask your careful attention, this afternoon, to some thoughts on the whole subject of Intercessory

Prayer. Never let us, brethren, preacher or hearers, listen to or utter that sermon on which we do not ask the blessing of the Holy Spirit of God. But more than at other times, if *that* be possible, let us, in discoursing of Prayer, ask the guidance and enlightening grace of the Blessed Spirit of All-Prayer.

We cannot help remembering, as we think of this subject, that there is a Church, claiming indeed to be the only Church, which seems to make more of Intercessory Prayer than we do. We go straight to God with our prayers: we go, only through Jesus Christ, the one Mediator. But the Church of Rome teaches that there is a host of Mediators: that we are not, generally, to go straight to the great God, or to the great Redeemer: that *they* are too exalted to be thus approached by us: and so that it is fit we should ask the Virgin, and ask the Saints, to intercede for us. I never wish, my friends, to speak harshly from this place of any who profess and call themselves Christians: and I do not think that the worshipping assembly in God's house best spends the hour of instruction and exhortation upon matters of controversy. It is better that we should seek by God's grace to mend our own faults, than that we should dwell upon those of other men. Yet it would not be right, in thinking of Intercessory Prayer, to pass this matter by without a word. No doubt, if you had known St. John,

or St. Paul, when they were living, you might very well have asked them to pray for you. No doubt, there have been Christian men, very inferior to St. Paul or St. John, whom if you had known when living, you might very well have asked to pray for you. I should have esteemed it as a great privilege, to have had the prayers of good St. Bernard. I believe that the prayers of Thomas à Kempis or of Archbishop Leighton, would have done any of us good. I believe there is many a Christian man and woman in this congregation and parish, whose fervent prayers for any of us would make us do our duty better, and better bear our cross. But it is a different thing altogether to ask such Christians after they are dead, to pray for us. They are not here for us to ask them. It is exalting them into gods, to suppose that after death they can hear requests made to them for their prayers, by hundreds of people at once, perhaps in hundreds of places. And we may be well assured that if such extraordinary power were given by God to any mortal, and if we were intended to avail ourselves of it, it would have been plainly and unmistakably revealed in Holy Scripture. Now you know there is not a word in the Bible that teaches us anything like that. And if no rational man would pretend to go and ask the advice of a dead friend, no more should we ask his prayers.

There are those, indeed, who pray for us above. We have a great High Priest, who is passed into the heav-

ens, and who intercedes for us there. And there is, likewise, a kind sympathizing Spirit, Who is God; Who makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. And with these intercessors, we need no more. We do not need to ask the Virgin Mother of our Lord; we do not need to ask St. Paul or St. John; we never dream, when gathered within these walls, of asking good St. Bernard, to take the prayers we offer, and present them acceptable unto God. No: we ask the Blessed Spirit to prompt us within; and the Blessed Saviour to pray with and for us: and so we are content. There are kindness and sympathy in *their* hearts, millions of degrees beyond those of the best man or the kindest woman on earth or in heaven. We say, Blessed Jesus, pray for us; Blessed Spirit, pray in us: and no more!

And so, the reason why we may ask the living to pray for us, but not the dead, is just that we can go and ask the living to pray for us; but we cannot ask the dead. *They* are meanwhile beyond all communication. It is possible enough they may be near us sometimes: there are things in Holy Scripture which may be taken to imply as much. But then we do not know it: we cannot tell *when* they are within hearing of our voice, if they are ever so at all. We may believe, indeed, that in the glory above, those who loved us and left us *do* pray for us. The mother, that left her little child on earth, will be the mother wherever she goes: and will love and care

for her little one as much as ever. From her distant shore she may be watching her child, through all the years in which the rosy little face of infancy is changing into the lined features of age. But not a word can pass between them. And the child, walking this earth, need not ask his departed parent's prayers. Let us bless God, that he does not need them. One, more than father or mother, *does* pray for all His people. There is no fancy, no sentimentalism, about that comfortable truth!

But you may pray for your living friends; and you may ask them to pray for you. There is no saying what good you may get, by the prayer of Christian friends. And you, my brethren, though the humblest and poorest, there is no saying the good you may do,—do to your children, do to your friends, do to those who preach the Gospel to you, do to the whole Church of God, by your earnest and persevering prayers!

Now, do we feel this? Do we habitually pray for those we love; and do we pray for them with the earnestness of people who believe our prayers to be a real thing? I am afraid we are, every one of us, often very far from feeling all this as we ought to feel it. You who are parents, and who work so hard for your children, and who care for *their* well-being a hundred times more than you do for your own, wishing that *they* may be far better and happier people than you have been;—do you pray for them as earnestly as you work; and as feeling

that your prayers may do them as much good as your best pains? And do we really and heartily pray for those of our fellow-Christians, whose good estate greatly concerns our own? Such are the ministers of the cross, who amid much care, and weakness, and unworthiness, tell us of the unsearchable riches of Christ. It concerns every Christian in a land like this very deeply, what kind of person his minister is; and whether he do his duty cheerfully and hopefully, or sadly and despondingly. The services of each Sunday ought to be a help and comfort to all: Now we know that in our dear Church, the comfort and profit of the public worship of God depend only too much upon the minister: the congregation are only too dependent upon his clearness of head and devotion of heart: and who can tell how he may be strengthened and inspirited by the prayers of the flock? Then, do we pray for those who have used us ill, as we think; though very likely they think differently? Do we pray for them, not spitefully but heartily? Not in the spirit of the Pharisee, thanking God that we are not as this Publican; but as those who remember that they are frail and erring; and that all the blame in any quarrel is seldom upon one side? And do we do all this as believing that our prayer, heartily offered through our Saviour, has an actual prevalence? No doubt, whether we pray or work for others' salvation, we cannot do so with quite the same confidence as

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for our own: for some consent and co-working on their part is needful. But we are to intercede for those we care for, as feeling that when we bow before God all alone in our closet, and tell Him what we wish for them, we are putting a true power in operation: though in the case of it, as in the case of every other power we can ever put in operation, we must leave the result with God.

Not much need be said as to the way in which we ought to pray for those we love. We pray for them as we pray for ourselves. We ask God to give them the same things we ask for ourselves. We ask for guidance through this present life, and for glory afterward, through the precious sacrifice of Christ, and the precious influences of the Holy Spirit: and we ask, as the occasion arises, for all the multitude of separate blessings which are included under these. And as the occasion arises, too, we should do all we can to bring about the things for which we pray. All temporal, and all spiritual blessings, as God shall see them meet, are the things which we may humbly ask for ourselves, and for those who are dear to us. And we ask these good things for them, just as we ask them for ourselves; remembering that we know so imperfectly what things are truly good for us, that we may oftentimes be asking the wrong things: and so desiring that our Heavenly Father's wise and kind will may be done in us; and

that He would “bless us indeed”;—sending us what He knows to be blessing, though *we* should not take it to be blessing; and denying us that which He knows is not blessing, though we might think it so.

But a word may fitly be spoken as to the way in which we ought to pray for a different order of human beings: for those we think have used us ill;—for those we think in error;—for those we think in sin.

I take for granted that we are all agreed that we ought to pray for such. No one can forget our Saviour’s words: “Love your enemies: bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

Now, my friends, in praying for such, let us not do as some good people do: take for granted (that is) that you are infallibly right; and that whoever differs from you in opinion, or acts in a way you do not like, is certainly wrong and bad. It does not at all follow because a man thinks differently from you, that he is wrong and you are right. And still less does it follow, because a man thinks differently from you, even upon very important matters, that he is certainly a bad man. It is not quite sure, that in some difference with your neighbor, in which you think you have been entirely blameless, and that he has treated you very badly,—it is not quite sure that you have not been somewhat to blame too.

And so, brethren, in praying for such as may be called your enemies, — and I believe that truly good and wise and kind people, even in this fallen world, will have very few, — and that when we have enemies it is generally in a great measure our own fault, — let *this* be our rule and way. While you seek heartily to forgive such at God's footstool; and while you ask Him to forgive them and to change their hearts; pray too that He may forgive you your share, if any, in the strife; and ask God that whoever is in the wrong, may be made to see it, and may be brought to a better mind. Let it be suggested, too, as an excellent rule, that prayers for such as you think are bad, and have used you badly, be offered privately; when you have entered into your closet, and shut the door, and are making your requests known to your Father which is in secret. If that rule were always adhered to, it would remove the temptation to *that* which is evil and unchristian about certain intercessory prayers. There would be no temptation to pray *at* the bystanders, rather than *to* the Almighty: there would be no risk of making prayer a declaration of your doctrinal belief; no risk of making prayer a creed, and little risk of making it a sermon. There would be no risk of making prayer what it has been made, — a means of expressing your unfavorable opinion of a fellow-sinner's character, or doings, or views: no risk of making it something like an imprecation of

Divine wrath, hypocritically veiled under the form of prayer. Whenever the great thing which you honestly feel you ought to ask for any human being, is, that he may be turned from the error of his ways, and converted to a better mind, — ask *that* of God when you are alone with God. It is the safer, better, more kindly, and more humble way. To publicly express a very unfavorable opinion of a fellow-creature, — even though that opinion be couched in the form of a prayer for him, — is not, generally, a friendly thing. And it may be doubted whether it is ever a purely Christian thing.

There is just one other suggestion which I wish to make, as to Intercessory Prayer. It is, that when we pray for others, we ought to do the same thing which we ought to do when we pray for ourselves: and *that* is, to accompany and follow up our prayers with our best endeavors to bring about the things for which we pray. You know the great familiar rule for every Christian's work and prayer: it is, to pray as earnestly as if we could do nothing by ourselves; and at the same time to work as hard as if we could do everything by ourselves. And if this, when named, looks like an inconsistency, it is just one of the many things about our holy religion which grow plain in practice: the difficulty is solved by going and trying. And we shall never believe that any one is thoroughly sincere in praying for a

thing, unless at the same time he is doing his very best to accomplish that thing. Commend us to the practical side of Christianity for sound common sense: you will nowhere find it set forth more plainly than in the New Testament, that Heaven helps those who help themselves: and it is one of the very earliest lessons to be got by heart by every believer, that our work and God's work weave beautifully into each other: "Work out your own salvation: *for* it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do." And it is just those Christians who feel most deeply the reality and prevalence of prayer, who will most diligently seek to show that they are in earnest in offering it, by using every means which God puts within their reach to accomplish the temporal and spiritual welfare of those for whom they pray. It has been well said, that if you want God to hear your prayers for others, you must hear them yourself. It is as mere a mockery to pray that those you love may be brought to Christ, and at last to heaven, while yet you never move a finger to bring them, as it would be for a man to sit down idly amid his heaps of quarried stones and pray that his house may be built, while yet he never moves a hand to build it. And yet, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it": they are but the two aspects of one great truth. And indeed, it is only in regard to spiritual things, that you will find people so forgetful, that pains

must go with prayers. You do not pray that your little boy may be a good Greek scholar, and yet never teach him Greek. You do not pray that your friend may not fall into a pit hard by his way on a dark night, and yet never warn him that the pit is there. Now, just act on these plain rules of sound sense, as regards the most important things of all. You may indeed pray for those for whom you can do nothing else : but there are those for whom you ought to pray, for whom you may do much more. Pray for your children ; and try to train them in the right way. Pray for your friends : and never miss the chance of doing them a good turn, for this life or the next. Pray for the Heathen : and help the agencies for their conversion. Pray for the sorrowful ; and never lose the opportunity of comforting a sad heart : and a kind word may go far here ; or even the hearty sympathy, felt though unexpressed. O brethren, if any human being, even the humblest, were to determine that he would go through this world — steadfastly using every occasion that offers, for saying a kind word or doing a kind deed : if every morning he resolved that *that* day he would by God's blessing sought in prayer, lighten some grief, soothe some care, do some good to some one ; then God only knows how much that human being might do ! And if it be more blessed to give than to receive : if you never made another happy, but a still greater happiness rose unsought within your own

bosom : if the gush of thankful joy in the heart relieved, had its warmer and purer counterpart in the heart whence came the kind deed that relieved it ; O brethren, what a pure joy and peace has God put within our reach, even in this world of care.

But it is time that we should cease : our little space of weekly meditation has passed away. And let me say, in coming to an end, that the great impression which I wish we might all carry away from this church this afternoon, — and from this half-hour spent in thought on Prayer for others, — is, What a great means of good and usefulness God has put within our reach, in allowing us to do what the text enjoins, — to “pray one for another.” And the true, great difficulty as to Intercessory Prayer, is not to be got over by any sermon, or by any argument or illustration, — but only by the clear bright irresistible teaching of the Holy Spirit of God. All these things which have been said you all knew to be true whenever you heard them : I have little faith in any religious teaching, for witness to whose truth you cannot appeal to the heart and conscience of those who hear. But the true difficulty as to Intercessory Prayer, is, to feel its reality : to get into the way of using it, habitually, as a most effectual and powerful means. Let not the promise to pray for another, be with us the cheap gift which is valued by

neither giver nor receiver: let it be a living thing, which by God's blessing may do good to both. And praying one for another, as people of the same Christian congregation, — as members of the great family in heaven and earth, — O let us feel more drawn together in true unity than ever, — as we gather, like little children, at the same great Father's knee!





XI.

CHRISTIAN CONSOLATION UNDER BE- REAVEMENT BY DEATH.

“ Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him.” — JEREM. xxii.
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“ But He said, Weep not: she is not dead, but sleepeth. — ST.
LUKE viii. 52.

THESE two texts come from very different quar-
ters; and, though the words are very like, their
spirit is quite different; and the counsel con-
tained in the second goes upon a reason a thousand miles
away from that contained in the first.

In the first text we have the words of Jeremiah. He was an inspired Prophet, but one in whom a special amount of human passion and impatience lingered: and we seem to trace something of his peculiar nature in the way in which he has expressed himself here. Then it was not to the end of suggesting comfort to the people of Judah, that Jeremiah bade them cease to weep for the dead: all he tells them is, that sad as the lot of the dead may be, there is something worse; and they should keep their tears for *that*. For king Shallum, son of Josiah, king of Judah, was deposed by the Egyptian king, and

carried off to Egypt to hopeless exile; and all that the prophet has to say to the men of Judah, is, that though but three months had passed since good king Josiah died, they had best cease to weep for *him*: and they might weep sorely for the poor exiled Shallum, the wicked and deposed monarch, who was carried captive into a distant country, and who would see the land which he had ruled, briefly and unworthily, never more. In short, all the prophet has to suggest comes to *this*: that though there may be reason to mourn for the righteous dead, there is far weightier reason to mourn for the hopeless exile, degraded, and broken-hearted. So I think, brethren, that in our dark days of bereavement, it is not to Jeremiah that we shall go for consolation. *He* has little to give!

Nay; we shall go somewhere else: and what Christian needs to be told to Whom we should go for everything that is good, and comforting, and cheering! Not to the impatient Jeremiah, but to our own blessed and beloved Redeemer: not to Jeremiah telling that there is something sadder than death; but to our Saviour telling that if we could see it right, death is not sad at all: not to Jeremiah telling that Josiah, dead in his grave, was less to be wept for than Shallum captive and exiled; but to our blessed Lord, the Resurrection and the Life, telling that to the believer there is no true death at all; hushing the mourners round that little

bed; — looking on the pale face of the little girl lying there, and saying, “She is not dead, but sleepeth!”

You know, of course, — for every Christian knows, — that in the little child of whom our Redeemer was speaking life had but lately gone. And you know, too, that it was very soon to be called back: that those parents were to be comforted as no parents among us will ever be: that the Great Awakening for which all the Christian dead sleep, was to be anticipated in that young sleeper; and that with kindness and almighty power blended as they never were in another that ever trod this earth, the great Lord of life was to speak to her by the pet name she used to bear about the house, — was to say the inexpressibly sympathetic *Talitha Cumi*, which does not mean *Damsel, arise*, but *Rise, my little pet*, — and restore her to life again. But although there were special circumstances in *that* case, such as cannot be with you, my friends, in your bereavements, still we may most fitly regard these words of the text as spoken to all Christian mourners, as the sure and precious and abiding consolation of all the Church of Christ.

Let us think of them so. And may that kindest Friend, the blessed Spirit of all light as well as of all comfort, in this as in all things be our Guide!

You know, brethren, the confused and inconsistent

kind of feeling which mourners, in their first days of trial, know so well : how sometimes you feel as though you had resigned yourself to God's will ; and as though you had so realized the blessed hopes and consolation of the Gospel, that you could quite look beyond the mouldering grave, and the poor body sown in corruption, to the immortal rest, and holiness, and happiness, to which the soul of the believer has gone ; and how again the thought of your own loss, and of all the lowliness and unutterable sadness of the fact of death, so overwhelms you, that for the while you can but weep and endure. No doubt, there is something very true to human nature and human feeling in the blank, disappointed way in which Martha, the sister of Lazarus, received the Saviour's promise that her brother should rise again. "I know," she said, "that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." I know all that, it is as though she said : but *that* is not what I want : *that* is cold and far away. Ah brethren, the feeling has been common in all believing hearts ever since ! Not always can they fully take the Christian comfort given by Him Who "hath abolished death." They cannot but vaguely think, that though the dear ones they have lost are safe with Jesus, still it may be a very long, weary way, that must be trodden before they shall meet again : that our eyes must look on many things before they shall see again the face and the form that left us ; and that to have a

parent or a child in Heaven, is not like having them here by our side. O, what long years of weariness, care, temptation, before the little child you see going about dressed in black because its mother has been called from this world, will see a mother's face again!

Now, brethren, I will acknowledge, quite readily, that a heathen philosopher, just as well as a Christian minister, might write an eloquent sermon on a text that bids us cease to mourn for the dead. Indeed, various philosophers, casting our blessed Faith quite aside, have actually done something like that. The evil is, that though the philosophic and sentimental considerations which such men have suggested, may seem weighty and forcible in days when all goes well with us, no real mourner would care a straw for them; and least of all the philosopher himself, when great bereavement came his way. You will remember that beautiful letter which Cicero, the Roman statesman and orator, received from his friend Sulpicius, on his daughter's death: which sets out in language which few divines can command, every reason for being comforted except the right ones. Before Christianity taught the mourner of a blissful world beyond the grave, and of a happy meeting there, what could you have said to comfort the parent whose beloved child had died? Well, we know. For that letter of condolence shows us all that could be said, by kindness and ingenuity, without Christianity, to

comfort the heart-broken mourner : but O, how poor, how empty, what a mere mockery all that comfort is ! Why grieve, says the Roman friend to the great philosopher : surely after seeing your country enslaved, your heart should be indifferent to so small a matter as the loss of a poor weak, tender woman ! And then the friend adds, Do not forget that you are Cicero, the wise, the philosophical Cicero, who was wont to give advice to others. Remember those judicious counsels now, and let it not be said that fortitude is the single virtue to which my friend is a stranger. These are the kind of things which philosophy was able to suggest, as reasons why we should cease to weep for the dead. There was, indeed, another topic of consolation suggested by that good Roman friend, of which I purpose to say more before I conclude : but passing on for the present, let us think what is, in sober fact, the consolation which our blessed religion offers to such as mourn the loss of friends.

And let it be acknowledged, that strong consolation is needed here. It is here that the pressure is put upon our faith ; the strongest pressure it will have to bear till we come to die ourselves. The parting of friends is a very sad thing, even though both remain in this world : it is no light matter, as those who have felt it can tell, for a human being to go out from his father's house, and to turn his back on the scenes and the friends of child

hood, perhaps never to see them more. It is sad, when those who sat in infancy by the same fireside, and prayed at the same parent's knee, must fight the battle of life far apart, each bearing cares and knowing men that the other will never see nor know. And yet, though half the world be the space that parts them, and years have passed on since last they met, while they remain in this life the means of communication are not cut off: the letter comes, time by time, with good news from a far country; and it is at least possible that they may meet again. But the parting which death makes, is absolute and complete. No tidings come to us from the country beyond the grave. It is a silent country, an unseen country: we can hear and see and know literally nothing of our friends who have entered it. So far as sense can discern, it is as though they were not.

And let it be said honestly, that the loss is unspeakable. The bitterness of death is not entirely past. It comes, indeed, of our weak faith that it is so: but then to have a faith which is often weak and trembling is the condition of our being here. Our religion does not require us to repress entirely that great sorrow which He who made our hearts knows they have felt at such times, and must feel again. Our Blessed Redeemer Himself, with human frailty, wept beside a grave. It is in no unfeeling spirit of stoicism that He uttered such

words as those of the text: it is because He can show the mourner abundant reason why he should dry his tears.

