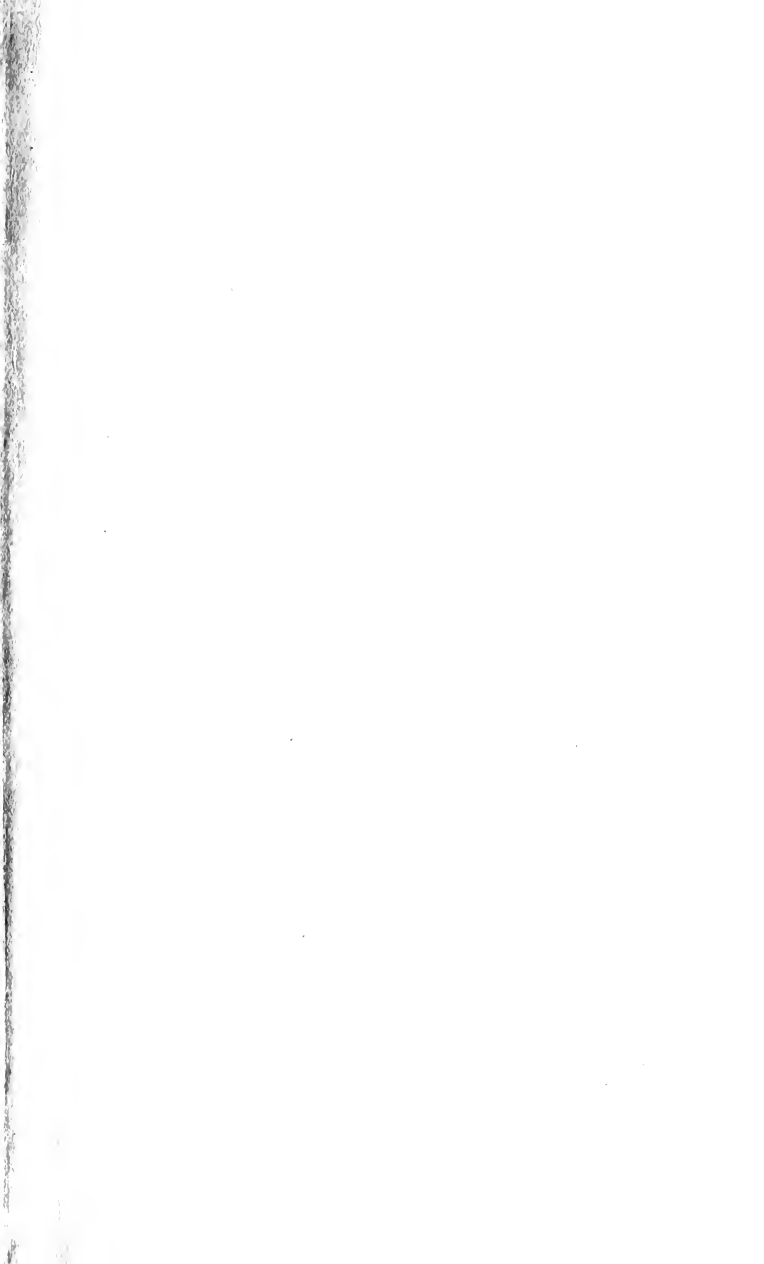




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HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS CHRIST

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE WORD AND THE WAY

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HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS CHRIST

A STUDY
IN THE MIND AND METHOD OF THE MASTER

BY

WILLIAM LEIGHTON GRANE, M.A.

PREBENDARY OF CHICHESTER AND RECTOR OF BEXHILL-ON-SEA
AUTHOR OF "THE WORD AND THE WAY"

A Hard Saying, who can hear it?

The Words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are Life

London

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PREFACE

IN a former volume the present writer has endeavoured to define the principles upon which a reasonable faith in the Inspiration of Holy Scripture may securely rest. As one of these principles it was recognised that a difference of weight and value attaches to different parts of the Library we call the Bible.

Now one of these parts is plainly of paramount importance. For few will fail to find the very heart and soul of the biblical body in the words of "The Word of God" Himself. By this, the core of Christianity, its claim on the hearts and lives of men must finally be judged. And upon their acceptance or rejection of this, the future of the Faith must eventually depend. But right understanding

must precede just judgment. What is the preliminary to such understanding? Before all things it seems necessary to set the Words of Jesus in their own proper historical light in order to arrive at the meaning they conveyed to those who first heard them, for this alone can safely be accounted the primary meaning of their Speaker. Such therefore, in short, is the method used in the following pages.

Amid much unbridled controversy on matters intrinsically trivial, and despite an obvious tendency in some quarters to prefer the mediæval before the primitive, it is at least a hopeful sign in the religious outlook of to-day that the thoughtful of every school seem more than ever disposed to turn for guidance and relief to a Study of the Mind of Christ. And surely the Master's Message is for all. To the disciples of Reason it is He Who cries, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin? If I say Truth, why do ye not believe Me?" To the bewildered seekers after Authority it is He Who declares, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

And this, the most astounding claim imaginable on the lips of an outcast Teacher, the Centuries have justified,—so justified one would have thought as clearly to indicate, even to bewildered seekers, the true seat of Authority in matters of Religion.

Twenty years' experience in the Ministry is however scarcely needed to make one alive to the fact that among the authoritative and reason-compelling Words of Jesus Christ some undoubtedly cause trouble in various minds. Appearing on a shallow acquaintance either impracticable or reasonless, they not only lose authority but sow the seeds of doubt. The object, therefore, of this book is the lessening of such perplexities—the removal of stumbling-blocks—by setting forth the principles which seem to elucidate the Teaching of the Master. It is an attempt to construe the meaning of some of the more striking of Christ's "hard sayings." Others, here untouched, might no doubt easily be cited. But the aim of the writer has not been to exhaust the verbal difficulties in the recorded utterances of our

Lord. He has rather sought to examine the Master's method, and to illustrate its underlying principles by a number of examples perhaps sufficient to enable the reader to apply those principles in solving other problems for himself.

W. L. G.

THE RECTORY, BEXHILL-ON-SEA.

September, 1899.

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Jesus Christ.

THIS (THE WORD OF THE FATHER) IS HE WHO WAS FROM THE BEGINNING, WHO APPEARED AS NEW, AND WAS FOUND TO BE OLD, AND IS BORN AT ALL TIMES IN THE HEARTS OF THE HOLY . . . THOU SHALT LEARN TO KNOW THOSE THINGS WHICH THE WORD DISCOURSES, BY WHAT MEANS HE CHOOSES, AT WHAT TIME HE WILLS.

Greek Writer of the Second Century.

HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS CHRIST

THE PROPHET'S GOAD

"Never man spake like This Man."—ST. JOHN vii. 46.

It is one of the great evils which have come upon modern thought, partly induced and perhaps to some extent excused by the complex and multiform life of the time, that a kind of distrust has become felt, even where it is not exactly expressed in words, in the precepts left to us by Jesus Christ and in many of the principles of Christianity as commonly understood and commonly interpreted.

Thus, while the Christian Religion professes to harmonise the diversity which exists among the excellent aims of men, and so to settle for us the standard of conduct ; on the other hand we are told that this claim is indefensible, and

we hear the most glaring incongruity between Christian precept and Christian practice boldly excused on the ground that Christian life is nowadays perfectly impracticable. The exigencies of modern life, it is said, are quite incompatible with regard for Christ's precepts, unless indeed for those who may be willing to withdraw out of the larger world of men and live in a little circle of their own, apart from the struggle for existence and the babel of the strife of tongues. Some press this view to further issues, and maintain that sundry commands which come to us with the sanction of our Lord would not, even if practised, tend to the formation of a noble character.

It is asserted, for instance, that all the prominence given in Christianity to altruistic duty is not really elevating and fruitful, but rather ignoble and injurious. It is urged that to bear one another's burdens and exercise the instinct of pity and benevolence is a practical mistake, that every one should rather live out his own life and look first after himself, and that such a course will in the long run best enable him to be useful to society, while it permits and provides those personal gratifications which each is fully entitled to claim if

he can, and which God intended men to enjoy. Such arguments are perhaps backed by what are supposed to be illustrations in point. Christian precepts are rudely handled, Christian positions in fact mis-stated or only half stated, or else exaggerated, till the desired end appears in sight, which amounts to this, that Jesus Christ, instead of being the Revealer of God's Will and the Light of the world, was merely a narrow enthusiast belonging only to a remote age. Who has no gospel for the nineteenth century.

It is the aim of this book to show that this position is a false one, and that even as regards those words of Christ which may be called "Hard Sayings" there is no justification in fact for the notion that His teaching has become outworn, or that the possession of His spirit has ceased to be the noblest attainment open to human ambition in the domain of morals.

If, indeed, this were not so, if Christian doctrine be suitable only for the use of ages now bygone, if the moral standard of Jesus can no longer be regarded by reasonable men as an ideal even to be aimed at, then we Christians are in sorry plight. For as we pass the waves of this troublesome world, we are as men clinging to some derelict which is a

ship no more. Driven before every gale of passion, sucked along by each current which happens for the nonce to be strongest, we can but toss and drift, drift and toss, with neither helm to use nor haven to make, till storm or starvation make an end. Thus our fate is not merely to be inconsistent, which is bad ; but to be inconsistent on principle because in real doubt, which is infinitely worse.

But as matter of fact, no one except through wilful blindness is shut up to this fate. The principles of Jesus only appear worn out, or impracticable, or useless, when they are misunderstood and misinterpreted. Hostile critics of Christianity would never dream of abusing any other book or playing fast and loose with any other author in the way they treat the gospels and the words of Christ. To take at random some highly figurative or intensely concentrated sentence, and proceed to apply it without a thought as to its original import or the special circumstances of its utterance ; to persist in forgetting the obvious truth that a principle of life is one thing, and the application of that principle in totally different times and surroundings is quite another ; this sort of thing is the most utterly unscientific

misuse of letters that ever masqueraded in the name of literary criticism. Whether it be ignorance, or whether it be injustice, it is equally scandalous. Yet this is what they do who snatch away some phrase of Jesus from its proper setting, and then declare that, because they cannot apply such and such precept literally, therefore the whole fabric of Christianity is an effete superstition and its ethical conceptions utterly unadapted to the needs of modern life.

Now there is not the least reason to deny that there are among the precepts of Jesus what may fairly be called "hard sayings." Were it not so, perhaps His teaching would not now be paramount, nineteen centuries after it was given. If Christ had been content with platitudes, no doubt He would not have been crucified; but then He could never have claimed for His words that "they are spirit and they are life," nor would the ages have agreed that "never man spake like This Man." If Christ had been content with platitudes, perhaps the dry-as-dust dullard for whom no sin is mortal but the flash of genius, or the prosaic literalist who can forgive everything but the picturesque, might have been satisfied;

but no purifying flame of enthusiasm would then have kindled the light of Christendom in the world, and no Christian Church would have been alive to-day to justify that word, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me," and to echo back over the centuries the old response, "Lord, to Whom shall we go? THOU hast the words of Eternal Life."

It is thus that "Wisdom is justified by the works of her children." And, therefore, our wisdom seems clearly to lie in thankfully taking the sayings of Jesus, whether they look difficult or not, and in reverently trying to understand and make our own their spirit.

But there are two great qualifications in particular without which no one who speaks to us moral and spiritual truth, especially if he speaks to us out of the past, can ever be understood. The first qualification is a certain degree of sympathy. Our thoughts must to some extent work in the same plane, our desires must in some degree be set upon the holy end for which the teacher speaks, even as Christ Himself implied when He said, "He that wills to do the righteous will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." And the second condition springs from the fact that every great teacher primarily

addresses the men of his own age. Therefore the modern disciple must add to his sympathy a certain degree of historical imagination. He must be willing to make the best effort possible to set the teaching he would understand in its own proper historical light. Thus we cannot expect to interpret fairly the precepts of Christ without remembering that at the time He spoke there were many truths which had been sadly understated, and some which were entirely ignored. Hence it had become before all things necessary to restore the balance of truth, and the emphatic language alone suitable for this purpose might, under other conditions and if regarded apart from its specific intention, be very likely to look like exaggeration or one-sidedness.

Indeed the recollection of this alone will very often suffice to explain what at first seems difficult in some of the utterances of Jesus. Even your own experience in the art of persuasion will probably be enough to make this clear. You can understand Christ's method by your own. You know how, in argument with one who holds a contrary opinion, in order to put the view you wish to emphasise in the most telling light, you try to state it so that it

will strike and stick. You instinctively feel that a view which has been underrated or distorted is to be restored to its right position by the accumulation of statement upon statement, until the underrated or distorted proposition at last stands out in bold relief and full proportion, and you speak accordingly.

Every one again is familiar with this method in Art. The painter who desires forcibly to present some particular idea will isolate the figure or face by which he would portray it. He will deliberately subordinate by light and unfinished treatment all that is merely complementary, in order to fix your eye and rivet your attention upon what he wants you particularly to notice. It is the best possible method for the end in view, and therefore it was freely used by Jesus Christ. The gospels teem with examples. It was the way in which the Master constantly spoke, throwing His truths out in burning phrases, in parable and paradox which seize the imagination and score the tablets of the mind. Thus we frequently find the neglected side of human life taken up and clothed, decked out with bright colour, touched with poet's skill and prophet's fire; and we note the insight of Him Who "knew what was in man"

leading Him deliberately to ignore other sides to a question, in order that His hearers might seize intensely upon the one side which they had forgotten or had trampled under foot.

It has always been and always will be one of the notes of the great teacher, as distinguished from the small, that he is never afraid of apparent inconsistencies and contradictions. We see this constantly in the teaching of wise men of our own time. Every reader of Tennyson remembers how the tone and aim of the old and the new "Locksley Hall" are poles apart. Robert Browning again is full of hard sayings. But as some one said of a certain writer that he was better worth reading when he was wrong than most others when they are right, so it may be said of Browning that his obscurities are better worth studying than many another man's lucidity. No one takes less pains to avoid contradictions than that master of English prose, John Ruskin, but none can charge his teaching with the slightest ambiguity.

Or take, for further and fuller illustration, another of the prophets—Carlyle. There are still some who find in his message only sound and fury, signifying nothing. But this is not the verdict which has gathered the best consent

during the years which have passed since his death. In spite of many sayings that must be counted harsh or reckless, in spite of the almost total lack of that "sweet reasonableness" so invaluable to the teacher of every time and place, and notwithstanding other grave defects of temper and disposition, yet who can deny this man a place among the prophets? Up to a certain point, and always as far as his own personal conviction justified, he boldly and faithfully spoke out his message. He was always on the side of God as against the world, the flesh, and the devil. He was always on the side of duty as against selfishness. Ever an Apostle of Work, with a killing contempt for idleness, he never lost himself in the barren desert of utilitarianism. Ever an Apostle of Thought, crying constantly to the thoughtless and the shallow "Let us strive to think well," yet he never made a god of mere intellect, but continually affirmed the spiritual nature of man and the supernatural character of his destiny. Who can doubt that such an one, so convinced of the reality of a God-implanted conscience, so sure of the capacity of man to travel upwards if only he would keep the spiritual end in view, so superior to the vulgarities of luxury and wealth,

so alive to the imperativeness of social duties and to the hollowness of all class distinctions not based on reason and justice,—who can doubt, I say, that such a man was truly entrusted with a message for his time and was highly qualified to deliver it?

Why then—and here is the question which concerns our argument—why has so much that he has written been declared mere rhetoric and rhodomontade? Was it not precisely because the reason for much of a great teacher's method and language is hidden until we grasp the nature and prevalence of the opposing forces against which it was hurled,—until we set it in its own proper historical light.

During Carlyle's life, wealth and manufactures were making the most gigantic and extraordinary strides. The seer saw men growing intoxicated with the triumphs of material success. He stood appalled. How could he deal out pretty speeches when the outlook was so black? Revolutions are not made with rose-water. And Carlyle set himself to work the most difficult of revolutions, a revolution of thought. He wrote to influence an age which scoffed at things spiritual because it had lost sight of them, and which had lost sight of

them because it had come to regard the world as nothing but "a large cooking-range." It was necessary to talk strongly if such people were to be made to listen. And as the reformer saw the idolatry of money ever absorbing more and more of the thoughts and lives of men, what wonder if he poured the vials of his scorn upon the notion that society could be bound together by the slender nexus of "cash payment." As he saw Mill and his utilitarian contemporaries growing more and more sceptical and starting many on the downward track, or at least chaining them to the material mundane round of measuring up the yarn without a thought for the mill hands who produced it, what wonder at the heat with which he thunders out "the Everlasting No" of a deeper insight, and proclaims "the Everlasting Yea" of a higher faith. This much is surely clear, that it is only in proportion as we realise the moral atmosphere in which a prophet's lot is cast, and remember his own origin and place therein, that we shall become qualified to judge rightly of "the why and the wherefore" of his scalding speech.

Sometimes in our study of some great teacher it will not be so much the apparently

exaggerated strength of his language, but its seeming contradictoriness, which makes him, as St. Peter said of St. Paul, "hard to be understood." St. Paul indeed is a very good example of this particular cause of misunderstanding. The "antinomies," as I believe they are technically called, of the great apostle have served to fill heavy tomes with barren discussion. And immense ingenuity has been expended in laboured attempts to harmonise his words with what looks at first sight to be contrary teaching from the lips of St. James. Yet most of this toil might have been saved by the use of a single key to the whole set of difficulties. This master-key is simply the understanding and keeping in mind those errors or exaggerations of truth, which both apostles were equally engaged in correcting, and which in some of the Churches had assumed this form and in others that ; calling, therefore, here for strong statement on one side and there for plain speaking on another.

The recollection of this common method of the world's teachers clears the way for a fair consideration of those utterances of our Blessed Lord which have presented difficulty to men's minds and provoked their hostile criticism.

For it must be remembered that however incomparable the One Master may appear, yet no Teacher, however Divine, is free from limitations when he has to deal with humanity. He is obviously limited to those methods and forms of speech which are calculated to effect his purpose with the men whom he addresses. He has to arrest their attention ; he has to make his message understood, and suitable to its immediate hearers. The occasion and the circumstances of the address must therefore determine its form. It is these which will call here for the scathing of pachydermatous hypocrisy, " O generation of vipers, how can ye escape the judgment of Gehenna ! " and there for such surpassing tenderness of Infinite Purity as could kindle afresh the dying embers of a soul's life, " Neither do I condemn thee ; go, and sin no more. "

The sayings of our Lord are continually being turned into stumbling-blocks because critics persist in ignoring the occasion and circumstances which explain and justify their utterance. It is hard to kick against the Prophet's goad. Why not try to understand it ? Why not recognise that the use of parable and paradox is part of the regular method of

the wise, and that "hard sayings" may be spoken, not to confuse and confound, but to stimulate and guide? "Cast not your pearls before swine" is cited, for example, as an instance of purely harsh exclusiveness. But what of the wisdom of such reticence in face of invincible ignorance and prejudice? And what of the exceeding rarity of the Master's use of it? How seldom it is said, "He answered nothing," or "He wrote upon the ground," or "He went unto another city." On the other hand how frequent, how constantly recurring is the picture of the Good Shepherd seeking some wandering sheep "until He find it," of the patient Husbandman producing flowers of surpassing beauty from soil of smallest promise.

Some would have us believe it better to have refrained from withering a fig tree than to illustrate a nation's fate and quicken the faith which might avert the doom. To others again, the release of a human spirit from the bands of a living death counts for nothing in view of the loss of some swine. But to those who see with other eyes, who see a unique career filled with "greater things than these,"—things which make the Life of Christ the

most beautiful the world has seen—such laboured magnifying of the comparatively trivial argues only a striking want of moral perspective in the critic, and a singular lack of material for criticism.

Such cavillers are fond of appealing to Reason. But reason is precisely the faculty which revolts at such light attempts to discredit the beneficence which “went about doing good,” to discount the “gracious words” which were the “wonder” of a multitude, and to decry the authoritative doctrine which drew from enemies the confession “never man spake like This Man.” Reason it is which looks to facts and weighs them. When the license of a Magdalene is exchanged for chaste devotion, when the cupidity of a Zaccheus proffers four-fold restitution, when even political antagonism and animosity sink out of sight, and Simon the Home Rule agitator, “Simon the Zealot,” makes common cause with such an embodiment of alien oppression as Matthew the publican,—then it is Reason which exclaims, “What strange doctrine is this! What manner of Man is This?” to which and to Whom such varied victory falls.

Reason, again, looks on at the tragedy of the Cross, and watches whether, in so supreme

a trial, wisdom will be justified by its works. Reason overhears the last words of the Crucified Christ,—the prayer for His torturers' pardon, the care for others' needs in the midst of personal anguish, the royal welcome of the last poor prodigal who has "come to himself." Reason considers what sort of character it is which can face the uttermost depths of desolation and yet rise out of them to rest in the Everlasting arms; she estimates the moral force which effects a dying brigand's penitence and inspires the matchless venture of his prayer; she observes the absence of fanaticism which speaks out the human cry "I thirst"; she marks the quenchless love which "hopeth all things" and despairs not, even then and even there, of finding in the human nature gathered at a public execution some redeeming ruth; she feels the power which draws pity from hearts inured to pain, from men by profession pitiless, and she notes the soldier's *posca* moistening lips sealed to every anodyne but that of sympathy.

Reason, I say, remarks these things: and it is the voice of reason, not that of sentiment or superstition, which speaks in the Centurion's verdict, "Truly this man was a Son of God," and which urges the timid discipleship of

Nicodemus out of the stage of secret conviction into that of open confession. Then—since the influence of Jesus, instead of dying with Him, began thenceforth its wider, larger and immortal life—let us finally observe that the conversion of St. Paul is the sort of fact which appeals to reason more strongly than a score of captious or microscopic criticisms. Reason finds here a solid beam of more value than many chips. She watches the typical Jewish bigot setting out from Jerusalem determined to crush Christianity, the trusted emissary of Judaism armed with “authority to bind all that called on Christ’s name.”¹ And presently she overhears, from the mouth of this erstwhile persecutor transformed into a Christian apostle, the astounding confession, “I am ready not to be bound only but to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus.”²

Is it not an eminently sane conclusion that He Whose influence wrought such marvels spoke with unique authority?—amply justified the wisdom of His teaching, nay, even made good His own extraordinary claim, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.”³

¹ Acts ix. 14.

² Acts xxi. 13.

³ St. John vi. 63.

A TOUCHSTONE

“Unto you is given the mystery of the Kingdom of God : but unto them that are without all things are done in parables : that seeing they may see, and not perceive ; and hearing they may hear, and not understand ; lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them.”—ST.

MARK IV. 11, 12.

OF all the hard sayings of the Prophet of Nazareth this one is at first sight the most incomprehensible. We are inclined to exclaim in amazement against the possibility of Jesus Christ having ever spoken thus. We are disposed to fancy that here at least the reporters of our Lord must be at fault, that possibly their own narrow and exclusive thoughts may have coloured the words they here attribute to the Master and produced a tone foreign to the Speaker's original intention. At all events we feel prepared to maintain that the intention must have been something quite distinct from the surface meaning of the text.

We call up the vision of the Speaker's actual character. We remember the description He Himself has given us of His Mission to mankind. We know that this is He Whose "gracious" speech was the constant wonder of His hearers, Who came not to destroy men's lives but to save them, Who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. We know that this is He in the accents of Whose voice, heard even now across the ages, sound evermore the chords of an infinite compassion and of a love without limit and without rest. We know that this is a Teacher Who lived on earth but to restore our wandering race into the way of Truth, revealing to mankind the nature of that God Who continually showered the tokens of His Fatherhood upon the evil and the good. We know that this Teacher is also the Redeemer, Who felt Himself "straitened" till His saving work was done, and Who, amid the bitter disappointments of His life, consoled Himself with a sublime confidence in the issue of His last resource, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

But how, then, are we to understand the apparent total contradiction between such a

character, such words, and such a life—all instinct with the spirit, “Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out”—and this passage which seems to state simply enough that “to them that are without” the inner circle of Christ’s followers His teaching was veiled in mystery and parable in order “that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them”?