Now the great grounds of Christian comfort, in times of bereavement, are two. One relates to those you have lost: the other relates to yourselves. The first is, that those who have died in Christ have made a blessed and happy change in leaving this world for that where they are now. And the second is, that if you and they be both united to Christ, you have the confident assurance that you shall meet again.

And, indeed, brethren, when we think of the first of these, we are constrained to feel and lament our want of faith. No truth can be plainer, than that Heaven is better than earth: a hundred things go to prove *that*: but it is only now and then that we are lifted up to a height of spiritual insight and fervor in which we truly feel that it is so. Strong convictions, large but vague, are often indicated by little things: just as floating straws show the direction of a great wind. And there is one little peculiarity in our common way of speaking, which shows our natural unbelief in the grand Christian doctrine, that to the believer "to die is gain." Speaking even of friends who, we most firmly believe, have fallen asleep in Jesus, you know we habitually speak of them as though they were objects of pity: we speak of our *poor* friend, our *poor* sister, our *poor* little

child, that died. This is, doubtless, a manifestation of that curious inconsistency with which, I have already said, we think of the departed. It comes, too, of our naturally thinking of them as we saw them last, in the pain of dying, or in the lowliness and helplessness of death; — thinking of these things, rather than of the unseen glory and rest to which they passed away. No doubt, the lowliness comes first; and that is the last thing *we* can see. Through a dark and gloomy portal, the Christian enters the land of light: it is “through the grave and gate of death,” that we pray we may “pass to our joyful resurrection!” Yet there is a pleasing touch of simple faith, in the fashion in which in another country they name the Christian dead. They don’t say “my *poor* friend” there, nor “my *poor* child”: no, they use the word which in their tongue means *blessed, happy*. And surely *that* is the worthier way in which to speak of such as have gone from this world of sin and sorrow, of corroding care and anxiety, and of no full satisfaction to the thirsting soul, into the land of holiness and happiness, of peace and rest.

And surely, Christian friends, you may well see reason to cease mourning for the Christian dead, when you think where they have gone: and how much better they are there than here. And though in the weakness of nature you may not be able to take this comfort at the first, yet you would not truly wish those dear ones back

again. However amiable, however good and happy they were here, they are inconceivably better there: and let us pray for God's grace to feel it! Parents, whose child God has taken, just think how gloriously that little thing is provided for! You would have been content to be parted from your little boy in this life, if that was needful for his comfort and advancement; you never expected that he would be with you all your days; but you knew that in a little he must go out, like a bird from the nest, to push his way through life alone. And it is better that the Saviour has taken him by the hand, and given him a place in His own happy presence. Your child went soon, perhaps: but you cannot tell if death would ever afterwards have found that little one so fit to die. It was an innocent thing when it went away from you: and there was no mark of sin on its fair face: but the seed of that evil thing was in its heart; and you cannot tell to what it might have grown. And let every one, who mourns a Christian friend departed, think how much evil that friend may have been taken away from. It may be, — you cannot tell, — that the dearest friend you have, though now to all seeming an earnest believer, may be taken by the Tempter's wiles, and fall short of heaven and happiness; but the dead one is safe! He is where no change can ever come, save that blessed change from good and pure, to purer and better. And when you think of all

your departed friend is, how holy, how happy, how safe and sure, — and then think of all the care, and pain, and sin, — and the risk of eternal ruin, — that hang over this present life, — tell me, Christian brethren, as you stand over the bed where he lies, even with the first sorrow in your heart, would you wish him to live again? If God were for once to give you the power to bid the soul come back, would you dare to speak the word that would do so?

But there is another reason why we should not mourn unduly for the dead who die in the Lord: one that touches us who remain more nearly. It is this: that we hope to meet them again; — we know that if our own death be that of the righteous, we shall certainly meet them again.

And perhaps, after all, this is the thought that will avail the most to dry the mourner's tears. It is indeed a comforting thing to think that those who have left us are holy and happy and are with Christ, however little we may know about details. But though we were assured of this, yet there would be something indescribably sad, in the thought that we should never see them more, and they had quite forgotten us. We are selfish creatures at the best: and it would be bitter to think that in the memory of the glorified dead we once knew so well, there survived no trace of our days together.

Some of you may know, that the class of Christian divines whose great end is to strip Christianity of all human interest, and to make it as cold and repulsive as themselves, — going, of course, upon the grand principle, that the more disagreeable a thing is, the likelier it is to be the right thing, — have maintained that in the better world there is no recognition, and no remembrance: and that those admitted to heaven may live through eternity in the society of its happy souls, and never know that the spirit next them was a sister, a child, a friend, on earth. I am not going to waste time in arguing against a notion so monstrous: enough to say that there is not the slightest warrant for it in God's word or in man's reason: and if you would be guided by me, my friends, whenever you find that chilling, disheartening, and revolting doctrine set out in any book, you would finally lay that book aside, as written by some one utterly unfit to be trusted with the instruction of his fellow-creatures, in matters so momentous.

And let me repeat, that the certain hope of meeting and recognizing our departed friends, is perhaps the most deeply felt reason why the Christian should not mourn for the dead. It must have been a fearful thing to hear a friend's last farewell, for such as cherished no expectation of ever seeing or conversing with him more. We hardly wonder at the overwhelming anguish which impelled to wild despair some of those who sorrowed

with no hope. To think, that time would go on and on, bringing its manifold changes: and yet that the touch of the vanished hand would never more be felt, nor the old familiar face be seen! But it is quite different now. We know the words well; homely and kindly words, and true:—

“ A few short years of evil past,
We reach that happy shore,
Where death-divided friends at last,
Shall meet to part no more! ”

And you are quite justified in believing, that in the better world, there are memories that are treasuring hours of converse with you; and hearts that are waiting, with certain and happy expectation, till you arrive there. They have left you in this world; and you will miss their kind advice, and their warm affection, and their earnest prayers; but death can neither drown remembrance nor quench love: and they are remembering you and waiting for you: and theirs will be the first voices to welcome you, entering the Golden City. And the meeting *there* will not be as men meet here, where a parting waits on every meeting; and where the joy of meeting is often damped by the sight of the sad change which has been wrought by the intervening time. No partings there! Many of you will think how the best of Christian poets, looking back as an old man upon the mother he lost when a little child of six years old, has

beautifully told us *that*. For fifty-two years the oversensitive man had come on his earthly pilgrimage, since the little boy of six last saw his mother's face. You remember the famous words:—

“I heard the bell tolled on thy burial day:
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away:
And turning from my nursery-window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu!
But was it such? It was. Where thou art gone
Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown.
May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore,
The parting word shall pass my lips no more!”

We can reach no higher than that, in the way of comfort for the Christian mourner. Yet, turning from this warm reality, let me, to make you feel how unspeakable are our Christian privileges, turn back for a minute to that letter of philosophic consolation I have already named: and show you what a good and virtuous man, not knowing of Christ, could say by way of support to a father who had lost a beloved child. He wrote thus:—

“I lately fell into a reflection which, as it afforded great relief to the disquietude of my own heart, may possibly contribute, likewise, to assuage the anguish of yours. In my return out of Asia, as I was sailing from Ægina towards Megara, I amused myself with contemplating the circumjacent countries. Behind me lay Ægina, before me Megara; on my right I saw Piræus, and on my left Corinth. These cities, once so flourishing

and magnificent, now presented nothing to my view but a sad spectacle of desolation. Alas, I said to myself, shall such a short-lived creature as man complain, when one of his race falls either by the hand of violence, or by the common course of nature: while in this narrow compass so many great and glorious cities, formed for a much longer duration, thus lie extended in ruins? Remember then, O my heart, the general lot to which man is born, and let that thought suppress thy unreasonable murmurs. Believe me, I found my mind greatly refreshed and comforted by these reflections."

There, my friends, was the sort of consolation in bereavement which the greatest ingenuity and affection could suggest, apart from religion. And what do you think of it? What do you think it is worth? Would *that* kind of thing comfort your heart, as you laid a beloved child in the grave? Would you not feel it a hollow mockery of your anguish? In those letters it is taken for granted on both sides that Cicero had parted with his child forever, — that she was gone out like the flame of an extinguished taper, — gone! But O, when the Sun of Righteousness rose, how the darkness of bereavement was scattered! You don't go to a mourner now, and say, Remember that St. Andrews Cathedral is in ruins; so is Linlithgow Palace; so is Holyrood Chapel. When grand things like these go, why mourn for your little loss? Nay verily: you speak of the Blessed Spirit of

all comfort, and of life and immortality brought to light by Jesus Christ our great Redeemer! . And the parent may remember yet, with many tears, the darkness of that season when a little child died: may remember yet how her heart was almost broken as she looked on the white little face, and the cold lips laboring with the rapid breath, and then the little silky head laid in its coffin: but even amid her grief the mother knows that her child has gone to a far kinder parent than herself, and to a Home so happy and so safe that not even she could wish it back again: and as for herself, she knows too, that if her faith is rested on her Redeemer, when a few short years are gone, and she too has passed through the river of death, a white little spirit will await her on the farther side with the joyfullest welcome; and the mother will enter the gate of Paradise, not like a stranger to the place, but hand in hand with her child!

And it is with glorious realities like these, and not with sentimentalism about ruined cities, that Jesus lightens the darkness of bereaved hearts and homes. *He* does not say, "Weep not, for it is no great matter after all": but "Weep not: they are not dead, but sleeping!"

Now I should be uncandidly shrinking from declaring the truth, if I failed to remind you, in concluding, that all this strong consolation belongs only to such as

have believed in Christ, and as mourn the loss of Christian friends. And the two practical lessons from this thought are, that if we would not have death part us eternally from those dear to us, we ought first, to make our own calling sure by God's grace, that we may not on the Judgment Day see them on the right hand of the throne, and ourselves cast out to perdition: and next, that we should care for the souls of those dear to us as well as for our own, lest upon that great day any such should accuse us of that neglect which ended in everlasting separation: saying that if we had warned them as we ought, they had not come to this end of woe! God forbid that any here should ever have to think, that there were turning-points, moments of decision, in which our counsel and entreaty might have saved a soul from death; yet through our remissness, did not!

Do you sometimes think, as you sit by the warm winter-evening fireside, and hear the keen blast shake the windows, and howl mournfully through the leafless boughs, — and as you look round on the cheerful scene within, with its warm light and its blazing fire, — do you sometimes think *then* how out in the dark of the winter night, the snow lies white or the rain plashes heavy above some dear one's grave: how the sharp blast roars round the head-stone that marks where

such a one sleeps,—sleeps cold, and motionless, and alone: and does it seem to you a hard thing and a sad thing, that in that dreary melancholy of the grave the departed one of the family must lie and slumber, while the fire is blazing bright on the hearth of the old home; till it seems to you a natural thing to weep for the dead, condemned to that cold negation of all that is bright and cheering? And do you sometimes think, in the long beautiful twilights of summer, summer with its green grass and its bright flowers,—that surely it is a loss to those that are gone, that *they* cannot see the softened evening light, nor breathe the gentle air? but that in their cold and narrow bed they still must rest and moulder; knowing nothing of the sweet scenes that surround them: not seeing the daisies in the sunshine over them, not feeling the soft breeze sighing through the grass that lies upon their breast? If you do these things, then remember, that it is not the dead you loved that moulder in that grave: it is but the cast-off robe, the shattered cottage of clay, that is turning there to the dust: it is the weak fancy of erring humanity, to dream that what in our friends we loved, has part or portion there. Remember, that dwelling above, in light and glory, *they* never miss the warmth of the winter evening fireside, or the calm of the evening in June. And taught, God helping you, by His own illuminating Spirit, you may discern a vision of a glorious land,—

that self-same "country" which the "strangers and pilgrims on earth" have sought for these six thousand years: a country where the "tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them: and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." Where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away!" And taught by our kindest Guide, the Blessed and Holy Spirit, to see that Happiest and Holiest Land: thinking of the glory of its inhabitants, their peace and rest: and thinking of the "abundant entrance" which our gracious Saviour offers into it to all who will but come to Him: we shall humbly ask Him to lead us thither; and we shall "weep for the dead" that "sleep in Jesus," no more!





XII.

THE FIRST PRAYER IN SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

“And hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place ; and when Thou hearest, forgive.” — 1 KINGS viii. 30.

THE Temple is finished at last ; that holy and beautiful house which David had it in his heart to build, but the completion of which was reserved for Solomon his son, in his days of wisdom and magnificence. The wealth and the art of that age have done their utmost, to make a fitting house for God ; for in that age men were wont to render to the Almighty of their best ; and though their very best was poor to make a dwelling for Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, still they felt that *that* was only the stronger reason why it should be freely and heartily rendered. Stone and cedar-wood, gold, silver, and brass, all have been gathered and fashioned ; and silently like the palm-tree growing, that mystic fabric rose in glory. The cedar has been carved, the costly stones have been laid, the chapters have been moulded, the curtains have been spread, the two thousand measures

of water have been poured into the molten sea. The workmen have stayed their hands at last: and to the Feast of the Temple's Dedication, that Feast whose stir and bustle are so long since past, Solomon has assembled "the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, and the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel." They bring in the Ark, and lay it down within the holy place; and the glory of the Lord fills the house of the Lord. And the king, standing before God, the spokesman of a great multitude gathered in solemn silence, recounts how his father had desired to build that house, but had not been permitted;—how at length the house had been built, and was here presented, a humble but hearty offering to the Almighty. It is as if Solomon said, Look on this house, it is our very best, it is all we can do, though a poor place for the house of God. "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded! Yet have Thou respect unto the prayer of Thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which Thy servant prayeth before Thee to-day: That Thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which Thou hast said, My name shall be there: that Thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which Thy servant shall make toward this

place. And hearken to the supplication of Thy servant, and of Thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive!"

Such, and so simple, touching, and beautiful, were the words of the first prayer offered under the roof of Solomon's Temple; and it appears to me that there is something very striking and suggestive in these words. "Hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive." Forgiveness is the first thing asked for. Solomon takes it for granted that forgiveness will be the great thing needed by those who in after days would pray in that house. He does not tell us what shall be the prayer, further than as the nature of the prayer is implied in the nature of the answer he bespeaks for it. It is as if he said, When Thou hearest the prayer offered here, listen to it in Thy dwelling-place, and answer it fully and completely,—and *that* will be done by granting forgiveness to those who in this place shall at any time offer prayer. "When Thou hearest, forgive." In that single request, in that one word, Solomon gathers up the essence, as it were, of all the prayers that ever should be offered beneath that Temple's roof. Ah, how well the wise king understood human nature! Do not fancy that it was because of what he knew of the especial nature of the Jewish people, ever a race prone to go astray, and thus likely

when they came up to the Temple, to have need to ask for pardon, that Solomon preferred the petition he did then. Nay : it was because Solomon knew well, that pardon will always be sinful man's great want, and that pardon ought to be the burden of sinful man's constant prayer. He knew that out of all the things which we can ask from God, there are many which we may need at some times and not at others, or which some men may need and others may not need ; and so which may sometimes be prayed for, and at other times not mentioned in our prayers. But there was one thing, he knew well, which was needed by every man, at every hour, and in every place ; and so which should be especially asked for in every prayer. The human race, amid all its accidental differences, of color, and clime, and language, is in its essence everywhere the same : the self-same thing now, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as when amid a multitude of men, all dead, all buried, all forgotten, Solomon stood before God at his Temple's Dedication : if David prayed, " Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great " ; the Saviour when *He* dictated a prayer for Christian use to the end of time, taught us to say " Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors " : and never more fittingly can we even yet bespeak God's kindly attention to the prayer of any mortal anywhere, than in that petition which dates from nearly three thousand years back, and which

says, "Hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive!"

So familiar have these words become to our ears, that I doubt not many of us are accustomed both to hear and to utter them with very little thought of all they mean. And I have thought that it might be a very fit thing, and profitable for us all, to fix our attention for a while to-day upon them, and to consider how many things are implied and suggested by them. May God's Spirit so direct us, that we may draw from them the spirit and essence of the truth they teach; and nothing less nor more.

The first thing which I shall mention as taught us by this text, is, that all men are sure to need forgiveness: that whatever differences there may be among them in other respects, they all agree in this, that they are sure to need forgiveness. You observe, Solomon had no particular individuals in his eye, when he uttered these words of our text. He did not know who they might be that might "pray toward that place": he says "Hearken Thou to the supplication of Thy servant, and of *Thy people Israel*, when they shall pray toward this place; and hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive." But Solomon felt that he could not go wrong in entreating that besides and beyond the other blessings, whatever they

might be, that God might grant in answer to prayer to the people who should ever pray in that Temple, the Almighty might grant forgiveness to all, without any exception. That was as much as to say that whether future suppliants did at the time when they might present their supplications, need or not need strength for duty, counsel in perplexity, comfort in sorrow, sober-mindedness in success, or resignation in disappointment, they were quite sure all to need forgiveness. Any other thing they might need or not: *this*, from the very make of their being, they *must* need. Now, what is forgiveness? Forgiveness implies that a man has done something that is wrong;—some wrong that is especially directed against some other being;—and so which might justly excite the being wronged to regard the wrong-doer with an unfriendly and angry feeling, and seek to inflict punishment upon him: but that the being wronged resolves to pass by the offence done him,—to blot it out from recollection, so far as may be,—to cherish no angry spirit towards the offender, and to take no vengeance upon him for that which he has done. I have endeavored to set out what is meant without using at all the word which we are accustomed to employ to signify all this; but I am sure it will at once arise in the mind of all of you: all this is just saying in other terms that every man is a sinner, and needs the pardon of his sins. I need not speak of

God's word as telling us this: universal experience says the same thing. Although you know nothing more of any person than simply that he is a human being, you are quite sure that times without number he has done wrong, or neglected to do right. If you were to go into a church that was newly built, and had never yet been used for public worship, you would feel quite certain that every person who ever would worship there, though the church should stand till the end of the world, would be a sinful person, needing, as the very first and greatest thing he needed, that the Almighty God, whose favor is life, whose anger is death, should pardon his sins: and as you thought of future congregations that in days to come should pray beneath that roof, old and young, sorrowful and joyful, prosperous or disappointed, how fittingly you might breathe the petition which Solomon offered when his beautiful Temple was dedicated to God; and say, "And hearken Thou to the supplication of Thy people, when they shall pray in this place: and hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place; And when Thou hearest, forgive!"

A second thing which I think we may learn from our text is, that the chief thing which beings like us ought to ask for in our prayers, is the pardon of our sins. Solomon seems to have thought that there was nothing which men needed so much; nothing which it was

so important that they should get; nothing which included and meant so much. He seems to have thought,—for he asks for nothing more,—that if a man received this blessing, if a man was completely forgiven,—he was safe, he had got everything, he needed no more. Prayer, you know, is asking *what we need* in Christ's name: and of course, the thing mainly to be prayed for is the thing we *most need*. And it does not cost much thought to enable us to see and feel, that this thing is pardon and forgiveness of sin. It was of this, no doubt, that our Blessed Lord was thinking, when, alluding to something which he did not name, but which all would understand, he said "One thing is needful." For see what is meant by being an unforgiven sinner. It means that a man has the anger of the Almighty God resting upon him. It means that the creature, weak, helpless, dependent, is at enmity with the Creator, without whose aid he cannot draw a breath, move a limb, live a moment. It means that the word of the True is solemnly plighted to destroy him: that the power of the Almighty is solemnly engaged to destroy him. It means that he is one of those, concerning whom God has declared that when they leave this world, they must enter into a place of infinite and never-ending woe and wretchedness; and there dwell through eternity still under the burden of His wrath. *That* is what is meant by be-

ing a sinner, not forgiven: it means that *everything* is wrong! It means that everything that is bad is doomed to come down on the wretched soul: it implies that nothing that is good can ever be enjoyed by it, so long as it remains as it is. Is it not plain, then, that the first and greatest need of every man, is that he should be forgiven? And what is meant by being forgiven? It means that everything that was wrong before, is now set right. It means that everything that was bad before, is now made good. It means that God, before an enemy, is now a friend. It means that God, formerly the angry Judge, is now the reconciled and gracious Father. It means that God's true word, formerly plighted to destroy us, and God's Almighty power, formerly engaged to destroy us, are now plighted and engaged to preserve and bless us. It implies that through all our earthly duties, God's kind hand will lead us: that in all our earthly trials, God's kind hand will support us: that when we leave this world, heaven shall be our home, and Jesus our brother, and endless eternity our pure and happy life. All *that* is meant when we speak of being forgiven. There is not a blessing, great or small, that we can ever need, that is not included within the compass of that word. Was it any wonder, then, that the wisest man should make *that* the burden of the first prayer he offered beneath the roof of the Temple he had built to God!

Or did it not rather show how wise he was, when addressing One from Whom we have so very much to ask, yet before Whom our words should be few and well-ordered, he expressed his general request that his people might receive from God everything that was good for them; as he said, "Hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive!"

A third thing which I think we are taught by the text is, that God is the only Being who can *forgive*, in the large and full sense of that word. You will remember, when I say this, the remark of the Scribes and Pharisees when our Saviour told a certain man that his sins were forgiven; they said, "This man blasphemeth: who can forgive sins but God only?" And they said what was true, if Christ had been a mere man. No one but God can forgive sin. And it is quite easy to show you how and why it is so. For, you know quite well, an offence can be forgiven only by the person against whom it was committed. Nothing can be plainer than this: that if you had done some wrong to one neighbor or friend, it would be of no use to go and try to make amends for that wrong to somebody else. And if you felt in your own heart that you had done wrong to any man, you would not feel easy in your mind till you had confessed your error and obtained forgiveness from the very man to whom you had given cause of offence. Now all sin

is in its essential nature, something committed against God; and, therefore, it can only be forgiven by God. I know quite well that very many sins are committed against man as well as against God: and when that is so, the offender will not find peace until he has acknowledged his offence and obtained forgiveness from the human being he has offended, as well as from the Almighty. But *every* sin is committed against God: some against man too, but all against God. Whenever any wrong is done, God is wronged by it, whether man is or is not. And although it may make a deed more mischievous, when it does harm to many human beings,—when it wrongs man as well as God,—still it adds little or nothing to its guilt: for the essence of its evil is derived from its being sin against God: *that* one fact makes it just as bad as bad can be. There is a striking illustration in Scripture of this great truth, that sin especially consists in wrong done to God,—that its great aggravation consists in this,—and that when the conscience is awakened, the thing that weighs most heavy on a man's heart is, that he has sinned against God. You will all remember on what occasion it was that David uttered the penitent words, “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.” Words strangely out of place, we should be ready at first to say. Why, if ever there were sin against man,—against the individual man, and against the very framework and foundations of hu-

man society, it was David's foul, base, execrable, forgiven but never forgotten sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. Had he not sinned against that faithful servant, — sinned against every honest man and virtuous woman in his dominions, — sinned against the throne he had disgraced, — sinned against that trust, and faith, and honor between man and man, that is the thing that holds society together, and that keeps men from flying off from one another, a wretched, suspicious, hating and hateful race of solitaries, each with the hand against all comers? And does the murderer, the adulterer, the liar, the betrayer, the mean wretched trickster (for had he not been an inspired king, every man would have called him all that, and that he *was* an inspired king makes him worse, not better), does *he* think to extenuate his guilt, by forgetting all the beings and the interests he had wronged so foully, and turning to God with his transparent pretext, "Against *Thee, Thee only*, have I sinned"? Nay, not so. David did not mean to extenuate or cloak his guilt: his eyes had been opened, too late for his fame though not too late for forgiveness, to the unexampled wickedness of his conduct: we cannot doubt that he felt all these circumstances of aggravation deeply and keenly: but still he felt that the great, central, blackening and overmastering virus of his sin was, that it was sin against God: he felt that in the presence of that awful recollection all lesser things about his con-

duct grew scarce discernible,— as a little taper that is plainly seen in darkness is hardly beheld at all in the sun's brightest beams: and depend upon it, he did not mean to excuse his sin, but to say the very worst of it, when he said, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." And if it be, that even the sin that is most against man is more against God, you will see why it is that it is to God man must go in the last and great resort, to get the forgiveness of his sins. They are specially done against God, and who but the God they have wronged and dishonored can forgive them? They have blighted God's fair universe: they have damaged God's creatures: they have broken God's law: they have cast doubt on God's sure word: they have dared God's mighty power! Who, then, can forgive them but God alone! Yes, you who have wronged a friend or brother, — you who have lied against his fair fame, — you who have cheated him out of his hard-earned means, — you who have lifted the hand against his limb or life, — you who have made his life dark and his home desolate, — go, indeed, when you have been made to feel your guilt, go and confess your fault to him, go and ask his forgiveness: bend your proud neck, come down from your haughty spirit, — if the cup of humiliation be a bitter one to drink, remember that you mixed it for yourself, and be thankful that there is any way, however lowly, though it makes flesh and heart to stoop, that can lead

away from the endless doom you merit : but never think that when you have got your fellow-creature's forgiveness, that *that* will do. No; remember that there is One whom it is a more serious thing to offend, against whom you have offended as well: remember that the wrong is done to God, which you thought of as done only to your fellow-man: go to *Him*, and seek to make peace *there*: though the bitterest hater of sin, He is the readiest to welcome back the truly repentant sinner: Tell Him all about your transgression, — you cannot conceal it, if you would, from the Searcher of hearts; and if words fail you in the deep sense of your guilt, then take those which Solomon said for himself, but which will suit you well, and such as you; and say “Hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive!”

I have time only to mention, as another thing which is taught us by our text, that prayer is the way to obtain the forgiveness of sins. You see Solomon looked forward to days when sinful beings should, under the consciousness of guilt, employ the natural and recognized means for getting that guilt forgiven. He took it for granted, that when men felt they needed forgiveness, they would pray to God to forgive them: and so he himself, in anticipation of very many prayers which would be offered for pardon, says, “Hear Thou in

heaven Thy dwelling-place ; and when Thou hearest, forgive." But indeed it is so plain that when you want anything from God, the right way to get it is to ask for it : this is so completely the dictate of common sense, that the matter needs no enforcement or illustration. I may only remind you, as an encouragement to pray for forgiveness, of that gracious promise, "If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it." The only restriction to the large-hearted assurance is, that what is asked should be really good for us : and as there can be no question that forgiveness, implying all that we have seen it does imply, is truly good for us, we may regard the promise as absolute in this case ; and believe that if we heartily ask forgiveness in Christ's name, we are perfectly sure of obtaining it. And now, having, as I think, shown you the main truths which the text teaches us, let me in conclusion remind you, that we are living under a better dispensation than that under which the prayer in my text was first uttered : and let me ask you to attend to two Christian additions to the text. Forgiveness is the great thing we have to ask for ourselves from God, now in the Christian day ; just as it was in the Jewish dawn : but there are two things which I ought to remind you of, as matters of especially Christian origin, bearing upon this text, and upon the general prayer for forgiveness.

One of these is, the new form which the prayer for

forgiveness has assumed under the Christian dispensation. Solomon's prayer was, "When Thou hearest, forgive." Christ's prayer is, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Solomon's prayer is for pardon generally : pardon unlimited : simple forgiveness. Christ's prayer is for forgiveness up to a certain standard, and no higher : forgiveness defined and limited : in Christ's prayer we ask for such forgiveness as we are ready to grant, and no more. Any man might offer Solomon's prayer : not every man durst offer Christ's, if he weighed its meaning. And all this is very characteristic of Christianity, which is pre-eminently the religion of the heart. If the heart be not right, Christ's prayer is not a prayer for forgiveness ; it is an imprecation of wrath and woe. Think of the revengeful man, — the unforgiving man, — bending before God ; and praying Forgive me my trespasses, just as much as I forgive them that trespass against me ! What an awful prayer ! How true, that the very prayers of the ungodly are sin ! Think of a man feeling in his heart, "I don't forgive and I will not forgive such a one who has offended me" : then looking up to God and saying, "Forgive me my trespasses, as I forgive his" : — that is, not at all ! Every time the unforgiving man utters the Lord's prayer, he prays that he may *not* be forgiven : he prays for his own eternal damnation ! And not only that : his prayer is an insult to the heart-

searching God: he is making Christ's prayer bear the very opposite meaning from that which Christ intended that it should bear; for surely that beautiful petition was meant to whisper to us, that before we venture to repeat it, our hearts should be purged of all enmity against any living mortal. Think of this, all of you, when you pray for forgiveness now. Remember that this is the only Christian form of the prayer for forgiveness. No Christian *can* pray for forgiveness absolutely, as Solomon did: Christ's condition is always understood. Whether we bear it in mind or not, we shall get no more forgiveness than we are ready to give. And to prevent any mistake on this point, think of the first words Christ uttered after teaching his disciples his own prayer: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Nothing can be plainer than *that*. And *that* is the Christian condition on which alone forgiveness can be found, or forgiveness need be sought.

And our other remark upon the prayers for forgiveness which *we* ought to offer, is one which is suggested by the very definition of Christian prayer. It is only that our prayers for forgiveness, as for every other blessing, should be Christian prayers; that is, prayers

offered in the name and in trust of the merits of Christ. It is not prayer now, just to ask God for what we want. In Solomon's days, *that* might have been prayer. But you have all been taught from childhood what prayer is now. It is "an offering up of our desires to God *in the name of Christ*." Not that the Saviour's name need always be formally mentioned, though it is well that even *that* should never be neglected: but that the prayer should be offered in simple dependence on His merits; in simple hope of His intercession above, and of His Spirit's prompting within. Every blessing, we say, should be asked for Christ's sake: but even more than others, if that could be, the forgiveness which we owe entirely to His great Atonement. For, so far as we can see, God *could not* have forgiven any sin, but that Jesus lived and died. Only those washed and made white in His blood, can ever appear, faultless and forgiven, before the throne of God. "The chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." O, do we need to be advised to plead, when we ask forgiveness, the only reason why we can hope to be forgiven! If it is only for Christ's sake that God *can* forgive us, is it not the least we can do to ask that he would forgive us for Christ's sake!

Such, then, are some plain thoughts upon the prayer

for forgiveness, — expressed, as I trust, so plainly that every one here can understand every word that I have said. There are finer sounding things we might ask for than forgiveness: there is nothing we need so much, — nothing for which it is more meet that sinful creatures like us should pray. It is not a pleasant thing to man's proud heart frankly to confess that he has done wrong, and humbly to supplicate pardon; but it must be done, nevertheless, however hard it may be to do. And as we ask God for Christ's sake to forgive us all our iniquities, let us for our encouragement think of one Divine Being, of Whom when on earth it was said with truth, though said by His enemies, "This man receiveth sinners." And think that He, so merciful to the worst, was the "image of the Invisible God": and as you bow in penitence before the Almighty, think that *that* kind face is looking down on you as you pray, — think that you are speaking and telling your story to that kindest and gentlest heart. And going now hand in hand with our Elder Brother, to pray to His Father and our Father, we may go with a holy boldness to which Solomon had no right, and we may urge a plea which Solomon did not know. And as we humbly confess our great unworthiness, — as we banish from our hearts every bitter or unkind feeling towards any human being, — as we rest, with simple faith, on our Saviour's merits alone; — the old words will suit us yet, as

they tell us of human nature's old want, and lead us to Him Who alone can supply it;—and our prayer will be, from the lip as from the heart, still “Hear Thou in Heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive!”





XIII.

THE EXPECTANCY OF CREATION.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” — ROMANS viii. 19.

NO larger statement, no sublimer thought, will you find even upon the page of inspiration. For the word which is here translated *the creature* means all creation, — all that God made, whether animate or inanimate. And the phrase translated *the earnest expectation* conveys the idea of a fixed, bent, rapt state of earnest looking forward, and looking far away, for something intensely longed for, that is yet in the dim distance before. And so, as we read the great Apostle’s words, as we seek to picture to our minds their meaning, there rises before us, as some vast, majestic vision, the imagery of a whole world, a whole universe, — fields, trees, rivers, clouds and stars, — great nations, thronged cities, endless crowds of immortal beings, numberless hosts of creatures, animate yet without rational souls, — all waiting, watching, looking out; standing (for such is the force of the word) with the

head thrust forward, and silently, eagerly, gazing far away for something hoped and longed for; — something that is slow, indeed, in coming, but that is sure to come at last. Such, and no less, is the picture which St. Paul desires to set before us in his sublime and comprehensive assurance, that “the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.”

It is no more than just that I should tell you, that this passage in which St. Paul sets forth the travail and expectancy of creation, has been the subject of very much debate among such as have written on the interpretation of Scripture. But without wearying you with any account of their discordant opinions, I have adopted the interpretation of the passage which is most generally received, and received by the most approved authorities; and which appears the most consistent with the entire spirit of the verses of which the text forms the first. We find it stated there, that “the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly”: which is understood as meaning that the entire creation was involved and deteriorated in the Fall of man. We find it stated too, that “the creature itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”: which is understood as meaning that the entire creation shall participate in man’s restoration; that the disgrace of sin and sorrow shall yet be wiped away

from Nature's beautiful face ; and that the dumb sufferings of the brute creation shall be ended if not compensated. And finally we find it stated that meanwhile, while sin and suffering last, all nature does as it were groan beneath them, eager to be delivered from them: "We know," says St. Paul, "that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.' By a strong figure, the apostle represents all the universe, even to the dumb brutes, even to the lifeless fields and rocks and trees, as doing what in strict fact only sentient and intelligent man could do:—grieving and sorrowing over the prevalence of misery and guilt, and longing for the day when these shall go forever:—awakened to a sense of the moral and physical evil to which it is subject, groaning under the bondage of its own corruption, and only sustained by the hope of a future emancipation into liberty worthy of the creature of God, and of a purification which shall bring it back to the goodness in which it was created at the first. In brief, the teaching of the entire passage is, that all nature has fallen: that all nature will be restored: that meanwhile nature is in a state of suffering: but that this suffering is relieved by a constant, earnest, hopeful expectation of better things. And thus it is, that "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God": waits, that is, for the day when sin and sorrow shall cease: when fair

landscapes shall no longer form the setting (as it were) for human wickedness and woe: when only righteousness and happiness shall dwell in the new heavens and the new earth.

In dwelling for a little upon the sublime thought suggested by the Apostle, let us arrange our reflections thus: Let us think, first, of the Fact that all Creation is in some sense fallen: next, of the Fact that all Creation is in some sense earnestly expecting: and thirdly, of the End which, if the Apostle be right, is the object, possibly the unconscious object, of all her longings and desires.

And first, of the Fact that all creation is in some sense fallen.

It need hardly be said that only intelligent and responsible man is capable of falling in that sense which involves the idea of guilt. Whatever fall may have passed upon the world and upon the brute creation, has come through no fault of *theirs*: and whatever they may be called to suffer, can be regarded as the punishment of no sin on *their* part. And yet, I think that no reflective man will deny that there is a sense, a true and a weighty sense, in which all the lower creation is involved in the Fall of Man; and fell with Man when he fell. Who is there that does not know what suffering man's sin, man's cruelty and man's thoughtlessness, inflict day by day upon the poor dumb lower animals?

For this is a case in which it is eminently true, that “evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as by want of heart.” Who is there that does not know that the dumb creatures suffer because man fell: that the fact that man is cruel, impatient, thoughtless, — in short, sinful and fallen, — is the cause of incalculable anguish and suffering to these guiltless beings? Ah, the over-driven horse, urged beyond its speed and strength, the starved and tortured dog or cat, are witnesses to us (how often), as we walk the streets of this great city, that creatures which could not sin are yet involved in that suffering which is sin’s sad result! And it is worthy of remark, that even that conduct in inferior animals which appears to us to contain something of a moral element, — *that* which we call *vice* in an inferior animal; is always the result of some wrong conduct upon man’s part: anything that is properly *wrong* in the actions of a dumb creature, anything that looks wicked, or intentionally malignant, is imported into its conduct from some previous sin or error on the part of man. Have we not been taught, by one who is well entitled to the name of a practical philosopher, that if there ever appears anything evil in the character of that noble and generous animal which works for us through all its life, though, so far as is revealed to us, with no rest remaining for it when its life is done, — it is because of some preceding evil, or mistake at least, in a human being:

that there would be no such thing as a vicious horse, if there had not previously been a cruel, or an ignorant, or an impatient, or an injudicious man? But there is no need to introduce what may be matter of debate, into a question about which there can be no debate: and such is our assertion, that the consequences of man's fall extend even to the brutes that perish. *They* suffer, because man sinned. And no small measure of their suffering, has been actually the direct consequence of man's sin, as such. Think, for instance, what millions of innocent lives were cut short by the drowning waters of the Deluge! Man's sin brought those waters: but they quenched many a poor dumb life into which sin had never entered. And think, too, what hosts of guiltless creatures have yielded up their lives as sacrifices for sin,—sin in which they had no share. When the Israelite came to seek the pardon of his transgression, he was not allowed to come, as we do, and present the spiritual sacrifice of a contrite heart, and plead the merit of the Redeemer's grand sacrifice offered once for all. No, the poor dove must die: the harmless lamb must shed its blood: the peaceful ox must be burnt on the altar: suffering, in God's mysterious appointment, because man sinned: testifying to the eternal and fundamental truth, of the essential and indissoluble connection between suffering and sin. Now, we know God cares for oxen. Rely upon it, it was a thought to

God, when the brute creation, all but a few representatives, perished at the Flood. Rely upon it, He did not overlook or forget the suffering of the poor lamb whose blood turned aside the Destroying Angel, nor of the beasts with whose blood under the law "almost all things were purged." You remember how among the reasons for sparing Nineveh, God did not overlook the circumstance that there was "much cattle there." Yes, brethren: there can be no doubt at all that the poor dumb creatures *are* involved in Man's Fall.

But I said that the text teaches us as a Fact, that all creation is in some sense fallen: not only the sentient brutes, but the unconscious air, and woods, and streams. Now as for the inanimate creation, of course, it cannot *suffer* consciously. Man, can both sin and suffer. The inferior animals can suffer but not sin. And as for the landscape, as for the inanimate universe, *it* can neither sin nor suffer. How, then, you will say, can *it* be involved in man's Fall? And we reply, that it is a mistake to fancy that a thing is perverted from the end contemplated by the Creator, only when it knows the fact and suffers from it. This world, this inanimate creation, is involved in man's fall, *according to its nature*: it is fallen, in the way and the sense in which, by the make of things, it is possible that it should be fallen. Of course, there is no guilt: it cannot sin. Of course, there is no pain: it cannot suffer. But there is perver-

sion : degradation : turning of it aside from the wise, and kind, and beneficent purposes contemplated by the Creator : and in that sense Nature's fall is real and deep. You would almost think that Nature is obliged, by man's sin, unwillingly to do many things which she would not do if she could help it. Noble means and instruments are perverted to base and sinful ends. The atmosphere is constrained unwillingly to carry from the speaker's lip to the listener's ear, words which are false, which are impure, which are profane. Surely that beautiful, liquid ether was never made for that ! Cannot you almost personify it, and think of it as rebelling against the base use to which sinful man turns it ? Food is constrained to strengthen for sinful deeds. Is it not hard, so to speak, upon the innocent grain, upon the generous grape, that they should be compelled, whether they will or no, to yield their energy to the arm of the midnight murderer, as readily as to the hand that does the deed of mercy and never tells the fellow-hand ? Can you not imagine wholesome food and wine as mutely protesting against the base excesses of which man's sin so often makes them the instruments ? Can you not almost think that it is reluctantly that Nature suffered man to discover and to combine, from among her elements, agencies of destruction and suffering ? And, since the days of the friar, who stumbled upon that combination of materials, separately innocuous, but to-

gether so powerful to scorch and blast, which hides the modern battle-field with its sulphureous clouds ; think how great a share of human ingenuity has been directly given to wresting from Nature that which shall quench human life, which shall tear and torture. No doubt, my brethren, so long as the agencies of warfare are possessed by any nation, they must be possessed by all nations, — and by none with stronger necessity than by our own, the great stay and hope of European freedom : but still, what a perversion of material resources and of human energies from their peaceful and natural uses there is in the armaments and munitions of war ! Ah, if there were no evil and angry passions in the heart of man : no treachery, no cruelty, no selfishness, no injustice ; there would be no wars nor rumors of wars : and no perversion of iron and oak from the arts of peace to the arts of destruction. Look at a ship of war, my friends. What a grand and imposing spectacle it is ! And in a fallen world, a necessary thing, too. But think, is it not one great proof that man is fallen ? And is it not one great aggregate of most valuable and noble means, distorted and perverted from their right and innocent ends ? Think of the costly material, think of the skill and science and industry, that have gone to make *that* a claw to tear, a tooth to bite, — a grand weapon of misery and destruction : and say if the consequences of man's fall do not reach to the oak in the

forest, the iron in the mine, the flax in the field, the very air and water! Not, surely, for this did the oak-tree grow, and the flax wave, and the iron slowly mature in the veins of the earth! And, not lingering on individual instances of noble material agencies perverted to evil by man,—such, for instance, as the printing-press, that mighty agent, concerning which it is hard to say now-a-days whether it does most good or harm: think how the whole landscape is often darkened by the brooding cloud of sin; how often climes where the sky is bright and the breeze fragrant and the earth charming, are made dark and sad even to man's view, and how much darker and sadder to the pure eye of God, by the deep degradation and horrid cruelty of the savage races that dwell there! You know how the good and kind Bishop felt that all in vain were the spicy breezes of Ceylon, and its incomparable material beauty, while only man was vile: that vainly the gifts of God were lavished, while the blinded heathen bowed to wood and stone. Think of the Vale of Siddim: outwardly “beautiful as the garden of the Lord”: yet bearing a race so evil that the thunder could no longer sleep, and the fire of heaven was called down to cleanse its foul infection away. And *there* the very scene was not merely darkened by the moral evil: it had to perish along with it. You remember how strikingly it has been said, “Beautiful scenery remained, spread over

the world ; but one part of it had sunk, and vanished forever. The natural beauty and the human wickedness were struck out of the universe at one tremendous blow. At that one spot, it is far towards four thousand years, since Nature bloomed and man sinned, — for the last time !”