Now the first thing we may be certain of is this: that if the surface meaning of a single utterance is entirely at variance with the general trend and tenor of the same speaker’s doctrine, and is evidently out of harmony with his habitual attitude of mind, then the apparent meaning at first sight is not the true one, and we must patiently dig below the surface in order to reach the truth.

The next thing we ought to recollect about any utterance of our Lord recorded in the Gospels is that fresh light on its significance may often be gathered from the parallel passage in the record of one or more of the other evangelists.

Let us, then, proceed to use these two con-

siderations in the case of our present difficulty. Turning first to the parallel accounts, we find that comparison with the words of St. Luke (ch. viii. 10) will not help us. It is true that he omits the last clause "lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them," but otherwise the words are practically identical with our text.

But the moment we turn to St. Matthew (ch. xiii. 13-15) the result is very different. St. Matthew here evidently gives the full report, of which St. Mark and St. Luke give only the essence in a form so concentrated and condensed that the reader is much more liable to mistake the intention of the words. St. Matthew occupies more than three times the space used by the other two synoptists in reporting this particular part of our Lord's speech. His words run thus:—"Therefore speak I to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull

of hearing, and their eyes have they closed ; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again, and I should heal them."

Thus from comparison with St. Matthew, who is characteristically interested in every citation from the older Scriptures, we learn (1) that the words, which seem so impossible to understand as the direct expression of our Lord's intention to mystify His hearers, were in fact a kind of short-hand report of the gist of a considerable quotation from the book of the prophet Isaiah. And we also learn (2) what indeed we might have guessed, that the true sense of the passage is not a statement by our Lord of His own purpose toward them "that are without" (as the curtailed report of St. Mark appears to suggest), but is rather the simple statement of a fact and of a law which the Speaker has been forced, however regretfully, to recognise: "Therefore speak I to them in parables, *because* seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

Thus the truth emerges, not that Jesus Christ ever in the least intended to veil Him-

self from any soul among the multitudes around Him, but that He had come to recognise how few of those who listened to his words themselves intended ever to remove the veil of unbelief or prejudice, of hypocrisy or selfishness, which, until they chose to tear it from their hearts, would turn His own most elementary lessons into enigmas hopelessly insoluble.

It is not to Christ, but to those whom He addressed, that the difficulty of the passage must be charged. In their true sense the words carry nothing more than the sorrowful recognition by the Speaker of the inevitable result of human perversity and wilfulness. To "them that are without," the truths of the Gospel must remain wrapt in mystery and paradox, not because Christ spoke in parables in order to hide His meaning, but because of such folk it is in every age so calamitously true that "seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they (wish to) understand." "This is the judgment, that the Light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light."

It is an observation much in point that the method used by Jesus of teaching by parables "automatically adapts itself to the spiritual

capacity of the hearers. Our Lord thus ~~avoided~~ the danger of casting before swine the pearls of divine truth. The sacred mysteries were mercifully guarded from those who had no more sense than to trample them under their feet, whilst they were placed within the grasp of those who had the capacity to assimilate and apply them. Those who lacked the moral and spiritual capacity to receive the the revelation of God heard only the earthly story of the parable. With this they stored their memory until perchance they arrived, at some future time, at the perception of a higher meaning in it. Those, on the other hand, who had the will and the capacity to know and act upon the truth, could not rest for an hour satisfied with the mere husk of the narrative, but demand without delay its inner meaning, asking of their Lord, 'Declare unto us this Parable.' Thus the Parables implicitly presented an automatic test of the capacity of those to whom they were addressed. The earthly-minded heard in them an earthly story; the spiritually-minded found in it the revelation of spiritual light."¹

Those who do not will to obey can never

¹ Unpublished sermon by Rev. W. Allen Whitworth.

comprehend the doctrine which remains mysterious always to the disobedient soul. While to the sympathy of the true disciple "the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven" readily reveal themselves. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear." These are they who have the talisman to turn all further gifts to good account, therefore unto them shall more be given, and they shall have abundance; while from him that hath not, from him who is wilfully blind and refuses to receive and act upon the truth he knows, shall be taken away even that which he hath. In other words, there is an irrevocable law in the moral world that the disobedience and blindness that are wilful shall be followed by the blindness and the incapacity which are not an arbitrary penalty, but an inevitable consequence.

The classical example in the Bible of the outworking of this law is the case of the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The King of Egypt was forced, by signs which he could not gainsay, to believe in the power of Jehovah, but no moral impression was produced upon his mind by the marvels of Moses; his heart was never reached. The impenetrable armour of

his selfishness was proof against every appeal either to mercy or justice. This nation of slaves was uncommonly convenient for the work of the country. Why should he lose this advantage? He would not. "Pharaoh hardened his heart, and would not let the children of Israel go." And this hardening process has always these two stages. The earlier, in which the man's free will chooses the wrong course; the later, in which the wrong course thus freely chosen becomes familiar and habitual, and the grieved Spirit of Goodness gradually withdraws. The voluntary hardening becomes involuntary hardness; and the opposition to right, allowed and encouraged, issues in an obstinacy which is at once the natural fruit and the penal consequence of the sin. It can only be of a heart whose owner has chosen to shut and seal it against every softening touch or warning stroke that it can ever, in any sense, be said, "God hardened" that heart; and even then the phrase ought not to be understood to signify anything beyond the ratification of the law expressed by Fletcher in the lines

"Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

For God is against no man while the long "day of his visitation" lasts; He is ever "more ready to hear than we to pray," full of grace as well as full of truth, yearning over us as Christ yearned over the Jerusalem He loved,—that City whose inevitable doom even the tears of the Son of God could not avert, because the things men will not see, when they may, must at length become "hidden from their eyes." Then all that is left even for Incarnate Love is this: "How often would I have gathered thee, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but *ye would not.*"

The opportunity neglected, the moral talent buried, pass entirely away from the stubborn and the slothful, by the very same law which blesses the facile and the industrious with an increase of the powers they have learnt to use aright. Evermore, not Christ only, but reiterated experience ring the warning in our ears, "Take from him the pound," the precious chance that he has wasted. Take it away from him that will never do anything with it, and "give it to him that hath ten pounds," to the man who has proved his capacity to use what is entrusted to his keeping for his own and others' good.

Returning now to the passage before us, we find that it is this great truth—on one side so happy, and on the other so awful—which Isaiah announces as part of his own experience as a spiritual teacher. And the old prophet's words are quoted both by Jesus and by St. Paul as stating a principle, of which their ministry in a later age affords still further illustration.

Moreover, this principle has been similarly recognised by every great moral Teacher and Reformer in all time. Sooner or later, with whatever pain and grief, one and all have come to see that the effect produced upon large numbers of people by the preaching to them of the truth has been not the quickening, but the deadening of the spiritual faculties. From the days of Noah and Lot to those of Carlyle, Ruskin and Tolstoi, the preachers of righteousness have been mortified by this same issue of their mission. Some have been consumed by chagrin and disappointment; others have refused to cast their pearls before swine, and taken refuge in silence and dismay. Some have persevered to the end, despite obloquy and opposition, daily turning evil into good. Enduring "as seeing Him Who is invisible," they have gone on "sowing in tears," whether

they shall ever "reap in joy" or not. But the experience which has borne these various fruits has been a similar experience. Every prophet has had to drink of this same cup. He has had to see the truth for which he was content to live or die, not only received or rejected, but producing entirely opposite effects upon different natures,—here "a savour of life, unto life ; there a savour of death, unto death."

It would perhaps be hard to find a more dramatic representation of this than is supplied by Mazzini's description of the first stage in his career. It appears that, while the leader's first efforts for the liberty of Italy materialised the greater number of those whom Mazzini had stirred to embark upon it, the failure and consequent defection only served to strip this heroic soul of the last rags of selfishness, and consecrate it more utterly to the will of God and the duty that lay before it. Says the Italian patriot, "It was the tempest of doubt which I believe all who devote their lives to a great enterprise yet have retained a loving heart, are doomed, once at least, to battle through. . . . During these fatal months there darkened round me such a hurricane of sorrow, disillusion and deception, as to bring before my eyes, in all its ghastly

nakedness, a foreshadowing of the old age of my soul, solitary in a desert world. It was not only the overthrow for an indefinite period of every Italian hope, it was the falling to pieces of that moral edifice of faith and love from which alone I derived strength for the combat. . . . I drew back in terror at the void before me. Perhaps I was wrong after all, and the world right. Perhaps my idea was indeed a dream? One morning I awoke to find my mind tranquil and my spirit calmed, as one who has passed through a great danger. . . . I saw Duty as Life's highest Law. And I swore to myself that nothing in this world should again make me doubt or forsake it. . . . Whether the sun shine with the serene splendour of an Italian noon, or the leaden hue of the northern mist be above us, I cannot see that it changes our duty. God dwells above the earthly heaven, and the holy stars of faith and the future still shine within our souls, even though their light consume itself unreflected as the sepulchral lamp." ¹

Now this glimpse into the heart of the Italian prophet may help us in some small degree to enter into the heart's experience of those great

¹ Cited by Adam Smith : *Commentary on Isaiah*, vol. i. p. 85.

ones who have in every age borne their witness, and fulfilled their mission, whether men would hear or whether they would forbear, choosing evermore to obey God rather than men, resolute to serve their fellows regardless of themselves. It is a tragic thought to recollect the terrible solitariness of these noble lives. Job and Elijah, John the Baptist and St. Paul in days of yore; Dante and Savonarola, Mazzini and Gordon in days less dim and distant; and a goodly fellowship of prophets all along the stream of time have had the same cross to bear: not one of them but felt the "hurricane of sorrow, disillusion and deception" darken round them: all knew the bitterness of that "distrust detected even in those most dear to them," and whose unwavering confidence might have given them the very best support.

And when we turn to Him Who was not only a Prophet of the Truth, but the very Truth Incarnate, and overhear the question asked even of the least faithless who were nearest to His heart, "Will ye also go away?" or listen to the declaration, "Verily I say unto you, one of you shall betray Me," then we know that even this Prophet also shared the

terrible experience of the rest. The gall of misunderstanding, of suspicion, of rejection, we cannot fail to recognise welling up in the mind even of the Master, now in the pathetic lament, "How often would I but ye would not ;" or now in the regretful sentence, sealing the self-chosen doom of the Temple and the city that He loved, "There shall not be left in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation ;" or yet again in the dictum of the passage before us, "All these things are parables dark and paradoxical ; for the hearts of those to whom I speak are waxed gross, their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest haply they should turn again and I might heal them."

In every case, the cause of this effect of the witness borne to Truth is to be found not in the Truth itself, nor in the sometimes stammering tongue of the speaker, but in the attitude of mind of those that hear. In the case of Jesus Christ, to represent Him Who was called the Friend of publicans and sinners as the pitiless enemy of bewildered seekers after truth would be a monstrous conclusion indeed. In the language of the particular parable to which

the text originally refers, not the seed nor the Sower is at fault, but the soil. If spiritual seed is to spring up and bear good fruit, the ground on which it falls must be "good ground." St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians (2 Cor. iii. 14—16), has nearly paralleled the statement here. Speaking sorrowfully enough of the blindness of his own countrymen, he says, "Their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the Old Covenant the veil remaineth unlifted; which veil is done away in Christ. But whensoever Moses is read, a veil lieth upon their hearts. But whensoever any shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

This, then, is the great practical lesson from such warnings, for all hearers in every age: "Take heed how ye hear." You are responsible for this, as truly as the preacher is responsible for his message. Even the preaching of Christ Himself could have no other issue than the division between sheep and goats, between those that heard in order to learn and those that heard only to cavil or to scoff. The same "gracious words" which, falling upon the willing heart as a savour of life, laid the foundation of the Christian Church

in lives devoted to the Kingdom of Heaven, falling at the same time on hearts trodden hard in the round of a lifeless religionism, or choked with the stones and briars of recklessness or sensuality, could do nothing but stir in such souls the spirit of enmity against the purer ideal. It was inevitable that even the words of "the Word of God" Himself, "provoking some to love and to good works," should rouse in others only the bitter antagonism of "hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness," which ended in the tragedy of the Cross.

The main lesson of this passage then is the lesson of our responsibility. If you would believe in God you must live so that you need God to exist. If you would know of the doctrine whether it be of God, you must will to do the will of God; or the doctrine even as taught by Jesus Himself will evermore be "foolishness" or "a stumbling-block," as it always has been to "them that are without" and who determine to remain so. Take heed what ye hear is often a necessary caution, for there are teachers who are but blind leaders of the blind; but "Take heed *how* ye hear" is always necessary, for unless this caution be attended to, voices of angels, whispers of the very Spirit of God, pleadings of

the Christ Himself, can have no other effect upon the careless or the callous than to harden further, till change and amendment grow day by day and year by year less likely because more difficult.

On the whole perhaps it would be hard to find a better summary of the practical bearing of such passages as this which we have been considering, than is supplied by the continual burden of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "They to whom the good tidings were before preached failed to profit because of disobedience and because of unbelief. We then ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them Let us fear therefore, lest haply a promise being left to us, any of you should seem to come short of it."

A COMPARISON

“ Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist ; yet he that is but little in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.”—ST. MATTHEW xi. 11.

AFTER listening to Christ's panegyric upon the work and character of John the Baptist which occupies the preceding verses, the remarkable climax of the text strikes with tremendous force. In what respect, we are compelled to ask, is "he that is little" in the Kingdom of Heaven greater than the last and greatest of the prophets? Plainly, if the comparison intended were one of individual character as between man and man, there is none, with the exception of the Speaker Himself, who could be cited in its justification. The personality of John the Baptist will in the matter of moral grandeur hold its own with that of any Christian hero, as completely as on the witness of Jesus it stands pre-eminent among

the seers and prophets of the preceding dispensation.

Our Lord's eulogy of the Baptist is evidently calculated and arranged to throw into relief the transcendent spiritual privilege of those—even the least of those—whose happy lot it is to live in the light of that Kingdom of Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost, for which so many kings and prophets of old time had waited with a watchful hope.

The last of these watchers, the immediate Fore-runner of the King, the veritable Elijah of the Advent, had the joy of changing the note of longing and expectancy for that of introduction and fulfilment. "There cometh He that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose." "He must increase, but I must decrease." That moment when the always self-effacing prophet "looked upon Jesus as he walked" and declared Him the Saviour of the world, marked the summit of his career and the end of his mission.

John indeed was never greater than when he realised the limits of the work assigned to him. Many men in almost every age have had the power to draw crowds to listen to their preaching, some men have had the far greater gift of

arousing in their listeners the desire to obey. But the supreme honour of the Baptist and the hour he would have counted his greatest, was not when "Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan" hung upon his words, nor even when every class of that conscience-struck community plied him with the question, "What then must we do?" The acme of his triumph was reached when he was able to point his disciples to the actual presence among them of the Desire of all nations, and cry, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

When we think of the insight displayed in that triumphant proclamation, of the faith then required to make it, and of the way the words have since been verified, our hearts go out toward that great seer who stands a moment on the brink of the river whose streams were destined to gladden the world, and leaves the world to drink thereof, while he himself is borne away to the dungeon and the martyrdom so often the crown of those of whom the world is not worthy. We know well that we shall search in vain for a nobler record or for a grander man than this; and yet the Master tells us that "he that is little in the

Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." What is the meaning of this verdict?

Clearly we are to seek the explanation in some new vantage ground of spiritual privilege which belongs to those described as being "in the Kingdom of Heaven," as compared with men, even good and great men, who could not be counted as its subjects. What then, precisely, is this Kingdom of Heaven? And what are the privileges of its members?

Now the Kingdom of Heaven was unquestionably the accepted Hebrew formula for the long-expected golden age in which a perfected Society would rejoice over the triumph of truth, justice and peace, and the banishment of misery and wrong. The phrase was the popular symbol for a divine reign, which was to be recognised, permanent and universal. Every Jew looked sadly back to the time when Jehovah was regarded as the King of Israel; but in the time of Christ all true Jews were downcast, because this reign of God had become so largely a thing of the past. They felt that Greek and Roman principles and modes of thought were now ascendant, and that the face of the Invisible King was turned away.

Then it was that the Baptist's cry rang like a clarion through the land, proclaiming, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Moreover Christ Himself took up this message and had it so constantly upon His lips that nearly thirty times in a single Gospel the phrase, or its equivalent, occurs. What did Christ mean by the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, or his Kingdom?—for He sometimes spoke of it as His own.

First of all, it was clearly a *present* Kingdom. Jesus spoke of something which could be recognised. No mere invisible fiction, no mere glorious ideal, but a visible body of believers who had accepted Christ as Leader and Saviour and Lord. Though it was a Kingdom "not of this world," because instinct with a heavenly spirit, yet its aim and object were to promote the life of Heaven upon earth,—to realise the reign of Righteousness and Peace, not in some far off Utopia, but there and then. Before that generation passed this Kingdom was to be established in the world.

And it was so. The narrow and exclusive policy of Judæa shrivelled at the touch of Imperial Rome. With the fall of Jerusalem

came "the end of the world," the "consummation of the age." And then a new age dawned which presently saw the Empire itself crumble under the disintegrating forces of its own corruption and of the secret leaven of the expanding Christian Church publicly proclaimed on the first Whitsun-day. The Kingdom of God was in fact the Church of Christ. And the Church of Christ to-day, so far as it is true to the intention of its Founder, is still a Society organised for the glory of God, and therefore for the well-being of man, by the promotion of right doing and good living here and now.

The importance of this fact of the Visibility of the Father's Kingdom is clear enough, inasmuch as the very first necessity for one who will live for the Kingdom of Heaven is a solemn conviction that it is here, and therefore to be lived for. This is the conviction which will best prevent those mistakes which have laid some Christians open to the charge of "other-worldliness." This view of the Kingdom as a Society is the best preventive, too, of that tendency to over-individualise the truths of the Faith which has dwarfed and stunted so much of the religious thought of many truly pious men, and driven others in recoil from it—

notably the saintly Faber—to break away from their natural fold and join a Church which seemed to them more Catholic because less individualist.

But though the whole social aspect of Christianity has been too much neglected, we must never, in the natural reaction of our thoughts, allow ourselves to ignore the other view, upon which the Master laid at least equal stress: “Behold,” He says, “the Kingdom of God is within you.” Jesus Christ never gave ground for the mistake into which some Reformers of to-day have fallen,—the mistake of imagining that you can regenerate mankind in the mass, or in any way otherwise than through the regeneration of individual character. Your modern philanthropist is too often impatient of this method. Moved at the sight of many evils, he hastens to construct a sort of parliamentary “lift,” whose planks are local government, village councils, shorter work hours, free education, allotments, teetotalism, appropriating and sharing out some one else’s property, or some other panacea; and he seems to think that all which remains to be done is to invite or to compel the ignorant, the poor, the drunken, and the dissolute to stand on the

machine, and, with one turn of the legislative crank, they shall be lifted, if not into the Kingdom of Heaven, at least into a region where ignorance and poverty and vice are known no more. But, unfortunately, history and experience tell us that, however helpful they may be, all such wholesale schemes do not really go deep enough to satisfy the needs of the case, and that the mass can only be thoroughly and permanently raised by raising the individuals of which it is composed.

Surely in this, as in all else, it is our wisdom to learn from the method of Jesus Christ. He, the greatest Reformer this poor world will ever see, habitually regarded Society through the individual. He founds a Society; He will establish a spiritual Commonwealth; but He never loses sight of the fact that this Church of His will be an aggregate of individual hearts, and that it is there in the heart that the foundation must be laid. "Be not led astray," says the Master, "one may say, 'It is here'; another, 'It is there'; but let no such voices distract you from this certainty, Lo! the Kingdom of God is within you." "Personal repentance, the kindling of pure and productive affections, must precede and usher in the reign

of God on earth." The wider rule of the Kingdom over the race grows by the gradual and secret working of the leaven through the lump; by the restoration here of a straying sheep, there of a missing coin, by the return here of a penitent prodigal and there of a mechanical externalist, over whose souls the glory of the Sun of Righteousness has risen with healing, purifying power. There, in the inward spirit of those who have "come to themselves," so as to desire before all things the life which is Service, the service which is Life,—there, in the hearts of those who recognise the God within them, is the centre whence the peace of the Kingdom shall never cease to radiate till the world and the Church are one.

And the privilege of those who are citizens of this Kingdom of Heaven upon earth—the vantage ground they occupy in comparison with the heritage of even the greatest of the sons of the past—What shall we say of this?

You remember how in the dawn of history there came a voice to Abram which said, "Get thee out from thy father's house into a land of which I shall tell thee; and I will make of thee

a great nation, and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Ages after there was heard in Palestine a voice proclaiming, "There is no man that hath given up father or mother or house or children or lands for My sake and the Gospel's but he shall receive an hundred-fold more in this present life, and in the world to come life everlasting." It has been justly remarked that while the two calls resemble each other in sound, in substance and meaning they are exactly parallel. "The object of both was to create a new Society which would stand in a peculiar relation to God, and which should have a legislation different from and higher than that which springs up in secular States. And from both such a Society sprang: from the first, the ancient Jewish theocracy; from the second, the Christian Church."¹

The public inauguration of this Divine Society, the birthday of the Church, was the great day of Pentecost, when after a new fashion the Holy Spirit came into the world to be the Presence and Power and Life of God Himself in the hearts of the children of the Kingdom. But the *twofold idea* of the outward Society and the inward individual inspiration is to be traced

¹ *Ecce Homo*, p. 41.

in every coming of the Kingdom, Past, Present or Future. "All who desired enrolment were taught to understand that they began life anew, as truly as if they had been actually born again. And lest the Divine Society, in its contempt for material boundaries, should lose its distinctness altogether, and degenerate into a theory or a sentiment or a devout imagination, the initiatory rite of baptism, with its outward publicity and formality, was declared as indispensable to membership as that inward spiritual Life which is membership itself."

The essential point of our Lord's comparison lies in this mystery of a new and heavenly *Life* which is the privilege of incorporation into the Divine Society of the Kingdom. John the Baptist—inferior to none born of women—is still less than the least of those born of that birth "from above," which is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. John, near as he was to the King and the Kingdom, standing even on the very threshold, yet fell far short of the fortune of those who could say with St. Paul, "our citizenship is in Heaven." John truly was the friend of the Bridegroom; but what was that to the lot even of some weak and unworthy soul who is so united to Christ as to become

part of His Body, who is made "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven?"

It is this position which Christ extols so highly in the text. The comparison is between the position of the best and greatest under the old covenant and the position of the humblest disciple under the new covenant. As the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, comparing the terrors of Sinai with the blessings of Zion, "Ye Christians are not come unto a Mount that might be touched, that burned with fire and with blackness and darkness and tempest . . . but ye are come unto Mount Zion, unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in Heaven, to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of a new Covenant."

Now privilege of whatever kind means always responsibility. No Christian will expect his charter to be exempt from such a rule. He will rather seek to know how he may hope to fulfil its obligations. Assured that closer to him here in this Christian land Christ's Kingdom could not be; conscious of the strength

of its Righteousness, the calm of its Peace, the inspiration of its Joy, he will feel bound by these blessings to enlarge the number of hearts that share them.

Such a citizen will recall the King's own method. He will repeat the old watchword, "Repent—change the inner man—and believe the good news." He will seek the race as Christ did, through the individual. He will be suspicious of wholesale schemes. Such means as force or display he will entirely repudiate. For he knows that the Kingdom which "cometh not with observation" is founded ever upon inward conviction and established in the enthusiasm of united affections and a common aim.

Such a citizen, again, will acknowledge one Law only as supreme—the Law of Love. Therefore he will refuse to accept those false and conventional standards of Society which are ready to rot the heart out of religion, and which make the "All ye are brethren" of the Master a mere meaningless mockery. Besides this rejection of social or religious exclusiveness and prejudice, there will follow, from this same supremacy of love which "hopeth all things,

believeth all things," the willingness to recognise the good, however little, which lies in the hearts of all; the faith that within every soul there must exist among the things it loves and venerates "some rough idea of duty, some light mist of disinterested love—a broken fringe of holy light, whence a divine life may be begun and radiate."

It was in this spirit that the ever spreading Kingdom of God on earth began its march, and won the sway it holds. Here a little and there a little it moved on, conquering single hearts, and leaving there a garrison of truth and love before advancing to newer victories. And precisely because of this slow but sure and thorough method, it came to pass that "before the word and work of Christ the craft of hierarchies, the force of governments, and the weight of a massive civilisation gave way. And while thousands of State projects on the vastest scale have been conceived, executed, and forgotten, while on the field of history the repeated tramp of armies has been heard to approach, to pass by, to die away; while the noise of shifting nations, and the shriek of revolutions, have gone up from earth to heaven and left silence

once more behind—this meek power triumphs over all.”

And those who live and work on the same quiet unobtrusive lines will succeed to-day in advancing that same Kingdom. Even the poorest and weakest and most obscure of its true citizens can help in this great endeavour. The Kingdom of Heaven is as a grain of mustard seed, and we can sow it ; it is as a foam-globe of leaven, and we can mingle it. But every citizen's success will be only in proportion as he is himself possessed by the life and spirit of the Kingdom. Often and often will he need to pray on behalf of that world within his own heart, “ Put down in me, O Father, all that exalts and magnifies itself against Thy rule. Mortify and kill all vices in me, all corrupt desires, all rebel murmurings, all proud, malicious, or resentful thoughts ; and do Thou ever strengthen and confirm within the spiritual kingdom of Thy love.”

Without this—nothing. For though the Kingdom of God be an everlasting kingdom, destined to embrace the world ; though the traces of its wider sway already flush the hills with gathering light ; yet if any one is to share

the splendour of its Triumph and enter into the joy of its Peace, lo! the light of the Kingdom must be within. In the conscience the voice of its Law, in the will the energy of its Righteousness, and in the heart the love of its Truth must reign supreme.

CHARACTER READING

“ And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. And He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead : but go thou and preach the Kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee ; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”—ST. LUKE ix. 57-62.

WE have already seen that in order to understand the language of any great and original teacher we must bring to the task certain qualifications for success.

Thought is necessary, for essential truth does not always lie upon the surface. Sympathy is necessary, for the mind and will must work in harmony with the main object of our teacher. We must have moreover sufficient historical imagination to place ourselves at the

time and amid the circumstances of the teaching we desire to understand.

Let us try to bring these qualifications to bear upon this passage, and see how they help us to its interpretation. We find here three different applicants for discipleship: each met with a chilling answer calculated to discourage and deter, while in one case apparently the harshness of the reply is unnatural if not positively cruel.

The sceptic of course has an easy method with such passages as these. M. Renan may serve as a type. "In such fits of severity," he writes, "Jesus went so far as to abolish all natural ties. Despising the healthy limits of man's nature, He demanded that he should exist only for Him, that he should love Him alone We should almost say that, in these moments of conflict with the most legitimate cravings of the heart, Jesus had forgotten the pleasure of living, of loving, of seeing, and of feeling He boldly preached war against nature; and total severance from ties of blood."¹

Thus does M. Renan illustrate for us the saying that "extremes meet." For here is a

¹ Trubner's Trans., p. 222.

man gifted, as plenty of his writing proves, with the poetical instinct, with artistic feeling and with an exuberant imagination, talking like the most mechanical literalist who ever murdered a metaphor or cudgelled a paradox. This is so far convenient that to answer the one will be at the same time to answer the other; for the objection of the sceptic and the difficulty of the literalist are founded on the same misunderstanding.

These utterances of our Lord unmistakably (one would have thought) belong to that class of sayings which are enigmatical in form, which, taking a proverbial turn, do not diffuse their meaning as a flower its scent; but from which the truth, like the juice of certain kinds of fruit, can only be taken by breaking through the outer rind or shell which hides while it preserves it. In this light they should be examined, for so only will they deliver up to us their treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

First comes the eager volunteer: "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest;" and Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

The difficulty here is comparatively small. It

consists solely in the fact that a would-be disciple who has expressed his aspiration in terms of enthusiasm, instead of being encouraged, is deliberately repelled. But there is nothing very strange in this. Those sudden transports and ebullitions of feeling, which with some modern religionists count for so much, counted with Jesus Christ for very little. He never regards them as evidences of a character upon which He can depend. The characteristic of this scribe (for so St. Matthew calls him, ch. viii. 19) was impulsiveness. And in the answer he received we have but another example of that "mistrust of emotional fervour" which our Lord uniformly shows. The woman who cried, "Blessed is the womb that bear Thee," the scribe in the case before us, and St. Peter when he said, "I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death," all are answered by our Lord in the same tone of repression.¹

But perhaps you still feel that, after all, the reply has a tone of harshness which is out of keeping with the graciousness of Jesus Christ towards the children of men? Then I ask you to remember what those even who doubt the Divinity of Jesus have never denied,—His

¹ *Pastor Pastorum*, p. 376.

extraordinary insight into character. These are the words of One Who beyond all others "knew what was in man." What if Christ saw hidden in the heart of this wonderfully eager volunteer the ruling motive of self-interest? What if, when he came to Christ, his mind was full of the belief: this is the promised Messiah, I will throw in my lot with His, and then all the wealth and splendour of his Messianic days I too shall share? If now this be the key to the character of the man, then what utterance could be more necessary than this warning against any false assumption? What more entirely kind than to state in picturesque simplicity the naked truth? I who come indeed as the Messiah of the Jew come not in the joy of David, nor in the magnificence of Solomon, but as a "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Indeed I have no home on earth which I can even call my own. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

The next instance is more difficult. "Jesus said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the Kingdom

of God." On the face of it this sounds indeed "a hard saying." Has Christ, we ask, no reverence for the dead, that He thus tramples upon the common instinct of humanity? Is the natural affection naught to Him which in the presence of death bids us lay aside for the time all other interests and duties till we have borne to their last resting-place the dear forms that we still love, though they have fallen asleep? But to argue so were surely inconsistent with all else we know of Jesus Christ. Is not this He who was moved even to tears over the fate of the city that He loved?—who showed the tenderest compassion to the bereaved mother at the gate of Nain; and who, at the grave of His own friend, "groaned in spirit and was troubled," even though He was about to rifle the tomb and rescue its spoil? Yet here is this same Christ apparently preventing a son from paying the last offices of filial duty, and forbidding him to attend the funeral of his father!

Such is the conclusion of the literalist, for such must appear to be the surface meaning of the words. In the search for some deeper and truer meaning than that which appears at first sight according to the letter, we need not, however, fly to the opposite extreme, with

Theophylact and others, and understand that the father here being, perhaps, in extreme age, the son asked to be allowed to stay with him till he died. For this is not to explain what is written, but to explain it away.

On the other hand we *are* bound to read the words in the light of the time when they were spoken. Thus we ought to recall the fact that the Jews buried within twenty-four hours of a death, and that for a son to be seen in public during this short interval between the death and burial of his father would have been considered highly indecent, and is therefore highly improbable. Accustomed as *we* are to a considerably longer interval between death and burial, it has been commonly assumed that this man's father was lying dead at home when our Lord met him. But Eastern usage both precludes this idea, and at the same time makes it very likely "that the completion of the ten days of strict mourning was regarded as part of the obsequies, and that the word 'bury' applies to this. The father might have been laid in the ground, but the ten days not having expired, the funeral solemnities were not considered to be past." ¹

¹ *Pastor Pastorum*, p. 378.

These I take to have been the actual circumstances, first because they best accord with the facts judged in their proper historical light, and next because they remove from our Lord's utterance an excessive severity which is foreign to all that elsewhere falls from His lips when dealing with similar cases. But allowing this view to be correct, and accepting the explanation that the request made related rather to the fulfilment of additional rites beyond the literal interment of the body; though we have removed a needless exaggeration of the difficulty by ceasing to encumber ourselves with a false notion based on our own modern and Western usage, yet the harsh inflexibility of the tone and spirit of the answer still remains, and calls for further comment.

But do we not all know the type of character to which this very tone administers the precise tonic that is needed? Have we not ourselves experienced the mood of mind and heart in which an imperative command calling us to immediate action is the only specific for our case? There is an old tradition that the speaker here was afterwards the Apostle Thomas. Whether this be so or not, his gloomy and desponding temperament is very

common in the world. It is next to impossible for some people to look on the bright side of things. They are ingenious even to subtlety in shutting out the sunlight.

Now these are they whose mournful turn of mind exposes them to peril. Out of such material grows all too easily either the hard and miserable cynic, who is near to crying with the devil himself "Evil, be thou my good!" or else the maudlin sentimentalist to whom all life is one long funeral, and tombs and monuments the cherished tryst of morbid feelings and despairing thoughts. Now the best possible medicine for a malady like this is an authoritative call to immediate, wholesome, bracing work. Sensitive, distrustful, sad, "quailing under a nerve-storm," the morbid man who hesitates is lost, and yet by himself he is too weak to act. A foreign will must come to his help, and take the place of that which is failing. But such a will can hold no parley with excuses or delay, for every moment spent in lingering increases the hold of what is really a disease. Therefore, in the peremptory tone of the command lies the hope of its effecting a cure.

Now, this is exactly the treatment which is followed here. "Jesus saith unto another, Fol-

low Me." Your man of mournful and doubting temperament is no eager volunteer like the last. He needs the word of actual invitation. Even then his gloomy disposition rises into evidence. "Yes, I will follow Thee," he seems to say; "but there are still those sad obsequies to be wound up. Life is not worth living, yet I will follow Thee: let me but bury all my old love, and then—what matters?" And the Master of the lives and thoughts of men checks that unhealthy outlook upon life, chills that poor regretful barren sentimentalism, dashes it aside with a strong dose of common sense. "The duties," He seems to say, "which are owed to the dead are sacred duties; but think rather of the duties you owe to the living, think of the work that cries out to be done. Sentiment is ever easier than sacrifice; yet to be and to do are more important than to feel."

Do we not all of us, at times, need this lesson? Is there not a sort of luxury of sorrow and disappointment and regret? Is it not positively nice sometimes to be miserable? These are dangerous times, which call for strong measures and strong words. The unfaltering hand of one who is stronger than we must lift us, even by force, out of the mire and clay of

our perverted imagination, and set our feet upon the rock of truth and fact. Our hope is in obeying the exhortation of the poet who echoes the words of the text :

“ Trust no Future howe'er pleasant,
Let the dead Past bury its dead,
Act,—act, in the living Present,
Heart within, and God o'erhead.”

This then is the everlasting message : Beware lest any tender regrets of heart and life should veil from you more obvious duties. Take heed lest, in the remembrance of those duties toward the dead, you forget your higher duties toward the living. Better it is to give bread to the hungry body, better far to satisfy the hungry soul, than to brood over the dead in any luxury of woe. “Go thou rather and publish abroad the Kingdom of God.”

The third case in this passage need not long detain us, because much of what has been just said is again applicable. “Another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee, but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at home at my house.” What could be more reasonable? For better for worse, the man will follow. One thing only he asks, one little favour : may he but go home first to take leave of those that he loves,

and explain to them his intended absence? But the Master, Who has insight into the nature and disposition of this man, sees where his weakness lies, and takes the opportunity to warn him: "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Christ never forbade that farewell. But He does admonish the speaker and through him every one of us according to our need. Duty to God is a paramount duty, with which nothing else can be allowed to compete. In order to do it faithfully there will be times when even innocent pleasures must be forgone, when "they that have wives must be as those that have none, and they that possess as though they possessed not." The Christ Who provided for His own Mother amid the torture of the Cross does not frown on this proposal, but He teaches that even the most right and natural human tenderness for the claims of kindred and of home must never be allowed to interfere with obligations that are divine, or lower the standard of what men owe to God.

Do you say that the call to waive such claims as these is a "counsel of perfection," a summons to "wind ourselves too high for mortal man

beneath the sky?" A little thought will remind us that, in every walk of life, the path is barred against the man who has not the power to put aside the ties of affection when they cross the line of duty. If the tradesman and mechanic, if the soldier and the statesman, the lawyer and the doctor, the artist and the philosopher, must learn to accept the spirit of the couplet,

" I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more,"

shall not this same truth be true in the sphere of religion?

It surely needs no argument to convince us that life would not be so difficult if our temptations sprang only from what is plainly wrong. It is often in the crucifixion of self in regard to matters intrinsically harmless, that in the process of spiritual evolution Christ leads us from the lower to the higher. When He deals with those who aspire to fellowship with Him, He passes beyond any question of obvious sin into a rarer and loftier air, and we seem to hear Him say, 'What is wanted in the true follower is a loyal determination to let go whatever interferes with the demands of the highest right.'

And is not the man of amiability and kindness and warm affection, the man full of friend-

liness and hospitable feeling, just the kind of man to be in danger of forgetting the necessity for this high and strenuous endeavour? Surely it is he above all who will be tempted to rest satisfied with the aroma of kindness which pervades his home. Such an one, we may well think, was he to whom the Master, not in harshness but in wisdom and in love, says, "If you allow anything, however innocent in itself, to distract you from the duty which God has given you to do, you are forsaking the vocation wherewith you are called, forsaking the highest that you know, and you stand in danger of lowering not only your line of conduct, but the character which is daily being formed by your actions." Remember, then, when the claims of "other things," even lawful and desirable things, clash with allegiance to Christ, remember that "no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Now the most striking thing about these three instances,—the thing in fact which probably led to their being placed together in the narrative—is the difference of treatment by our Lord of cases outwardly similar. One is repelled who volunteers to follow forthwith, while two others who crave but a slight delay are imperatively told to come at all costs at once.

Why is this? A comparison of this passage with the nearly parallel one in St. Matthew viii. makes it probable that the occasion of the second and third colloquies was different from that of the first, and therefore the exigencies of the hour may partly have dictated the diversity of treatment. But, apart from this, is it not most reasonable to suppose that the sufficient explanation lies in the simple fact that He Who could say with a fulness no other Shepherd ever could, "I know my sheep," adapted His method to the real condition of each separate case? How can we doubt that to our Lord's eye every human being had a moral and spiritual physiognomy of his own? And if He, thus "needing not that any should tell Him," held the key of each man's character, how could He do otherwise than vary His method with the differing needs of each?

What becomes, then, of the "hardness" of these sayings? Must we not allow it to have disappeared? In taking the wisest was not the Master also taking the kindest course with these three men? The impulse of merely evanescent eagerness, or of calculating self-interest, whichever was the leading note of the first character,—was it not better stopped at once? The tendency to brooding melancholy

and to exaggerated sentiment, or the leaning toward the idols of home and an immoderate appreciation of domestic joys, what more wholesome medicine for such weaknesses than the positive, inflexible summons to immediate active service in the cause of God and of mankind?

The passage we have been reviewing affords in short an example of that method which the great teachers of the world have always freely used in order to make their listeners *reflect*. Sometimes Christ spoke with transparent simplicity, with no other object than to convey His meaning as widely and as plainly as possible. But at other times, as in many of His parables, the Master wrapt His lesson in some striking figure or phrase intended to arrest the attention, and to call out his hearers' own capacity for thought. He uses the Hard Saying as a goad. It is thus that Christ speaks here. The object seems on the surface to be only to discourage and deter. It is in fact to make men think; to force them to look below "the letter which killeth," till they find the spirit wherein alone and evermore is "life."

THE WINNOWING FAN

“And there went great multitudes with Him: and He turned, and said unto them, If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”—ST. LUKE xiv. 25, 26.

THESE words were spoken, not like those we have been considering, to meet the case of certain individual characters, but to the multitude at large. Loosely attached crowds, moved chiefly by curiosity, often followed in the train of Christ. But for the purpose He had in view, this casual adherence was a hindrance rather than a help. It would excite the suspicious hostility of the authorities, and give occasion to Christ's enemies, without in any way consolidating that spiritual kingdom “not of this world,” which He came to inaugurate on earth.

For this work they only who are “called and chosen and faithful” will serve, and it was

necessary to winnow these from the merely wonder-struck throng. Christ knew that this mere crowding after Him had little enough in common with true discipleship. We are not surprised, then, to find the Master "turning to the multitude" with words evidently chosen to repress and repel. The difficulty is not to find the motive, but to justify the terms of Christ's address. "Take them literally, and," as Archbishop Trench remarks, "they stand in direct contradiction to the whole teaching of the rest of Scripture, and of our Lord Himself elsewhere. They enjoin an immorality. They require of men to hate those whom it is their prime duty to love."

Now in the first place, much that has been already said concerning the "hard sayings" of the ninth chapter of this Gospel applies also to these words. Christ desires enthusiasm, but He desires also thoughtfulness. By an expression so astonishingly harsh and stern, He would undoubtedly sift that miscellaneous crowd, but He would also arouse His hearers to thought. If they really intended discipleship, let them realise what it meant. As in all other affairs of life, the cost must be counted. As he who sets about to build must count his

capital, or bring himself to bankruptcy ; as he who prepares a military expedition must carefully reckon his resources, or else court defeat ; so must they, who, either without consideration or from unworthy motives, flock after Christ, count the cost of real discipleship. But besides the curious in that mixed multitude we may be sure there were the selfish also, people who calculated, indeed, but without knowledge. These would be cherishing the chance that it might be "good business," as we say, for their "own life," and also for their families and friends, if this Jesus of Nazareth turned out to be the true Messiah, and came into His rights of privilege and power.

Now Christ would have no man follow Him on a misunderstanding. He would never, like some who would enlist recruits for earthly war, deny or minimise the trials and perils of fellowship with Him. He will rather go to the opposite extreme, and therefore He states His terms in the most uncompromising form : "Whoso hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, cannot be My disciple."

These multitudes had no idea of the ordeal

of suffering involved in really following Christ. They naturally clung to their own life ; but, if they became His disciples, they might be called even to die for His sake. Are they prepared for this sacrifice? Are they ready to regard as an enemy that natural love of life which at such a crisis would tempt them to forsake Him? Still further, are they ready to regard as an enemy that natural affection which might tempt them to violate their fidelity to Him? which indeed would surely do so in those coming days, which Christ foresaw, when "a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Thus we see that our Lord would actually have been screening the truth, and deceiving the people, if He had not taught, as plainly as He did, the full measure of the claim He made on their allegiance : "Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me." For in this quotation from St. Matthew we have in fact the essence of the teaching of our text. Here in St. Luke the lesson is conveyed in bolder paradox, in terms which provoke attention, and compel either admission or rejection at the chambers of the mind. Yet no one, save the too learned M. Renan, or some dear, bungling literalist, need find in this word

“hate” any real difficulty. No one else will ever think of Jesus Christ as deliberately “trampling under foot everything that is human—blood, and love, and country.” What the common sense of most will and must see is rather what the Master intended : that no terms, however strange, however striking, can too vividly set forth the absolute supremacy of His claim upon the affections and the lives of men.

The actual form of this oriental aphorism is not, after all, the really surprising thing. We may be sure that what made that listening crowd catch their breath in astonishment was not the “hatred” called for by the letter of this phrase, but the *absolutism* of its tone and spirit. Though indeed Christ’s hearers might not grasp exactly what He positively meant by so startling a paradox, they knew quite enough about the Speaker to understand what He did not mean. The common folk, who heard so gladly the prophet of Galilee, would have smiled at M. Renan and the mad conclusions of his learned doubt. They had Christ’s whole life and teaching for a witness that He would never make light of the sacred ties of natural affection or despise the claims of kindred, or compound with that spirit of hatred which He taught men to regard as the essence of murder

itself. I cannot believe for a moment that those who heard this saying actually fall from the lips of Jesus were ever troubled by mistaking His intent. They would clearly realise that One whose whole teaching hinged upon the Divine Fatherhood, One who gathered up all human duty into Love for God and Love for Man, could never mean them to "hate" those whom they were most bound to love on earth. It was not this sharp, strong word that staggered them. Not in this lay the "hardness" of the saying. They knew that suicide was no more enjoined in the clause about hating one's own life, than was literal hatred of near relations meant in the other clauses.

But what undoubtedly did astound them, and was intended so to do, was the essence and spirit of the words. For, when all legitimate allowance is made for Eastern hyperbole, what an amazing claim remains! What mere man—however great, however good—dare claim the like for an instant, without expecting and deserving to be called insane? It is fashionable to-day to asperse the doctrine of Christ's Divinity. Books have great vogue which deny all miracles but one—the miracle of the sinless life of a flawless Teacher. Such writers descant on the beauty of the one and on the wisdom

of the other. But after they have explained away the passages which directly declare the Oneness of Christ with God Himself, there still remains the very strongest evidence for the Divinity of Jesus in what is said quite incidentally, as for example in the claims made in the concluding part of the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ speaks of His own authority interchangeably with that of the Supreme, or in such a passage as that now before us, where the absolute subordination of all other interests and affections, however desirable, however innocent, is unreservedly called for. On the part of any less than the greatest, lower than the highest, the demand would undoubtedly involve an unanswerable charge either of consummate folly or of boundless presumption. Yet here, as Archbishop Trench¹ has aptly observed, the claim is made "not in the name of Another, whose messenger the speaker is, but in His own, setting forth Himself as the object to whom all this measureless devotion is justly due, and who, claiming it all, claims nothing but that which is His own by right."

This extraordinary absolutism, then, I take to be the really staggering thing about this

¹ *Studies in the Gospels*, p. 254.

passage. But it presents no difficulty in theory, whatever it may do in practice, to the humble believer in the Incarnation. Such an one hears the just demands of the One Master, with sorrow indeed at the heavy debt of unfulfilled allegiance which he is conscious of having accumulated, but without surprise and without recoil. Reason and experience, moreover, come to strengthen his wavering fidelity, for they remind a man how often natural affection, if it be gratified without regard to moral duty, becomes corrupted in the process and turns to loathing and to disappointment.

Thus too he grows to realise how even pure family ties and duties, blessed as they usually are, must not be turned into idols or suffered to hamper the "clear spirit" in its ascent to God. And finally he begins to understand how "the strongest and truest love is that which is capable of the courage and self-sacrifice involved in the infliction of necessary pain."¹ And, therefore, just as he who "hateth his life in this world" really "keeps it unto life eternal," so he, who according to Christ's paradox "hates" his friends, really loves them with a deeper, more abiding, and more unselfish affection.

¹ T. C. Finlayson, *Expositor*, vol. ix., p. 430.

THE MIGHT OF MEEKNESS

“Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”—ST. MATTHEW v. 38-42 (cf. ST. LUKE vi. 29, 30.)

THE difficulty here is precisely opposite in kind from that of the other instances we have been considering. Hitherto we have been confronted by an apparently excessive severity and harshness. Now Christ seems to recommend a tenderness indistinguishable from weakness, and to proclaim absolutely the duty of non-resistance to injuries.

But the fact that the tenor of these hard sayings is antagonistic, that while some seem to overshoot the mark in one direction, others do so in a direction which is precisely opposite,—this fact should put us in the way of finding an invaluable clue not only to these particular

problems, but to a score of other difficulties which have been used as arguments against the truth and wisdom of Christianity. If we found that the thrust and bearing of all that is difficult to understand in the speech of Christ went in one direction, then it might be otherwise ; but as it is, ordinary common sense suggests what further enquiry proves to demonstration, that, in these strikingly picturesque and forceful sayings, our Lord was not enunciating precise rules of conduct to be literally followed in detail ; but was rather declaring broad general principles, which swept now this way and now that.