Thus, then, we have seen that it is truth the Apostle tells, when he says that all Nature is in some sense fallen: involved in Man's fall. But another fact asserted in the text is, that all Nature is waiting for better days. “The creature,” that is, all creation, is in a condition of “earnest expectation.” In the case of the first fact, that Nature is fallen, we can find a thousand proofs from our own experience, that the Apostle's statement is just: and this second one, of Nature's expectancy, might be received upon the same testimony: though it is the authority of revelation which *here* comes in to clear the teaching of experience from the suspicion of transcendentalism or mysticism. And, indeed, all things *are* unconsciously looking forward. There is a vague, dumb sense, that surely better things are coming. All conscious things live in an undefined hope. We can discern many indications that this is so. How ready human beings are to listen to the assurance that there is “a good time coming”: and wherefore? Not, surely, that there is any great sign as

yet of its approach: but simply from some vague, general belief that surely evil will one day die, and the reign of good begin! All men are vaguely looking forward: expecting something, they cannot say what: but only that things will be not always as now; — will some day be better than now. Why does the man who has got abundance of money, more than he can ever spend, — and no one to leave it to, — why does he still pinch and save as before: why, but from some shadowy looking-forward, which he does not care to define? Why do most men, when they begin any task, feel eager to get through with it: why, but for that onward bent, that “earnest expectation” that is in all “the creature”? Men are waiting, they know not for what: but there is a strange, ceaseless look-out for something farther: not to be explained by human philosophy, but to be unravelled by this text. And we can discern traces of the same feeling in inferior natures. Why does the poor hack lean to his collar so eagerly, and toil up the steep street overburdened, but from some vague, dull, confused hope that surely all this will end. And it is no transcendentalism to ask you, whether you have not felt, when you have gone forth on a fair summer evening, and stood in some sweet scene in the country stillness, — as if all Nature, — trees and fields and twilight sky, — were waiting for something: wanting something, not here as yet? You remember

how the poet describes a landscape beautiful, complete: but he looks upon it: and somehow he feels that "there lacketh something still." And the great German poet and philosopher Goethe, has recorded, that he never could look on a beautiful summer landscape, without feeling as if it were waiting for something, asking for something, which was not there.

And so we come to ask, What is the End for which all creation is so earnestly waiting? All Nature is fallen: all Nature, man, beast, inanimate things,—is looking forward: Looking forward for what?

Ah brethren, you who feel in yourselves a constant craving for something unattained as yet, believe it, it is no earthly end that will satisfy the longing of your nature! There is this remarkable peculiarity about all earthly ends, that whenever you have attained the end which is at present the object of your hopes and wishes, you will see another before you, and feel you cannot be content till you have reached *that*: and, *that* reached, you will see before you another still. You think now, some of you here, perhaps, that if you could only reach such or such an end on which you have set your heart, it would be well with you: you would be perfectly happy and content. The poor man, barely keeping his head above water as he struggles for bread for his children, thinks how happy he would be could he

only be sure of always finding food and raiment for himself and his own. That end reached, another is proposed: and as the man rises gradually to platform after platform in the social world, the view extends before him. The poor man wishes to be rich: the rich man longs for a recognized position in society: the man who has got *that* thinks how pleased he would be could he obtain a title, fame, nobility: ah, there is no end of it! The man in town thinks how pleasant it is to live in the country: the man in the country how pleasant to live amid the society of the town. Yes, brethren: there is more in this than the mere morbid feeling of restless discontent: every human being, vaguely dissatisfied with his present state, is a new witness to the grand principle, that "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God!" You know that you are always looking onward: you are always postponing the true enjoyment of life to some indefinite period in the future: ah, my brethren, it is for no earthly end you are looking onward: you may not know it, but you are looking onward to that period when sin and sorrow shall cease! *That* is the only end in the universe that shall absolutely satisfy the great craving for happiness and rest which is in the centre of man's nature: *That* is the only summit on reaching which you will see no farther summit stretching away beyond. What a blessing it is, my friends, to be told what it is

we really need! Ah, men in all ages felt the great, vague longing: the Christian only knows what it is that shall fully satisfy that longing: we know that "man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever": holiness and happiness, Christ's beatific presence in heaven, it is *these* towards which we are blindly reaching forward: and "the earnest expectation of the creature," the dumb, unconscious yearnings of man's heart, can be sated by no earthly end, by no sublunary fruition: they are waiting and watching for the accomplishment of all things, — for the "manifestation of the sons of God!"

And so, Christian friends, the single thing within the range of possibility, that will satisfy the soul's longings, the expectancy of all Creation, is to find that assured part in Christ, which shall enable us to go to God and rest in Him as a reconciled, loving Father in Jesus. By the make of our being, we never can be right, till we lay our weary head upon the bosom of our God. "Thou madest us for Thyself," said the wise old Father of the Church: "and our souls are restless till they find rest in Thee!" It is vain, my friends, it is utterly vain, to think to find rest, peace, happiness, satisfaction, anywhere else. There will always be something lacking, till we rest in God. It is something more than the utterance of exalted piety, — it is the sober statement of a philosophic truth, the psalmist's exclamation,

“Whom have I in heaven but Thee; and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee!” There are those on earth that you love: there are those in heaven whom you venerate: but there is none that can fill the place of God. We fancy, vainly, that if we could but reach this or that end, prized and beloved, we should be right: could we but reach *that*, it would be well with us: but O, vain, vain is the fancy that we ever can be complete till we are in heaven with our Blessed Saviour, clearly seen and fully enjoyed at last. You who are young and hopeful; you in the spring months of life, you may hardly believe that this can be so: you may find it hard to believe that no imaginable worldly wealth, honor, love, happiness, could fill the yearnings of your heart: but O, trust it, there is something within you that will not be put off with these: there is a thirst and a craving which these can never slake. For “the earnest expectation of the creature,” the dumb unconscious longing of all creation,—from the immortal spirit of man, down to the poor shadowy consciousness of the unreasoning brute, yea down to the waiting landscape in the still twilight of summer,—“waiteth for” nothing meaner, nothing more mortal, nothing less precious, nothing more evanescent, than “the manifestation of the sons of God!”



XIV.

LIVING TO ONE'S SELF.

“For none of us liveth to himself; and no man dieth to himself.”
— ROMANS xiv. 7.



WE should all, perhaps, feel something like terror, if it were brought home to us how true, in one sense, *that* statement is about every one of us. There can be no doubt at all, that in a very real and solemn sense, “None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” And it might strike each one of us with an awful conviction of responsibility, if we were enabled to read back the history of our own life; and if we were made to know what a tremendous influence we have, quite unconsciously, wielded over some of our fellow-creatures. There was a day, perhaps, when in the hearing of some young person whose character was yet unformed, and easily susceptible of impressions good or bad, some one here may have said, hastily and thoughtlessly, some word, — some uncharitable, suspicious, cynical, sceptical word, — which, being taken up and retained by that young person’s memory with that

readiness and tenacity with which our memory does too often take up and retain that which is evil (and there is not a sadder proof that our nature is fallen); — being so taken up and retained, and often recurring to that young person's recollection, germinated into something in thought, feeling, or action, infinitely worse than ever you dreamt of; but for which, notwithstanding, you are in some measure responsible in the sight of God. There is many a godless man this day, who is encouraging himself in the way to ruin and perdition, by thinking of some foolish or sinful word or deed of a professing Christian. And on the other hand, we may thankfully believe, that there are people on this earth, leading holy lives, and going on towards glory in heaven, in whom all that good dates from some solemn word said by a believer who never knew in this world what that word was to do; in whom all that good began with the hearing of a sermon that was preached under a specially desponding sense of uselessness, — or, earlier than that, with a mother's prayers, which she died thinking went all for nothing. Yes, brethren, we go on through life, and at the last we die, exercising a great unconscious influence upon those around us: an influence whose extent will never be known till the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. And the humblest person exercises this influence just as truly as the mightiest. If the character of the poor slave is formed by his

owner and taskmaster, the character of the owner and taskmaster is just as truly formed by the slave. And the little child that died before it ever spoke an articulate sentence, may have done more than the wisest and greatest to permanently affect the whole character and life of its parents: by its life, and never more than by its death, it may have brought them to a serious care as to the great concern of salvation never felt before: and doubtless, in many cases, when souls have been brought in childlike faith to the Redeemer, it was by the hand of a little child. There is a sense in which the most selfish man, — the most self-seeking, the most self-contained, cannot live and die, to himself. He will influence those who know him, by his whole life; by the tone of it, by the atmosphere that breathes from it. He will act on those around him, as with the gentle but never-ceasing force of a quiet current, setting either to what is better or to what is worse. Every professing Christian here is as a legible Epistle, known and read of all men. By his entire life, he is saying to all who know him, "One thing is needful: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness: I am but a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, and heaven is my home": or else he is saying to all who know him, by his entire life, "All these things are very well to talk of, but give me the main chance: worldly wealth and eminence and comfort and enjoyment are the great solid

things after all!" My friends, have you not known professing Christians whose whole life was crying out *that*, as with a trumpet's tongue: and only God knows what evil such men do, who say one thing with the lip, and just the opposite with the life! And as we cannot live to ourselves, neither can we die to ourselves. Our death is the testing-time of all our life: it is the crown and sum of it: it is the thing that fixes the character of it all. And what an incalculable difference in the practical influence on others that may come from a death! Think of the callous, hardening, chilling effect of a death of which the man that hears, says, "Ah, he's gone: no great loss to anybody but himself": and then think of the cheering, softening, thoughtful effect of a death of which you hear, and say, "Well, religion must be a real thing and a wonderful thing, to have kept a human being up in suffering and in death as it did there!" And very naturally the wish will follow,— "May we die in such a way as that!" And even the worldly and bad-hearted Balaam was lifted up for a little above his worldliness and wickedness, when he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

So true is it that our text says, "None of us liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself." We shall every one of us be affecting those around us, for evil or good, while we live; and when we die.

There is another obvious sense, in which the text

says true of most of us: perhaps of all who are here. There are many of you who have much depending on you, and depending on your life; there are many of you whose worldly work is rather for your children than for yourselves: and even the young among us, who have no one that looks to them for daily bread, might know that those who support them are in truth dependent on them too;—that their turning out well will gladden their parents' hearts,—that their turning out ill would wound and break them;—that for most of the peace and joy and hope that people in middle age look for in this world, they look to their children,—fondly hoping that all the errors into which *they* fell, will be corrected in the fresh experiment of a new life, and that the ill-fortune that came across their plans and hopes will in *that* be unknown. And we are so dependent on one another,—our interests are so mingled and intertwined;—that in this sense too, “None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” You cannot tell how far the influences, moral and even material, of a life or a death, may stretch away. Indeed, so thoroughly is it God's will that in this world the interests of human beings should be linked together, that the most manifest effects reaching to millions of people, come of causes in the feeling and conduct of human beings thousands of miles away, and never seen nor known. A fancy, in a savage race, for some

article of British manufacture, for bright-colored cloth, for knives or looking-glasses, will increase the comforts of many homes in a great manufacturing town: will give the little children better food and clothes, and will send them to school. Or a race of slaveholders arise in war for the great right of holding their fellow-men in slavery: and the consequence is felt by thousands of starving workmen, and their wives and little ones, in a country three thousand miles across the sea; and directly or indirectly it reaches the purse of most people in Britain. There are chapels in Scotland that are not endowed, because of a bloody war on the other side of the great Atlantic: there are heathen people to whom the means of sending the Gospel of Christ are diminished by the same sad cause. My friends, there is no end of illustration of this text, regarded as setting out the great fact of human inter-connection and inter-dependence. The millions of our race are linked together in the most wonderful way: it is only gradually that we are finding out that the welfare of one race or nation is the welfare of all. We are learning to cast away the infidel question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We are learning the economic truth and profitableness of words in which a heathen writer set forth a sentiment so thoroughly and essentially Christian: "I am a human being," he said: "and I feel that I have something to do with everything human!"

Are not these words like the echo of his, who drew his inspiration from a far higher spring than any mere human genius; and who declared, taught by the Holy Ghost and no other, that "None of us liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself!"

Yes, my friends, there are some, who could not do well, for a while yet, without you. There are those, by whom almost every human being would be missed, if he were taken away. We do not live entirely for ourselves: and though it may be true, as the great French divine said, that we shall die alone, each *by* himself, it will not be each *for* himself. Very few lives could be quenched without loss and grief to some one. Very few graves are opened and closed but to the saddening of some hearts.

I have lengthened these remarks, because the thoughts that have been present to us are interesting in themselves, and will readily suggest to you important lessons. And indeed, in discourses founded on my text, it is a common thing to dwell entirely upon these two thoughts, as though they summed up the teaching of the text. But it is not so. And although we are far from venturing to say that either or both of them might not have been present to the Apostle's mind when he wrote this verse, directed and inspired by God's Holy Spirit, still it is quite certain that his main purpose in writing the text was to set out an entirely different truth. And

what seems our duty, in trying to understand a text of Holy Scripture and profit by it, is, not to force upon the words, or draw from them, what may seem the most striking or effective meaning they will bear; but remembering Whose words they truly are, remembering that they are God's words to us, and inspired by the Blessed Spirit, to seek to understand what it is that God is saying to us in them: and what is the mind of the Blessed Spirit in them.

Now when we look at our text, not as a detached statement of a truth; but standing where it does, as a step in an argument; the Apostle's meaning is quite plain. He has been arguing for charity, forbearance, toleration, among Christians, in matters not of vital importance: a lesson not less desirable and needful in Scotland in the nineteenth century, than it was at Rome in the first. He has been trying to get people to believe, that though a man think differently from you and me, on any point short of the great essential doctrines of Salvation, he may yet be a conscientious Christian man, acting according to his light; and, as in the presence of God, trying to do what will please Him. In the little matters of ceremony and observance of times and seasons, in non-essentials in short, St. Paul tells us that the rule is that every man should be fully persuaded in his own mind that what he thinks or does is right: and if good men differ from us, — if they like

Episcopacy best while we like Presbytery best, — or if they prefer what is called the Voluntary Principle in ecclesiastical arrangement, while we prefer exceedingly the principle of all Christians till very recent days, of a national profession of Christianity and a National Church, — why, then to give them credit for being fully persuaded in their own minds too. We are, to sum up, to recognize as Christians all whom God would recognize : and strongly and heartily as you and I may hold to the venerable and beloved Church of our fathers, I know there is not one of us who fancies that if a soul be washed in Christ's blood and sanctified by the working of God's Spirit, that soul will be rejected by God because he dissents from us : there is not one of us who fancies that acceptance with God and admission to heaven will turn in the least measure on such things as these : and if there be people who think differently, — if there was a good man once who solemnly declared that he could not recognize as a brother-Christian any one who did not hold his peculiar views as to the proper way of appointing ministers to vacant parishes, — why, all that just shows that there may be very sincere Christians who have very narrow and unchristian ways of judging their fellow-men. “ He that regardeth the day,” says St. Paul, “ regardeth it unto the Lord : and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for

he giveth God thanks: and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not; and giveth God thanks." Everything the true Christian does, you see the Apostle says, he does as for his God and Saviour: and then comes in our text: "For none of *us*," says St. Paul, speaking of all Christians, and telling something that was to be taken for granted as a matter about which there was no doubt whatsoever, — "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Let me tell you here, that the apparent widening of the sense in the second clause of the next, *no man* taking the place of *none of us*, appears only in our translation: for in the original language, though the word translated *of us* is not repeated, the word translated *no man* is precisely the same word which in the former clause is translated *none*. Thus you see St. Paul, in the text, is not laying down a principle as to all human beings: he is not going into the philosophy of our responsibility for our influence on others, nor is he speaking of the inter-dependence and mutual linking each to each of us men: but he is reminding those whom he addresses of a matter on which they are all agreed; to wit, that it is a thing distinctive and characteristic of all Christians, that everything they do they do for God. None lived to himself; none died to himself: If we live, we live unto the Lord; if we die, we die unto the Lord: Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. And thus the great truth taught in

the text is, that the Christian does not live to himself, in the sense of seeking his own advantage and ease and pleasure ; in the sense of thinking mainly of self, and self-interest. The Apostle is not telling us, as he would have been telling us in the formerly suggested senses of our text, of something that men must do whether they will or not ; of something that is a condition of our being, and that we can no more resist than we can resist the law of gravitation, or the laws of heat and light. He is telling us of something that Christians do of their own accord, — with their heart's full consent, — and not just because they are driven by a force too mighty to resist, and so cannot help it. He reminds us how the Christian is one who "wherein he is called, therein abides with God": one to whom, in the higher attainments of the spiritual life, "to live is Christ and to die is gain," because to die is "to depart and be with Christ." And there is something in the mention of not even dying to ourselves, that is echoed and interpreted in that ancient prayer, in which believers say, "We commend to Thee, O Lord, now and forever, our soul and body, our mind and thoughts, our prayers and our desires, our life and our death." And the state to which believers are in the text spoken of as having attained, is that for which the good Anglican divine prayed:

"Teach me, my God and King,

In all things Thee to see:

And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee."

Thus St. Paul, in the text, is speaking of Christian people ; and is telling of something which it is most important for us to remember is characteristic of them all. And this is, that their will is subordinated to God's ; that they do not seek chiefly or only for worldly profit or pleasure ; that their great end is not to get on in life, but rather "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Now, we all know, that in this sense of the phrase, many men do live entirely to themselves and not at all to God. There are people who could not seriously say that from Monday morning to Saturday night, — that is, through all their work-day time, — they bestow any real thought or pains to the end of reaching anything beyond the horizon of this world — beyond the realm of time and sense. They work to get food and raiment and a home for their children and themselves : to rise a little in life : to provide some store for their family after they shall be gone. Now all this is right : it would be holy work if it were done as for the Saviour, and as in His presence : it would be holy work if all the while you did it you were looking beyond the mere worldly task, — looking *through* the glass to the Golden City beyond, instead of merely looking *on* the glass and stopping there : but if in all that work, most fit and right in itself, the thrifty mother as she stitches the garments of

her little ones or hears their lessons, or the hard-wrought father as he toils and pinches for their provision, looks no farther than this world, — then, self-forgetting as the father and mother may be, they are doing the very thing St. Paul means when he speaks of living to one's self! And still more plainly does *he* incur that condemnation, the heartless selfish egotist who lives to gratify his own inclinations; to please and serve and indulge himself. And whether this self-indulgence be in the gross forms of sloth, and appetite; or in the more sublimated form of the gratification of a refined and luxurious taste; the man who never sets God before him, and never honestly works to do good to his fellow-sinners, lives as thoroughly to himself if he gives himself to the collecting of pictures, or books, or curiosities, as the mere glutton or drunkard or sluggard could. Every human being that is not trying to live to God, is living to himself. For there are but the two ways, living for time and for eternity, living for this world and for the next, accepting Christ and rejecting Him, being regenerated and sanctified by God's spirit and being left with the old sinful nature. Christian brethren, to what a searching and humbling test it brings us, to remember these plain truths! That the believer's wish is, or must it be said ought to be, to do and bear God's will, and to put his own wishes aside. It is not his great end to get on in life, to grow rich and honored, to enjoy comfort

and pleasure, to gain a little advance in social standing. Such are the natural aims of all unconverted persons: they wish, naturally, for the best they know. But the Christian knows of something better than worldly good, and seeks for *that!* He sets his affection on things above, not on things on the earth. He has been assured that a saving interest in Christ is the one thing needful; and that such worldly prosperity as God knows is good for us, will be given to us if we "win Christ." And so the believer's desire and prayer are, that he may be enabled humbly to take the discipline God sends, if it be but sanctified by the Blessed Spirit. "God's will be done, not mine," is the utterance of his very heart. And he knows that God's will is his pardon and sanctification: that the very best thing that can befall him is, that God's will be done!