Christ and Christianity deal in principles, not rules. His words are as sown seed capable of endless growth. Keep this in mind, and you have the clue to everything. The mistakes that people make in interpreting the doctrine of Jesus come, nearly all of them, from not realising that it was His invariable method to avoid laying down rules which time and circumstances would soon make obsolete, and to proclaim principles capable of eternal application.

Suppose, for instance, that our Lord had adjudicated the question of inheritance which

two family disputants brought to Him for settlement, endless confusion would have resulted from the judgment. "We should have had an isolated case of the law of inheritance, on which an irreversible decision had been pronounced. Every code framed for Christian lands would have had to accept and embody this. Endless guesses at the special circumstances of the case would have been made, and every one who contested a distribution of property would have endeavoured to show that this ruling of Christ covered his own claims."¹ In refusing here to become "a ruler and a divider," Jesus followed His invariable custom; He constantly asserted the principles of love, unselfishness, order, which would decide all questions, but the questions themselves He would not decide. He would lay down a broad political principle, "Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's." But He would not determine whether a particular tax was due to Cæsar or not. So also Christ lays down a great social law: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal." But to say how much is just and equal, Christianity leaves to each

¹ *Pastor Pastorum*, p. 405.

master and to each age of society to determine. So again, Christianity binds up men in a holy brotherhood ; but what are the best institutions and surest means for arriving at this brotherhood it has not said. Whether, for instance, competition or co-operation will best conduce to its realisation in the community ; whether a merely national patriotism, or a transfigured form thereof embracing mankind, presents that pure ideal which may at last bring " Peace on earth to men of goodwill " ;—such issues are left to the growing experience and the developing Conscience of Humanity to work out.

The purview of the child is not that of the full-grown man. And there is a childhood of the race as well as of the individual. What is condoned in one age is scouted by another. Within the covers of the Bible itself the progressive growth of moral and spiritual perception is plain to read. And the subsequent history of social evolution tells the same tale. Even the conscience of Christendom is sensitised by slow degrees, and the great conscience of Humanity more slowly still. Hence we see the wisdom, the necessity, of Christ's method of enlightening the world.

Thus alone it comes to pass that Christianity is the Eternal Religion which can never become obsolete, just because it commits itself only to eternal principles. And the Founder of our Faith shows Himself so resolute on this point that it seems exceedingly probable that He cast so much of what He had to communicate into the startling and paradoxical forms which so puzzle the literalist, precisely in order to prevent His hearers making of them rules when He intended only to deliver principles, the application of which He purposely left to their own common sense.

There is an instance in the Gospels which goes to show that even when a saying of Christ has all the appearance of a regular rule, it was not our Lord's purpose that it should be taken otherwise than as a principle. In St. Luke xxii. 35, Jesus refers back to the first missionary journey of the Twelve. They were, He had told them (St. Matthew x. 9, 10), to set out with practically nothing but a staff in their hands,—no money, no provisions, no change of clothes—casting themselves wholly on the kindness of men and the Providence of God. There was no doubt a wise object in this order: it was the best to effect the immediate purpose.

Now suppose you take this as a literal rule to be followed by ministers for all time, you not only expose the words of Christ to ridicule and contempt, but you actually insist on retaining a rule which He Himself repealed. For at the close of Christ's Ministry, in view of dark and troublous days, He said to the Twelve again, "But now, he that hath a purse let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." Now it is plainly quite impossible that we should render a literal obedience to both these rules. And what is almost equally clear is that even the Twelve never attempted literally to obey the latter. For example, common sense forbids us to suppose that Christ meant the Apostles to leave the table at which they had just eaten the Last Supper and go out and buy swords, or that He ever intended swords to be wielded in His service. Indeed, but a few hours after, St. Peter did strike at Malchus with his sword, and only received a rebuke for his pains.

Is it not clear then that by these deliberate admonitions which look like rules, but are really statements embodying principles of set purpose so framed as to prevent their being

taken literally,—is it not clear that the great object of our Lord in this picturesque and paradoxical language was to drive us to look beneath the actual words until we find the principles those words enshrine?

If now we go back to our text with these considerations clearly in mind, how entirely plain it grows that this turning of the smitten to the smiter, this offering fresh opportunity to the would-be thief, this indiscriminate giving to every beggar and lending to every one who seeks a loan, were simply so many vivid pictures to enforce attention to a most fruitful and profitable, though generally neglected, principle. Pictures they are in fact purposely painted in glaring colours, figures indeed of a most valuable truth, but left almost grotesquely out of drawing precisely in order to cut off the possibility of their being taken as patterns for *literal* obedience.

The actual example of our Lord is quite sufficient proof in itself that He could never have intended His followers to turn these startling illustrations into maxims for literal imitation. For the practice of the Master Whose whole Life incomparably exhibits the principle here taught, none the less plainly contradicts

the letter He uses to convey its spirit to our minds. We know that from those who, from unworthy motives, asked of Jesus treasures more precious than silver or gold, He did "turn away"; and bade His disciples use discretion lest they cast their pearls before swine. We remember how Christ deliberately did "resist evil," when, whip in hand, He chased the traffickers from the Temple. And we recall how, when on the occasion of His trial an apparitor struck Him on the cheek, Jesus did *not* "turn to him the other also," but rebuked the smiter for the cowardly blow. But such instances need not be multiplied, a single one of them is proof enough of the point I am urging, that this passage was never intended to supply a series of rules, but to claim attention and obedience to a great and glorious principle capable of innumerable applications.

And though no single sentence could easily be framed to define it, this principle is surely comprehensible enough. Christ preaches not the non-resistance which involves being overcome of evil, but that which "overcomes evil with good," which disarms hostility by the exhibition of a generous spirit, which by gentleness turns away wrath and retaliating only with

kindness heaps "coals of fire" on the head of the malicious. The Christian is never bidden to open his door to the burglar, or his pocket to the thief. When he meets either the unscrupulous speculator who swallows the living of the orphan and the widow, or the murderous landlord who refuses sanitary conditions to his tenants, he not only may but ought to "be angry and sin not." And his commission to the sturdy beggar who seeks to live upon the toil of others, is neither to give nor to lend, but to tell him, in the words of St. Paul, that "if a man will not work, neither should he eat." In short, Christianity calls no man to ineptitude and imbecility, but to exercise a "sound mind" in sober, righteous, and godly living.

The principle of this particular passage is the principle of the power of good. Christ inculcates a habit of life formed on the belief that "in the long run good is stronger than evil, kindness than cruelty, love than law." Thus the Christian is summoned to exhibit in all the affairs of life a spirit of consideration, of kindness, of generosity. In the cultivation and practice of this spirit the words of Christ will be obeyed. We really do His will, "not when we refuse to take a legal oath, but when we culti-

vate a truthful spirit : not when we turn the other cheek to the smiter, but when we conquer anger and violence with meekness and love : not when we give or lend to every one that asks of us, but when we cherish a charitable spirit."

Everywhere, and by all means the Christian disciple is called to be a servant not of the letter but of the spirit. He who so "learns Christ" alone will ever understand with what a breadth and depth of truth the Master spoke when He said, "It is the spirit which maketh alive. The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life."

AGAINST ANXIETY

“Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”—ST. MATTHEW vi. 31-34.

THE difficulty here lies rather with ourselves than with the actual words of the Master. “Take no thought” is the old English equivalent for “Be not anxious,” as the Revised Version reminds us. There is therefore nothing subtle or mysterious in the exhortation. It is magnificently simple. Yet who is there among us who has not often found it a “hard saying”? In an earlier age perhaps, when the speed and pressure of life were less, for the dwellers in some pastoral Eden of a bygone day, possibly even now for some exceptional people—the happy few endowed with perfect

health and ample means—the doctrine might seem suitable. But for the mass of mankind at the end of the nineteenth century, hardly bestead in the battle for subsistence, for men immersed in bitter business competition, for tillers of the soil who can grow little to any profit; in short, for the immense majority of the race, how can we regard this exhortation against anxiety except as unreasonable and extravagant?

First, however, we have to remember that no saying of any man's can be rightly interpreted apart from the recognised standpoint of the speaker. We know that here that standpoint is not far to seek. For the fundamental principle of the doctrine of Jesus was the fact of the FATHERHOOD of God. The Boy of twelve must be about His Father's business. In that He found His meat and drink until the end, when we hear Him add to the ancient prayer of commendation from the Psalms He loved, this characteristic touch—"Father," "*Father*, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit."

And as at the beginning and the end, so it was throughout. When Jesus described the circle of religious thought, He stated it in

terms of the Fatherhood. Repentance was a return to the Father; "I will arise and go to my Father." When ye pray, say, "Our Father, Which art in Heaven." The type of character was the Father; "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." The principle of all life was the Will of the Father. Providence is the mindful oversight of a Father: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." One of the few rays of light Jesus cast on the future showed the Father's dwelling-place: "In my Father's house are many mansions." It has been truly said that the effect of such passages—and they could be multiplied indefinitely—is cumulative and irresistible. They are no mere proof texts for a dogma; they are an atmosphere in which religion lives and moves and has its being.

Now it is this doctrine of the Fatherhood Divine which is the key of the problem now before us. Every questioning of doubt, every protest we may urge as to the importance of these physical necessities, every plausible excuse we may contrive for worrying about them, is conclusively met with the simple statement, "Your heavenly Father knoweth,—knoweth

that ye have need of all these things." And when Christ said, "Your Father knows," His whole argument implies also "Your Father cares." And even more specifically He continues, "All these things shall be added unto you,"—these temporal needs shall be fulfilled,—if only ye seek first the Father's kingdom and His righteousness. If, that is, you put the needs of the spirit before those of the body, and concentrate your energies, first, not on amassing material gain, but on the attainment of spiritual character,—thinking more of what you may become than of anything you may be able to get—then your Father in Heaven will not fail you.

Thus we see that the difficulty of Jesus' teaching on this subject of worldly anxiety resolves itself, in fact, into the difficulty of firmly believing His foundation doctrine of God's paternal care. When we hear Jesus discoursing of repose on Providence, our temptation to explain the whole thing away as an idyll or a dream gathers force from the doubts we entertain as to whether God is after all solicitous of His creatures' welfare. If we really believed that the Almighty does know and love and care, then these precepts against

anxiety about our worldly concerns would seem to us no longer difficult. It is because we doubt that truth, which alone makes Christ's bidding a reasonable command, that we find ourselves so impotent to obey it.

Moreover, there is considerable ground for hesitation. The Fatherly cares of God appear at times to admit of the very strangest misfortunes. Though Christ and Christ's Church declare that He "ordereth all things in heaven and earth;" though the Psalmist asserts that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth" to the obedient; and an Apostle repeats that "all things work together for good to them that love God;" yet we have after all a feeling, irrepressibly recurrent, that experience contradicts revelation in this matter. As we pass in review the horrors of war, the hideousness of slavery, the indescribable misery and squalor which disgrace the purlieus of the finest cities of the world, the terrible sufferings which by no means only dog the steps of sin, the triumphs of evil and the frequent ill-success of good; as the daily press pours out its awful tale of shipwreck and accident, of famine and suicide,—we stand appalled at the lurid picture. These, we say, are facts.

How are we to reconcile them with the beautiful dreams of the great Galilean Teacher? Surely it is only left to us, as we look earthward, to exclaim with the ancient pessimist, "Behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit;" or, looking heavenward, to cry with the prophet of old, "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself." "We see not our signs," and so we practically disbelieve in the paternal government of God; and, disbelieving, it becomes utterly impossible to fulfil the word of Christ, which bids us cease from personal anxiety and care.

Now Jesus, Who always discouraged speculative thought, never solved for us the mystery of evil in the world, and it is probable therefore that it will remain unsolved until the Day of God. But Jesus did give to the world both teaching and facts which enable us, despite that mystery, to believe in the power, wisdom, and love of the Eternal. By His teaching of Immortality He lifts the believer out of the untenable position in which he would otherwise find himself in face of the problems of life. To all these things we can now say, The end is not yet. It is not for this world only we have the heritage of Hope in Christ,

“ Traversed heart must tell its story uncommented on : no less,
Mine results in ‘ Only grant a second life, I acquiesce
In this present life as failure, count misfortune’s worst assaults,
Triumph not defeat ; assured that loss so much the more exalts
Gain about to be.’ ”

We know that God has not finished with any of us when we go down to the grave, least of all with those whose earthly opportunities have been the fewest, whose chances have been the worst, whose time here has been cut off prematurely.

Our great difficulty always and necessarily is to see things in their proper proportion and perspective. We scale everything by this little earth-life, and our measure is the measure of a man. But the scale of God is infinite, His counsels are from all eternity, and require eternity for their completion.

“ There shall never be one lost good ! What was shall live as before ;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;
On the earth the broken arcs ; in Heaven the perfect round.”

Human wisdom, therefore, consists largely in recognising its limitations. But what is possible to human wisdom does not end with this, or we might crown the Agnostic with the laurels of the wise. And this can never be, since the Great Father, “ Whom to know is everlasting life,” has freely offered to man’s

reason all help necessary to peace of mind and freedom of faith, though it suffice not to the satisfaction of his curiosity. The teaching and the life of Jesus Christ crown the revelation of the Father. The only begotten Son, "He hath declared Him." And as the spirit of Jesus rises in our hearts,—“the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father,”—we are no longer given over to despair, or doubt of the eternal love.

“I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ,
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it.”

In our moments of darkness, when we read Christ's teaching about the lilies and the birds and the Universal Father, and are tempted to contrast the beauteous idyll with some ugly and untoward fact, we have only to turn from the teaching to the Teacher, and faith and hope revive again. We may argue the teaching optimistic, but with the record of His life before us, it is not open to conclude that Jesus was wrong. "He drank the bitterest cup; He suffered the shamefullest death; and yet reconciled the incalculable tragedy of His life with the love of His Father." When upon the Cross Jesus said, "Father," "it may have

been," as has been remarked, "a pathetic delusion, but it was the delusion of Him Who of all the race knew God best."

II. In this insistence on the Divine Fatherhood Jesus Christ gives us the Secret which makes reasonable that entire trustfulness which otherwise would seem to us impossible. But there is a second great principle, upon which Jesus was constantly dwelling, which shows us the *Method* by means of which we are to overcome the temptation to anxiety. We learn that in the mind of Christ the physical and material were always subordinated to the spiritual. Your living is one thing, your life is another. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of possessions." "Man doth not *live* by bread alone." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." This kind of speech was constantly on Jesus' lips. And the way in which strenuousness in spiritual endeavour is here coupled and contrasted with uncarefulness in temporal matters goes to indicate that the way to avoid anxiety in the lower is by absorption in the higher.

The Method, then, for the attainment of a quiet mind in temporal things is to estimate truly their unimportance compared with things

eternal. "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, only to be mulcted of his life?"

And is it not just by neglect of this Method of Jesus that we fail so constantly in obedience to His word? Do not many of us deliberately invert the Christian aim? Are we not full of care because we strain first and mainly after physical good, and at best are only willing that the spiritual blessings of the Kingdom should be added thereto? Yes: the animal and the earthly grasp us with the power of their nearness and of their coarse reality. The spiritual and the divine sing to us with angel sweetness from the invisible world. But these voices sound so faint and seem to come so far, that though we can distinguish their message of grace, contentment, trust and duty, it requires more of an effort than we are disposed to make, sometimes even to listen, much less to obey. And so it comes to be that men are keener on the things that pass than on those that abide. Wealth, success, reputation, rank,— "these be thy gods, O Israel." To make a *coup* of some sort—political, social, even commercial—this is worthy of careful thought, of anxious scheming, of well laid preparation.

The vagaries of fashion, the amplitude of the wardrobe, even the pleasures of the table,—anything, everything, material and mundane will engross the thought, and assume far greater importance in our worldly view than, for example, the conquest of temper, the contempt of gossip, the forgiveness of injuries, the exercise of generosity and love,—in short, the attainment of character.

Yet we can recognise the beauty of this call of Christ. And since, in the sphere of human duty, to discern an excellence is to receive a trust, it follows that by this which we morally admire we are practically bound. We know perfectly well that, rightly understood, the command is reasonable and wise. We know that in Christ's thought, to live like the lilies or the birds never meant an idle standing still, to subsist on what the heavens might send. These fowls of the air, says Jesus, "God feedeth them." Yet they are never found, regardless of the changing year, hanging always on a miracle. On the contrary, that which God giveth them "they gather." Christ never condemns foresight, for foresight is perfectly compatible with Faith. He condemns the restless anxiety which is born of avarice and selfishness

While birds and insects continually provide for their needs, they do not worry about them. Perfectly guided by instinct they are excellent examples of that unconsciousness which is the mark of perfection in the exercise of the functions of life.

Moreover, according to the method of Christ the fulfilment of each part of His command helps obedience to the rest. The more a man is engrossed about the higher, the less power over him will the lower have. And on the other hand the nearer any one approaches unconsciousness, "taking no thought" for the lower things necessary alike to all animal creation, the freer will he be for that strenuous "taking thought" for those higher things which are the proper and peculiar privilege of Mankind.

In ordinary experience we are accustomed to connect plain living with high thinking, simple tastes with moral worth. This is so much evidence for the wisdom of Christ's teaching here. Determined striving after truth or goodness leads inevitably to a certain carelessness, or rather unconsciousness, about the things that perish in the using. And this is the ideal condition of mental and moral welfare. It is thus

the injunction is fulfilled, "Labour not for the meat which perishes, but for that which endureth unto life eternal."

In flagrant instances, over-carefulness in material things is at once recognised as contemptible. We suspect the health of a man who is for ever consulting his digestion. The valetudinarian stands confessed an invalid. The epicure spoils his appetite by "taking thought" for it. The dress of the dandy and the money of the miser illustrate the same truth.

So far, therefore, from regarding this saying of Jesus as a piece of pious extravagance, we ought to recognise its entire accord with the dictates of reason and with our common experience of life. In listening to the Master's protest, we are not called to "wind ourselves too high for mortal man beneath the sky," but we are called to watch lest the material side of life engage and engross us too fully.

It is only by the diligent use of this Method of Christ, at first perhaps with distinct and conscious effort, that we can hope gradually to learn and at length habitually to feel that the life is more than food, as the body is more than raiment. But as long as we persist in lending

the whole weight of divinely implanted powers to join in the selfish scramble of scheming competition, or to make provision for the gratification of the flesh, we shall surely miss the mark and degrade our human nature. For, however true it be that man lives by bread, it is at least equally true, and even more eternally important, that man cannot live by bread alone.

The realisation of this ideal, the possession of this secret and the practice of this method have distinguished the Saints of God in every age and place, as their language and their lives abundantly show. Let the words of one bear witness for all. Hear a man who had as deep an experience of the labours, trials, and vicissitudes of life as it is possible to imagine falling to any human lot. Hear St. Paul, from his Roman prison, writing to his beloved Philip-pians, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say rejoice. Be careful for nothing—in nothing be anxious—but in everything let your requests be made known unto God. And (then) the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

THE FRIENDSHIP OF MAMMON

“I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness: that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles. He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much: and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?”—ST. LUKE xvi. 9-12.

THE Kingdom of Heaven we are accustomed to regard as a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom “not of this world.” We think of its great ones as the “servants of all,” an aristocracy neither of rank nor of wealth, but of goodness. We picture its honours bestowed on virtue, not lavished on success. We remember that much that is highly esteemed among men is mere abomination in the sight of God, and we rejoice that the judgments of the Kingdom of Heaven are not human but Divine. There is no room in fact for even a momentary confusion in our

mind between the spiritual nature of the beatitude which Christ passes upon the meek, the loving and the pure, the sons of light ; and the tangible satisfactions coveted by the children of the age, and which so often crown the efforts of those who are wise in their worldly generation.

What then are we to understand by this enigmatic saying with which Christ concludes the story of the Steward, "I say unto you"—you, My disciples—"make to yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles." Is the saying ironical?—intended to point the absurdity of imagining that any mere worldly astuteness can commend itself to the Lord of the spirits of all flesh? Is it a satire upon the notion that the gift of God can be purchased with money? Are we to read it as a vial of scorn poured upon the thought that admission to "the eternal tabernacles" can be "arranged" by that politic paltering with truth or smart commercial double dealing, which is so often for a time successful in merely temporal affairs?

This would seem to be a perfectly possible explanation. But, on the other hand, our

Lord seldom indulged in irony at all, and never, so far as I remember, except on one occasion, in addressing His own disciples. So that it will be safer here to take the words as a serious instruction.

The right clue to their meaning seems to be given in the words that follow. "He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much." That is, he that is faithful in mere Mammon matters, in that common intercourse of life which is material and transitory, he alone will be faithful in the hidden things of the spirit which are deep and real and lasting, and to him only can therefore be entrusted the "true riches" of the spiritual life. While on the other hand, he who is unfaithful in the stewardship of those outward and tangible things which are merely accidental—lent with the lease of life—such an one is bound to fail in dealing with that which is spiritual and essential and can alone be properly styled "his own," since character is the true soul and self whether of a man or of a nation.

It is in fact in the unchanging and inviolable Law of Character that we find the key to the whole passage. It is this law which everywhere

connects the "very little" and the "much," the secular and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal. Those little words and thoughts and acts of everyday may in themselves be trifles; but the moral character each thought and word and deed is slowly and surely building up—that is no trifle. Not time only but eternity is involved. And therefore the attempt to separate between the secular and the religious in the affairs of life is a foolish and impossible attempt. Nothing may be accounted trivial on the ground of its being secular, because the secular and the spiritual, the little and the great, the transient and the abiding are indissolubly joined by the law of character.

Therefore Christ teaches those disciples of His, some of whom as tax-collectors and business men were possibly inclined to chafe at the unspiritual nature of their work, that their faithfulness in the little would prove in reality to be faithfulness in much, for by means of their good stewardship in things mundane, they would be securing the rights of the most valuable of all proprietorships,—winning possession of themselves,—forming that Character which is the only "true riches," and to which alone "the eternal tabernacles" will afford an everlasting refuge.

We can gather how forcibly and clearly all this would appeal to Christ's Jewish audience when we come across the following parable which is found in the Rabbinic writings of the time, and was no doubt current among the people. In this story a king is represented as having employed two administrators: one over the gold and silver, and the other over the straw. The latter official was suspected of malversation, and when he thereupon complained that he had not been set over the gold and silver, they said unto him, "Thou fool, if thou hast rendered thyself suspected with regard to the straw, shall they commit to thee the treasure of gold and silver?"¹

Again, it seems impossible to imagine an apter comment on the words of Christ "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much," than this of the Jewish Midrash, "The Holy One, blessed be His Name, does not give great things to a man until he has been tried in a small matter;" a principle which is thereupon illustrated by the history of Moses and of David, who were both called to rule the people after faithful apprenticeship as shepherds. Moreover, in the Christian dispensation

¹ Edersheim's *Jesus the Messiah*, p. 274.

instances abound. Judas Iscariot, chosen, no doubt, for a certain business capacity, to be the chancellor of the apostolic band,—we know how he handled the Mammon of unrighteousness, and we recall his miserable end. Stephen the deacon supplies an ideal contrast. Similarly chosen for secular work in order to relieve the clergy of the primitive Church, this man “full of faith and of the Holy Ghost” is lifted from the scene of his fidelity in that which is least to the highest pinnacle of honour. As the Proto-Martyr of Christianity his name is immortal. As he lays down his stewardship, the gates of heaven open to his dying gaze, and the form of that Friend Who sticketh closer than a brother stands ready to admit him to everlasting habitations.

We take it, then, that Christ here intends to teach that by the faithful use of “a very little,” even by means of unrighteous Mammon—a deceitful thing, unworthy to be regarded as an end in itself—a character may be formed, and virtues and graces won, which will befriend us for ever. He would therefore have the sons of light, in their spiritual preparation for eternity, emulate the zeal and foresight displayed by the children of this world merely for their own

immediate advantage or to meet the contingencies of time.