I have spoken of a refined and sublimated way of representing that essential selfishness and worldliness which is wrapt up in the Scriptural idea of living to one's self. It is probable that as I spoke of it, some of you would recall a brilliant chapter by a brilliant author, commending living to one's self as the best and happiest life. What that author understands by it is, living according to our own views, and never thinking of catching the eye or applause of others. It is "living in the world, as in it, not of it. It is as if no one knew there was such a person, and you wished no one to know

it : it is to be a silent spectator of the mighty scene of things, not an object of attention and curiosity in it : to take a thoughtful, anxious interest in what is passing in the world, but not to feel the slightest inclination to make or meddle with it. He who lives wisely to himself and his own heart, looks at the busy world through the loopholes of retreat, and does not want to mingle in the fray. He hears the tumult, and is still." *

Such are the eloquent words in which living to one's self is put in its most refined and least repulsive way. But is not this, after all, just making our own ease and comfort the great thing? Is it not just to say that it might disquiet us, might fever us, to do the work God sets us in this world, — to battle with evil and to strive for the right, — and so we shall hide ourselves in a hole, and dastardly shrink away? Yes, the life thus sketched is as thoroughly selfish and self-seeking a life, as his, who in the most degrading way seeks to attract the notice of others. Man's chief end is not quietly to enjoy himself, any more than it is conspicuously to get on and grow famous. Listen to the noble declaration of truth and lesson from it : "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price : therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's!" And O how different from that easy epicureanism of the moralist is the great Apostle's sublime resolution, that

* Hazlitt.

“ with all boldness, as always, so now, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death ! ”

Now, Christian friends, here in my text we have all a test given to us, by which we may try the reality of our Christian profession and character. We all profess and call ourselves Christians : we all hope to be saved through Christ : we all trust, humbly trust, that we have believed in Him. Well, there are consequences that will follow if we have done so. And a very marked one, about which there should be no doubt, is that of which St. Paul speaks to us here. Is there not something striking in the simple, easy way, in which the Apostle says these words, almost in a parenthesis, and not taking the trouble to support them by any argument, — as if he felt that here was something so perfectly unquestionable about the people he was addressing, that it needed only to be named ? Ah, he must have been sure of his men ! He must have so read their spirits as to know that they were right with God. For we cannot think that he deliberately gave them credit for what he knew they did not possess ! Now would it be a safe thing for any one preaching from this pulpit, to look round upon the congregation and say, We differ one from another, we who are here, in a great many respects : some of us think and feel one way, and some of us another way, in political matters, and æsthetical : some

would like this, and some would like that : but there is one thing certain, one thing in which we are all agreed and alike : “None of us liveth to himself, and none of us will die to himself!” O, if the Apostle Paul, standing in this church to-day, were to say these words to us ; should we listen with the composure of men who knew that they were being spoken of no better than they deserve : or should we not feel anything honest within us prompting us to cry out, O don't give us credit for *that* : we don't deserve it : we may be trying to attain to *that*, but we are far away yet from it : we dare not say that we are living to God and Christ : we know that we are seeking too much our own profit and honor and comfort and pleasure ; we are living far too much to ourselves ! O let us pray for more grace, Christian friends, that we may be delivered from this sin, that lingers so long ; that we may all live more to God ! Self-seeking is a bad sign of us. Let it be our desire rather to deny ourselves, — to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, — to follow Christ, taking up our cross daily ! It is our business, as believers, to please God, and not ourselves ; thankfully remembering that we never please God so well, as when we take the straight and steep path that leads in the end to rest and glory !

And you know, brethren, that this great test and mark of the Christian, given by St. Paul in the text, is one that is thoroughly accepted by people who are not

Christians. You know how cheap those that are without hold the Christian profession and the fair words of the man in whom all *that* is tainted with the plague-spot of selfishness, or self-seeking, or self-conceit. A believer of high pretension to grace and spirituality, yet eagerly grasping at money and preferment, at social standing and recognition,—you know how such a one is a stumbling-block, and is named by godless people with a smile or a sneer. And you know, too, how the appearance of that eye mainly to self-interest and self-advancement, mars and clogs all the efforts a Christian man makes to do good. Just in proportion as you feel that a man is forgetting himself, and what you think of him, is the power he has to move you, to convince you, to profit you. It is the great secret of spiritual usefulness, the ceasing to live to yourself! And the self-seeking minister of religion, eager for worldly promotion and reputation and applause,—O what a useless creature *he* is towards profiting and comforting souls: how light we hold *his* counsel and warning! But that messenger is indeed powerful, with better strength than man's, who we feel is never thinking of himself; but of us, and his great message!

Now it is natural for us all to wish to get on; to be among the rising people in our vocation. But O, there is another end, infinitely better and worthier! Let us try to live to our Saviour; to grow in grace; to bless

our fellow-sinners; to do some worthy work in this world, which may remain after we are away. And so our life, lived as before God, will serve His cause in this world: and our death, its sight and its remembrance, may do good when we are gone.

It seems a curious thing, indeed, to talk of God being glorified in us, such poor weak sinful creatures as we know ourselves to be: and to talk of Christ being magnified in our imperfect lives, all errors and repentances, and in our lowly death, with its weakness and pain. Yet so it is. "They glorified God in me," said St. Paul of those who heard of his conversion: and God shall be glorified in each of us, being truly converted to God. And if we make it our resolution and endeavor, that, by the all-sufficient grace of the Blessed Spirit, none of us shall henceforth live to himself, and none of us shall die to himself, — then true it is that Christ shall be magnified in us, — poor sinful yet redeemed and sanctified creatures, whether in life or in death!





XV.

THE COMING NIGHT.

“The night cometh.” — ST. JOHN ix. 4.

EVEN on a bright summer morning, the man who has a long journey before him pushes on briskly and actively. He does not saunter by the way if he is a man of energy and sense. And why? Because he knows he has only a limited time; and he must make the most of it. The sky above is all blue and bright: there is not a cloud: the sun is rising higher and higher: yet, however little appearance there may be of it yet, he knows that “the night cometh.” He knows that far away as yet, — away towards the East, a deep and mighty shadow is stealing onward over the world. Before it all is activity and cheerfulness and exertion: behind it all is quietness and repose; man’s labor has ceased. He knows that when once that shadow has come up to the place where he is, he can journey on no longer. So he feels that he must make the most of the day while it lasts; for “the night cometh.” The psalmist speaks our experience when he says that

after the sun has arisen, "Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labor, — until the evening." But when the evening shadows fall long, and the evening breezes whisper softly; then, in all ordinary cases, man's labors cease. And night is the time for rest, not for working: whatever our day's task may be, we must see to finish it before night comes.

There is hardly a thing more natural than to do what Christ does in our text; — to extend this principle to a longer day, the day of life; and to a darker night, the night of death. How naturally we speak of the morning of life, — meaning infancy and childhood: how naturally of the evening of life, meaning the decline into age. And how naturally, as the light fades away, and the shadows gather, do we trace in all this the resemblance to approaching death! Indeed it is by figures, drawn from the passing over of day and the coming on of night, that we just as often as not describe the life and death of man. Who is there that does not understand the old man's meaning, when he says his sun is fast going down!

And in this case also, there is the same practical lesson as in the other. Here too we are called on to make the most of our time, because it is limited. Here too we are bidden to make the best of our day, because "the night cometh." It was in this sense that Christ spoke the words of the text. He had a work to do: and He

gives His reason for missing no opportunity of doing it ; for losing no time in doing it. "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is yet day : the night cometh, wherein no man can work." His life and His ministry were drawing to a close : and if He was to do His work at all, He must do it soon. He had now an opportunity of working a cure upon the Sabbath-day : He had already risked His life in doing so : for this offended the Pharisees and priests. However, He would not lose His opportunity. I may run risk by this, — it seems as if He said : — may I not put it off till to-morrow ? Nay, I have but little time before me ; life's day is drawing to its close : I must do this work while the day lasts ; — for "the night cometh !"

There was nothing in this way of thinking that was personal to our Blessed Saviour : the self-same considerations apply to you and me. The self-same reason should weigh with us. There are many things which this is a reason for. There are many things we ought to do ; many things we ought to leave undone ; because "the night cometh." And perhaps some of you may remember that the greatest of English moralists felt this so strongly, that on the dial of his watch, — ready to catch his eye whenever he looked at it, — he had these words engraved in their original tongue : — "For the night cometh." He thought it fit, that every time he looked to see how time was going on, he might be re-

mined of the end of it. He thought there was something he might be the better for remembering, at the commencement of every engagement, in every company, in every place, in every occupation; in the bustle of the street when crowds of men went by,—in the quiet chamber over his papers and his books where the hours passed on so silently,—in the view of regal state, and youthful beauty;—still something worth remembering in that most suggestive truth expressed in the simple words,—“For the night cometh!”

Let us, with humble prayer for the guidance of God’s Spirit, look for a little at these words of Christ. Let us consider certain lessons they teach us: certain things we ought to do, or to leave undone, because “the night cometh.”

The most obvious and important of these is that suggested by our Saviour Himself. It is that we ought to do now the work we have to do: to set ourselves immediately to life’s great work. This, you will remember, was the lesson which the wisest of men drew from the same thought. *He* said, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: *For* there is no knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device in the grave, whither thou goest.” And certainly the most obvious lesson from the truth that time will come to an end, is to make the most of it while it lasts. And life’s great work, you need not be reminded, is the care of your salvation. *The* great lesson, then,

which by pre-eminence we learn from our text, is that we should see to it, while the day of life lasts, to gain an assured interest in the Redeemer. But before thinking of this, let us think for a little upon some of the other teachings of the truth our text contains: because these make a natural introduction to this great lesson: they make us feel its supreme moment; and they gradually lead us up to it.

If you are ready to set your affection on earthly things, then there is a lesson for you in the text, — Do not: for “the night cometh.” And how much we all need this lesson: how ready we all are to set our whole heart on our worldly interests, and to live as if this life were all. A man is ready to feel content and self-satisfied when his earthly affairs are all going on well. A man who has got thoroughly into the spirit of some earthly pursuit, toils on in it as though he believed all would be well with him if he could only reach that thing, whatever it is, which is the object of his present desires and endeavors. There are several things which, in all countries and all ages of the world, men have been found to make the objects of their especial regard, — a regard so pervading and so constant, that we quite understand that it must be the state of heart and mind which the Bible describes as “setting the affection on things on the earth.” Such things are wealth, and standing in the world: such a

thing is reputation or eminence. And so we have always been found who repudiated ambition, and sought rather that warmer thing, comfort. Some have sought, as the best of earthly ends, a quiet and pleasant home, a lowly lot, surrounded and gladdened by the love of friends. And while the man who toils for wealth or honor oftentimes toils in vain; or finds what looked so inviting at a distance turn to ashes on the lips, like the fabled apples of the Dead Sea shore: there is more of true and real enjoyment in *his* heart who takes St. Paul's advice and "studies to be quiet": who seeks to go peacefully through this life, far from its din, and unvexed by its ambition. But see to it, my friends, amid all your earthly blessings and enjoyments, that you do not set your whole heart on them; that you lay up your treasure elsewhere. You know how apt we are, when interested in a worldly thing, to be supremely interested in it: how ready we are to make idols of our blessings: the more need, then, of the admonition of our text. Ah! these things only last for life's little day; — and "the night cometh." Even as you look round upon all those things you value most, remember that they are fleeting from you. The night is coming on just as fast when the noonday light is beaming, and the green earth smiles in the sunshine, as when the evening shadows are gathering thick and fast. And, in like manner, through all the hours of the

day of life, the night of death is drawing nearer and nearer. The hour is coming when you must part from all earthly objects of affection: and what is to become of you in that hour if your whole heart was set on these? You would not tie your whole earthly happiness to a flower that is to fade at sunset: and is it more reasonable for a being that is to live forever, to choose for his portion what must pass from his grasp whenever the sun of this short life goes down? O that we could feel it, that even now the shadows of all worldly things fall eastward, and the night is coming fast! Christ did not say "the night *will* come": it is "the night cometh"! Even now, the shadow of parting broods over all our intercourse with those we love. Even now, the home comforts are passing away from the man of simple domestic tastes: the riches from the rich man, the fame from the famous man, the power from the great man. Look at your pleasant home that you love so well: beware of loving it too much: for "the night cometh"! Enjoy the estimation of your fellow-men: take the advantages of your well-earned wealth: but remember that "the night cometh"! Look on the face of the friend you love best: and O, pray and strive that both of you may reach that happy shore where friends are never parted: but make up your mind to a parting here: for "the night cometh!" Over the green fields: over the blue hills: over the shining

river: over the trees and flowers: over our dear home: over all we ever saw, ever knew, ever loved: over them all, and over you and me, broods the shadow of approaching night: and the hour is coming, even now, when you and I must bid them farewell forever!

Our second lesson from the text is one of patience. If you are ready to repine and to lose heart amid your cares and sorrows, then there is a lesson for you in the text. Do not: for "the night cometh." And we often stand in need of being reminded of something which may give us patience to endure and to hope. For we are never clear of something which causes us anxiety, vexation, or grief. We are always hoping for a time when no grief shall vex us, and no care disturb: but very seldom, hardly ever, does such a time come. Some cause of annoyance is ever springing up when least looked for. Nor does it wholly reconcile us to all this, to tell us that God sends us a thousand blessings for one discomfort, or one great distress: true enough *that*, and it is a ground for thankfulness: but a whole cup of fair water by the infusion of a few bitter drops becomes a bitter draught: and it is sad to think how much good, how many blessings, may be neutralized so far as their power of giving happiness is concerned, by some little but constant fretting and worrying care. And even the true believer knows what he is to look for; for "we must through much tribulation enter into

the kingdom of God." In addition to the common ills that flesh is heir to, there are the special trials which arise out of his character as a new creature in Christ Jesus: the conflict with remaining corruption and ensnaring temptation: the hearty sorrow for sin: the overwhelming doubts as to how he stands with God. And it was not, perhaps, saying too much, when one of our sweetest poets declared, that even looking back on a life with no special crushing crook in it, it would be a *hideous* thing (such was his word) to believe that the future should be no better than the past had been. And naturally as we cling to this pleasing, anxious being, we should many a time feel it a burden too heavy to bear, if we had to think that things would go on in the self-same way forever: that eternity would be the same round of worrying business to look after, of thousand little cares and vexations and paltry annoyances, of wearing and endless engagements, with here and there the great deep grief that strikes straight at the heart, and that makes us think so lightly of all that had sufficed to disquiet us before: I think we should almost long for the quiet of annihilation in the prospect of an eternity like *that*. But whenever the Christian wearies under the burden of all he has to bear, he thinks: Ah, these things last only for life's little day: and dark as that day may be (and it will be light to my Saviour's) it will drag through at last: for "the night cometh."

And sweet as is the evening hour of rest to the laboring man, — gently as the twilight falls, and releases him from toil, — O what should *that* be to the eventide that descends on the true believer, wherein the Saviour “abides with him”: what should *that* be to look on to, compared with the saved soul’s rest upon the bosom of its God! I think it an unworthy feeling for a Christian man, though I believe it is a common one, to think of this night that shall end all the sorrows of the day of life, as if finding comfort in thinking of *that* were the last sad resort of utter hopelessness, — something only to be turned to when every other crumb of comfort fails. It may be sad indeed to make up our mind that this life is done for us; that for us there is no happiness more save in turning our back upon everything we know or ever knew, and launching away into an untried world: there is indeed a bitterness in *that*, and it may seem to some but a last poor comfort when all others fail. But it seems to us a reasonable and a Christian thing; a thing commended to us by apostolic authority, and hallowed by the example of Christ Himself; — to gain strength and patience to bear up under the ills of life by the anticipation of the bliss of immortality, — by remembering that the blackest cloud must soon blow over, and a glorious day dawn out of the grave’s dark night. O if we had the faith really to believe God’s sure and precious promises, concerning the perfect rest and holiness

that remain for Christ's people away in the country we look for and journey on to : if we could but feel how little a thing time is, and how mighty eternity : if we could but realize what trifles they are that vex us here, compared with that "exceeding weight of glory" which Christ has purchased for His own : O then, what rest and soothing there would be to the weighed-down soul in the assurance of the text ! Not so pleasantly does the evening stillness fall upon the noisy work-day world, as that blessed thought would sink upon the tossed and fevered heart. The whirl would cease ; the fever of soul would abate ; the little earthly cares would sink to their true insignificance : the soul would feel that it has something grander to think of and to care for : the day of life may be troubled and dark, but it will come to a close at last : for "the night cometh !"

Our third lesson from the text is so closely akin to that we have been considering, that we need do no more than mention it. If you are ready to turn weary of your duties, then there is a lesson for you in the text : do not ; for "the night cometh." Pleasant as duty honestly performed may be, still in this world we must sometimes toil on when we have little heart or strength for it. There may be such a thing as "to drive the round of life's wearisome tasks till the jaded body is felt as a burden." But "there remaineth a rest for the people of God" : and although there will be no idleness

in heaven, but constant occupation ; there will be no weariness, — no fatigue. And as through the burning hours of toil the laboring man looks forward with joy to the evening when his work shall end : so the Christian pilgrim, called to “bear the burden and heat of the day,” may find refreshment in the thought that “the night cometh.” But not lingering on this :

Our fourth and last lesson from the text is that which we at first mentioned as by eminence *the* lesson which our Saviour drew from it. “The night cometh” : and day, the time for working, will be ended then : and therefore while day lasts we should see to it that we accomplish the great work of life, the working out of our salvation ; — that work which must be done before the day of life is ended, or it can never be done at all. We said that the other lessons we can draw from our text lead us up to this one : they all come in to make us feel more deeply how important this one is. For in order that you may rightly learn these other lessons, you must first learn this. Without learning this, you cannot practise the others. We asked you, when wearied with duty, to comfort yourselves by remembering that “the night cometh,” and the rest remaineth after life’s sun has set : but there is no comfort here save to the true believer ; to the man who has effectually minded Christ’s great teaching in the text. We asked you, when overwhelmed with great sorrows or stung by small ones, to comfort

yourselves by remembering that “the night cometh,” and that with life’s day all life’s troubles cease: but there is no comfort here save to the true believer; to the man who has effectually minded Christ’s great teaching in the text. We asked you, when tempted to set your heart upon worldly things, to remember that “the night cometh,” and that these things last only for the day which that night will close: and is not the lesson, to “set our affection on things above,” just Christ’s great lesson, set out under a different light? Let me, then, ask your serious attention to this thought; that because the night will come, because the day will end, we ought at once and earnestly to finish that great work which life was given us to do. “One thing is needful”: and we have all been taught from our childhood what that one thing is. It is a saving interest in Christ: it is to have repentance and faith: it is to be regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. It is in short to undergo that change, so well understood in the general by all of us, which makes a man a Christian. *That* is our work in this world: we all know quite well that it is: there is not one of us here but intends some time to do it, if we have not done it already. I believe that if we exclude those who avow themselves infidels: and those who are so steeped in vice that they never seriously think at all: — if we just take the common run of men of decent conduct, there is not one who does not intend at some

future time to set himself to the working out of his salvation. No man intends to be damned. I do not believe there is one soul here that could this day look round on this place, and then say, It is my purpose that I, who am here, shall at last take up my abode in perdition. And we say there is a lesson to all in the text: see to it, while it is called to-day, that you seek and find a part in Christ. Let it be *now*, for fear it should be never. See to it now, for it is only while the day lasts that this great change can be made: "the night cometh when no man can work": there is no repentance in the grave: death fixes our state for eternity. See to it now, for we have every reason to compel us to this great work now: we lose nothing by making the change; we gain everything: it brings the heart a peace here, which nothing else can give: it makes us the friends and children of the Almighty Disposer of the universe: it is the only thing that can enable us to look on, calmly and cheerfully, to that night of death which is so dark and awful to the worldly man. See to it now, for we have every encouragement: Christ died to gain this great salvation for us: He pleads for us before God: He knocks at the door, and invites us to trust ourselves to Him: the Spirit is promised to help our infirmities: and God has declared that He wills not that any should perish, but that all should believe and live. See to it now, for it never

will be easier: there never will be a time when Satan will be ready to resign you, and when your own weak heart will have no leaning to the things of time and sense: you never *can* slide into salvation and peace without an effort: you will always have to “*strive* to enter the strait gate.” See to it now: we have the weightiest reason to do it soon. “Now is the day of salvation”: now is the time we *can* do it: when the night has once come it will be too late: and remember no twilight foretells the coming of this night: it may be here in a day or an hour. And here is one great difference between the night of which our text speaks and that which closes the common day. “The night cometh” now: and if at this moment there be no trace of its approach, there will be soon: it will not be long before the sun shall slope towards the West, and the breeze turn chill, and the light lessen and die away: and these hints of night’s approach, these heralds of his coming, will warn the traveller to quicken his step, and the worker to push on faster with his task, if they would finish what they have to do before night interrupts them. But although life has its evening too: although gray hairs, and departing vigor, and enfeebled faculties, may mark the decline to *its* dark night, death: still the day of life may be ended in a moment without a warning, and the night of death may come like the tiger’s spring, without a forewarning cloud. The bursting of one little

vein: the failure of some little spring in the machinery of our wonderfully made frames: the slip of a foot: the falling of a stone: *that* is all that is needed to eclipse our sun at noon: to cut our day sharp and short. And O, brethren, if this be so, shall one rational being be found within these walls, who will allow his life to go on and on, knowing that life's great work is yet to do, and still not earnestly laboring to do it? It will stand you in no stead, in the other world, to say that you always intended to repent some time; and that you verily believe you would have done so had you not died. I cannot think of any words to make the duty of casting yourselves on Jesus now, if you have not already, plainer than it is at the very first glance. "The night cometh": it may be here very soon: it may be that before you reach your homes this day, your day of grace may be suddenly ended: yet that little time is all you have to make your peace with God. O what can be plainer than that you should make the most of that little time! What plainer than that you should not lose a minute of it: what plainer than that if you intend ever to become a Christian, it should be now; even now!