The Master, in fact, is giving a lesson upon the most important of all matters to the Christian pilgrim—how to pass through things temporal so as not finally to lose the things eternal. And He shows how the two are interdependent. ‘If,’ He seems to say, ‘If your ordinary man of the world is always careful to look forward, if he surmounts the difficulties of life by shrewdness and tact, providing against misfortune by securing friends who may be ready to repay him in the evil day; so may the ordinary transactions of his daily round furnish forth the means to the man of God of laying up treasure in heaven, of deepening and purifying that spiritual nature, whose tenderest associations, whose deepest friendships, whose true home, are in the eternal tabernacles of the world to come.’

Such would seem to have been the moral of the story of the steward, for those to whom it was immediately addressed—the disciples of Jesus. And for us Christians of to-day this application is of all others perhaps the most directly practical, warning us against regarding anything as common or unclean, reminding us that nothing is really secular but what is sinful,

and assuring us how the most insignificant duty faithfully discharged—as unto the Lord—is fraught with issues of eternal and spiritual importance.

There are, perhaps, few hard workers in the world who do not sometimes chafe against the tedious routine and drudgery of life. Then let them remember that God's gauge of faithfulness is unaffected by the sphere in which their trust is exercised, but is sensitive simply to the care and conscientiousness displayed therein.

The rôle of the humblest disciple is, in fact, transfigured by this teaching of the Master, which lends Divine authority to Keble's lines :—

“ The trivial round, the common task
Will furnish all we need to ask,
Room to deny ourselves—a road
To bring us daily nearer God.”

But this moral does not exhaust the teaching of the story. Though seemingly addressed to His own disciples, it is impossible to exclude the conviction that the speaker had the by-standers also in His mind, and among these especially the Pharisees.

To shame the selfish exclusiveness of the Pharisee, Christ had spoken the matchless parables of the preceding chapter. And immediately after this Story of the Steward, St.

Luke reports how “the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they scoffed—turned up their noses—at Him.” But Jesus answered, “Ye are they which justify yourselves in the sight of men,”—just as the astute steward had commended himself to that man of the world who was his master in the story—nevertheless “that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

And then the Master shows what is working in His mind by continuing, “The Law and the Prophets were until John : from that time the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man presses into it. *But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the law to fail.*” He puts His finger here on that playing fast and loose with the Law which was a sin of the Pharisees precisely analogous to that of the steward in the story. In their doctrine of Corban elsewhere scathingly denounced, and in their notorious laxity in the matter of divorce which is the point here cited, the Pharisees by these devices, “indulgences” in the truest sense of the word, had no doubt won friendship with the world, but they had done so by bidding men consider their full debt of a hundred measures of wheat or of oil discharged by writing down fifty or fourscore,

It is surely a noteworthy thing that this should have been a failing of those very men who were so shamefully relentless against the outcast classes. The immediate sequel drives this home. The very next parable shows up the exclusiveness of the Pharisee in the person of the Rich Man who having all the heart could wish in the way of religious privilege, yet refused to the heathen and the publican even the crumbs of his sumptuous fare.

This however has always been the way of the world. "Men compound for sins they have a mind to, by damning those they're not inclined to." And it is precisely what one would expect of Pharisees, for they were emphatically children of the age, "the religious world" of their own day. Successfully justifying themselves before men, their word had greater weight with the Jewish public than that of king or priest. What they approved was, for the people, properly accredited: what they banned was disallowed. They might have used this immense influence for untold good. They might have drawn men by their faithfulness in the small matters of external discipline and ritual to attend to great things upon which depended their eternal peace. But they did not. Like the steward in the story, they

secured a continuance of their own personal prestige, but like him also they paltered with the trust committed to their keeping. And being thus found faithless in that which was least, in their administration of the letter of the Law, they showed themselves *a fortiori* unfit to deal with its deep and holy spirit.

To the Pharisee there was no virtue but of a legal and external kind. The result at best could only be a poor, perfunctory, mechanical obedience, ever on the watch for some loophole of escape into paths perhaps not forbidden by the letter of any specific command, yet plainly contrary to the spirit of God's will. Therefore, says Jesus, this external Pharisaic righteousness is a hollow affair which may for a time ingratiate the children of this world, but which can never serve as a standard for the children of the kingdom of God.

To sum up then, let us simply say, "It is required of stewards that a man be found faithful." And rightly viewed, all life is stewardship. This English nation is a steward with responsibilities perhaps vaster even than those of the Chosen People. Let her see to it that she does not lower the standard of the national conscience by putting fifty measures of oil and

fourscore of wheat for the hundred, in the administration of justice, goodness and truth, whether at home or abroad. Not the Jewish Church only but the Catholic Church is a steward; let her see to it that she does not waste her strength in binding on men's consciences burdens either utterly intolerable or absolutely insignificant, while other matters of moment are disparaged or ignored.

The attempt to change the always and altogether voluntary and medicinal use of Confession to a priest, into an habitual practice of binding obligation; the attempt, whether overt or disguised, to fence the Altars of the English Church against all who resist this encroachment;—these are instances of the intolerable,—acts of Unjust Stewardship.

The infatuation which forecasts any general acceptance of this yoke is only equalled by the foolishness which prefers a piece of antiquated symbolism before the priceless pearls of Order and of Peace. Sacrifices on earth there are whose savour is sweet in Heaven, but the smoke of "Will-worship" out of censers of Disobedience is not among them. Those who thus mistake are monumental examples of misguided zeal. Nominal stewards of a Reformed Church, they secretly despise and often openly

contemn the whole genius of the Reformation. Inconsistent stewards, they conjure with the name of Catholic while incontinently claiming an individual right divine to trample upon Order, the paramount note of Catholicity. Lawless stewards they seem ; for whom nor Church, nor State, can produce an Authority which their non-conforming consciences allow them to obey. Foolish stewards—must it not be said?—who “waste the goods” of the Master by weakening the effective strength of His Body in this land, by making that Body a byword for confusion, amid the tears of friends and the laughter of foes.

But the Church, like the Nation, of any and every age is but an aggregate of units. Not individual Jews only, or individual Christians of Christ's day alone, but you and I and every man are stewards of all that appertains to us, whether our place be high or low, whether our trust seem great or small. If we exploit our position, or abuse our privilege for selfish ends ; if we lower the standard of our conduct from that befitting sons of light to that which may commend us to the children of the world ; then, even though the shelter and the friendships we have planned for our convenience may possibly

not fail us here, it is certain that no eternal home will offer us a welcome for the long hereafter.

Happy then the public man who at the end of his career can challenge the world in the words of the aged Samuel : " Behold, here I am : witness against me before the Lord : Whose ox, or whose ass, have I taken ? Whom have I defrauded ? Whom have I oppressed ? or of whose hand have I taken any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith ? and I will restore it you. " And equally happy the humblest and obscurest citizen of the kingdom of God, if only he can echo the psalmist's words, " I am small and of no reputation, yet do I not forget Thy precepts. "

Yes, these and such as these, are the truly blest, for they—the obedient and the true—are the salt of the earth and the light of the world in whatever age their lot is cast, and theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Upon each, and each alike, whether stewards now of the little or the much, shall surely fall at last the Master's benison : " Well done, good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things : Enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord. "

THE HUNDREDFOLD REWARD

“Peter began to say unto Him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee. Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for My sake, and for the Gospel’s sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.”—ST. MARK x. 29, 30, 31.

SOON after our Lord had entered upon His last public journey to Jerusalem, teaching and preaching as He went, we are told that “a certain ruler” threw himself at Jesus’ feet with the question, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”¹ The road to life, replies the Master, is obedience to the commandments. “All these,” returns the questioner, “have I observed from my youth.” It was no idle boast, the man was perfectly sincere, “And Jesus, looking upon him, loved

¹ St. Mark x. 17.

him.” Christ recognised a nobility of mind opening the loftiest possibilities to this young life, if only it could be rescued from the cloying circumstances which now oppressed the better soul within. Between the lines of the scant report we can read the gist of the colloquy: ‘There is indeed a Service which is ‘perfect freedom,’ but the price of its liberty is greater than any mere punctilious keeping of the law’s letter. There is a Life which is ‘life indeed,’ but it outruns the guidance of any mere code of rules. You seek to win that Liberty, you desire to live that Life. ‘One thing thou lackest.’ The letter killeth: it is the spirit that maketh alive. The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life. Now that you have learned the lesson of the letter, let us go on to counsels of perfection.

Obedience, truly, is better than any sacrifice ceremonial, but there are sacrifices which are greater even than Obedience. They transcend because they more utterly fulfil. “Go, sell whatever thou hast . . . and come, follow Me.” But “his countenance fell at the saying, and he went away sorrowful: for he was one that had great possessions.”¹

¹ St. Mark x. 17-22.

Now it is to be observed that when the lawyer consulted Jesus as to the first and great commandment, and when Zaccheus, some of whose wealth had come by questionable means, applied to Jesus for spiritual direction, no rule of poverty was imposed: nor upon Christ's disciples generally was any such injunction laid. Why then in this particular case of the young ruler? Because, it would seem, his case combined an exceptional spiritual capacity with an exceptional weight of material hindrance to its development.

“ He rode a horse with wings, that would have flown
But that his heavy rider kept him down.”

If the spirit is to be set free to attain perfection, the down-dragging weight, whatever it may happen to be, must be cast off. In this case it was a superfluity of worldly wealth. The young ruler was, in fact, an illustration of the quaint warning of old Sir Thomas Browne, “As a man maketh his train longer, he maketh his wings shorter.”

For an immediate and total break, however, not merely with possessions, but with the position and power they conferred, this eager inquirer was not prepared. He made the great refusal. But he did so with a heavy

heart : and though for the moment the yearning love of Christ was disappointed, we can easily believe that by and by what was denied to impulse may have been yielded to consideration. As the Master presently took occasion to remind the ardent Peter, "Many that are first shall be last, and the last first." It would not therefore be surprising to find this young man, a little later, among the number of those who after Pentecost sold the lands or houses they possessed, and laid the prices at the Apostles' feet.¹ But for the present the incident is closed, and all we are told is that the failure of so promising a candidate to pass the appointed test caused Jesus to exclaim, "How hardly shall they that trust in riches enter into the Kingdom of God!" It was a cry not of denunciation, but rather of pity and regret,—of pity, as the Master thought of the Temptations created and multiplied by wealth,—of regret, as He remembered "the deceitfulness of riches," and how easily they "become not only the care, but the torment, of those that possess them."

On the departure of the young ruler, St. Peter is impelled to improve the occasion. Spokesman, as usual, for the rest, he cries,

¹ Acts iv. 35.

“Lo! we *have* left all and followed Thee.” It was a very crude remark, but the fathomless forbearance of the Master ignores the fatuity of the implied comparison between the fishermen’s sacrifice of scanty means and a precarious livelihood and the denied devotion of fortune and position. And He vouchsafes an answer couched in terms at once simple and profound. The spiritual neophyte might console himself with its letter, while its spirit might minister to the aspirations of a deeper insight. “Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house or brethren or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for My sake and for the Gospel’s sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life.”

At first we may fancy that in this reply the sceptic finds some justification for the common cavil that the Christian motive is “purely selfish.” If, for all that is surrendered, “a hundredfold” is to be returned, the following of Christ appears to promise well from a commercial point of view, and the ancient taunt “Doth Job fear God for nought?” seems still

to find a pretext. But when we observe those two fateful words recorded by St. Mark, "with persecutions," any material advantages which the rest of the promise might be supposed to offer seem to be entirely discounted. This little clause is quite sufficient to dash with disappointment any worldly hopes which a too literal interpretation of enhanced family affection, multiplied houses, or extended acres, might have raised. In days of persecution, the greater a man's property and the more abundant his kindred, by so many the more avenues could he be attacked, and so much the more easily victimised. It is probable that some such considerations, dimly realised, account for the silence with which Christ's double-edged forecast was received. There is a marked absence of eagerness to discuss in further detail this singular "hundred-fold" reward. We know, indeed, that later on, to the early Christians there was given an exultation of soul which, despite persecution, preserved them in unspeakable and constant gladness, even as their Master before them had "rejoiced in spirit" with Gethsemane and Calvary in view. But nothing of this kind could then have been understood even by the chosen few.

It may indeed be doubted whether at this period they would have found the least difficulty in accepting the most unqualified promise of mundane reward. The Rabbinic teaching of the day revelled in what to us appear the most childish pictures of the good time coming when the Messiah should really arrive. The very walls of His capital were to be of "silver, gold and gems, while all kinds of jewels would be strewn about the streets, of which every Israelite was at liberty to take. The land would spontaneously produce the best dresses and the finest cakes." ¹ And there is nothing in what fell from the lips of Christ's disciples at this time to lead us to suppose them in advance of the current ideas. Their pride and self-seeking, their indignant repudiation of every hint concerning the suffering and death of their Lord, their perpetual thought of precedence and requests for posts of honour in the new kingdom, their frequent mistaking and materialising of the Master's metaphors, all point to a low stage of spiritual perception.

Now even a Divine Teacher could lead such men but slowly, "as they were able to bear it." If then, during this process of education, Jesus

¹ Edersheim, *Jesus the Messiah*, Book V., p. 458.

is found to give a material cast and colour to His teaching on the subject of reward, the necessity of penetrating minds still occupied with childish things would explain and justify His method.

It seems, however, open to doubt whether the text should be regarded as in any sense an example of the *argumentum ad hominem*. The repetition in describing the reward of the exact terms which previously describe the renunciation may be used simply to emphasise the notion of *equivalence*, and to illustrate how all that is given up for Christ becomes more truly and closely our own, how all that we lay up with Him will be returned again with usury. And one can better sympathise with those who feel that this is not in fact the case, "now in this present time," than with those who cavil at the form in which the promise is stated.

The solution of this difficulty is really a question of character. One man will regard as a "hundredfold" reward what another is unable to appreciate at all. It is all a matter of standpoint and of character. We all know how it was with the Speaker of these words. He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor. He was so immersed in His Mission that ties

of earthly kindred sank into insignificance: "They that hear the word of God and keep it, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." For the Gospel's sake He had "emptied Himself" of His glory, but His home was still "My Father's House," and He was ever, even while on earth, "the Son of man Who is in heaven."

Now the real guerdon of such a soul as this defies express definition. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived it to the full. Glimpses of "the joy set before Him" reach us in those wonderful chapters (xiii.—xvii.) of the Fourth Gospel which bare the inner life of Jesus. Hints escape the Master's lips at other times. They occur constantly in the Sermon on the Mount. We may well believe that verily He had His reward, even in that "present time" of trouble and persecution. His was the perfect knowledge denied to all but the perfectly obedient, His the absolute faith which banished care, His too the supreme love which turned devotion to delight. With Jesus, "Eternal Life" consists in "knowing God," and this inclusive epitome of the Christian's inheritance is a present gift as well as a future blessing. It belongs to the life that now is and to that which is to come.

The manifold reward of the righteous may at times in Scripture be described in terms of current thought, but it is monstrous to imagine that the end and aim of such a life as Christ lived, and such doctrine as He taught, could be anything "purely selfish." Such criticism is palpably absurd, if only for the reason that precisely in proportion to any Christian's faithfulness to the Spirit of Christ, in that degree would any "purely selfish" reward be unattractive and repellent.

From the lips of this same Apostle, renewed, "converted,"¹ "begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead";—from the St. Peter of his First Epistle, "put to grief in many trials," yet "rejoicing greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory";² no such infantile question as that of the text was likely to have fallen. It is therefore idle to speculate upon the possibly different terms our Lord might have used in teaching one who at this later period had practically become another man. Since some of us even to-day are in our spiritual childhood, and none are quite full-grown, let us rather examine the truth here actually taught.

¹ St. Luke xxii. 32.

² St. Peter i. 3-8.

And surely it is a very practical and wholesome truth. If, for conscience' sake, a man is called to break with friend or kinsfolk, if he must sacrifice his wealth or a large part of it, is there not in fact a gain awaiting the acceptance of the loss? Goods are given for our good; relatives and friends, that we and they may mutually minister to each other's welfare. If these ends are better served by renunciation of either, then in that directer reaching of the spiritual end is found the compensation for the sacrifice. Take the lives of the Twelve for example, and watch them gradually gaining those very ends of moral and spiritual culture to promote which kinship and possessions are conferred upon men. Who can doubt that they had their "hundredfold" even in this life, though to win the blessing they gave up for a time their home and livelihood and the joys of family affection? Did not each of them wonderfully realise the meaning of the lines—

“Hearts have I found of sister and of brother,
Quick on the earth or hidden in the sod.
Lo! every one awaiteth me; another
Friend in the blameless family of God.”

And is it not true also generally that to the Christian there fall corresponding yet superior

relationships and possessions to those resigned for Christ's sake? "Houses and lands," observes Mr. Cox,¹ "kinsfolk and friends are express types of higher kinships which are open to us, and of more enduring riches. From the father of our flesh we derive our first and best conception of the Father of our spirits. Human love helps us to apprehend the love of Christ. The corruptible treasure on earth speaks to us of the incorruptible treasure in heaven. And if we leave, or lose, any of these typical relationships and possessions for Christ's sake, we gain that which they typify,—a house not made with hands, treasure which moth cannot corrupt, the family in heaven and in earth, the Father of an infinite Majesty, the Friend Who sticketh closer than a brother. Do men lose by such exchanges as this? Do they not rather infinitely gain?"

The promise, then, is fulfilled in fact to all who fulfil its conditions. Was not St. Paul absolutely in earnest and absolutely sincere, when he stood up amid the luxurious splendour of Agrippa's court and said, "I would to God that not thou only, but also all that hear me this day might become such as I am, except these bonds"? Despite his chain the glorious

¹ *Expository Essays*, p. 209.

Apostle was the freest of them all, despite his voluntary poverty the richest.

As a rule, no doubt, the literal forsaking of all they have and all they love for Christ's sake is not men's duty. More often they are called to use all for their own and others' good,—those that buy, however, being ever as though they possessed not, and those that use this world as not abusing it,¹—a by no means easy line of conduct, yet one to which reward belongs precisely corresponding to our faithfulness in keeping it. For, what the author of the "Imitatio" has said is certainly true: "It is almost impossible to estimate what peace a man brings to others and what joy to himself by managing himself aright." Such an one, and he alone, has the root of the matter in him. If he has wealth, he will not be high minded nor "trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, Who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."² If he is poor, he may nevertheless "have all things and abound."

" Lord of himself, though not of lands,
Who having nothing, yet hath all."

Even "with persecutions" he will know how to win his soul in patience, like them of old

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 30.

² 1 Tim. vi. 17.

time who "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had their own selves for a better possession and an abiding one."¹

A difficulty must always seem to attach to the general question of Reward, because that question involves two principles, which, however generally accepted, are not at first sight easy of harmonious adjustment. While on the one hand all men acknowledge that virtue should be disinterested, yet, on the other, that virtue should be rewarded undoubtedly appeals to a sense of fitness which is universally felt. Now both these principles are recognised in the Teaching of Jesus. "Do good and lend, hoping for nothing again."² "When you have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants who have but fulfilled our duty."³ "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's shall save it."⁴ In such and in manifold similar language, the disinterestedness of virtue is enforced. But the picture of the relation between man and God cannot be complete without reference to the other principle involved. It does not follow,

¹ Hebrews x. 34.

³ St. Luke xvii. 10.

² St. Luke vi. 35.

⁴ St. Mark viii. 35.

because from the servant's point of view reward is the last thing to be thought of, that therefore the gracious Master must deny the reward of His "good pleasure." "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching : verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them."¹

At first sight, the disinterestedness which is of the essence of goodness may seem incompatible with the promise of reward. But the meeting point of toil and pleasure, of duty and delight, is no fiction.

" It was my duty to have loved the highest :
It surely was my profit had I known :
It would have been my pleasure had I seen."

Is not the lost chord of the harmony found in the *nature* of the Christian's recompense? The question has too often been treated as though God rewarded spiritual qualities by the bestowal of material good. But it is not so. He does not give his children sugar plums for telling the truth, nor increase their bankers' balance in order to recompense their integrity. And if some Christians have, in modern days, merited the charge of "other-worldliness," they

¹ St. Luke xii. 37.

are as wrong as any could have been in the past who sought to win heaven by making earth a hell. But such mistakes need not make us hesitate to hold that "the wise and virtuous life, not the wicked and self-indulgent, will be the truly happy life, and that sin is the real self-sacrifice."

No doubt the instinct is true and right which tells us that the sphere of religion is one altogether separate from the sphere of profit and loss. And we may feel the question of St. Peter,¹ "What then shall we have?" seeing we have done so and so, to be unworthy of a fully instructed follower of Christ. For we know that if the practice of righteousness were repaid in material reward, goodness and gain would soon become convertible terms, and covetousness be indistinguishable from piety.

But we need never find in the New Testament those grounds of irritation we feel in hearing or reading some modern exponents of popular religion. When, for example, St. Paul asserts that "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,"² we know well, with the Apostle's own career before us, that he does

¹ St. Matt. xix. 27.

² 1 Tim. iv. 8.

not mean "profitable" in a commercial sense but in a spiritual sense. No other could have been thought of by one whom elsewhere we overhear on this wise, "Now behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing what shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth that in every city bonds and afflictions abide me; but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."¹ When such a man as this looks forward to the "crown laid up for him in heaven," we know that it is no golden circlet which he covets, but, in his own language, a "crown of Righteousness,"² the priceless boon of a perfected character completely victorious over sin. Similarly, when Paul's Master tells of the unspeakable gain which is theirs who have made sacrifices for His sake, we are very sure that here also the reward is not translatable into terms of land or lucre, but that its currency belongs to that hidden kingdom within, where the Father Who seeth in secret realises by His Spirit to those that love Him what eye

¹ Acts xx. 22-24.

² 2 Tim. iv. 8.

hath not seen nor ear heard nor heart conceived.

Such account of the disciple's recompense as words can partially convey, Christ Himself did give to St. Jude, when He said,¹ "If a man love Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him;"—a reward which only the injustice of unreasoning malice could stigmatise as "selfish," and one as unlikely to corrupt the disciple as to excite the cupidity of the world.

¹ St. John xiv. 23.

SPIRITUAL SUICIDE

“ Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewithsoever they shall blaspheme : but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.”—ST. MARK iii. 28, 29. A.V.

THIS passage and its parallel in St. Matthew (ch. xii. 22–27) are credibly reported to have driven more people to despair, and to have urged a larger number of victims into that saddest of all forms of insanity known as religious mania, than any others in the Bible. And yet they are recorded as the words of the holiest and the tenderest Who ever spake on earth, of that Son of Man Who never broke the bruised reed or quenched the smoking flax, Who willeth all men to be saved, Who died to draw all men unto God ; and Whom an Apostle describes as “ the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe.” What is the meaning of it all ?

Before, however, we can arrive at our Lord’s

meaning, we must first know what were the words He actually used. Years ago no one could see what those words really were, unless they were familiar with the Greek Testament. Now, fortunately, every one can see this by simply turning to the Revised Version. The first of the two verses reads practically the same in both Versions, but the changes made by the revisers in the last clause of the 29th verse are among the most necessary and valuable of any for which we have to thank them. Since 1881, those who could not refer to the original have been aware that Christ never used the phrase "but is in danger of eternal damnation," and that what He did say was, "but is guilty of an eternal sin." In the parallel in St. Matthew, this clause does not appear at all, and there is a slight difference in the form of the preceding sentence. Whereas St. Matthew reports, "Whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in that which is to come ;" St. Mark, with his love of brevity and terseness, is content to say, "hath never forgiveness." Thus we notice here—what appears also in other places—just the slight differences which are so valuable as clearly

showing the independence of the narrators along with the obvious oneness of their narrative.