Yes, brethren, "the night cometh." It has been coming on all the time I have been speaking to you. In some of us the sun of life may be mounting up, and in others declining: but in none of us is it standing still. And there is not a point of sharper contrast between the

true Christian and the mere worldling, than in the respective feelings of the two as they think of this great and acknowledged fact. It is to the worldly man a fact that is all sad and dreary: it is to the Christian man a fact that is all glorious and bright, though with the sobered brightness of a blessed hope, that is as far from romance as it is above it. There is no theme on which worldly genius has spoken more beautifully, because there is none on which the worldly heart has felt more deeply, than the sad contrast between the dull realities of life's decline, and the bright hopes of its rising: and he spake truly to nature who repudiated the notion that any *earthly* gain connected with the evening of life could make up for its morning joyousness: the natural feeling is expressed most beautifully in the words, — and we well believe their author meant what he said, —

“ Ne'er tell me of glories serenely adorning

The close of our day, the calm eve of our night: —

Give me back, give me back, the wild freshness of morning, —

Its smiles and its tears are worth evening's best light! ”

Yes, to the man whose whole view is confined to this world, it is an awful truth that the text declares. It is a very sad thing for a man to look round him on his pleasant home, amid its beautiful trees and its kindly neighbors, and with its warm comforts; and then to think “the night is coming that shall part me from all

these : and when I am parted from them I have nothing else to look for : beyond the grave I have no hope and no home." — And even if a man has very little of this world's goods : even if he is very poor and very wretched : still if he be not a Christian, it is an awful thought that "the night cometh" : for we naturally cling to bare life ; and bad as life may be, death to the natural man is something infinitely worse. It is only to the true believer that there is any comfort in our text. It is only he who can feel no cloud cast upon life's little day by the thought that "the night cometh." It is only he who can calmly anticipate that night as it comes on ; knowing that though it may end a happy day here, it shall usher in a far happier and brighter. When the believer remembers this text ; when he looks onward to the night it tells of ; he sees an eternal day beyond it. *His* view does not stop upon the grave : it takes in a happy country upon the farther side. When the man who is not a Christian reads the text it means to him no more than it actually says : it means just that night is coming : night with all its terrors : night, dark, dismal, eternal : night that knows no morning. But when the Christian reads my text, it means more to him than meets the eye : it means that night indeed is coming, but after night a blissful and eternal day : the night our Saviour speaks of is a moment's interval of dark, that parts the cloudy day of mortal life from the bright and glorious day of an

eternal world! The believer's day goes down, only like the sun, which even as it sinks beneath our horizon and from our sight, is rising in glory upon bright and distant lands. When the Christian's friends stand round his dying-bed, and say his sun is setting fast, it is at that very moment dawning in brightness upon the sinless and sorrowless world. His day sets here, and in that hour it rises there: his spark of life is extinguished here, and there in that moment it is rekindled a thousand times as brightly: time ends for him here, but only that eternity may begin there: he is no longer the poor sinful dying man upon earth, but he is the pure and happy immortal in heaven! What wonder then, if he should listen calmly to the declaration that "the night cometh!" It is but the line of shadow across which he steps into the sunshine! It is but the threshold over which he passes into his own dear home! Yes, "the night cometh"; and also the Eternal Day.





XVI.

DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE.

“But speak to you the things which become sound doctrine.”—
TITUS ii. 1.



AND what were these things?

The following verses tell us. “That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things: That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children; To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.” These are the things which St. Paul described, as “the things which become sound doctrine”: that is to say, a faithful discharge of all duty is what “becomes sound doctrine.” So the general principle which we draw from the words of our text, regarded in connection with the verses which follow, is, that it is fitting that a good life should go with a sound creed: that virtue

should accompany faith, and practice grow out of belief. Doing must arise out of knowing. Faith must manifest itself in good works. Pure morality must succeed to Christian faith. A holy, sober, just, and devout life is "the thing which becomes sound doctrine."

Now the better to understand St. Paul's meaning in the words of our text, let us think of the circumstances in which they were written. Paul, it appears, had been in the island of Crete, and had done something towards laying the foundations of a Christian Church there. For some reason which is not recorded, the Apostle had to leave Crete before he had got things arranged as he could have wished. He therefore left Titus behind him, "to set in order the things which were wanting, and to ordain elders in every city." Perhaps St. Paul had been compelled to part from Titus hurriedly, without having had time to give him all the instructions he desired: perhaps the Apostle wished to furnish Titus with some more permanent directory, to which he might refer from time to time, as the occasion arose: but however that might be, St. Paul wrote from Nicopolis this Epistle, intended for the guidance of Titus in the important work of fully organizing the Church of Crete. And the great Apostle gives the youthful Evangelist no smooth or flattering account of the character of the people committed to his charge. St. Paul, as we all know, was the last man in the world to care for giving

offence when the truth was to be spoken: and we have no more striking proof of this than in the way in which in this Epistle he describes the general character of the Cretians. Lying, cruelty, and brutal manners, gluttony and sensuality, are the things which he mentions as characteristic of this people: and there is a sharp rebuke to the mealy-mouthed preachers of modern days in the entire spirit of those instructions he gives Titus for dealing with such. St. Paul wanted plain speaking: there was to be no going round about for fear that people would not like it. Of course they would not like it: but notwithstanding that, Titus was to "rebuke them sharply, that they might be sound in the faith": he was to "speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority"; and to "let no man despise him." Now probably you are all aware, that in almost every age of the Christian Church there have been men so foolish or so wicked as to teach that if men have faith they may do without works: they have taught that if any person has thoroughly and heartily believed in Christ, it does not matter in how many sins he may indulge; inasmuch as our works have nothing to do with our acceptance with God. It is indeed quite true that no human being can be justified before God upon the ground of his own merits: "by the works of the law can no man be justified": and it is simply and solely for the sake of Christ that any man can obtain pardon, or peace, or heaven. But there

never was a wickeder lie told by the father of lies himself, than that those who have believed in Christ are set free from obedience to the moral law as a rule of life. Now remember what kind of people were the inhabitants of Crete. They were a gross, sensual, lazy, lying race: they were just the very men to grasp at the idea that Christianity was a religion that would save them from hell, and get them admittance to heaven at last; while yet it would allow them to enjoy the pleasures of sin in this world. They were just the very men to stand up for faith without works, — “to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness,” — to resort to that foul, wicked, idiotic heresy, that drew tears from the eyes of Paul himself, and made him declare, even weeping, that such as taught it were “the enemies of the cross of Christ.” And so Paul, knowing what kind of people the Cretians were, bids Titus adapt his instructions to their case; and tell them plainly and oftentimes that doctrine and practice must go together. Therefore it was that the Apostle so earnestly declared that pure and strict morality, — the faithful discharge by all sorts and conditions of men of their personal duties and their social, — were “the things that become sound doctrine.” And in reading over this Epistle you cannot fail of being struck by the earnestness and frequency with which Paul presses on Titus the same idea. “This is a faithful saying,” he says (chap.

iii. 8), "and these things I will that thou affirm constantly; that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." Then (v. 14), he says, "And let our's also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." And in the preceding chapter, the Apostle exhorts servants to fidelity, and honesty, and obedience, that thus "they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." Still more fully does he set out the connection between faith and morality in the verses which follow (chap. ii. 11, 12): "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." And so complete, indeed, is the statement of all our duties which is contained in this last passage, that it is generally taken as the basis of the classification of human duty which is set out in systems of Ethics: the "soberly" including all the duties we owe to ourselves; the "righteously," all we owe to our fellow-men; and the "godly," all we owe to the Almighty. And thus it is, my brethren, that St. Paul would have us understand, and that in the plainest and clearest way, that for men and women, old and young, servants and masters, all kinds of men in all kinds of circumstances, faithfully and constantly to seek to avoid every sin and perform every duty, is what becomes,—he does

not say sound morality, — he does not say sound views and principles in Ethics, — he does not say sound notions of the fitness of things and the fundamental laws of reason and virtue: but he *does* say that all this is “the thing which becomes sound *doctrine*.”

Thus boldly and resolutely does St. Paul assert the vital and inseparable connection between Christian faith and Christian virtue: between evangelical doctrine and pure morality. And I doubt not that many of you know that there have been men, and that at no distant day in our own country, who have been bold enough to maintain that St. Paul was wrong and mistaken when he did this. There have been and there are men who maintain that the doctrine of Justification by Faith is subversive of morality, and “adverse to the interests of virtue and practical righteousness in the world.” There have been and there are men who maintain that if you go to a man, and tell him that no doings nor sufferings of his own can ever save him from hell or gain him admission to heaven, but that it is by faith in Christ, and that alone, he is justified before God; this is the way to make that man feel that he is set loose from every requirement of morality; and to make him think that since his own doings have nothing to do with his acceptance with the Almighty, he may do just what he pleases. What is the use of my doing anything, the man may say, since all my doings count for nothing? Why should

I deny myself in any way, or labor to perform any disagreeable and painful duty, when I have only to believe in Christ, and then I shall be placed on just as good a footing as if I had practised labor and self-denial to the most harassing degree? And I will grant you that there have been men,—how hopelessly ignorant of the very alphabet of Christian knowledge and experience,—how recklessly wicked,—how idiotically senseless and foolish I forbear to say,—who have actually gone upon these principles: who have pretended that they knew that some process had taken place within their souls,—where of course no one could see whether it had or had not,—which they considered was that “believing in Christ” to which salvation is promised: who therefore pretended that they knew their salvation was secured: and who, “by gross departures from some of the most obvious and incumbent moralities of life,” have proved a stumbling-block and an offence to multitudes. Ah! but these are the very men against whom Paul directs his sternest and most deeply-felt rebukes: these are the men who “turn the grace of God into licentiousness,” and “who rank among the privileges of the Gospel an immunity for sin.” These are the very men of whom Paul declared “often, and even weeping, that they were the enemies of the cross of Christ”; and its very worst enemies. They are Satan’s own choicest emissaries, veiling themselves under the name of Christ. Chris-

tians, do they call themselves! Christianity repudiates them and flings them off: she knows them not, and disavows all connection with them. *They* talk of sound doctrine! They don't know what it means! Give us the Gospel's open enemies and we can brave them: but save us from the foul dishonor done to the name of Jesus by the moral worthlessness of those who thus falsely profess themselves the Gospel's friends! Fix it in your minds, my brethren, — you cannot do it too firmly, — that St. Paul, the stoutest and firmest advocate of the great evangelic doctrine of justification by faith, is at the same time the strongest exponent of the moral requirements of the religion of Christ. The self-same hand that wrote, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law”; wrote also at the close of a sad list of moral transgressions, that “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”; and wrote that “they which are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts”: and wrote that “the grace of God that bringeth salvation, teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” Nor did Paul maintain these two doctrines, that of justification by faith, and that of the necessity of a pure life, as things which were both true, but not easily reconcilable with one another. He did not first set out in his Epistle to the Romans the

first great doctrine, of salvation simply through Christ : and then, finding it pushed into consequences legitimately flowing from it, which yet he shrunk from, try in writing to Titus to hedge in that doctrine, to make deductions from it, and reservations upon it, so as to bring it into something like consistence with common conscience and common sense. No such thing. There is no eating in one doctrine, to give due prominence to the other. He puts the two side by side : he set them out as perfectly consistent and conformable with one another : he does all this with an unaffected simplicity which proves he thought that no one who was not either desperately wicked or desperately foolish could ever fancy them anything else : He makes the one indeed grow out of the other : and when he would prescribe and enforce moral duties, see how he speaks of them to Titus : “ Speak thou,” he says, “ the things which become sound doctrine !”

But we have much more to say than this. Not only do we declare, taking St. Paul for our present authority, that it is not true that the doctrine of justification by faith is subversive of morality : we say, on the contrary, that the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel received into the heart in their saving power are not the best but the only guarantees and sources of all morality. It may at the first glance appear somewhat inconsistent, — but the

question is one of fact, and to the test of fact we are content to bring it, — when we say that to go to a man seeking earnestly for salvation, and to tell him that his own best doings have no merit whatever, but that he must rely simply and solely for forgiveness on the atoning blood of Christ, and seek for the influences of the Holy Spirit to originate and carry out every good feeling and good action: — when we say that to tell a man *that*, and make him feel it, — is the way to make him seek to avoid sin and to practise all that is pure and right in a way that nothing in this world would ever have made him do while he was depending on his own works as a ground of merit, or whilst he was urged to the practice of morality just for morality's sake. It may seem strange to those to whom it is simply announced as a theory; but it is no less true; that *that* evangelical system which seems to undervalue morality, — which makes nothing of it indeed as a ground of merit, though it makes everything of it in another way shortly to be spoken of, — is the system which above all others has proved in fact successful in producing the best and noblest specimens of morality; — of all that is amiable, honest, pure, lovely, and heroic. If you wish to find the man who is most conscientiously, constantly, and successfully laboring to allow himself in no sin, and to leave undone no duty, you should look to the humble and contrite soul who feels and confesses that in him there is

no sufficiency and no merit ; and who acknowledges simply and from his heart that Christ is all in all,—the single foundation of his trust and hope. Now my friends, this is a question of fact ; it is a question to be decided by appeal to fact. And I ask those among you who have learned by experience what it is fairly to get off the ground of your own merit, and with some sense of the freeness of the Gospel salvation to cast your souls upon Christ ; whether you cannot testify that sin never appeared to you a thing to be so hated and shunned, as when you thought of it as all parted from you forever by the Saviour's precious blood : whether you could even admit to your mind for one moment the idea, that you might go on in sin because you felt or hoped that your sins would never condemn you now. And do you not know that those around you in whose case you have most reason to think there is the spirit of true Christianity, are precisely the men most distinguished for all that is just, amiable, moral, in the affairs of daily life ? And does not even the most worldly man feel a thrill of disgust, and almost of horror, when he finds the man who goes to a communion-table, and there professes himself Christ's, acting either unsoberly, unrighteously, or ungodly ? Look to St. Paul himself. How assured was *his* faith in Christ ! What says he ? “ I know in Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day ” : and

how did this man live? “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly: so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” And I may remind you, too, of the memorable confession of one who was among the most illustrious of divines, that for many years he urged upon his people the importance of morality, as the ultimate end of his preaching; and in all that time his preaching produced not the slightest improvement upon the moral habits of his parishioners: but at length he learned to set before them, and to urge upon their acceptance, the free offer of forgiveness through the blood of Christ: and then it was that a higher moral tone spread through the parish: then it was that scrupulous fidelity and honesty took the place of unfaithfulness and fraud: and that great and good man carried with him to all his after-life the conviction, taught him by his own experience, that “to preach Christ is the only effective way of preaching morality in all its branches”; that the doctrines of the Gospel, received into the heart, are the only sure spring of all morality.

We have said, my friends, that the question is one of fact; and facts without number confirm St. Paul’s assertion. But do not imagine that we shrink in the least degree from bringing the matter to the test of reason. Do not imagine that we think that the best of the argu-

ment lies with those who say that the doctrine of justification by faith is inconsistent with morality. You observe that in our text Paul speaks of all sorts of people being careful in their respective stations to perform their duty, — Paul speaks of these things as “the things which *become* sound doctrine.” Now if these words be rightly applied, there must be something in sound doctrine fitted when rightly regarded to conduce to morality. And it is easily to be proved that the fact is so. I have not stayed to tell you what Paul meant by “sound doctrine”: I take it for granted that you all know: the Apostle just meant the grand characteristic doctrines of the Gospel: and we now say that in every view these are eminently fitted to promote a pure morality. Does not the Gospel teach us that we should hate and avoid sin? — Does not the Gospel teach us that sin was the cause of unutterable anguish and agony to our gracious Redeemer; and that every sin is a crucifying of Christ afresh? Is it not a ready lesson from this doctrine that we should hate and shun sin? Does not the Gospel tell us that the great work of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts is to regenerate and sanctify; and that “this is the will of God, even our sanctification”: and if there be meaning in words or actions, does not all this mean that day by day we ought to be growing more free from sin? Does not the Gospel reveal to us a holy and happy heaven, as the end of our hopes and strivings; and tell

us that "without holiness no man shall see God" there: that "the pure in heart shall see God": and that "there shall in no wise enter there anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie?" But one feels it is almost a wasting of time to set one's self to prove that the Gospel from first to last sets its face against all sin. We have just indicated a little of that "sound doctrine" which virtue "becomes": and I think no one can fail to see how naturally the two things, faith and practice, go together: how these doctrines which we have mentioned, and many others, lead directly to a pure and holy life.

We said a little while ago, that although in one way the Gospel makes nothing of what are commonly called "good works," it makes a very great deal of them in another way. "Sound doctrine" tells us that good works can do nothing to save us: that as a ground of merit they are absolutely worthless: that we are saved through Christ alone. We are justified by faith, not by works: but then, "sound doctrine" tells us that wherever there is true faith, there will be works also: that faith manifests itself in works, and that works are the evidence of faith. Justification is a thing which is invisible to us: it is something done in heaven: and it is not possible for us to turn over the leaves of the Book of Life, and ascertain there whether the name of this

man or that man be written there or no. But still, we have means of judging, in some degree, whether we ourselves or others be justified: because justification, itself unseen, does (so to speak) cast a visible shadow: whenever justification exists in heaven, sanctification walks visible upon earth. Wherever faith is in the heart, though we cannot see itself, we can see what springs from it: it will manifest itself in a pure and holy life, as certainly as good seed in the ground will evidence its presence there by springing up into leaves and fruit. "Faith without works is dead"; is the strong declaration of the Apostle James: *That* faith which lies dormant in the heart and never affects the life, is no faith at all. St. John puts this with equal clearness, making works the evidence of faith: "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." "Whoso keepeth His word, in him is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him." Then St. Peter writes, "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath

forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fail." You will remember St. Paul's statement to the Galatians, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith *which worketh by love.*" And we have no stronger declaration of the essential necessity of works of morality as the evidence of a living faith, than that of St. James: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Never forget, my brethren, that by yourselves you can do no good thing: your best doings have in them a character of evil: and it is only in virtue of a saving union with Christ, and by the motion of the Holy Spirit on our hearts, that we can perform any duty, or do anything that is pleasing in the sight of God. But fix it in your minds, — you cannot do so too deeply, — that wherever there is faith in the heart, *there* will be morality in the life: that to any view save that of God, Who alone "looketh upon the heart," the single proof that can be of the existence of faith, is a life conformed to the strict requirements of a morality that far exceeds and transcends the very purest that human philosophers ever conceived of, or human lawgivers ever thought to enforce. If any man in his daily life allows himself deliberately in the practice of any known sin, or in the neglect of any commanded duty: if a man in his daily life violate any of the re-

quirements of morality : I don't care a straw how plausibly *that* man may talk about his faith and his Christian experience : I don't care a straw what professions he may make of having believed in Christ, and felt in his heart the great, saving change : He has no faith : He has no part in Christ : He is no believer : and the more plausible and the more loud his talk of these things may be, the more plainly should I say of him, what I the more firmly should believe of him, that he is a vile hypocrite and his profession a vile lie ! Ah, he may be regular in his appearance at the house of God : he may be constant in his attendance at the communion : he may make long prayers and loud ones : he may interlard his conversation with texts of Scripture : he may turn up his eyes, and drawl out his words, and speak compassionately of others who have (as he fancies) less light than he : but he has never believed, — for faith purifies the heart, and works by love, and overcomes the world : he has never seen the evil of sin, as that which nailed the Saviour to the Cross, — for O how abominable sin looks to those who look at it as that which shed the blood and drew the tears of Jesus : he has never repented, — for true repentance is repented of no more : he has never practised, — and faith without works is dead ; a sham and a delusion. If there be a clear full spring, that wells forth upon the mountain's side, think you it will keep its waters within itself ; or will it not rather send them' forth through field and

wood, a refreshment and a blessing to all things near? And such a spring is living faith: it cannot be confined within the heart: it will go forth in a thousand ways: in kind looks, in gentle words, in benevolent deeds, in charity, in patience, in strict honesty, in perfect truthfulness: in whatsoever things are pure, honest, lovely, and of good report. If there be a noble tree, that has stood for centuries, yet which has the life in its heart as sound as ever, — will it, when the spring days come back, remain all stern and still: or will it not rather send forth millions of leaves, each a green living witness that there is life in the old tree yet? And such a stem is living faith: so certainly will it put forth leaves and fruit: so certainly will true repentance “bring forth fruits meet for repentance”: so certainly will true faith “go forth and bear fruit,” — fruit “which shall remain.” And if it be true that the evil and inconsistent behavior of professing Christians has oftentimes been a stumbling-block in the way of men; no less true is it that every faithful consistent believer, whose daily life is colored by his faith and consistent with it, is something to recommend his religion to all who see him. What but this did our Saviour mean, when He said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven?” And when the Christian seeks to obey this command, what has he to do but to exhibit in his daily life “the things which become sound doctrine!”