Taking then the most difficult of these statements of our Lord's Teaching, we ask first what the sin is which He so tremendously denounces as to say it "hath never forgiveness"? and we have next to make clear the justice and inevitableness of the doom declared. For not until we understand that the judgment given is the necessary consequence from the nature of the sin itself, will this saying, instead of appearing hard and dark, begin to radiate with Pity and Love.

Now, inasmuch as no word of our Lord or of any other Teacher can ever be rightly understood apart from the circumstances under which it was spoken, we must turn to the incident which called forth this warning. We find that the specially religious world of our Lord's day refused to acknowledge His inspiration and authority. As, however, they could not deny His power, they descended to the Satanic stratagem of ascribing Christ's beneficent wonders to the powers of Evil, instead of to the Spirit of Good. "He casteth out devils," said the Pharisees, "by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." Those pedants who, rather

than give up their pedantry, thus chose to confound the Spirit of Truth with the Father of lies, and either to point their sneer or excuse their contempt, would smirch the garments even of God's Messiah with the mire of hell,—these arch-confounders of Good and Evil it was who drew from the lips of the Saviour of men the most terrible and tremendous warning that He ever uttered upon earth.

Let us thoroughly realise the special horror and peril of their sin. It was bad enough to be proud and prejudiced, to be bigoted and blind ; it was worse to have rejected the Christ and abused the motives of His Divine compassion ; but even this might be forgiven, for to speak against the Son of Man was not necessarily to bar the door of repentance. But these men had gone further than that. They had begun to descend the ladder whose foot is lost in the abyss. They had entered on a course the pursuit of which necessarily excluded every ray of heavenly light. The Spirit of Truth might correct men's errors, but for those who refuse to recognise the plainest proofs of His Presence no hope remains, simply because for them there exists no Holy Spirit. Good has grown evil, the Holy has become unclean.

Such then was the position of these Pharisees to whom the Master spoke. The light which lighteth every man had come into the world in a new way. It was burning in upon their consciences through the words and deeds of Jesus the Christ. They felt His power. In their hearts they knew that His words were true words, that His works were good works. But "Christ humbled their vanity. Christ exposed their insincerity. Hence they hated Him ; and, blinded by their hatred, they affirmed words which they felt were true to be untrue, and ascribed works which they felt to be good to the power and craft of the devil." They saw the light, and knew that it was light, and yet they loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil. In a word, they were "speaking against the Holy Ghost," the Spirit of all truth and goodness ; and so long as they did that, there was no hope for them. They were wilfully closing the heavenward window of the soul, and so long as they did that, how could any light from heaven shine into their souls? Hence Jesus, "knowing their thoughts," knowing too the desperate condition out of which such thoughts arose, simply warned them that it was desperate.

Nothing indeed could be kinder, nothing more merciful, than this seemingly "hard saying," since it was spoken to men thus guilty of that most perilous of all forms of folly—a wilful, obstinate confounding of good and evil. Any less vehement condemnation could only have concealed the certain issue of persistent blindness, and would have pitilessly left these men to eat of the fruit of their doings, until for the possibility of change it was too late. Such language, instead of staggering our minds, becomes natural and necessary, the moment we see how the occasion called for it. Nothing is expressed but the naked truth—which it had been cruelty to hide—that under whatever dispensation men live, in whatever world their lot is cast, they are self-excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven by the one crime which, in the nature of things, "hath never forgiveness," and thus may become "liable to eternal sin."

On reflection it seems difficult to imagine any more compassionate and tender course which could have been followed, with men whom the Saviour saw hurrying blindfold toward the edge of the most awful moral abyss, than to utter such a warning as might

best arouse them to realise their peril, ere by their deliberate continuance in evil they had strangled their own capacity to repent, and with it the possibility of pardon. Let any man be sufficiently persuaded of the reality of the danger in which his fellow stands, and surely the strength of the language of his warning may fairly be regarded as a measure of his love. Where then were the Pity of the Christ, if, seeing what He saw and knowing what He knew, He had not blown this terrible trumpet-blast? These Pharisee fanatics in refusing Christ's words were indeed sinning against the Light; but, in ascribing His power to the Lord of Evil instead of to the God of Good, they were actually quenching that Light. The Master saw them wilfully putting out their own eyes lest they might see the Truth, riveting fetters on their own limbs lest they might move along the path of duty, stifling the one Voice within their souls which alone could always give them Light and Leading, always show them Truth and Duty.

And where were the Love of Him Who died to prove the Love of God to an unbelieving world, if, knowing the consequence

of this "blaspheming against the Holy Spirit," He had not declared in plainest terms what must be its inevitable issue in utter incapacity to do anything but despise all that is most worshipful, or to admire aught but what are justly objects of contempt? When Christ saw men—outwardly religious men, even teachers and leaders of the people—deliberately following an inverted Ideal, saying, in effect if not in words, "Evil, be thou my good;"—when He saw that by no arbitrary fiat of Omnipotence, but by the very nature of the chosen sin, such a character as they were forming, such an attitude of mind as they were fostering, neither had nor could have forgiveness;—what would Christ's love for humanity have been worth if He had not cried aloud to such men about their danger?

Knowing how the Angel of Forgiveness cannot dwell with Impenitence and Pride, knowing that Repentance is in the nature of things impossible to the mind so perverted that Evil has become its Good and Good its Evil, Christ saw these men before Him in the very way leading to destruction, because in the way of becoming so inured to evil, so at home with perverted notions of right and wrong, as to

be upon the brink of the commission of that "eternal sin" which forfeits the possibility because it crushes the desire of forgiveness. This being so, where were the Love or Truth of Christ, I say, if indeed He had *not* thus plainly stated the inevitable fate of men choosing to commit spiritual suicide by burning all bridges of repentance?

Let us then at once and for ever put far from us the hideous imagination which denies to God our Father the property "ever to have mercy and to forgive" every sin which does not of its own nature and essence preclude the possibility of pardon. It is absolutely appalling to find people who are the heirs of centuries of Christian teaching, who have the Gospel of Jesus in their hands and the story of His Life and Death at their finger ends, capable of conceiving the Almighty as a Being so diametrically different from the Father Whom Christ revealed that He will not forgive us sins which we did not mean to commit, even though when we fear that we have committed them we are bowed down in sorrow and repentance.

Surely we can see what an utter travesty of the truth it is which has maddened so many

souls with fear lest, in some unknown and unintentional way, they may have fallen into a certain mysterious sin called "the sin against the Holy Ghost," which shuts them from all hope of pardon. Surely we can see upon how barbarous and blasphemous a misconception of the God and Father of us all such baseless fear is founded, May the God of all righteousness in pity pardon those who are responsible for allowing men to fancy that He could ever doom a single soul beyond reprieve for some indefinite and undefined transgression into which unawares it might have slipped. Why, this would be tantamount to thinking our Father in Heaven capable of setting traps for our feet and snaring men to their own perdition! Such a Deity would deserve the name of Devil, and to conceive the God Whose Name is Love guilty of such diabolic dealings is itself so grievous a confusion of light and darkness, good and evil, as to come perilously near the very plain and definite wrong which in this passage men are mercifully warned against committing.

To us at least our Heavenly Father, Whom the Incarnate Son revealed to man in all the beauty of His Holiness, will never so appear.

We shall not stand in any danger of confounding His merciful warnings against the inevitable issue of persistent blindness and folly, with a desire on His part to withhold forgiveness from any soul whatever, willing and desirous to accept it. As we read these burning words we shall see behind them evermore the Figure of Him Who wept over the impending fate of the wilful City, and cried with that pathetic lament of mingled reproach and love, "O that thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. . . . How often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing,—but ye would not."

"Ye would not." Those words are the key of the whole position. It is not God Who excludes, but man who rejects; and, rejecting, excludes himself. That Jesus Christ, realising whither this abuse of free-will must lead, should warn the Pharisees, that He should warn us, how even He cannot save men who deliberately refuse to be saved; cannot give the light of life to those who wilfully close their hearts against it,—this is perfectly in accordance with all we know of His mercy and of His truth. In the letters of St. Paul we find the same note

struck: "Grieve not the Spirit." "Quench not the Spirit." These passages, like the text, are warnings plain to read against the presumptuous abuse of spiritual faculties, opportunities and gifts. They urge us against being false to truth and duty, on the ground that to be untrue to any truth is to resist the Spirit of all truth, that to be unfaithful to any duty is to resist, and may be to quench, the Spirit of all grace.

It will help us to understand the real significance of our Lord's words if we bear in mind the distinction He appears to draw between overt acts of transgression which may be forgiven on repentance, and the inward attitude and state of mind which bars forgiveness by precluding penitence.

The sin which Christ deliberately contrasts with that which is unpardonable is the sin of speaking against Himself, the gracious Son of Man. Now, to speak against the Son of Man is to speak against, to reject, or to deny the revelation of God's Truth, Will, and Love made in and through Him. We know that there are those who do this to-day, denying a manifestation of God in "God¹ Manifest in the

¹ Whether ΟΣ or ΘΕΟΣ be the true reading (1 Tim. iii. 16) the sense of the passage remains the same.

flesh." And some of these are good as well as learned men, and to denounce such men as wilful and notorious sinners, or to assume that they are impelled to their wrong views by base motives or evil deeds, is as much a crime against reason as against charity. No doubt for any to take upon themselves to reject the Christian revelation without due examination of evidence, without due consideration of its claims, must ever be an act of sinful presumption; yet is it also one which none but God can judge, for to all else lie hidden those intellectual prepossessions and that inherited bent of mind which may very possibly extenuate the fault.

If, as we sometimes confess, there lives more faith in honest doubt than in half our creeds, we shall be loth to condemn men who honestly doubt; driven to it often through the fault of those who, by darkening counsel with words without knowledge, have made intelligent faith well-nigh impossible. And if this be our own feeling, prompted by the most ordinary considerations of justice, can we imagine it otherwise with God? We shall recall the case of that chosen vessel among the Apostles, more abundant in labour and suffering than any

other in the cause of Christ, who once, as Saul of Tarsus, "thinking to do God service," blasphemed and persecuted the Son of Man, for Whom, after the light had come, it was Paul's one ambition to live and to die. And we shall learn to draw the distinction here drawn by the Master Himself between sins of ignorance which forgiveness ever waits upon, and that other and quite different *state* of wilful, stubborn, hostile sinfulness which can never be forgiven while men cleave to it. This is that "eternal sin" which adds a damning guilt to every other, making salvation necessarily impossible, because it consists in conscious, deliberate, and persistent opposition to the voices of Reason and Conscience, practically, that is, to the Voice of God within the soul.

Thus at length we come to see what this terrible state is which in this passage is so mercifully denounced. It is the state of the man who has, may be for years, *not* been honest in his doubts and denials, who besides sinning against the God without him seeking to reveal Himself in Jesus, has also sinned against the God within him. It is the state of him who, when Conscience said "This is true, and you ought to believe it," or "That is duty,

and you ought to do it," has habitually and of set purpose refused to accept the truth or do the duty, though he felt them call him with Divine authority. In a word, it is the state of him who has added the sin against the Holy Ghost to the sin against the Son of Man.

If, now, such an one pass out of this world in this condition, impenitent and unchanged, how can anything else be true of him but the doom of the text? Has he not persisted in placing himself outside the pale of forgiveness by making forgiveness impossible? What God may have in store for such in that other future world we cannot tell, for we are not told. We can but cherish the hope that in "the almost sacrament of death," or in the possibly fresh conditions of that "bourne whence no traveller returns," new moral forces may take effect, and the scales fall from those eyes of the soul which here were sealed. We may cherish this hope, I say, but all we can be sure of is that so long as any man deliberately shuts out the light, the light cannot reach him, either here or there; that so long as he refuses to part with his sin, he cannot be saved therefrom.

I have spoken of this "æonian sin" which

“hath never forgiveness” as a state of sinfulness, and so it plainly is, for no single act of sin could ever justify the epithet “eternal.” The question of most practical moment for all of us arising out of this passage is clearly this. What are the steps by which this perilous condition of mind is reached? How may we learn with certainty never to take those steps?

In the first place it is perfectly clear that any who are suffering from anxiety about their own condition may be freely assured that they, at all events, are not in the way of this sin. For, in whatever degree they feel a godly fear about it, by that very fear are they totally removed from that indifferent and callous, or actively hostile, state of soul here in question. The perilous state is theirs who have no qualms, no doubts, but are completely blinded by their pride and self-complacency. It is the men who are ever occupied in shutting upon others the gates of a Repentance of which they feel no need themselves—these are the Pharisees for ever liable to the judgment of this passage.

Moreover, the warning they so pre-eminently need is in some degree needed by all. For which of us does not sin against the light of

Conscience which is the organ of the Voice of God, and therefore against the Holy Spirit? Which of us has not often one foot at least upon "the primrose path" which leads to "the everlasting bonfire" of all that is purest and noblest and most worth keeping? Which of us can be too careful lest we so familiarise ourselves with evil that it grows to us less evil than it is, lest we build ourselves into that dungeon of delusion where darkness appears as light, and light is loathed. No, there is not one of us can be too watchfully on guard lest we consciously and wilfully resist the Spirit of Truth and Goodness. Whenever a man has seen a truth and refused to accept and act on it because it cuts his prejudices against the grain, or imperils his worldly interests; then that man is going the road which, if he persists in following it, will bring him into the condemnation of the text. For whenever men resist the God within them, and so long as they refuse to hear and obey what they acknowledge to be His voice, what hope is there for them in any age, in any world, or under any dispensation?

Better, it seems to me, would be the state of the agnostic, so he walk faithfully though

sorrowfully under the burden of life, with no heaven above to shed down strength and consolation, and no hope of immortality to brighten the path of duty, than that of the orthodox believer, glib of tongue in shibboleths, who is nevertheless faithless to Conscience and to Duty which all the while he knows to be speaking with the authority of God Himself. Since it is from God's Holy Spirit that all true thoughts proceed, can we not see that to close our eyes to any truth or duty—whether religious, scientific, political, social, or commercial—means far more than the mere impoverishment of the tone of our life. It means also the resistance or neglect of that pure and gracious Spirit by Whom we are made one with the Father and the Son: it is to impair the very channel by which truth comes to us, and to cripple the very faculty by which we are enabled for all dutiful and worthy enterprise. To “as many as are led by the Spirit of God” all things are possible, but without that leading whither shall we drift? Well, therefore, may an Apostle entreat, “Grieve not the Spirit,” “Quench not the Spirit.” And well may the least disloyal pray with bated breath, “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.”

GEHENNA

“Whosoever shall say ‘Thou fool’ shall be in danger of Hell fire.”—ST. MATTHEW V. 22.

EVERY student of the Bible, and especially those who depend for their understanding of it upon the English text, should feel deeply grateful to the company of scholars who gave us the Revised Version. Scores of instances might be cited in which the meaning of the original writers here appears in English for the first time in a form at once accessible and authoritative, while in hundreds of other cases obscurities and inaccuracies have been cleared away.

It is, however, impossible not to regret that the Revisers were inconsistent in their rendering of the Greek words which in the old Version were all alike translated “hell.” The three words in the New Testament, to all of which King James’ translators gave the one rendering “hell,” are really proper names; a

fact noted in the margin of the Revised Version by the use of a large initial letter in each case. *Tartarus* occurs once only, in the form of a verb, in 2 Peter ii. 4, where the context conclusively refers it to a temporary and not an endless state. Tartarus was first a mythological magnate of ancient Greece. But as far back as the Iliad of Homer, the name stands for a subterranean realm as far below Hades as Heaven is above the earth ; while later poets describe Tartarus as the place of punishment in the lower world where the wicked expiate their crimes.

Hades is first of all identical with Pluto, the lord of the infernal regions. In Homer the word never occurs but as a synonym for this god, but later it also was used for his abode or kingdom, so as to become a common and general title for the under-world, covering the intermediate state of bad and good alike, where they await the final separation of the Judgment Day. It is thus five times used in the New Testament. In St. Matthew xvi. 18, where it is declared that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the Church." In St. Luke xvi, to describe the position of the rich man, in the parable of Lazarus and Dives. In Acts ii. 27,

“Thou shalt not leave my soul in Hades nor suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.” More metaphorically the word occurs in the Woe pronounced upon Capernaum, in the parallel accounts of St. Matthew¹ and St. Luke.² In each of these cases the Revisers have placed the actual word Hades in the text, instead of perpetuating the wrong translation, which unfortunately still remains in the Prayer Book version of the Apostles’ Creed.

Having treated the word Hades in this simplest and wisest of ways, it is the more surprising that the third word in question, *Gehenna*, equally with the others a proper name, has been relegated to the margin, while “hell” or “the hell of fire” appears in the text. The consistent thing would certainly seem to have been to follow the course adopted in the similar case of Hades, and place *Gehenna* in the text as it stands, instead of using the word hell at all. Much good would have resulted, because the ordinary reader, meeting this strange word, would have been led to ascertain that our Lord thus referred to the well-known Valley of Hinnom, on the south side of Jerusalem, where the offal of the city

¹ Ch. xi. 23.

² Ch. x. 15.

was cast out, and where fires were kept perpetually burning to consume it. And whereas the retention of the word Gehenna used by our Lord would have thus put the reader on the right road of interpretation, the substitution of "the hell of fire" for the "Gehenna of fire" is almost certain to mislead.

For, though the word "hell" in itself simply means a hollow place, so that, in Old English, tilers (as coverers-in of a hollow) were called "helliers," yet, because in mediæval times this harmless meaning became quite obscured by the gross accretions natural to a coarse and cruel age, the word should have been avoided. Hell in the middle ages came to mean a place full of fire and brimstone, in which souls were literally burned, and the mediæval imagination revelled in description of the fiends and torments there abounding. These revolting associations¹ will for ever cling to the word "hell," so firmly are they rooted in the popular mind, and therefore it would have been better to substitute the word actually used by the New Testament speakers in each case. In its too commonly accepted sense, "hell" is no more a translation of Gehenna than it is of Hades.

¹ See pp. 168-173.

In order to understand the solemn warnings against sin which our Lord uttered several times in the Gospels, the main thing to be grasped is the meaning which His words would convey to the Jews who first heard them. The reader may realise this by the simple process of picturing what might have easily happened in more primitive times on any waste land adjacent to his home. He has only to imagine the town refuse conveyed thither, and fires kept perpetually burning to destroy the offal and purify the air, in order to have a fair illustration on a small scale of what was actually and continually going on in the Gé Hinnom outside the city of Jerusalem in the day of Christ. To earlier inhabitants of Bexhill, for instance, the once dismal swamp called Polegrove Marsh—supposing it to have been used as described—might well have become a symbol, in its filth and horror, of the fate of sin-bound, God-rejecting souls. And had some prophet then come and warned the obstinate and godless that if they continued in that evil way they would grow only fit for, and therefore in danger of, Polegrove Marsh; every local man would have understood that this prophet was speaking symbolically.

So it was with the Jew of our Lord's day. When Christ told any that they were in danger of the valley of Hinnom, His hearers would understand that Christ spoke symbolically although with none the less force. And if further (as in Mark ix. 33, 34) Christ alluded to the "worm" and the "fire" of the Valley of Hinnom, the Jew would understand that he referred to the end of persistent sin, under the images of the rotting garbage of the Valley of Hinnom and of the fires kindled there to consume it.

This being so, I venture to endorse the remark of the Bishop of Manchester that "it is a very great pity that the New Version relegated to the margin the word Gehenna," which tells this story. "It should have been in the text, and the misleading word 'hell' should have been excluded."

But to return to our passage: what are we to understand Christ to mean when He declares that "whosoever shall say to his fellow, 'Thou fool,' shall be in danger of the Gehenna of fire?"

The context shows that our Lord was at the moment engaged in illustrating the far-reaching and deeply rooted character of the morality He taught. He came not to destroy but to fulfil,

not to weaken or abolish the sanctions of the old law, but rather to strengthen and enforce them by demanding obedience not to their letter only but to their spirit. In His new kingdom—the kingdom of Heaven, the Christian society—there must be found more than the external righteousness of Scribes and Pharisees. The sixth commandment, for example, was not fully kept, according to the laws of the new kingdom, by any mere avoidance of murder. This fulfilment of the letter might indeed suffice for an earlier age, but now the time had come for a deeper and holier understanding of the underlying spirit of that “whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.” “I say unto you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother ‘Raca’ shall be in danger of the Council; and whosoever shall say ‘Thou fool’ shall be in danger of Gehenna.”

The general sense of this passage is clear enough. We are taught that whereas Moses condemned the specific act of murder, Christ condemns the angry passion at its root. The hot emotion in which potential murder lurks is incipient murder by the law of Christ, just as

the lustful look is incipient adultery. And if the angry feeling found vent in wounding and malicious words, this in Christ's view was a heavier crime calling for severer punishment.

Such, plainly, is the general drift. There are three sins mentioned: first, the feeling of anger; next, the expression of that anger in the contemptuous "Raca," ("coxcomb" or "good for nothing," meaning an empty worthless fellow), and finally the expression of anger in the harsher and more opprobrious "Fool." And as matching these three sins, there are cited three punishments, which are illustrated by reference to Jewish Courts of Justice. The judgment of the Local Court found in every Jewish city stands for the penalty of the first; the condemnation of the Supreme Council, the Sanhedrin, stands for that of the second; while for the third sin the liability is declared to be nothing less than the Gehenna of fire.

Now between the three offences cited there is a gradual fall. And we naturally look for a corresponding gradation in the liability of the offenders. But in the last two cases no sort of proportion is kept, if he who in a moment of heat lets slip the word "Fool" is liable to be damned to that everlasting torment which

popular thought now connects with the word hell, while the angry use of a less obnoxious word is simply liable to the sentence of the Sanhedrin.

But the fact is that we do not bring this passage into harmony with the character of the Speaker by simply explaining what is meant by Gehenna, and by understanding how different that meaning is from the mediæval conception of hell. After this first step much surely remains to be taken into account before this hard saying is cleared in the tribunal of conscience from a harshness and severity which are neither Christian nor Christlike.

Who does not feel that the "sweet reasonableness" of Jesus lies impugned, if these startling parabolic statements are to be taken in all the baldness of cold prose? But why should they be? May we not say here, as of some other sayings of our Lord, that they are purposely framed in this highly technical and figurative form so as to prevent as far as possible the chance of this treatment at the hands of the literalist?

In every Jewish city were Local Courts of justice having, till within forty years of the Destruction of Jerusalem, the power of life and

death ; but the ignominious death of stoning and the far greater ignominy of being cast after death into the foul valley of Hinnom,—these penalties could only be inflicted by the Supreme Council sitting at Jerusalem. Christ is speaking as an Oriental to Orientals. He uses their national customs, and above all that national sentiment—stronger even than with ourselves—which revolted against forfeiture of decent burial, to drive home in striking parable the spiritual lesson that the essential sin of murder lies deeper than any mere act of violence. He shows, by strong metaphor which no Easterns would misconstrue, because metaphor was their natural mode of speech, that angry thought as well as angry speech and murderous act were all to be held in abhorrence. But Christ never imagined that men guilty of angry thoughts or of hasty expletives would ever in fact be haled before actual courts, and condemned to literal penalties at once utterly unsuitable and totally disproportionate. No such use of courts of justice, whether Jewish or Christian, has ever been heard of : and to fancy Christ seriously proposing this unheard-of practice is to deny Him ordinary common sense. Moreover, to picture Him as literally recommending judg-

ments, such as no monster who ever disgraced his ermine would have consented to pronounce, is to do despite to the Saviour's grace.

What Christ Himself would have us do is something very different, and something which commends itself instantly to every man's sense of what is right. He warns us to beware of the "little foxes" that spoil the vines. He reminds us of the fatal importance of the beginnings of evil, and of the fatal connection between the slight and slender source, and the resistless torrent to which it may grow. He throws into strong relief the fact, elsewhere insisted upon, that "out of the heart of man" proceed the things that defile. He declares that "in God's sight the murderous wish, scheme, bent, *is* murder: and that every utterance of it, whether in word or deed, will entail severer punishment." "Be angry," we seem to hear Christ say, "be angry, and you will suffer for it; let your anger amount to utterance, and you will suffer the more: every new access and expression of evil passion will plunge you still deeper in sin and misery."

"Without a parable," we are told, "Jesus spake not unto them." The parable here at least is plain to read, and the "hardness" of the

saying—once it is seen to be parabolic—presents no difficulty to our understanding, and only troubles our conscience by the height of the moral standard it maintains. It is teaching such as this, from the lips of a Teacher such as Jesus Christ, which makes the best of men ready to cry, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,” though all the while he feels that no other prophet anywhere proclaims with such magnetic power “the words of Eternal Life.”

FIGURE AND FACT

“If thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. . . and if thine eye cause thee to stumble, cast it out: it is good for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.”—ST. MARK ix. 43, 47, 48.

ALMOST the only change made by the Revisers in this passage is the omission from the text of verses 44 and 46 of the authorised version, which are identical with verse 48. The best Manuscript authority is entirely against the words “where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched” occurring three times, and in favour of their appearance once only as here placed. Whether the clause was or was not repeated three times when our Lord originally spoke is not an important matter. If He said the words once, that is sufficient, and it behoves us to inquire what He meant by them.

Are they, or are they not, words which support the popular conception of hell as a place in which the souls of the wicked suffer interminable torment?

Do they, or do they not, "seem to show, how spirits lost in endless woe, may undecaying live?"

Have they, or have they not, any bearing upon the question whether our human lot—and especially that of the impenitent—is finally and irrevocably fixed at death for all eternity?

To each of these questions every unbiased student of Christ's actual words must return a most emphatic negative. What He says is that to "enter into the Kingdom of God," or as He describes the same thing in a previous verse, to "enter into life," is so great a privilege that no earthly sacrifice of a material kind is to be regarded as too great in order to secure the blessing. The figures used are of the strongest. Every one must dread disablement of hand, or foot, or eye. Yet to sacrifice even these all-important members is a small thing, says Jesus, compared with forfeiting "the Life which is life indeed," and being left outside the gates of the "kingdom of God."

And then He reminds His hearers of the

alternative. If men permit temptation to lead them astray : if they surrender to the glamour of the world, the seductions of the flesh, the wiles of the devil, instead of "resisting unto blood, striving against sin,"—then their moral nature will deteriorate, and they will go from bad to worse, until they become fit at last for nothing but that well-known end of the worthless and reprobate,—the "Gehenna, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched."

Of Gehenna I have already had occasion to speak, and these additional words will raise no difficulty for those who have before their minds a picture of that to which our Lord actually refers. Worms would be the natural and inevitable accompaniment of the rotting carcasses of the Valley of Hinnom. And as fresh garbage was constantly being supplied, the worms need never die for want of a continual feast. But the putrefaction in which they flourished would have soon become intolerable to the inhabitants of the adjacent city, and therefore the lighting of perpetual fires was found necessary to purify the air.

Gehenna, then, was a spot given over to the destruction of what was worthless and offen-

sive, and the worm and the fire were the natural means by which that destruction was effected. While the offal of the city continued to be cast there, the worms would never die, and the fires would never be quenched.

Such was the use of the Valley of Hinnom in the day of Christ, and such was the plain and obvious meaning which His words would convey to the Jews whom He addressed. Not one of them but would understand, accustomed as all Easterns were to the language of metaphor, that Jesus was setting forth, in the strongest possible symbols, the contrast between the blessed estate of those who, by accepting His authority and obeying His words, entered the kingdom of God which He came to establish upon earth, and the miserable plight of those, who, refusing His message and following the devices and desires of their own evil hearts, would come at last to be cast out into the outer darkness where would be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

It is to be noted that the phrases of the text are by no means the only ones in which are set forth the future lot of the wicked. The very way in which the imagery changes upon the Master's lips, appearing now in one form and

now in another, is sufficient to make clear that in every case He speaks in parable. For example, in St. Matthew xiii. 42, as the end of the tares is to be burned, so the fate of the wicked is represented in a figure as being cast into a furnace of fire. In St. Matthew xxiv. 51, where the conduct of the sinner is likened to that of a disobedient slave, the punishment accords with the comparison : his master shall "cut him asunder," or, as the margin has it, "scourge him severely," casting him into the dungeon where there is "the weeping and gnashing of teeth." At the opening of the next chapter, the fate of the foolish virgins is the symbol for the rejection of the wicked. We see them excluded from light and joy, and shut out into the outer darkness. Similarly in the parable of the Talents, spoken about the same time, the churlish and slothful servant is also represented as cast into the "outer darkness," where, as before, is "the weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This variety of representation is in itself positive proof that they are wrong who fix upon some one image, and then interpret it as though it announced nothing but actual fact. For if so, what becomes of the other figures? The

scourging, the outer darkness, the Valley of Foulness, the burning weeds,—it is plain that they cannot *all* represent the *literal* fact. Therefore let us confess that each and all are metaphors of the most forcible sort, intended to produce in us an infinite abhorrence of courses that inevitably lead to the fate for which they stand. From the one symbol which is most constantly recurring, and which is made more emphatic in the Revised Version by the proper translation of the definite article, we learn that the great reality which underlies them all is Sorrow and Despair.

These remarks and this conclusion may appear so entirely obvious as to be actually uncalled for, but nevertheless you know that this is not the case. Men separated from one another as the poles asunder upon other matters have united to interpret the oriental symbolism of the Bible as though it were the prose of a legal document. And in the doctrine now specially under consideration they have insisted, with a terrible persistence and a ghastly particularity, that the hell which they hold to be the portion of the wicked consists of physical torment in material flame. Arminian and Calvinist, Roman and Anglican have here joined hands.

“What sort of a place is hell?” asks the Catechism of the Wesleyan Methodists. “Hell is a dark and bottomless pit, full of fire and brimstone.” “How will the wicked be punished there?” “The wicked will be punished in hell by having their bodies tormented with fire, and their souls by a sense of the wrath of God.”

And the great Baptist Minister, who was the infallible pope of thousands of ultra-Protestants to the day of his recent death, has thus written of the future of the unsaved: “When thou diest thy soul will be tormented alone; that will be a hell for it: but at the Day of Judgment thy body will join thy soul, and then thou wilt have twin hells: thy soul sweating drops of blood, and thy body suffused with agony. In fire exactly like that which we have on earth thy body will lie asbestos-like, for ever unconsumed; all thy veins roads for the feet of pain to travel on, every nerve a string on which the devil shall for ever play his diabolical tune of hell’s unutterable lament.”

Here again is the dictum of Jonathan Edwards, whose teaching, though he died long ago, is still circulated in tracts, to the delight of all who love to watch the spread of infidelity;

—“The pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive the wicked: the flames do now rage and glow. The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much in the same way as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked. . . .”

Now we cannot think that such blasphemous coarseness—from the context of which I have suppressed the worst—is the monopoly of an ignorant sectarianism. For Catholic teachers Roman and Anglican alike, have vied with its ghastly realism. A Spanish Jesuit of two centuries ago scrupled not to write, “We are amazed at the inhumanity of Phalaris, who roasted men in his brazen bull; but this is joy in respect of hell, which penetrates the very entrails without consuming them.” And in one of the commonest current books of Roman Catholic devotion the reader is exhorted thus:—“Let us fancy we see hell, and imagine what is worst to behold,—a horrible cavern full of black flame. Sulphur, devils, dragons, fire, sword, arrows, and innumerable damned who roar in despair. Imagine the worst you can; and then say, all this is nothing compared to hell.”

Similar, though less violent statements, come from our own communion. These are the words of a famous former Dean of Gloucester : "The cup of wrath your hands must take, your mouth must drink. But you can never drain it. There is no last drop. Infinite vengeance ever fills it to the brim. Eternal wrath is ever bringing more. What is the curse? It is the endless accumulation of all the miseries which God's resources can command and God's power can inflict. It is the fiery torrent of the lake of fire."

Again :

"Salted with fire, they seem to show
How spirits lost in endless woe
May undecaying live.
Oh ! sickening thought ! yet hold it fast."

What pathos there is here. The popular conception shocks and sickens the pure soul of the Poet of the Christian Year, but he clings to it with the desperation of a loyalty which sees no alternative. These lines reveal the effect of these gross views of hell upon the refined and tender feelings of an imaginative and gifted man. But he is an exception. For the most part, the material view has been held without thought by those who have no imagination, and doubted and disbelieved by those

who have. The fact is that it is scarcely too much to say that these coarse and cruel views elaborated in the Middle Ages, which have kept back from loving allegiance to our Father in Heaven a greater number than ever they have deterred from sin, need to be dismissed for good and all as abominable travesties of the doctrine of the Gospel. These grotesque and horrible misrepresentations may not unfairly be compared with the actual misuse of the Valley of Hinnom itself by idolatrous Jews, after the worship of the fire-gods was introduced by King Ahaz. In the Gehenna of that day Hebrew parents had given their own children to the flames in sacrifice to heathen deities. And so great grew this scandal that among the reforms effected by Josiah, we read how the pious king "defiled Tophet, which is in the Valley of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech."¹ Signs are not wanting that an awakened moral sense in the Christian Church is disposed to subject the mediæval conceptions of Gehenna to a similar salutary process. No language seems better calculated to "defile" and finally to destroy these fancies

¹ 2 Kings xxiii. 10.

than that of those who uphold them. And it is only with this object in view that any such language has been cited in these pages. It is surely now high time that the children of Light should finally repudiate and reject, as a blot upon the Name of the God revealed in Jesus Christ, such dark conceptions as are fairly comparable in atrocity to the heathen practices which even the præ-Christian moral sense of King Josiah was constrained to sweep away.

Mary Tudor is said to have argued that, inasmuch as it was God's will to burn the bodies of heretics for ever hereafter, it must assuredly be pleasing to Him that she should burn as many as possible of them now. When we listen to such reasoning; still more when we read what some have written on the subject of the fate of the impenitent, the fact stands out in bold relief that in spite of all the ridiculous travesties of the truth concerning future retribution, men have seldom ridiculed the idea of retribution itself.

But this is no mystery, for the simple reason that, while conscience revolts at the pictures of hell drawn by human imagination, conscience at the same time proclaims the hell of Divine Law to be one of the most stupendous facts in

the domain of morals. It is thus that God intends "the removing of those things that are shaken, that the things which are not shaken may remain."¹ Men may and men do dream of an escape from that which their moral sense repudiates, but the reasonableness and the inevitableness of Retribution cannot be disposed of in this way. When the Wise Man asserts that the wicked "shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices;" when Isaiah denounces, "Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him;" when St. Paul declares, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap";—this constant burden of the Scriptures, that we cannot escape the consequences of our own conduct, instantly commends itself to our conscience and our understanding. We see how the evil-doer is continually engaged in preparing the Gehenna which in literal truth will be "his own place." The real essence and horror of "damnation" is separation from God and goodness. "Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone," is the worst sentence that God's violated majesty is able to inflict, and we should feel it to be so if we saw

¹ Hebrews xii. 27.

as God sees. This is the "outer darkness" indeed, and it is simply the issue and consequence of the heart's own obstinacy. For God destroys no man. Each one simply reaps what he has sown.

When, sixty or seventy years ago, the famous Caspar Hauser appeared in the streets of Nuremberg, released from a dungeon in which he had been confined from infancy, seeing no human face, hearing no human voice, nor ever seeing the full light of day, a distinguished German lawyer wrote a legal history of the case, which he called, *A Crime Against the Life of a Soul*. It was a fitting title. But it is even more accurately descriptive of the process to which so many voluntarily subject their own spiritual nature. Men muffle the voice of conscience, and next time its warning falls weak and muffled upon the will. And the weakness of remonstrance and the ease of resistance grow with every repetition of this wilfulness. Impulses of reverence are drowned in a sea of triviality: men walk by sight until the faculty of faith languishes and dies. Time and the petty concerns of this life so engross us that the intuitions of Immortality lose their force, and Eternity fades into nothing-

ness. Paralysis sets in, not of the body perhaps, but (still more to be dreaded) of the soul,—paralysis which can have no other end than spiritual death.

“Is that all?” does some one say. For indeed there are those who breathe God’s air and reap His benefits and live under the embrace of His Redemption, who are yet so dead as not to feel one whit moved at the thought of separation from Him in Whom alone is LIFE. And it is for this very reason men have found it hard to believe that anything which they do not now regard as painful can be really hell. They forget that what a being likes depends upon what that being is,—that corruption, for example, is no less corruption in our view, because worms like it. Nor is sin (and the love of sin) less damnation in God’s view because men are so miserably earthy as to like it. God saves us from hell, saves us from damnation, because He saves us from SIN: saves us through that growing knowledge of Himself which is the unspeakable reward of the obedient.

Yet, lest men should think that therefore sin is not the awful thing it is, God in mercy has united through the world these two, and

ordained that suffering shall follow sin as harvest follows sowing. On all hands the warning greets us. In the physical world: the headache which follows the drunken revel; the fever and pestilence which grow out of the violation of God's laws of purity and health; the soured and miserable old age following a selfish and dissipated manhood;—all these attest the truth. The same law is at work in the social relationships of men. If one sins against the moral instincts of society, he meets with exclusion or disgrace; treachery is punished with scorn, cowardice with contempt; a liar by the loss of trust; pride fails at last of sympathy; selfishness reaps its own isolation. What a man sows that shall he also reap. The verification of this law is everywhere. The poverty which results from indolence; the mistakes which are made by ignorance; the apathy and then disgust which follow on the indulgence of worldliness and sensuality;—all these are everyday facts. Appropriate penalty attends all manner of transgression. "God is not mocked." "The reward of a man's hands, lo! that is given him."

Now the retribution which thus dogs the evil-doer, and which we can verify for ourselves as

far as this world is concerned, is identical in character with that proclaimed by the prophets. Divine revelation and human experience coincide, and the teaching of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels confirms both. The imprisonment of the debtor who has imprisoned his fellow ; the exclusion of those who have made needless excuses ; the want of the prodigal ; the forfeiture of everything by the slothful servant ; the dismissal from the presence of Christ of those who have refused to acknowledge His Presence in the needy sons of men ; Dives craving a drop of water from the beggar to whom he grudged his crumbs,—such are some examples out of many illustrating a uniform principle. The Sin is directly the parent of the Suffering. Men “eat of the fruit of their own doings.” The inevitable end of sinful and godless courses is Sorrow and Despair. And it is an instructive fact that—in spite of the incredible caricatures of the doctrine of future retribution which popular religion has made prevalent—the reason and conscience of mankind, though every day more widely rejecting the travesty, have never been disposed to repudiate the truth.

FUTURE RETRIBUTION

“And these shall go away into eternal punishment.”

ST. MATTHEW XXV. 46.

IN the old version the words run : “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.” But in the Greek, as in the Revised Version, the same identical epithet is applied both to “punishment” and to “life.” This word *αἰώνιος* is frequent in the New Testament, and is a favourite word with St. John. It is an adjective patient of two legitimate and distinct meanings at least, but “everlasting” is not one of them, and the Revisers have therefore invariably substituted for this mistranslation the word “eternal.” Eternal is related to the Latin *aetas*, an age, exactly as the Greek *αἰώνιος* is related to *αἰών*, an age. This rendering therefore reproduces faithfully the indefiniteness and ambiguity of the original.

For the original word cannot possibly be

shut up to mean that which is without beginning and without end. A word which a "Father of Fathers" could use to describe an interval must be a poor expression for time without end. A word which St. Paul could twice use¹ in alluding to occurrences "before times eternal" cannot be taken to describe that which had no beginning. The plain meaning of "eternal" in such passages is aeonian, agelong, dispensational, referring to ages which had their truth to realise, which realised it and then passed away. The Apostle simply declares that God's promise and God's purpose existed before all the times, cycles, ages, which as they pass gradually and partially realise His will.

But besides this first meaning of the word eternal—aeonian, agelong, cyclical—there is another sense in which it is used. It may mean that which is by nature related to the abiding,—that which is real and spiritual, as opposed to that which is apparent and material. King James's translators recognised this sense of the word, or they would not have rendered "the life which is life indeed"² by the phrase "eternal life." This could only have been given as an equivalent to the Greek by men

¹ 2 Timothy i. 9, and Titus i. 2.

² 1 Timothy vi. 19.

who perceived that the "eternal" might mean the "real," just as the temporal may mean the phenomenal,—that which is seen being temporal, and that which is not seen being eternal. Moreover this use of the word has the sanction of the Master Himself, when our Lord says,¹ "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."

Thus we see that the two principal legitimate meanings of *αἰώνιος* are "agelong" or "aeonian," and "real" in the sense of spiritual; while the old equivalent "everlasting" is no *translation* of the word at all, but only a most hazardous interpretation of it rightly repudiated by the Revisers.

It would have been more consistent if, thus refusing to paraphrase the adjective, they had also refused to paraphrase the noun from which it is derived. But here they have allowed the definite "for ever" to represent the indefinite "unto the ages," and have relegated the literal and only accurate translation to the margin. No doubt "for ever" is less cumbrous, but it is often less exact, as for instance in St. Luke i. 33, where it is said that our Lord shall

¹ St. John xvii. 3.

rule over the house of Jacob “for ever,” when plainly the meaning can only be that He will thus rule, as the Greek says, “unto the ages,”—unto the ages, that is, during which distinctions of race and nationality last.

It seems also very material to a right conclusion on this whole matter to remember that the sacred writers had at their disposal at least three Greek words—ἀπέραντος, αἰδιος, ἀτέλευτος—which would have unmistakably conveyed the meaning “endless,” had they wished to convey it. Two of these words are actually used in the Epistles,¹ but never in connection either with the “life” of the righteous or with the “punishment” of the wicked. Moreover, by using the adjective “all” to characterise “the ages,” as is done in the last verse of the Epistle of St. Jude where glory is ascribed to God “before all time, and now, and unto *all* the ages,” the idea of time without beginning and without end could have been strictly expressed. But as this combination never occurs in the New Testament in the connection now under review, we seem bound to conclude that writers who deliberately chose a different phrase designed to express a

¹ ἀπέραντος, 1 Timothy i. 4. αἰδιος, Romans i. 20; Jude 6.

different idea. In using in the way they did the word *αἰών* and its derivative, they must have meant to describe future retribution as "agelong" or "aeonian" if they are thinking simply of duration; or, if their thought is rather of its character, it may perhaps be fairly paraphrased by "the punishment which is punishment indeed."

Driven from one stronghold by the discovery that punishment is nowhere in the New Testament said to be "endless," the upholders of this view have betaken themselves to a very sorry refuge. They argue that the fate of the impenitent is at death irrevocably and interminably sealed, because forsooth Ecclesiastes¹ says, "If the tree fall toward the south or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth there shall it be." Such argument is almost as foolishly irrelevant as that which seeks to establish the exceeding fewness of the saved from the fact that one only was healed at the pool of Bethesda or from the supposition that out of sixty wives, eighty concubines, and numberless others, Solomon loved only one!

The truth is that the state between death and judgment receives in Holy Writ the very

¹ Ch. xi. 3.

scantiest notice. Not more than two or three passages, even in the New Testament, have any direct bearing upon the question. And one of these, the Parable of Lazarus and Nimeusis, is so filled with Jewish imagery that very little can be built upon it. We cannot however avoid remarking a distinct improvement in the moral state of the departed Rich Man, who begins at least to evince an interest in the welfare of his brothers,—a grace of which he showed no sign in this world.

Then there are the well known sayings of St. Peter,¹ the older English version of the first of which left it possible to interpret the words as meaning that Christ went to the Antediluvians now in prison *when they lived on earth*, and by His spirit, through the preaching of Noah, called them to repentance. But the Revised Version, by its more correct rendering, has made this interpretation impossible. Here flesh and spirit are so opposed that, as in the Greek, the word spirit must mean, not The Holy Spirit, but Our Saviour's human spirit, in which (not

¹ *Christ also suffered for sins . . . being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit; in which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient.—1 Peter iii. 19. Compare also ch. iv. 6, For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead, &c.*

by which) He went and preached to the antediluvians in Hades.

What conclusion is legitimate from this assertion? First it seems to open the possibility of probation in the intermediate state between death and judgment. But secondly, the passage only cites this extended probation with regard to a particular class of men, whose case can therefore serve only as an argument affecting analogous cases, and not to establish a rule applying universally. In other words, we may argue from this instance not the continued probation of all men, but that only of those whose probation on earth, from whatever cause, has been incomplete. But this is all that right reason demands. We cannot doubt that any great natural catastrophe hurries thousands out of life, whose death cuts short and leaves incomplete their soul's moral trial. Any sudden accident must be liable to remove a man before his will has taken that decided action which fixes him "unto the ages" as either the friend or the enemy of God. And how can we believe that all the myriads of the heathen, or all the children of Christian lands who have been brought up by profligate parents, have come to an end of their moral probation when

they suffer the natural accident of bodily death? That God Who "was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," and Who "declares His Almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity," will assuredly not leave any soul under a disadvantage in this thing. Indeed the actual words of Jesus Himself, in warning the Capernaïtes, positively assert that distinctions founded upon the higher responsibility of greater privilege and the contrary, will certainly be drawn: "Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for you."

It should suffice for all of us simply to say regarding this whole matter, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" But the passage in St. Peter, above cited, seems at least to give some light of revelation, be it only a gleam, to point out to us the means by which the uncovenanted mercy of God reaches its beneficent end.

We cannot however too clearly keep in mind that our great concern is not with speculation, but with duty. There is no other answer now to be given to the question: "Lord, are there few that be saved?" than the one reply vouch-

safed of old by Him Who knew : “ See that, in your questioning about others, *you* do not miss the way of life. Strive, agonise, yourselves to enter in. The path is narrow, and the gate is straight.”

In like manner, if you ask “ How long shall last the inevitable eating of the fruit of evil ? ” We can but say, As long as the sin, so long the punishment thereof : as long as men love darkness rather than light and self more than God, so long must they eat of the fruit of their choice. Whether this will cease at last, “ far off, at last, to all,” God only knows. The most that we can do is to bound the lurid picture of a mis-spent life with the illimitable light of Divine Love.

It is plain that the foretold days when death and hell shall be cast into the fiery lake, when evil shall be no more because God is all in all, can be reached in one of two ways only : either by the destruction, or by the conversion of evil beings. While any soul is capable of recovery to holiness we may be certain that that soul will be the object of God's merciful regard. But the words of Christ and His Apostles do seem undoubtedly to indicate that there may be some in whom the reign of evil has become so

absolute and complete that they are irrecoverable ; and these warnings are supported by all we know of the Persistence of Force, evil as well as good. It seems impossible to conceive how after years, possibly ages, of wilfulness have made conversion more and more difficult, the human will can be brought back to right allegiance. But we must remember that our minds cannot now harmonise the seeming contradiction of human Free-will and divine Sovereignty. Yet we believe in both ; and we rest in the fact that what is impossible with man is nevertheless possible with God.

The absolute final Supremacy of Holiness, which is clearly promised, can only be reached by way of one or other of two alternatives. And either alternative may be strongly supported out of Holy Scripture. On the one hand, there are passages which indicate that in the Divine Counsel there is devised a way by which even God's disobedient and banished ones may not finally be expelled from Him. On the other hand, it appears to be asserted that there is a persistent perversity of will which must inevitably lead to "destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

Our wisdom surely is to leave the matter where revelation leaves it, and not to be wise beyond what has been written for our learning. This is one of the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God. We are sure which alternative would seem to secure the most triumphant issue of Divine Grace. We may *hope* that this may be the dazzling truth,—one of the many things held back because we cannot bear them now. But we may not interpret Scripture except in accordance with its general sense, and this cannot fairly be ascertained by fixing our attention solely upon one class of passages and ignoring others which have an opposing sense. Our late Laureate at the end of his *Vision of Sin*, seems to have taken us as far as revelation warrants.