XVII.

PATIENCE.

“Ye have need of patience.” — HEB. x. 36.

THEY had “need of patience,” thought St. Paul, those Hebrews to whom he was writing. So have we all. It seems from the position in which we find the words, that the particular kind of patience of which the Hebrews stood in need, was the patience which calmly waits for the coming of some expected good, rather than the patience which quietly bears up under the pressure of some present pain. “Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” Work manfully meanwhile, it is as if the Apostle said: and as for the reward of your labor, you must wait for that. You will not have to wait very long, after all: “Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” But human beings are very apt, not only to murmur and repine when evil and sorrow are present with them, but to grow restless and fretful when they are waiting for good, which is safe to come at last, but which they think

is long in coming. And so, says St. Paul, kindly and considerately as it was his way to speak,—and so “Ye have need of patience.”

So have we all. Many times, many ways, in many cases, we have needed patience, and we shall need it again. It is not, perhaps, a very cheering or encouraging view of life which such a text sets before us; but it is not the less for that a view that is just and right. It may seem that it would sound somewhat stern and severe, were we in such a strain to address some gay being, flushed with the hopes of youth, and full of joyous anticipation; and if, reckoning up to such a one the things that he or she would want to pass through human life peacefully, creditably, and Christianly, we were to place in the foreground a quality so little stirring and engaging as that sober, staid, grave and almost gloomy one, which is mentioned in the text. You will want honesty and industry, we might say without discouraging effect to some youth who has to make his way in the world: you will be the better for talent if it has pleased God to give it to you: you will need friends and kindly sympathy, all these and more: and such a story of the wants of future life might be listened to with the high-beating heart we should little wish to check or chill. You will need, most of all, Christian principle to keep you right, Christ's blood to wash your sins away, a Blessed Spirit to renew your nature, a Christian hope to sus-

tain you when you come to die. But tell me, you who have learned by experience what like thing is life: you who have learned it by that experience which does not take many years to come, — if there be not something, less pleasant to think of, less stirring to name, which will be needful at many a time, and in many a place; and if it would not be something less than duty, were we to omit to say to any one, to whom we were summing up the needs and exigencies of life, just what Paul said to the Hebrews long ago: — “Ye have need of patience.”

We have said, my friends, that it is no encouraging description of the life which lies before us all, that is implied in such a text as this. For “patience supposes pain: patience is the condition of mind and heart with which a Christian desires to submit to evil from which it is impossible to escape. And to say that we shall need patience, is the same thing as to say that we shall have much suffering to endure, much weary waiting for expected good, much of the sickness of heart which comes from hope deferred, much of that listless sorrow which comes from hopes disappointed and blighted. It is not an encouraging thing, to set out before one entering upon the journey of life, a picture of the fatigues and perils which must be encountered by the way. It is not an encouraging thing, when a man is just embarking on board the ship which is to bear him a weary voyage over the ocean, to point out to him the long ranks of buckets

for extinguishing fire, or the boats for conveying crew and passengers after the ship is wrecked, — and to say to him, You are very likely to need all these. *They* may, indeed, never be needed: no fire may ever break out; no storm may ever rise; no leak ever let in destruction; and at the conclusion of the safe and pleasant voyage, the traveller may be able to smile at all his needless fears. But it is not quite so with that unprepossessing provision which St. Paul suggests to us as one which will be needed ere the voyage of life is done. It is not a chance, and an uncertainty, whether we shall need Patience or no. Every one of us must and will. True it is, that the lot of some has hardly a crook in it: true it is, that some human beings, at some periods of their life, seem to be so highly favored, that little stock and store of patience would suffice for *them*: but the end is not yet: call no man happy before he dies: who shall say how soon the day may come, when the brightest lot may grow the gloomiest, and the heart which hardly ever knew care or sorrow, may have more than its own burden to bear! Sooner or later, we shall all have need of patience: O may God please to grant it to us when the need shall come! It is hard indeed to get, like many needful things: many have but small measure of it; and those who have most, have little enough. And how often we see, that those are most impatient who have least to bear, and that many a poor sufferer, upon whom

God in his mysterious decree has sent suffering which seems almost intolerable, is enabled to remain resigned and even cheerful under it all! But we repeat, that St. Paul's words, related in the text, may very fitly be regarded as spoken to us all. Many things will come the way of us all, which will tend to make us fretful and impatient. And let us think, for a little, of some of the most common of these inevitable things: some of those circumstances and events which are certain to happen to us all, in greater or less degree, and when pressed by which we shall have "need of patience."

The first and most obvious thing which occurs to our minds, when we try to call up those things which will make patience needful, is positive suffering and pain. Patience, in that sense in which it is most easily understood by most men, supposes pain. It means quiet and uncomplaining endurance of that which is painful: and indeed, if we were anxious to be philosophically accurate in language, it would not be difficult to show that patience never means anything else; and that all the circumstances in man's lot which make patience needful, do so because they imply suffering or uneasiness to be submitted to. But passing by such a thought as *that*, how much of positive pain, both of body and mind, falls to the lot of almost every human being: and how hard it is, yea but for God's grace how impossible it is, to refrain from impatience, from murmuring, from bitter

repining and accusing of Providence, when great trouble comes! Who but those who have actually felt the heavy load of severe bodily pain, repeated and protracted day by day, know the bitter and angry and impatient thoughts and feelings which it has power to stir up in our hearts? You have heard of the patience of Job: his name has passed into a world's proverb for his patience: yet how bitterly he complained in his time of grief: and how sadly true a representation of the natural tendency of the fallen human heart under overwhelming suffering, is that wicked suggestion which he so steadfastly resisted, that "curse God and die!" It is not likely, perhaps, that any one here will ever be tempted and tried as Job was: although indeed it is a strange and a mysterious thing, how some human beings are as it were singled out for terrible suffering: how some are doomed to lie for years on beds of agony,—how some are selected as the victims of unendurable wrong: and who can tell but that he or she may yet attain this sorrowful eminence,—may yet receive the shock of some fearful accident, or become the prey of some dreadful disease, or the victim of some crushing misfortune? Which of us here can tell how sadly we may need patience before we come to die! But suffering, whether great or small, always tends to make us impatient: and oftentimes those little, insect cares and pains which are of daily and hourly occurrence, and which

seem, perhaps, too small and insignificant to need any great exercise of patience to enable us to face them, yet suffice to spur us on to an impatience and fretfulness which are sinful and humiliating. The little trials of temper which we must meet day by day in domestic and social life; the seasons of occasional bodily suffering which we must all experience while placed in these frail and sensitive frames which in a thousand ways may admit pain; the little crosses and stings which are forgotten almost as soon as felt; all these sometimes are able to irritate and vex us into a frame of mind which makes patience wellnigh as needful as even those greater and weightier bereavements and sorrows which tend so sorely to stir up a rebellious spirit, — a spirit which chafes at and quarrels with the wise though mysterious decrees of God. And the very fact, to which experience testifies, that we are even more ready to grow impatient and fretful at little troubles than at great ones, because for great troubles a Christian man gathers up his endurance, and seeks to receive them submissively as coming by the appointment of God, while little ones he somehow does not think of in connection with the Almighty, and meets them in his own unaided strength, — I say this very fact only shows us the more strongly, that a very ordinary lot, with very ordinary trials, may yet furnish a great field for the exercise of patience; — patience not the heathen virtue, not the worldly prudence, but the Chris-

tian grace. Do not fancy, my friends, that patience is a grace which sorely-tied Job perhaps might exercise, but which is not for such as you. Do not fancy, that patience is a grace to be prayed for and to be sought after by those only who are distinguished above common human nature, by bearing more than its common heritage of woe. Do not fancy, that because your health is firm, and your spirits buoyant, and your temper hopeful, and your lot prosperous, and your home happy, and your mind easy, that therefore a very moderate share of patience will be quite sufficient. Nay, my brother: for if you have flesh that can quiver, nerves that can jar, a heart that can sink, dear ones that may be smitten: if little cares can annoy you, little disappointments irritate you; if you have the quick eye to which a hair's-breadth of deviation from right is wrong, the quick perception to which dulness and stupidity are as a sin: if you are, in brief, a cultivated man, and keenly and delicately sensitive, because of that cultivation, to every impression from within and from without; — then, my brother, let your path in life be what it may, as you traverse it, from hour to hour, you will “have need of patience!”

A second case in which patience will be very needful to us all, is when our hopes and wishes are deferred: when we have to wait and wait, day after day, week

after week, year after year, for some expected good. And how many human beings have to wait away, in this fashion, the best years of life ! How many a human being never gets the thing which he or she has waited for, till the power of enjoying it is gone ! “ It is good for a man,” says Scripture, “ that he both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord ” : and we can easily think of various benefits which result from a state of expectation. But surely patience, implanted by God’s Spirit, is mightily needed in such a case. For, if it be not given, how often it proves bitterly bad for man or for woman to linger out these days of expectancy : how often to do so sours the heart, withers up the affections, jaundices the views, turns the fresh hopeful being of youth, into the gloomy, bitter, solitary, despairing misanthrope of scarcely middle age ! “ Hope deferred,” said the wisest man, “ maketh the heart sick ” : and the universal heart of humanity feels that therein he spake true. There are few conditions of mind which are more painful, more enervating, than that in which day after day our hopes are put off, even though they are not finally blighted. Hanging on, in that condition of listless weariness, varied only by eager expectation and anxiety alternating with dull disappointment, the man feels that he can settle to nothing : he cannot apply his mind to his task : it would almost be a relief to know that the worst he fears has hap-

pened, so this wretched uncertainty were ended. Ah, the mother has "need of patience," who, day after day as the post hour draws near, trembles between hope and fear for the letter she looks for from her son, laid on the bed of sickness in a foreign land: and never does she need patience more, than when the message of many past days is repeated, that there is no word for her; and she must just wait on, sick at heart, through another weary day, again to hope and again to be disappointed to-morrow! It is sad to think how many weary hearts there are every day over the world, to whom patience is thus needful. I never did believe, that what philosophers call the light of nature, can prove the goodness of God: I believe that so far as there is any such light, it points in just the contrary direction; and never more explicitly than in the fact we all know, that things in this world not once in ten times turn out as human beings wish and hope; and that every man so much needs that patience which will bear up, through day after day, against hopes deferred, and at last utterly disappointed. Do we not all know, that if any human being has set his heart on any one thing beneath the sun, it is all but a certainty that he never will reach it; it will fall to the lot of some one who did not care for it, and did not want it? Do we not all know, that from the smallest matters to the greatest, the same strange perversity seems ingrained into the very essence of the

nature of things, rendering patience a needful thing at almost every hour of almost every day? Who does not know, that in this evil world things almost invariably turn out just in that way which we least wished and hoped? That day is nine times out of ten a rainy one which we especially desired should be fair: any little accident is pretty safe to happen just at the most inconvenient time: any little illness is almost certain to come when we most wished to be well. It is just on the day when you expect an important letter that something goes wrong with the mail train: it is just when the physician is wanted in a case of life and death that of course he is twenty miles away. Now all these, and a host of such things which each of you will think of for himself, may seem very small things. And so they are: but very small things may excite a most unchristian degree of impatience and fretfulness: and the deferred and disappointed hopes which may seem quite insignificant to strangers, may yet be very important indeed to a man himself. What does the world care, whether such a one reaches the position on which he has set his heart: or sees his children placed in life as he would wish them: or hears good news of the absent son in New Zealand? Yet to the man himself, these are not small matters. And so long as such matters are in every man's lot, every man will have "need of patience."

We might go on to point out various other sources of that peculiar state of mind in which patience becomes needful : but we have already suggested to you enough to make you see that, looking no further than to the endurances and the waitings which concern this present world, we may well understand our text as spoken to every member of the human family. We might further show you how needful patience becomes when we are prosecuting some long-continued labor, in which we grow weary and ready to give up : and how needful patience is in dealing with very many of our fellow-creatures, to bear with their slowness, their carelessness, their neglect of duty, their dulness of apprehension : how patience is needed in the transaction of worldly business, in every journey you take, in every place to which you go. We might show you how especially needful patience is to such as feel deeply anxious for the social and moral and spiritual elevation of mankind : for no one needs patience more than the Christian philanthropist and the Christian minister. We do not care so much about that impatience which frets because it cannot have its own way : this is an age in which not even monarchs can have *that* in dealing with their fellow-creatures : but it *is* hard and it is disheartening to find that men will neither be led nor be driven in the right way : it is hard for the earnest preacher of the Cross to feel that Sunday after Sunday he preaches the Gospel, yet sees no

fruit: that dying men will not accept the offer of life, that sinners refuse to repent, and wanderers to return. It is hard for the philanthropist to expend his means and exhaust his energies to add to the comforts and the intelligence of his humbler brethren, and yet to find, what some of us may have been distressed by seeing, a decided preference for dirt and squalor, and ignorance, — and a suspicion that some evil political motive is urging on conduct which pure benevolence suggests. It needs patience in that man's heart, who is thoroughly persuaded that the day will come when the religion of Christ shall overspread the world, yet who feels year by year how little the frontiers of the Saviour's kingdom are advanced, — how slow its progress is, — how little return in converted souls is made by many regions of the world, for the brave and earnest hearts they have broken, and the devoted lives they have cut down. Ah, look at India, and think of men like Martyn; and surely we have need of patience when we do! But it wearies and disheartens us even to reckon up the host of things which make patience needful for us all: and perhaps it was hardly necessary to insist upon so plain a truth. So we pass to the more practical question: As we need patience so much, how are we to get it? Where does it come from? How is it to be had?

Now we reply to this at once, that patience is a

Christian grace, the gift of God, and the operation of the Holy Spirit: and it is to be obtained, as all Christian graces are, by earnestly praying for it, and by patiently striving after it, and by humbly and reverently submitting to all those means which the Holy Spirit makes use of to implant it in our hearts; “Tribulation worketh patience,” says the Apostle Paul: and how often we know it does: how often long-continued affliction is sanctified of God to tame and subdue the soul into a calm and beautiful submission: but O, it was not tribulation alone that wrought this end, but tribulation sanctified, tribulation as an instrument in the hand of a higher Power. In many cases, long-continued suffering has wrought the very reverse of patience: it has wrought fretfulness, ceaseless discontent, wrath against God. And so we say, that no merely natural means will work true patience: the reasonings of philosophy will not do it, the trainings of education will not do it, the mellowing of years will not do it. Indeed, apart from the influence of religion, we believe natural temper grows worse the older we grow. What so crabbed and unlovely as age often is! Who so impatient as the ablest and best educated men often are! We will grant you, indeed, that in working patience, the Holy Spirit finds very different kinds of material on which His gracious operations must be wrought. It is much easier in some cases than in

others, to produce what looks like patience. There is not a respect in which natural disposition appears to vary so much. There is a constitutional impatience which is the natural result of the delicate nervous system and the quick active brain which always accompany high talent and high cultivation. Some people, again, seem naturally patient. They are not easily fluttered and excited. They are phlegmatic and comatose, — the result mainly of a dull brain and a slow circulation. Extremely stupid people often seem remarkably patient. But here, in truth, there is no true patience at all. There is nothing that deserves the name. For what *is* patience? Is it not *bearing*, — bearing what is felt as painful and irritating, and bearing it calmly and well? It is the man who feels keenly, and resists strong impulses to murmur, that is the truly patient man. You would not call a stone patient, let it bear what it might: and why? Because it feels nothing. And the nearer people approach to the insensibility of the stone, — that is, the more they have of what we may call natural patience, — the less they have of real patience. The truth is, the more patient men seem the less patient they often really are. That quietude of manner which is the outward sign of patience in one who is striving against anger or fretfulness may be the outward sign of mere stolidity in another man. It is not patience to be composed under what another would feel keenly, if the

reason of your composure is, that you do not feel it at all. It is not patience to await composedly the decision of some question which would make another tremble with eagerness, if the reason of your composure be, that you do not care how the matter goes. And so the heathen patience, — that patience, that fortitude, that stoical endurance, which resulted from caring for nothing, loving nothing, fearing nothing, — *that* was no patience at all! It was not half so sublime, in its dull, dead impassiveness, as the trembling eagerness of St. Paul's stammering tongue, the keen feeling of St. Paul's trembling heart, fighting against the law in the members with a nature through which emotion thrilled like wind through a tree! Ah, the true patience, that patience which God's Spirit works, and oftentimes by the slow wear of suffering years, is not the dull torpor of a clod, but the sensitive, eager, vehement resistance of a human soul against that to resist which it is, by itself, utterly unequal. It was in Paul, with his hot, hasty temper, striving to keep it down: it was in Job, stripped of wealth and children, tortured in spirit and in body, yet fighting with the temptation to curse God and die: it was in David, as with a heart almost crushed beneath the heavy visitation, he turned his pale face towards his chamber, and bemoaned his slain, rebellious, but still-loved son. It is not in the cold-blooded, heartless semi-brute, who takes quietly the

death of wife and child, because so long as he is not touched himself, he really does not care : but it is in the heart-broken mourner, it may be, who tosses on his feverish bed through sleepless nights of tears. It is not in the spiritless dunce, who acquiesces in that obscurity which is all he is fit for, and does not care that men should remain ignorant of a name which they would never care to know : but it is in the inglorious Milton, living till age with the consciousness of a gift within him, which was able to leave something so written as that men would not willingly let it die ; or in the lofty genius bending his energies upon the duties of a lowly station, the passage to an unknown grave.

But let us see to it, my friends, that none of us should fancy that because we find it hard to exercise patience, therefore we may be excused seeking to exercise it at all. Many people act as if they thought that because they have special need of patience, therefore they may do without patience altogether. Many a man appears to think that the hasty temper or the over-anxious disposition which he received from nature, is to be received as an excuse for a constant fretfulness, or for occasional outbursts of impatience which are humiliating to Christian character and destructive of Christian peace. But while we admit that no human being can tell how honestly any Christian man has striven with the evil heart

of nature, — how hard the law of the mind has fought against the law in the members; while we remember that we may partly know what a man has done, but cannot reckon what he has resisted: yet let us never forget that temptation is very rarely so strong as to destroy responsibility, or to excuse transgression. If any among us feels within himself, that impatience is his most easily besetting sin; — if any among us feels mournfully within himself that here it is the thorn in the flesh strikes deep, and the minister of Satan has most power to buffet; then let such a one remember that *here* is his battleground; — that *here* is the enemy which God specially intends him to resist, and *here* the end which God specially intends him to win. “Better is he that ruleth his spirit,” saith the wise man, “than he that taketh a city:” the truest and noblest conqueror is he who has come off victorious in that bloodless battle of life. And let us be sure of it, that “the God of patience and consolation,” — He who “knoweth our frame,” and who has told us how sorely we “have need of patience,” — will be ready by His Spirit and His grace to “strengthen us to all patience,” — to enable us to “possess our souls in patience,” — to “run with patience the race set before us,” — “patiently waiting for Christ” and His coming at the last. O, if the story be true, how one who stands out in the long ages past, as the purest and the best of heathens,*

* Socrates.

bore still upon his passion-scarred face the traces of storms gone by, after the discipline of years had made him the mildest and calmest and most self-subdued: if the tale be true that when one who professed to read men's hearts upon their brow, said that the gentle philosopher must be the most irritable and impatient of men, that tranquil heathen,—heathen because in his darkened age he never had heard of Christ,—stayed the derisive laughter of the standers by at the physiognomist's mistake, and exclaimed "He is right,—I *was* naturally so,—but Philosophy has cured me,"—O, if days of self-conflict and self-control could change the swarthy and puny being, with his satyr nature of old still written upon his satyr-face,* into the very best and gentlest: shall it ever be said, that the mighty grace of God, and the constant working of a Divine Spirit, will not suffice to calm and quiet the heats and storms and acerbities of nature, and to work out a better and loftier than the patience of the philosopher,—even the serene, equable, happy "patience of the saints!" May that patience be yours and mine! Patience to submit to all the appointments of God, even to those which now ap-

* What! that low, swarthy, short-nosed, round-eyed satyr
With the wide nostrils and Silenus' aspect,
The splay feet and low stature?

And yet he was
The earth's perfection of all mental beauty,
And personification of all virtue.

pear the darkest and the hardest to bear: patience to put down the evil suggestion to murmur: patience to wait on, day by day: patience to “wait,” like Job, if need be, “all the days of our appointed time”; till that happy “change shall come,” when the believer shall “have need of patience” no more.

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.” And so, the day will come at last, when this will be your thankful song as to the way by which God led you:—

“I waited patiently for the Lord: and He inclined unto me and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth; even praise unto our God!”





XVIII.

ST. PAUL'S CLOSING RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT.

“ For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.” — 2 TIM. iv. 6 - 8.



NEED not tell any of you, in the hope of telling you what you did not know before, that the books of the New Testament do not at all stand in the order in which they were written. The Book of Revelation, which stands last in the Bible, was written by St. John many years before he wrote his Gospel. And in like manner, though St. Paul's Epistles to Titus, Philemon, and the Hebrews, come in our Bibles after his second Epistle to Timothy, it is quite agreed by all those who have studied St. Paul's history and writings most carefully, that this second Epistle to Timothy is the very last that ever came from the aged Apostle's dictation. And so, this closing chapter of the second Epistle to Timothy, contains the latest inspired

words that were written or dictated by the great Apostle Paul.

You would readily think so, apart from any precise information. The special solemnity of these words which form my text, is such as might well characterize something said or written, under the inspiration of the Blessed Holy Spirit, by a Christian man to whom the last solemn realities were drawing very near. Sometimes, my friends, we have presentiments of things coming: presentiments which are occasionally right and perhaps more frequently wrong: and the whole question of such fanciful yet impressive premonitions lies within a field of which we know little or nothing. But there is nothing fanciful in St. Paul's words here. They are not like the baseless conviction sometimes found in a person stricken with illness, that this illness will be the last: not like the groundless belief, that clings to some through many years of life, that they are to reach some particular place in life before they die. Such convictions and beliefs, with no rational ground to rest on, do, we know, sometimes come most surprisingly true. But the great Apostle has risen to another region altogether. It is not the sunset of life, that gives him some mystical lore: it is something quite other, here, than the Celtic seer dreamt he traced on the mountain mist, or the Chaldæan shepherd in the stars. There is something here, that is quite different, even, from the hesitation as to the Fu-

ture which St. Paul himself showed, when he wrote that he would do such a thing "as soon as I shall see how it will go with me." The Apostle writes here as one who has special and thorough information, about which there was no uncertainty at all. He writes by divine inspiration: quite firmly now, as one well informed: aware of the Present; not afraid of the Past; sure of the Future!

He has very nearly done his work: the resting-place is in view at length. The thorn in the flesh has not to be endured much longer: the weary feet will soon be still, the trembling hands at rest, the warm heart cold. It was a bloody death that was waiting, a little way onward; for St. Paul is numbered not merely in the glorious company of the Apostles, but also in the noble army of Martyrs: but he passes quite over *that*, thinking of greater and worthier things. He does not think of the painful manner of his dying, but only of the triumphant fact of his death: he does not say how he was to depart, but only that he was going, and going soon. Let us recall the words again: they will bear many repetitions; like music which is all the pleasanter that you have heard it many times before: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day!"

My Christian friends, there are many things that were in St. Paul's life which will never be in ours. It was a wonderful life; more wonderful than we are able to feel it, through our long familiarity with the story. His mysterious rapture into Paradise, caught up where mortal has hardly ever been: his fierce persecution of the disciples of our Saviour: his miraculous conversion and his sight of Christ in bodily form: his burning zeal and incalculable usefulness: his supreme elevation of piety and spirituality: all these things are beyond us: there is a range of experience here that is high above what we know, or ever will know. But there can be no doubt whatsoever, — not the slightest, — that every one of us will some day stand where St. Paul stood when he wrote this text. There is no doubt at all, where the path of every one of us here present this afternoon, will end at last. There is just one end to all ways that human feet can tread. "The paths of glory," the poet tells us, "lead but to the grave": but so do all other paths, just as well. O, brethren, that we could really feel what it is that is waiting for each one of us, a little farther on! O that we could rightly consider our latter end, in our busy, careful days of health and life! And surely it is of supreme interest, and the most practical interest, to see how St. Paul felt, standing where we shall stand, at the close of this life and the entrance upon the other!

And first, see how calm the Apostle is in the present. He does not say a word of death: he does not name that thing: he puts the case in quite a different way. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." Yes: when that good man said that "our Saviour, Jesus Christ, hath abolished death"; he meant it! And speaking of the great change, he does not use the bitter word: he changes it for mild words speaking merely of transition. This "being offered": this "departure": *this* is not the king of terrors, that had so long been the bugbear of our race! God had given him the victory over it, through Jesus Christ: the Apostle was not afraid. Thus calmly and simply does he speak of what is beyond question the saddest thing upon earth: a thing in itself so overwhelming, that in its presence we feel that all the words spoken and written about it, are utterly futile and incapable to express the tremendous Fact. There is just one way of regarding death, in which it ceases to be the most crushing, humbling, hopeless, despairing, of all things: and this is in the light of His blessed words who said; "I am the Resurrection and the Life: He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die!"

Now, it cheers us, thinking of what lies before us, to see how St. Paul takes the last change, coming so very

near. It is natural that it should be so. I have stood in a church in another country, where there is a marble tablet on the wall, showing the resting-place of a very sweet and pleasing poetess. Upon that marble tablet there are engraved a few lines, telling of the abundant hope and peace in which she died. The last lines are these :

They who have seen thee look in death,
Will never fear to die.

And it is even so, seeing how St. Paul here looks and speaks : it is the same, seeing the peace and hope in which many Christians have departed. For here we get away from doctrine to fact : we pass from abstract statements, to examples of how the great system works in practice.

Do we all desire that when we come to stand on the utmost verge of this life, with time behind us, and eternity before, we may have the same peace and holy calm as the great Apostle ? Then there is but the one way. We must be daily living to our Redeemer now. We must be laying up our treasure in heaven : feeling, through all the cares and labors and interests of this world, that there is something above and beyond them all ; and that, though we can often hardly help being careful and troubled about many things, still *that* one thing is needful ! Burdened with our load of sins, in-

creasing day by day ; — wearied with our evil hearts, so prone to that which is amiss, so backward from all good ; — O let us come anew every day to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, that our sins may be washed away in the atoning blood of the Lamb : and let us pray unceasingly, every day anew, that the Blessed Spirit may dwell within us ; — sanctifying, enlightening, comforting ; — making us fit first for God's service, and next for God's rest !

And now that we have remarked St. Paul's calmness in the present, let us think of his Retrospect : let us think of his view of the past.

See what he says. " I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Looking back on his life, he feels that here is the sum of it.

He begins by speaking in figures, as he was accustomed to do. And looking at the first, you will remember how, in a former Epistle to the same Timothy whom he is now addressing, he had said, " Fight the good fight of faith." What he enjoined upon another he did faithfully himself. For now, looking back over many years, speaking in the frank honesty of his heart, not boasting but testifying to another what his conscience testified to himself, he says, " I have fought a good fight ! " And doubtless he had done so. You could not even imagine St. Paul as doing or saying a dishonest

thing: as taking credit which he knew he did not deserve: as seeing a spiritual enemy, an enemy of his Saviour, or his own soul, or his Saviour's people; and yet not fighting with it to the death. There was no truckling or trimming about St. Paul: and what was once said in this city over the grave of a good and brave man, was yet more true of the great Apostle; — *he* “never feared the face of man,” — no, nor of evil spirit. He had “fought a good fight”: he had resisted and battled with sin, and temptation, in every form: with the world, in that sense in which the world is a dangerous thing; with the great Adversary and his manifold emissaries; and, no doubt, with many evil tendencies and impulses in his own heart and nature. That eager, trembling frame, with the hot spirit burning it through; O how it must have tempted to hasty speech, to uncharitable judgment, to impatience of those who could not sympathize with him, and who lagged behind when he was burning to make a wide world hear of Christ crucified, of pardon and sanctification and resurrection! Yes: we can easily see that St. Paul had just what we have, something within himself that needed to be resisted and put down by God's grace. And then, the opulent imagination is ready with a further similitude, typing the Christian life. “I have finished my course”: he passes from the thought of the fight to the thought of the race. And you know already how closely these

thoughts were connected in his mind. You know how the Apostle wrote, long before, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly: so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway!" He had written these words in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: he had years before him then: he knew the risks of this life, and he had not reached the sublime assurance of more advanced days: he knew how diligently we must use the means of grace, if we would not come short of the hope of glory. But O, brethren, all *that* was over now. There was no fear at all, now, of being a castaway. The dangers of the way were past. The long race, with all its risks, was run. The path, the course, that once stretched away before him, now lay behind. And the Apostle seems to feel, looking back, that if he had not finished it as he wished, he had finished it as he was able. Next, laying figurative phrases aside, he speaks of something more that he had done. "I have kept the faith!" I have held my unshaken belief in that blessed faith, that holy religion, which once I destroyed: I have been faithful to my Master, to His cause and His commands: I have believed what He said to me, and done what He told me: I have never for a moment thought of ceasing to be His soldier and servant: *that* seems to be the force of this closing state-

ment in St. Paul's retrospect. And how true the words are, — what sober unexaggerated fact they set forth, — who is there that does not know? What man is there that ever lived on this earth who did more truly and worthily “keep the faith!”

I know that a thought has already risen in your minds, a thought of something like doubt as to the fitness of all this. Who was it that once wrote, writing to this very same Timothy, such words as these: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”: who wrote these words, but the self-same Apostle Paul? And who, but the same Saint and Martyr said, a little earlier in the epistle where I found my text, — “God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace in Christ Jesus before the world began; but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ?” Indeed, it is needless to multiply passages in which St. Paul declares our utter unworthiness in God's sight, and our justification through God's free mercy in Christ, and through no merit of our own. Now, brethren, does it strike you that there is a little inconsistency between these lowly and penitent declarations; and the seeming self-sufficiency of St. Paul's review of his own life in my text? Is there not a little self-complacency: does not the

Apostle, for once, think and speak too well of himself? You know, my friends, you and I might not like to speak so of ourselves, even if we thought so.

Now, to remove this impression, let us just remember this : that St. Paul was writing to a friend who understood him ; and who would read each separate sentence of the Epistle in the light of all the rest. He knew that something might be taken for granted in writing to Timothy : that something might be taken for granted as to the way in which Christian men, to the end of time, would read these words. For we know how strongly St. Paul felt and taught, that everything he was, he was "by the grace of God" : that everything good that Christian people are, think, say, or do, is of God's grace, and through the working of the Blessed Spirit of God. All *that* was clearly understood : it had been said a hundred times : it was taken for granted. There was no need at all to say, "By the grace of God I have fought a good fight : by the grace of God I have finished my course : by the grace of God I have kept the faith." Timothy would never dream of anything else ; nor would any reader who knows how perfectly explicit are St. Paul's views upon the great vital doctrines of our holy religion. It was no more needful to say more here, than it is needful for a minister to set forth the whole system of Christianity in every sermon he preaches : after all, we must assume some measure of

intelligence and Christian enlightenment in those to whom we speak of sacred things. No, when St. Paul wrote the text, he had not forgot that he had called himself the "chief of sinners": nor that he had said "In me dwelleth no good thing": nor that he had declared "By the grace of God I am what I am." And, rightly read, there is nothing in St. Paul's declaration in the review of his life, that is inconsistent with the simplest trust in Christ for salvation, or the most absolute sense of dependence on the Blessed Spirit that sanctifies. And let it be remembered, that it is not our duty, as Christians, to confess what we do not feel; nor to say worse of ourselves than we really know to be true. And there is nothing more fatal to sincerity in our confessions, than to get into the way of uttering confessions which we suppose must be true, but do not really feel to be so. There is no harm at all in a Christian man who knows that in his vocation he has by God's help done his very best, — no harm in his thinking and saying so. It is mere hypocrisy to pretend anything else. No doubt, the very best Christians, knowing the imperfection of their work and their hearts as others do not, will be the readiest to confess that they have nothing whatsoever of their own on which to rest for justification in the sight of God. The faithful minister who can say sincerely, looking back upon years of duty, — "I have done my very best for the spiritual welfare of the

Flock: I have never designedly neglected anything I could do for it: I have spent heart and strength upon it";—such a one will be the first to take up the words of one of Christ's most devoted servants: "Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling." And yet, in reviewing his ministry in the last days of life,—yea, in the hour of his departing,—our Redeemer will not blame his servant, if, with the failing strength and the pausing heart, he still testify that he did his little best with the talent God gave him. For never was there clearer or stronger teacher of the great verity of Pardon and Salvation only through Christ, than that Saint, Apostle, and Martyr, who, in the retrospect of his life said, and said by Divine inspiration,— "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith!"

So much for the Retrospect. Next, let us think of the Prospect.

We all know how natural it is for us to pass from looking back on the Past, to looking forward to the Future. You can hardly help thinking, when you recall the things you did and cared for five or ten years since, where and what you may be five or ten years after this. The Psalmist went from the Past to the Future in a single sentence which we all remember well: "The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless us." St. Paul

makes the same swift transition. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: *Henceforth* there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

He is standing on the very verge of this life. A few steps more of the path, and then he will bow his head, and pass within the veil. All this anxious, troublesome being, with its labors and weariness, its cares, fears, and temptations, will in a very little while be done with forever, — left all behind, to be seen never more: the soul was to pass away in its mysterious flight, — passing from human ken and comfort, as all departing souls do. O brethren, we see so far: but as to what is beyond, "we walk by faith and not by sight"; — God increase our faith!

To the eye of mere sense, this departure, which St. Paul regarded as only the beginning of his better life, seems the close of the troubled, anxious chapter of our being; and the blank end of all. You know how ancient philosophy doubtfully spoke and dreamt of a life beyond the grave: how one of the wisest and most amiable of heathen philosophers expressed his hope that man was immortal; and then stopped himself and said, "Perhaps I am wrong in thinking all this: well, if I am wrong, I would rather be wrong than right"!* But

* Si erro. libenter erro.

how different with the great Apostle! There is no doubt, no misgiving nor hesitation here. St. Paul felt just the same firm, simple confidence, about the Future as about the Past. *Henceforth*, he says, — as for the days and years to come, — there awaits me, — not the quiet grave; not nothingness and forgetfulness; not a leap in the dark into what no man knows: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day!”

Henceforth: for all time coming: *that!* We do not pretend to know the details of the bliss and holiness and rest of heaven. But we know this, that they are perfect: that in heaven, the soul, for the first time in all its life, is entirely content and happy. It is perfect peace, perfect love and purity, *there!* These, *henceforth*: from the moment that this life is left behind. Some of you, as I say so, will think of the weary feeling expressed so touchingly by a great and peculiar genius who lately died:* how he said that quitting this life, he did not wish to waken up to immortality all at once; that after the labor and worry and care of this world, he would like a total slumber of at least a thousand years. Many have known the feeling: but O, it is only a wayward fancy: it comes of carrying our earthly ideas to the kingdom that transcends them all. The weariness of

* Nathaniel Hawthorne.

heart and limb that grow here as years advance, is cast off finally in the dark river: and the soul enters on a rest and peace that will make it feel it never knew peace and rest before. O, it is not the thousand years of forgetfulness we need, to allay our weariness; and gently to soothe the unquiet heart as to the dreamless rest of a child. It is the realized and never-ceasing Beatific Vision of Christ, that will make us right forever; and our Blessed Redeemer, who so well knows our frame, seems as though he had anticipated and prevented the worn-out heart's craving, when he said so kindly, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest!"

Henceforth, the crown of righteousness: henceforth, rest! May it be so with each of us, for our Saviour's sake. There will always be a Henceforth: from each minute there will Henceforth be something: always a Future; a long Eternity, either of bliss or woe.

And *that* for each one here. The Apostle, hitherto, has spoken only of himself; because it was only of himself he was called to speak for his present purpose. But as if he had felt there was something that some people might think egotism and selfishness in this, he goes on to add words of warning and comfort to you and me. Not for Apostles and Martyrs only is that crown prepared: not for them only who have fought a good fight,

and finished their course, and kept the faith: but for poor sinful creatures like ourselves, who have to confess that in our warfare, iniquities prevail against us; that in our race, we have not laid aside every weight nor the sin that doth so easily beset us; that in our Christian life, we have not kept our faith as we ought, — but have been weak and wavering and unfaithful, — forgetting Him who found us when we were lost, and losing ourselves again in the waste wilderness. Yet if we do but love our Saviour's appearing, the great reward is ours. For our Blessed Master does not seek in us that which He will never find: and the Publican's cry of penitence is far liker us, than is St. Paul's firm summing up of the doings of a lifetime. Let us each anew send up that true universal prayer, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner": and if we offer it heartily, then God will hear us and pardon us and bless us for our Blessed Saviour's sake.

O that solemn *Henceforth*: solemn to each of us as we part to-day, thinking of no more than the chances and changes of this uncertain life: infinitely more solemn, as we each look forward to the hour which will certainly come to each, when the past will be done with, — our whole life here gone by forever; — and only Eternity before us, — Henceforth glory, or henceforth woe! We shall never properly understand, till we each come to die, how thoroughly, then, the Past is

gone, and our only portion is in the Future. You may feel it in some measure, looking on the face of one departed: thinking how utterly the many cares that drew those lines on it are past and gone:—looking at the gray hair, and thinking that *now* your friend is no longer old. What a sharp, complete end of all the interests of this world, has come! how free the heart is from all the little troubles and vexations that fevered it but a short while since! Yes: gone, where these things are not! Entered upon the great Henceforth; the life beyond the grave! The day will come to each of us when we can have nothing but what we can have *there*: when all the things we toil for and value here will avail us nothing: when the places and the people we knew, the books we used to read, the church where it was pleasant to worship, the room in which we sat, will all be things long since past away;—things that ceased to be for us years and years ago:—and nothing about us and before us but the great Eternity: Henceforth only *that*, and what we can have *there*! And, blessed be God, there is *that* we can gain here, and take with us there! No wonder that St. Paul declared that he counted all things but dross, that he might “win Christ.” For the good part in our Saviour is not merely the best possession now: in a little while it will be the only one: the only possession that will not pass from our failing hand when we die; the only possession we can take with us into the other

world. Brethren, have we a true interest in Christ? Let me say a hopeful word to such as earnestly desire it but are not yet assured of it, — a word not a whit more hopeful than is the tone of the whole New Testament; and not setting out any fancy of mine, but taken from the authoritative standards of the National Church: “One who doubteth of his being in Christ, may, notwithstanding, have a true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof: and in God’s account he hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it; and unfeignedly desire to be found in Christ and to depart from iniquity.” Is *that* our case, my friends? Do we unfeignedly desire to be found in Christ? Do we deeply feel our want of the good part in Him? Then let us thank God for some reason for a good hope through grace! And though we, weak and sinful and unworthy, will never be able to look back with St. Paul’s firm confidence on the past, we may yet humbly cherish St. Paul’s comfortable assurance for the future. And so, Christian friends, when we are ready to be offered, and the time of our departure is at hand, though we may shrink from saying we have fought a good fight, we have finished our course, we have kept the faith; feeling that it becomes us better to pass away from this world with lowly penitence in our pausing heart, and with the prayer for mercy through Christ on our lips as they are growing

cold; yet we may pass in the blessed hope, that Henceforth heaven awaits us: that Henceforth there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, which the Lord — less the righteous Judge than the merciful Redeemer — shall give us at That day!

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