“ At last I heard a voice upon the slope,
Cry to the summit, “ Is there any hope ? ”
To which an answer pealed from that high land,
But in a tongue no man could understand ;
And on a glimmering limit, far withdrawn,
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.”

But we know *Who* this God is Who thus reveals Himself. Even He Who is declared by St. Paul¹ to be “ the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe.” Is not the Christ His Incarnation?—the Good Shepherd

¹ 1 Timothy iv. 10.

Who seeks each wandering soul "until He find it,"—the great Apostle of those who have actually departed this life ignorant and out of the way, the mighty Herald of the evangel of Redemption to "spirits in prison" in the life grave.

We know how the purpose of that Saviour's Mission was by His life and work so to enlarge all minds and change all hearts, that, reflecting His image and being transformed into His likeness, they might all be "summed up in Him." (Ephes. i. 10.) We know how the largeness of His redeeming love is revealed in Romans v. 15, 19,¹ where instead of "many" which would imply the exclusion of some, the Revisers by translating "the many" have made it clear that St. Paul refers to all,—to the multitude and mass of mankind.

And we feel that such passages open to us a Vision of Redemption so vast that it can scarcely be said to have limits on earth or in heaven, in time or in eternity. We seem to see the uplifted Christ actually drawing "all men" to Himself.² We seem almost to hear

¹ *If by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the gift by the grace of the One Man Jesus Christ abound unto the many. . . . For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One shall the many be made righteous.*

² St. John xii. 32.

“every tongue” willingly confessing true allegiance.¹ The “sin of the world” seems indeed to have been “taken away,”² and the will of Him “Who willeth all men to be saved”³ to be veritably accomplished in the “reconciliation of all things” unto God.⁴

Pending further light let us at least thank God, Whose thoughts are deeper and higher than ours, that no inadequate human views, no hasty human speech, can ever hinder the fulfilment of the eternal purpose of His mind. Of that purpose He has revealed enough to stir our energies and banish our despair. The Unity, the Peace, the Holiness of the Universe He has created will be accomplished in the day His will is done on earth as it is now in heaven. Till the fulness of time is come, let that suffice. Meanwhile, it can scarcely be the duty of finite intelligence to set human limits to the quickening, transforming power of the Sun of Righteousness. Nor need we, judging merely by the poor dawn of our own age, forecast the shadow of our feeble faith across the noontide glory of that future day when “God shall be all in all.”

¹ Phil. ii. 9-11.

² St. John i. 29.

³ 1 Tim. iii. 3, 4.

⁴ Col. i. 19, 20.

But these considerations, intensely interesting as they may be, belong to the domain of speculative theology rather than to that of practical religion. For those "who do not will to be converted to God, for those who would but delay, for those who relapse after every conversion, and for those who believe they need no conversion at all," the warnings of the Bible are plain and clear. This present age is the "day of their visitation," "now is the accepted time," now the day of grace. Every hour's procrastination, every postponement of the great decision, increases the danger of that most moving of judicial sentences being spoken over the hesitating soul. "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

Some men's sins go before to judgment; but we know that this is not so always. Where conscience has been lulled to sleep, men may live oblivious of their plight and practically unconscious of what should be giving them great pain. Thus, as has often been pointed out, there are multitudes of godless people who seem to succeed in avoiding for the present the fruit of their doings. They are temperate,

and are blessed with health. They are shrewd and economical, and amass wealth. They are prudent, and avoid disaster. They are worldly wise, and secure worldly prosperity. If there were nothing beyond, it is said, if there were no hereafter, these would seem to be the wisest.

Now, in and for their own generation, judged simply by the world's standard, these children of the age are wise indeed. But judged by the law of Christ, their unwisdom is manifest even if this life were all. For what they enjoy bears no sort of comparison with what they lose, since no material gain can ever compensate for spiritual loss. "A man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of his possessions." And "what shall a man give in exchange for his Life?"

But as a matter of fact this present existence is not all. The wide judgment of the world is safe. The religious belief of three-fourths of the human race is one with the Catholic Faith in declaring that there is a hereafter. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this—judgment." Thus, for the successful man of the world, who does well for himself, and of whom all men speak well, quite as surely as

for the debauchee whom the feet of retribution have already overtaken, judgment awaits.

The reinstatement of conscience, hitherto resisted, insulted, dethroned, means for the men who have deliberately starved their souls, self-judgment and self-condemnation. And this is certain; for, though conscience may sleep, conscience will not die. Moreover it is the prerogative of this undying conscience always to see as God sees. And all that is needed for the utter misery of any who now find content in loving what God hates and hating what God loves is simply to see as God sees. Disguises and delusions and excuses then will disappear; reality and fact alone remain. Neither the justice nor the fact of retribution can be any longer doubted. Conscience will open out the nature of that God of Love Whom the godless have chosen to ignore. They will "see Him as He is," and the revelation of His loving kindness which ravishes the righteous, will consume them as with veritable "coals of fire." Memory will unfold its tale of mercies slighted and despised, of all the good which only "might have been," of unnumbered opportunities let slip. And this revelation of a wasted past, with all its side-issues of influence upon the

lives of others, must become a thousandfold more poignant, viewed as it will then appear as the most perverse frustration of the purpose of Divine beneficence.

To the man thus confronted with the gulf cleft by his own carelessness and sin,—to the man face to face with that most awful of all losses, the lost presence of the Holy Spirit,—what remains? What but the exceeding bitter cry: “Which way I fly is hell, myself am hell, and in the lowest deep a lower deep, still threatening to devour me, opens wide, to which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.”

Future Retribution, then is as real and as certain as future Bliss. There is a hell as well as a heaven, though both the one and the other have been so grotesquely misrepresented that the terrors of the one and the joys of the other have come to be widely doubted. “The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.” To realise the loss of heaven is to be in hell. And in the nature of this Perdition—this Loss which is loss indeed—lies the secret of its awful certainty. For thus we see how different it is from any mere arbitrary or objective penalty which might possibly be escaped. It is inevitable. Men

are in eternal misery, and must be so, as long as they are sensual, covetous, proud and loveless. The worm of conscience awakened when the soul is delivered from the body of this death, the unquenchable fires of remorse, the hell of a man's own self cut off from the One Spirit of holiness which could save it from corruption,—this Gehenna is no revengeful infliction of an unnatural punishment ; it is the natural outgrowth and fruition of a godless life.

This is the fate from which God in mercy and His Christ have been continually warning men to fly, by the voices of history, of revelation, of experience and of conscience all down the ages. And therefore we must every one acknowledge that we are without excuse, if at the close of our life-history the Redeemer of mankind can only sorrowfully say of us “I would, but ye would not.”

LIFE ETERNAL

“ *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath Eternal Life.*”—ST. JOHN vi. 53, 54.

“ THIS is a Hard Saying, who can hear it? ” Such was the comment originally passed upon the discourse of Christ which culminated in the words of the text. It expressed the view not only of the general public, but of the Master’s own disciples. Our Lord had been trying all through this address to lift His hearers’ minds out of the miserable mundane groove in which their thoughts were accustomed to run. These Jews had immensely appreciated the satisfaction of their bodily wants in the recent miracle of the loaves and fishes. Recollecting how Moses had fed their fathers in the desert, they seemed to think that if Jesus could but make His temporary provision continuous and regular, as the manna had been under Moses, then His

claim to be a prophet sent from God might be at least equally great. A multitude accordingly had followed Christ from the other side of the Lake, and some of them had gathered before Him in the Capernaite synagogue. They press Christ for credentials. They were true representatives of "an evil and adulterous generation which ever seeketh a sign." They would believe after they had seen. As however the Sign of signs stood before them, not in the form of perishable Mosaic manna, but the very Bread of God in the highest sense—that Bread which could sustain not the mere bodily existence but "the Life which is life indeed" of the eternal spirit—and yet their eyes were holden; Jesus could but sorrowfully say, "Ye have even seen ME, and yet believe not."

This sign-seeking betrays the low level of these people's thought. It is always a poor affair when men cannot recognise Truth and accept it upon its own merits; when the prophet is judged not by his message and his character but by his performance of miracle. "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe" was a saying often on the lips of Jesus, and it was always said reproachfully. Even when in later days the faith of an Apostle was lowered

to depend upon external proofs, though the evidence was granted and St. Thomas was abundantly convinced, yet he won scant praise from the Master : " Because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed. Blessed are they which have not seen and yet have believed."

To the men who look for " signs " in their prophet rather than for truth, it is natural that religion should appear chiefly a matter of externals. " What must we do that we work the works of God ?" But Christ bids them learn the inwardness of true religion, and the uselessness of works without the vitalizing principle of faith. " This is the *work* of God, that ye *believe* on Him Whom He hath sent." An answer, had it but been well weighed since by Christians as well as Jews, sufficient to have stilled waves which have often run mountains high on the troubled sea of theology. For here is faith declared to be the life of works, and works to be a necessity of faith.

Again these men with an appetite for miracle and for whom religion was an entirely external thing, even though they say " Lord, evermore give us this bread," can penetrate no deeper into the nature of Christ's meaning than the hope of a physical boon. Christ stood waiting

to relieve the hunger of the soul : their thoughts could rise no higher than the satisfaction of the claims of the body. The Living Bread which came down from Heaven stood before them in the person of the Son of Man Who would give His flesh for the life of the world. But they saw only the peasant Jesus, the Nazarene mechanic, "whose father and mother we know." These men, whatever their orthodoxy, were really materialists : their own spiritual nature was still undiscovered. Hence for spiritual Bread they felt no relish, knew no need. In vain before such men are spread the treasures of Him Whose words are "spirit and life." Their whole mode of thought is carnal, and "the flesh profiteth nothing." There is a Bread of God the assimilation of which differentiates the truly living from those of the children of men who only seem to live. But the materialist can get no further than such cavil as "*How* can this man give us His flesh to eat?" But Christ vouchsafes no answer save the solemn re-assertion of the fact, "Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."

This is the culminating statement of the doctrine which seemed to our Lord's hearers a

saying impossible to understand. Nor can we be surprised when we consider that for nineteen centuries the flood of controversy thus opened has deluged the Christian Church.

When to-day we ask what precisely it was which Christ intended to convey in this startling figure, we are first met by those who find here little more than a strong assertion of the paramount importance of participation in the Holy Eucharist. The Gift, say they, is the gift of Christ's Body and Blood there verily taken and received by the faithful, for the strengthening and refreshing of the soul. In the use of this divinely appointed sacrament, the terms of the text are completely satisfied and fulfilled. And the implication follows that no other fulfilment needs to be considered.

But with these interpreters I am unable to agree. The interpretation of a passage is one thing : the application of it is another.

There may, therefore, be a plainly justifiable *application* of words, studied in the light of after events and later teaching, which would nevertheless be quite inadmissible if put forward as their sole legitimate *interpretation*.

That this present passage offers an instance in point, several considerations go to prove.

We find that while St. John often takes for granted the two great Sacraments, he nowhere directly refers to them as outward rites. Thus the view cited ill accords with the habit of the recorder of the words in question. Again, the statement made is unconditional and absolute, and this also is against the theory here opposed. For there is no sort of qualification, such as eating and drinking "worthily" or the like, which the purely sacramental interpretation would properly require. The actual phrase used is also against this idea. For, wherever else in Scripture the Holy Communion is spoken of, the terms used are "*Body and Blood,*" while here we have the word "*flesh,*" a term strictly proper to the doctrine of our Lord's humanity, and in that sense here peculiarly apt. But there is a final consideration which alone suffices to forbid this exclusive interpretation. For by its acceptance these words would be robbed of all significance at the time when they were uttered. And it is surely inconceivable that Christ could have spoken to His original audience in a sense which none of them, however spiritually minded, could possibly penetrate then and there.

The truth is that the teaching here pierces

deeper, soars higher, and reaches wider than even the Sacrament itself. The doctrine reaches wider than any external act, for no external act can ever so include as to become a valid substitute for the spiritual verities which underlie it. The doctrine is also deeper and higher, inasmuch as the end transcends the means thereto however precious and sacred.

This position there now seems special reason very clearly to maintain. For certain movements of ecclesiastical thought in the present day unmistakably tend to confuse the delicate border line between faith and superstition. Intelligent faith demands that a clear distinction be drawn between the spiritual *end* for which Sacraments exist, and the outward *means* ordained for its attainment. To minimise this distinction is to voice superstition, not to glorify Faith. Yet, to judge by language frequently heard, much confusion on this point is prevalent. For do we not meet those who—not content with proclaiming the value of the Holy Communion as divinely appointed to be a wonderful channel of blessing to “them that rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same”—incessantly urge “making Communion,” as though this special outward act of obedience

were itself to be regarded as the supreme end of the religious life?

The attitude of mind which accepts this mistake without demur—unconscious of the radical importance of the distinction it obliterates—has its source elsewhere than in faith. And the prevalence of this mistaken attitude has no doubt given currency to the notion that our Lord's language in the chapter before us refers primarily to the then uninstituted Eucharist, or is simply to be regarded as prophetic of that Sacrament.

But, in rejecting a view which makes havoc alike of history and of interpretation, we need never appear to disregard the unique dignity of this truly "Divine Service." For all of us may find there offered, to our great and endless comfort, in concrete form, the very truth which Christ here states absolutely. And we cannot hesitate to aver that the Holy Communion is the very means best suited for the personal realisation of that truth. Nor can the conclusion be reasonably avoided that we have in the language of this chapter the best of all possible commentaries upon this venerable institution, and one infinitely to be preferred before any modern "Manual" whatsoever. Yet all this

is entirely consistent with the truth, so important to keep clear, that in this discourse at Capernaum Jesus Christ is dealing *primarily* not with the outward rite, but with the spiritual fact which underlies it.

Surely the point needs no labouring that these wonderful words are intended to describe, both for Christ's first hearers and for us, the profound spiritual truth that the calling of the Christian disciple is to nothing lower than to become "partaker of the divine nature." The striking metaphor used is prepared for by the previous train of the discourse, and it sets forth with marvellous force that this is to be realised by means of the Christian's absolute identification with the "Son of Man." As Bishop Westcott puts it, "The Son of Man lived for us and died for us and communicates to us the effects of His life and death as perfect Man." Without this communication of Christ, men can have "no life in themselves."

It is just this imparting of Christ Himself, so as to become in the recipient a spring of life within, which is the essential subject of this passage. It is a holy mystery which eludes prosaic definition. And even when it is described by Jesus Himself, it cannot but

appear a "hard saying" to men who have not or rather will not use the faculty of faith,—to men who have not or rather will not use the will to understand and obey. There is a life-long school of God in which such a lesson as this may be learnt. But Faith and Obedience were ever in that school the twin conditions of knowledge, without which nothing.

To the union of Faith and Obedience in any life is never denied the Gift of a wonder-working child whose name is Love. To love is given the revelation of God. Love unseals the sight and wins the Truth which flesh and blood cannot reveal. Love may doubt about a method, like that of the Cross: "That be far from Thee, Lord." Love may doubt about a fact, like that of the Resurrection: but Love clings to the person of Christ, identifies itself with His character, and all else may be forgiven. The final decision is safe: "Lord, to whom shall we go? *Thou* hast the words of eternal life"; the final devotion is sure, "My Lord and My God!"

Into the Love thus born of Faith and of Obedience, Christ was ever leading His disciples while He tabernacled among them in the flesh. It was to be the atmosphere in

which they lived and moved, it was to be the light in which all the mysteries of earth and heaven would grow clear. The story of the gospels shows how slow even good men may be in realising this ideal. And the theological history of the Church tells the same sad tale. The perfect Insight begotten of pure Love is still delayed; even for those that profess and call themselves Christians the ideal of Christ remains a poet's dream :

“ I'm apt to think the man
That could surround the sum of things and spy
The heart of God, and secrets of His empire,
Would speak but love; with him the bright result
Would change the hue of intermediate scenes,
And make one thing of all theology.”

That happy hour has not struck yet. We have still to wait for the complete fulfilment of the prophecy here cited by our Lord, “ They shall all be taught of God ”; so it becomes us not to be too hard upon those inappreciative hearers of a Master whom we ourselves follow so far off. Our wisdom will be to notice carefully how much in their attitude of thought reminds us of our own position. Is not our lack of faith rebuked as well as theirs by the assurance, “ He that believeth on Me hath Life Eternal ”? May we not well tremble in

our disobedience at the restricted promise, "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death"? And what is it but our lovelessness that denies us the rich experience which distinguishes the true disciple from the outside world? "If a man love Me he will keep my Word, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him."

It is nothing less than this which Christ is perpetually offering to all of us, and which He set before the Capernaïtes as a gift so much greater than loaves and fishes and manna. "*I am the Bread which cometh down from Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die!*" He offers us Himself, His Spirit, His way of looking at life and all its concerns, His revelation of the Father, His power over evil, His tireless energy for good. He stands at the door of the human heart and knocks, and with those that have the grace to open He abides. And the characters of those who receive Him and "practise His Presence" gradually shape themselves after His likeness. For them that miracle is wrought for which St. Paul travailed with his converts: the Christ is formed within them. They and He are One. They live, yet not they, but rather Christ Who liveth in them.

They engage in manifold pursuits : they look like other people. But whether they make tents like St. Paul, or doctor bodies like St. Luke, or collect taxes like St. Matthew ; whether they are soldiers like Cornelius, or servants like Rhoda--their Life is apart from all this, "their Life is hid with Christ in God." And the source and sustenance of all is the Christ Who communicates Himself to the believer,—to the man who so believes as to identify himself with the Son of Man, with an identification so complete as to justify the startling figure "eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man,"—with a union so absolute as to bear comparison with the ineffable Unity between Christ and His Father.

When Jesus says that He will give Himself to us so that His Life may become the life of our souls and His Death a veritable part of our spiritual experience, is it not plain that He is holding out to us that splendid possibility which the Saints of God in every age have all in their measure realised? Up to the understanding of this truth, which is the very core of Christianity, the Master strove in this discourse gradually to lift the minds of those whom He addressed. For the majority then present He spoke in

vain. We have seen how this was. But we dare not forget how perpetually recurrent is the hindrance which kept them unblest. As in the day of Christ, so now, physical comfort, mechanical religionism, outward and visible signs, are the material things which engross the thoughts of the world.

Moreover this materialism is always perpetrating the same blunders as of old. Otherwise indeed it could not continue to survive. The commonest mistake of materialism lies in the persistent use of the wrong instrument for its investigation. It is for ever crying out for "a sign," in order that it may "*see* and believe." But this demand is so utterly unscientific as to be positively stupid. It is only in its own sphere that sight is the instrument of knowledge. The scalpel has its uses, but there are more things in heaven and earth than ever can be laid on the dissecting table or brought within the walls of the laboratory. It is with these that Jesus Christ is concerned, and He offers you the only means by which these things are to be tested, when He tells you that you must believe and love and obey if you would know. It has been quite truly said that "Jesus insisted on Faith for the same reason that a mathema-

ician relies on the sense of numbers, or an artist on the sense of beauty: it was the one means of knowledge in His department. He was the Prophet of God, and must address the God faculty in man. Between Faith and God there was the same correspondence as between the eye and light. Faith proves God: God demands Faith."

This, then, is the perennial blunder of the materialist. He persists in ignoring Faith and falling back on sight in the quest for God and His Truth. But God is a Spirit, and His Truth is Spiritual Truth. And you cannot see the spiritual, any more than you can see a sound or hear a lovely landscape. You must use the sense proper to the object in view, and not that suitable to a different object. It is of the Eternal things not seen that Jesus spoke, and to treat these as though they were things seen and temporal is to add perversity to disobedience. "Faith is the instinct of the spiritual world: it is the sixth sense—the sense of the unseen." Apart from this power by which spiritual things are spiritually discerned, the teaching of Jesus could never be understood. To those of old who lacked this gift, the "Bread of Life" could mean nothing but a new

sort of manna, just as to their successors to-day it seems to present itself as almost a fit subject for chemical analysis. To those Jews who had it not the words of Christ provided nothing more than a fresh Rabbinic riddle, even as to-day men may be found to regard His Teaching mainly as an intellectual problem upon which they may exercise their ingenuity.

But men of Faith, in whatever age they live, outgrow these thoughts. They come to understand how "the flesh profiteth nothing," for theirs is the talisman which transforms the Words of Christ from mere food for the brain into "spirit and life" for the soul. And though for a time some speech may seem obscure, they come to understand that no Saying of Jesus was ever yet so "hard" as to refuse its meaning to the Obedience of Faith and the Insight of Love. And verily they have their reward, "now in this present time" and evermore, for to these their Master's promise is day by day fulfilled: "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life"; and "He that believeth on Me *hath* Life Eternal."

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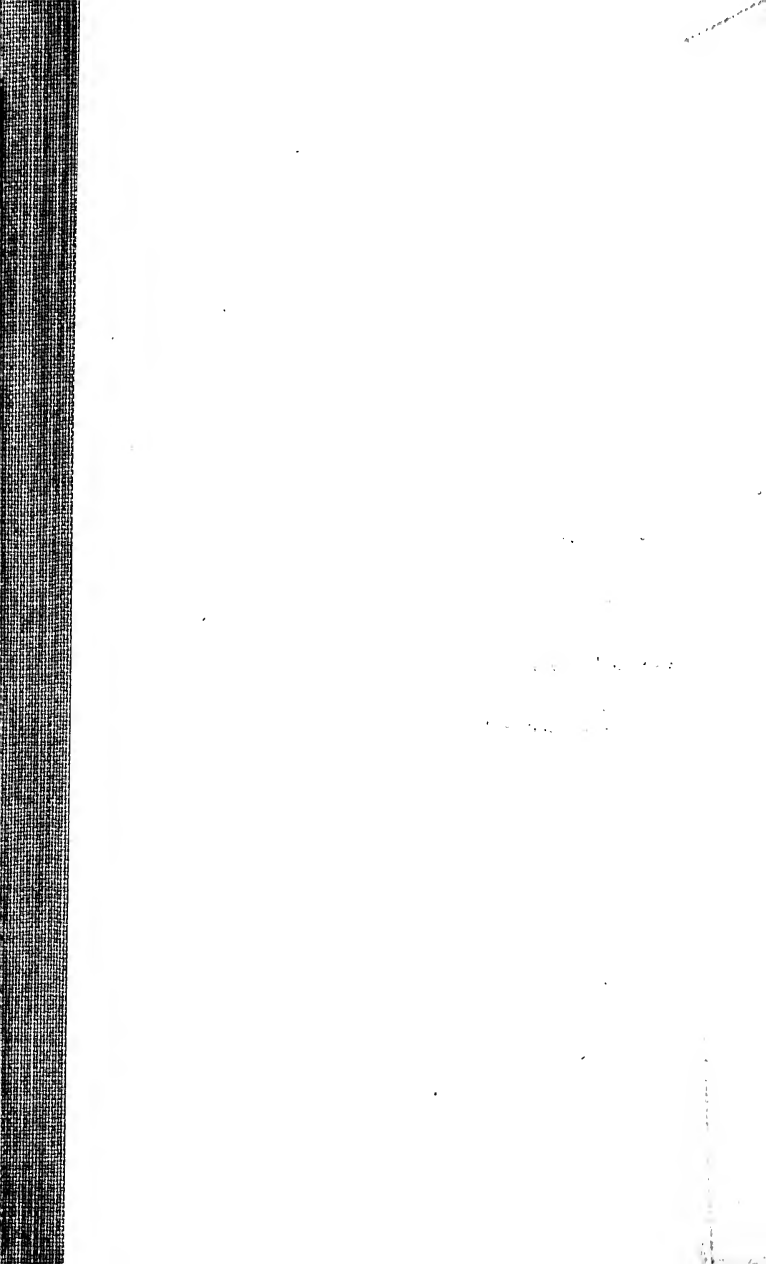
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